



Testimony of California University of Pennsylvania President Geraldine M. Jones

*Entered into the Public Record at a Joint Hearing of the Senate and House Education Committees
Wednesday, November 15, 2017*

California University of Pennsylvania views the NCHEMS Strategic System Review as a call to continue its longstanding commitment to providing active, applied education that leads to student success in the classroom and in the workforce. In addition, the review highlights opportunities for California to leverage its strengths to attract and serve students who are returning to finish their college degree; who have current or past military experience; and who face financial barriers to entering and remaining in college.

California has been invested in student success since its founding in 1852. Through a variety of initiatives, including the **Office for Academic Success** and the **Career & Professional Development Center**, our University supports academic achievement for every student, from the first day of classes through Commencement and beyond. California also takes a holistic approach to student success through innovative programs such as the **Cal U Cupboard** food pantry and the **Prevention Awareness Recovery Center** for students in recovery from addiction to drugs and/or alcohol — the first such program in the System. At California, we are dedicated to giving all students the support they need to earn a degree and enter the workforce confident, career-ready and prepared to succeed.

In addition, California is leveraging its particular strengths in service to the Commonwealth and the State System. Specifically, our University has demonstrated success in expanding higher education opportunities for these special populations:

• **Pennsylvanians who have some college experience but never completed their degrees.**

The Finish Line degree completion program engages with former college students who “stopped out” before graduation, as well as those who hold an associate (but not a bachelor’s) degree. The program relies heavily on California’s robust online learning system to deliver academic programming that meets workforce demand; this allows nontraditional students — primarily working adults — to complete their degrees efficiently without stepping away from career and family obligations. The Finish Line program takes a one-stop approach to providing admissions, academic records, academic success and financial aid services. Trained Finish Line coaches (staff) and advisers (faculty) work closely with each returning student to remove any roadblocks to readmission and provide a concierge-type experience from initial contact through graduation.

Since the program was launched in November 2015, more than 1,900 students have responded to the Finish Line marketing (finishline.calu.edu), resulting in 1,190 total

registrations. To date, 82 students have completed their bachelor's degrees, and an additional 220 Finish Line students are currently enrolled.

• **Members of the armed forces and military veterans who enroll in online degree programs.** California University initiated its Military Tuition Pilot Program in Summer 2014 to offer competitive tuition rates for active-duty military members, their spouses and eligible dependents when they enrolled through Cal U Global Online, the University's online degree program. Regardless of their address, the University charged these students a decreased in-state tuition rate that matched their Military Tuition Assistance reimbursement. By doing so, the University expected to increase overall student military enrollment by 5% in Year 1 of the pilot program and by an additional 5% in Year 2 of the pilot.

In fact, in Year 1 the headcount of students enrolled in the program increased by 50.5% overall, compared to the baseline; the overall FTE increase was 40.5%. In Year 2, the total headcount increase (compared to Year 1) was 22.4%, and the total FTE increase was 23.7%.

In Year 3, the pilot was deemed successful, and the program was expanded to include military veterans, their spouses and dependents who enrolled in a Global Online program. With both active-duty service members and military veterans participating in the program, the unduplicated headcount for Year 3 showed an increase of 41% compared to the previous year's enrollment, with a total FTE increase of 61.4%.

The program continues in Year 4, serving active-duty members from all branches of the armed services, members of the reserve and National Guard, and military veterans, along with their spouses and dependents. Through Cal U Global Online, these students can utilize their Military Tuition Assistance to continue their education from anywhere in the world, including deployments overseas.

• **Students who find it financially challenging to enter college and remain until graduation.** California's scholarship optimization program promotes both enrollment and retention by using E&G funds to help students meet the cost of higher education and graduate with less student loan debt.

The University evaluates each accepted student and awards merit- and need-based scholarships based on a matrix that takes both admissions criteria and financial need into account. Scholarship awards are announced early, motivating students to enroll. In 2017-2018, the first year of the Vulcan Merit program, 525 incoming students accepted awards totaling \$960,450. Need-based scholarships for 271 students totaled \$519,723.

The scholarship optimization program enables California to attract greater numbers of academically capable students, and by containing student costs, Cal U expects to retain more of these students through graduation. The University also realizes that with less student debt, graduates' prospects are brighter. On average, Cal U students graduate with \$25,683 in student loan debt from all sources — the lowest total within the State System.

Through these successful initiatives, California University of Pennsylvania demonstrates its commitment to serving Pennsylvania students and moving the State System forward.