

# CSU, struggling to raise graduation rates, eliminates no-credit remedial classes

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Erika Castellanos, a full-time student, expects to graduate from San Francisco State University within three years. The problem? She's already been there four.

Multiply those extra years at school by thousands of California State University students with similar stories, and you get a clogged pipeline across CSU's 23 campuses just as applications for freshman and transfer spots are at an all-time high for the nation's largest university system.

CSU turned away more qualified applicants than ever last year — 1 in 10 students, or 31,000 people. One reason is that for years, CSU has forced tens of thousands of underprepared freshmen to take remedial, high-school level classes that provide not a single credit toward graduation.

No more. For the first time this fall, CSU has disposed of those no-credit classes that not only slowed students down in their march toward graduation, but worked at cross-purposes with the university's goal of freeing up seats and professors to enroll more students.

They believe they've come up with a better idea: replacing the remedial classes with college-level courses — for credit — that are still supposed to help lagging students catch up. San Francisco State, for example, does it in two ways: by stretching one course into a second semester so the curriculum can be taught more slowly, and by offering a support class for students to take simultaneously.

"I would have been ecstatic if I'd have had the option for that," said Castellanos, who is premed with a second major in psychology.

Instead, Castellanos spent her freshman year taking math for no credit. Then, when her campus didn't offer enough chemistry labs for everyone who needed them, she had to drop chemistry altogether for a semester and take classes she didn't need. And there were other delays: wrong-headed advice from a campus adviser set her back several

classes, and the no-credit math led to confusion about how many credits she'd accumulated.

CSU's systemwide "Graduation Initiative 2025" has targeted those diploma-delaying conditions since 2016 and estimates it will need \$450 million from the state through 2025. CSU received \$75 million this year, and will ask for the same next year. The idea is to unclog the system and help more students graduate in four years. Or six if they can't attend full time.

With \$150 million paid out to CSU so far, campuses have hired more professors, upgraded mentoring programs and added academic advisers, Vice Chancellor James Minor told the CSU trustees at their September meeting in Long Beach.

Minor, who also holds the title of senior strategist for academic success and inclusive excellence, said campuses have added 4,300 new courses and freed up 90,000 new seats — nearly one for every freshman already enrolled.

And a key piece of the strategy is replacing the no-credit classes.

"All students who need additional academic support will now have the opportunity to complete credit courses from Day One," Minor said.