

Charles B. Reed

Cal State chancellor strives to promote quality and diversity in the nation's largest four-year college system

By Kathy Witkowsky

LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

THERE ARE TWO THINGS you need to know about Charlie Reed, chancellor of the massive California State University and one of the nation's most respected higher education administrators. For eight years now, Reed has headed the largest four-year system in the country, using his unique blend of political instincts, competitive drive and direct, plain-spoken manner to keep Cal State "on the move," as he likes to put it.

Number one, Charles Bass Reed loves to work. "I don't think anyone can outwork me," he said during a recent interview. This is not a boast so much as a statement of fact, one that comes up in nearly every conversation you have about Reed. "His biggest strength is his dedication to the system, his willingness to work unbelievable hours, and his tremendous energy," said Murray Galinson, immediate past chair of the Cal State Board of Trustees.

Even non-fans—and there aren't many—concede that point. As president of the Cal State Faculty Association, the faculty union that has been in protracted and contentious negotiations with the administration for more than a year, John Travis has been one of Reed's harshest and most vocal critics. Nonetheless, Travis acknowledged, "Charlie has worked very hard to promote his vision. And I will give him credit for that."

Charlie Reed's vision, like the man himself, is at once both extraordinarily straightforward and extremely ambitious. He wants his 23-campus, 44,000-employee system to serve more students, because education is their ticket to better jobs and better health, which in turn will create a better economy. "That's what universities are supposed to do, is improve the quality of life of its citizens," said Reed.

And to do that, Reed says, Cal State must reach beyond its 405,000 students and into the state's K-12 classrooms, where many students aren't getting the education they need to succeed in college. More than half of all incoming Cal State freshmen need remedial coursework in English or math, or both.

Because Cal State prepares 55 to 60 percent of the state's public school teachers, it is in a position to improve that dismal remedial statistic. That is why Reed has been so focused on improving and expanding the institution's teacher training programs, which have grown 65 percent since he arrived. Cal State now graduates 15,000 teachers a year, but the state still faces a critical shortage of math and science teachers. So Cal State has undertaken a \$2 million, five-year effort to double the number of math and science teachers it prepares, from 800 to 1,600.

But numbers aren't enough, said Reed: Cal State must also improve the quality of teaching. It has begun to offer a free 80-hour retraining program for math and English teachers. Next year, it will compare reading scores of Cal State-trained

teacher classrooms to those of teachers trained elsewhere.

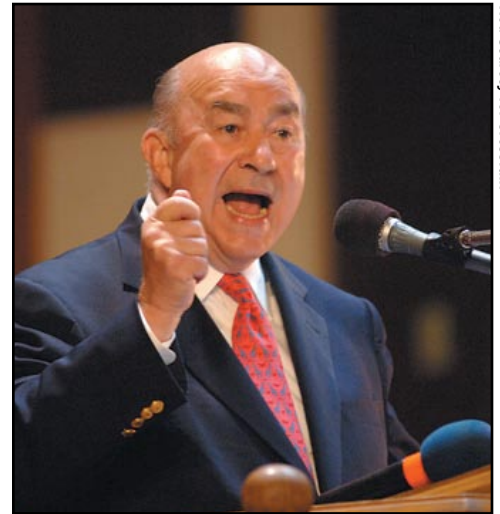
Also under Reed's leadership, Cal State has garnered national attention for innovative programs designed to help students prepare for college. One of the simplest is also among the best known: Cal State has distributed more than 70,000 copies of its free "Steps to College" poster, a Reed brainchild that spells out what middle school and high school students need to do to get there. It is available in five languages.

Meanwhile, more than 150,000 high school juniors have used Cal State's voluntary early assessment program, or EAP, which allows them to take an augmented version of a mandatory 11th-grade standardized exam so they can find out if they're ready for college-level work; if not, they still have a chance to catch up during their senior year. Should they choose, they can do so online, through tutorial websites Cal State has developed.

"He's one of the most important players in K-12 education," said Jack O'Connell, California state superintendent of public instruction, who refers to himself as chairman of the Charlie Reed fan club. "He's helped us break down the walls of all the segments of education."

Reed is trying to bust through racial and ethnic barriers as well. Fifty-five percent of Cal State students are minorities. That sounds like a lot, but the figure is still far less than it should be, said Reed, who wants the Cal State population to better reflect the population in the state's high schools, where more than two-thirds of students are minorities. So this year, Reed has stepped up the outreach, going beyond the public schools and into the communities of underrepresented students.

Top administrators from Cal State, including university presidents and Reed himself, have made presentations during Sunday services at 19 African American churches in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area to persuade potential students and their families that college is an important goal. Just seven percent of Cal State students are



Chancellor Charles B. Reed addresses the congregation at Oakland's Allen Temple Baptist Church, part of Cal State's extensive outreach effort.

Rod Searey for CrossTalk

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Tom Cogilli for CrossTalk

California Assemblyman Mervyn Dymally called Reed's church appearance "an act of political genius."

African American; only one third of these are male.

More than 30,000 people attended these two so-called Super Sunday events; afterwards, some people stood in line for nearly half an hour to collect the materials that Cal State was handing out. The enthusiastic response thrilled Reed. "If you've never had a grandparent or parent, brother or sister, who's been to a university, what the hell do you think you'd know about college?" he said. "They were starved for information."

The events garnered praise from the church pastors and congregation members. And Assemblyman Mervyn Dymally, who has been involved in politics for nearly half a century and currently chairs the California Legislative Black Caucus, called them, "an act of political genius."

"That was a coup," said Dymally. "I've never known a white college administrator to get into a black church."

Administrators from Cal State have also met with Vietnamese American, Native American and Hispanic community leaders. Cal State plans to continue the outreach, which will include two more Super Sundays next year.

In the meantime, Reed said, Cal State must also continue to improve articulation agreements with community colleges, the gateway for 55 percent of Cal State undergraduates. It must make better use of technology to help reduce the time it takes for students to graduate—currently about five and a half years for first-time freshmen—so it can accommodate more students. It must partner with industry to ensure that it is teaching the right job skills and providing internships.

And, armed with a recent economic impact study that quantifies the jobs and

the money Cal State generates for the state (82,000 annual graduates, 1.7 million alumni, earning \$89 billion annually), it must convince Californians of its value so it can raise more money from the private sector. The system still has not recovered from more than \$500 million in cuts it suffered

during California's recent budget crisis.

The success of the institution rides on its ability to make progress in all those areas, Reed said, because they're inextricably intertwined. It's a tough juggling act, but Reed thrives on the challenge. "I like keeping all those balls in the air," he said.

That he is able to do so makes him a rare talent, said David Ward, president of the American Council on Education. "He's without question one of the big thinkers about big solutions," said Ward. "As system president, he really does look at things from the broad social perspective rather than an institutional or campus perspective. And he does that very, very well."

Reed is up at five o'clock and at his Long Beach office by 6:30, where he prepares two pots of coffee for his staff before he attacks his lengthy "working list" of priorities, which is updated every couple of months, and which he has whittled down from 56 when he first took the job to a mere 30 today. In his eight years as chancellor, Reed has never missed a single workday; what's more, he routinely works weekends, putting in three weeks straight before taking a day off.

On his office shelves, surrounded by photographs and autographed sports paraphernalia, is a framed motto that sums up Reed's approach to life: "You work as hard as you can all day, and if you make a mistake, you fix it. That's all you can do." Now 64, Reed has lived by that creed ever since he was a child growing up in the tiny coal mining town of Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, where he was the oldest of eight siblings, and where he met his wife of 42 years, Catherine.

She first noticed him when they were both in junior high. Reed had a job at a produce stand, and she and her friends would see him as they drove past on their way to the swimming pool. "One day I got my mother to stop at the fruit market and I asked why he didn't want to go to the swimming pool," recalled Catherine Reed. "And he said he really liked to work, and that was more fun for him than going to the swimming pool."

As much as Charlie Reed loves to work, he hates to lose. And that's the second thing you need to know about him. "He will never lose," said Catherine Reed. "It might appear that he loses, but he'll be back." And back. And back. And back. Until eventually, she said, he'll win.

Reed developed his competitive instincts on the gridiron, where he played both offense and defense. First he was quarterback and linebacker for his high school football team, which he led to the state finals. Then he played halfback and defensive cornerback for George Washington University, which he attended on a football scholarship, majoring in health and physical education, and where he later earned his master's degree in secondary education and an Ed.D. in teacher education.

Reed honed his political skills as education policy coordinator for former Florida Governor (and later U.S. Senator) Bob Graham, who came to value Reed's dedication and political instincts so much that he eventually promoted him through the ranks to chief of staff. Before Graham traded the governor's office for the Senate, Reed accepted the position of chancellor of the Florida State University system. He held the job for an unprecedented 12 and a half years in a state where, as Reed describes it, "universities are a political sport."

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And like football, it's a game he learned to play exceptionally well.

"Football shaped his competitive, blunt personality," said Graham, who considers Reed a close friend. "He was not just a football player, he was a linebacker, which meant when the runner got through the defensive line, his job was to be at the right place at the right time and knock the guy's head off. That's kind of the way he works."

Just ask Carol Liu, chair of the state Assembly's Committee on Higher Education, who ran smack into Charlie Reed last summer. Reed had arrived one afternoon at his second home in North Carolina for some rest and relaxation with his wife, only to turn around and head straight back to California at five o'clock the next morning when he heard that a key legislative bill might die in Liu's committee. "I'd never, never forgive myself if I'd have stayed there and lost it," said Reed.

The bill authorized Cal State to offer independent doctoral degrees for the first time, in audiology (Au.D.) and education (Ed.D.). That was highly controversial, because California's 45-year-old Master Plan for Higher Education reserved the right to offer doctoral degrees for the more selective, research-oriented University of California system. Cal State is meant to focus on providing undergraduate education to the top one-third of the state's high school graduates; it also offers master's degrees. The bill was staunchly opposed by UC, which already had joint Ed.D. and Au.D. programs with Cal State, and by Liu, who also chairs the advisory committee for the School of Education at UC Berkeley.

But at the eleventh hour, Reed persuaded UC President Robert Dynes to remove his opposition to the bill if it was limited to the Ed.D. and did not include the Au.D. That was part of a calculated strategy on Reed's part. "The idea was to get as much as we could, but we said if we have to give up something, we'll give up the Au.D.," he said.

"I don't think of it as a horse trade so much as the best way to go about it," Dynes explained. "And once we got our egos out of the way, we both came to the same conclusion," he said: that it made sense for Cal State to offer the Ed.D., but that UC, with its medical facilities and healthcare expertise, should continue to partner with Cal State for the audiology degree.

After an intense lobbying effort orchestrated by Reed and the bill's sponsor, state Senator Jack Scott, chair of the Senate Committee on Education, it passed out of Liu's committee on a 5-2 vote. "I expected it to be a very hard fight. And it was a very hard fight," said Scott, who was subsequently named one of two "legislators of the year" by Cal State. Later, much to Scott's delight, the entire Assembly and the Senate approved it by overwhelming margins. "[Reed] knows how to get things done politically," said Scott, who, like Reed, is a veteran of both politics and higher education (he served as president of two community colleges). "He's quite indefatigable in the pursuit of things."

People who know him say the deal was quintessential Charlie Reed.

"The average college administrator, the best you can get is Poly Sci 101," said Assemblyman Dymally. As chair of the Assembly's Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance, he has been impressed by Reed's accessibility, responsiveness and savvy. "But he's Poly Sci Pragmatic 101."

"He's a consummate politician," said California Secretary of Education Alan Bersin, who also counts himself among Reed's many fans. "Even when you end up being in a big dispute with him, he's a good competitor. He could persuade you that something was in your interests even when you didn't think so originally."

That was not the case with Carol Liu. She still believes that the bill was a mistake, and that the new degree will suck precious resources from Cal State's undergraduate programs. "This is an end run by Charlie Reed to get around the Master Plan," said Liu, who saw herself as its protector and was peeved that the UC administration abandoned the fight. "It's the camel's nose under the tent."

Exactly, said Reed, adding that it's about time the Master Plan was revisited. After all, he noted dryly, "The U.S. Constitution has been changed a few times, too." He is happy to leave the Ph.D. programs to the University of California system, but he hopes Cal State's Ed.D. program will lead to approval of more Cal State applied doctoral degrees. "That's going to change the character of Cal State," he said, by adding prestige and name recognition to the institution. (It could use some: When Reed introduces himself as chancellor of Cal State, people often assume he means the University of California.)

So was it a win, a loss or a draw for Cal State? "We won," Reed declared without hesitation. "Absolutely."

And winning, to Charlie Reed, means scoring one for the students. That is why Reed was at the state capitol in May, lobbying alongside students, presidents and other Cal State officials for a financial aid bill that Cal State and the California State Student Association had co-sponsored. "I think he works hard for the students and really tries to do what's best for the institution," said Jennifer Reimer, CSSA chair for the past year, explaining why the CSSA gave Reed its most recent Administrator of the Year award.

Reed is equally popular with the university system's presidents, who say he is a leader they can trust. Yes, he's brusque. Yes, he's impatient. Yes, he's demanding. But, they say, he's also honest, reliable and open to hearing their ideas. Ruben Armiñana, president of Sonoma State University, calls him "a pussycat with a really loud meow."

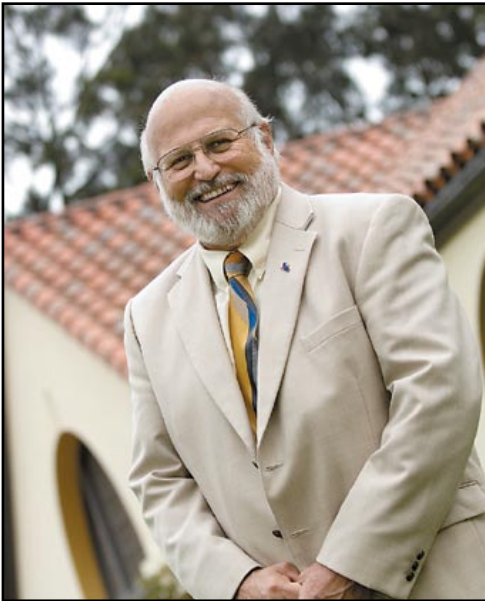
Paul Zingg, president of Cal State Chico (also known as Chico State) uses a different

Under Reed's leadership, Cal State has garnered national attention for innovative programs designed to help students prepare for college.



California Assemblywoman Carol Liu failed in an attempt to keep Cal State from offering doctoral degrees.

Paul Zingg for CrossTalk



John Travis, president of the Cal State Faculty Association, says Chancellor Reed largely ignores advice from faculty members.

animal analogy to describe Reed. “He’s something of a bull in a china closet,” Zingg said. “But I mean that positively. You know he’s in the room. And that’s good: to have folks be aware when Cal State is in the room. Charlie’s been very effective in announcing our presence and tying our presence to the agenda for the state of California.”

Reed does not receive such high marks from some Cal State faculty and the Cal State unions. But the days of faculty picketers and votes of no confidence—in Reed’s first year on the job, they were passed by more than a dozen campus faculties, incensed over what they

perceived as his disrespect for them—are long gone.

Still, there’s no love lost between the Cal State administration and the faculty, who feel they are overworked and underpaid. “Certainly there’s a lot of faculty anger over the salary and workload situation,” said Ted Anagnoson, immediate past vice chair of the statewide Academic Senate and a professor of political science at Cal State Los Angeles. “Probably too much of it is directed at the board of trustees and Charlie. Probably it ought to be directed more at the state.”

In the coming academic year, Cal State officials say, average faculty salaries are projected to lag 18 percent behind those at comparable institutions, more than 26 percent for full

professors. That is in large part due to the hit Cal State took during California’s budget crisis: Between 2002 and 2005, the Cal State budget was slashed by \$522 million, about 12.5 percent of its current \$4 billion budget.

At the behest of California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Reed and UC President Dynes negotiated a six-year higher education compact that provided an additional \$218 million to Cal State this year, but that only covered a 2.5 percent increase in enrollment and a 3.5 percent increase in salaries, the first in three years. The compact also provides for continued funding for the projected 2.5 percent annual enrollment growth, as well as steady increases in base

funding of three percent next year, four percent the following year and five percent during the last three years of the agreement.

Some legislators were miffed that they weren’t included in the compact negotiations, and thought Reed and Dynes might have done better. But Reed defended the compact as fair. And California Secretary of Education Bersin praised it as

politically pragmatic, given the state’s dire fiscal situation at the time. “Charlie’s been around the block enough to know that pigs get fed and hogs get slaughtered,” Bersin said. Translation: You won’t survive long if you try to grab more than your share.

But now that the state’s economy is improving, union leadership has been critical of Reed for failing to advocate for additional funding. “Initially they said it would just be a floor,” said John Travis, professor of government at Humboldt State University and Cal State Faculty Association president. “They have treated it as a ceiling. They do not ask for anything more than the compact, and we believe that is just not enough.”

Travis doesn’t have many kind words to say about Reed, whom he criticized for not listening to the faculty, and for raising annual tuition and fees. “It’s always been kind of surprising to us that he distrusts the advice that comes from the people who are doing the business of the university,” he said.

But even Travis acknowledged that Reed isn’t completely to blame for what he characterized as the union’s “dysfunctional relationship” with the administration. “This predates Charlie. It’s always been very difficult to bargain with the administration.” And he said he was pleased that Reed recently hired a consultant to help improve his relationships with Cal State employee unions. “I think all of the labor unions see this as a positive development. It’s a recognition of a problem,” said Travis.

Reed, for his part, said he thinks the relationship has already improved somewhat; he also has said that he recognizes the need to close the salary gaps lest they jeopardize the future quality of Cal State. And in fact, the Cal State Board of Trustees has approved a five-year plan that begins to address the issue.

But Reed said that the union leadership is not grounded in fiscal reality. “They think there’s some money machine somewhere,” he said, with exasperation.

Reed doesn’t have a money machine, but he has told his presidents they must raise more funds from the private sector, which he says has been largely untapped by Cal State. “California has so much wealth compared to most other states,” said Reed. “And we have to figure out how to access that wealth.”

Meanwhile, he believes student tuition and fees should continue to increase ten percent a year until students are picking up 25 percent of the total cost of their education. Currently, he said, tuition accounts for about 23 percent. Even with substantial tuition hikes over the past few years, the \$3,164 average annual cost of attending Cal State remains far below the national average cost of attending a public four-year institution, which this year was \$5,491.

Reed could not say how much longer he would remain at the helm of Cal State. But he clearly is in no hurry to step down. Because California is ten to 15 years ahead of the rest of the country in terms of population trends, he believes that Cal State can serve as a national model. And he wants to make it a good one.

Besides, said Reed, “I think I would die if I didn’t go to work.” ♦

Freelance writer Kathy Witkowsky lives in Missoula, Montana.

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