

Opinion: Expand free education to everyone

By Michael Hiltzik, Los Angeles Times

President Obama's proposal unveiled Thursday to provide free community college education to all "responsible" students is garnering immense attention. That's as it should be, although the details still need to be fleshed out and individual states will have to agree to shoulder a share of the costs.

But the proposal fails to address one glaring flaw in the nation's overall system of public higher education: It should all be free. That's the way it is in Germany, for instance, where there is a long tradition of low-cost university study. In 2014 the last German state holding out against free university education threw in the towel; now anyone, including foreign students, can study at a German university at public expense.

Free higher education to qualified students was also the rule in California, where the University of California had no tuition for state residents until Gov. Ronald Reagan demanded it in the early 1970s. Once the door was cracked open for tuition charges, it swung wide; a Berkeley or UCLA education was pegged at \$12,192 for state residents in 2014-15, plus myriad other fees.

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