

An aerial photograph of a university campus, likely California State University Channel Islands, showing various buildings, green spaces, and a large lake in the distance. The background features a range of mountains under a clear blue sky.

CSU Channel Islands

Competitor Review

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Overview and Methodology

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Competitor Analysis Overview

The purpose of this work is to assess the brand positions of CSUCI and several regional competitors to understand:

- The brand space each institution owns
- How each institution conveys its brand position
- How brand claims are supported through the university's behavior (via what we can see)
- Implications for the brand space CSUCI owns today (and could own in the future) and how that brand identity is conveyed

We assessed each institution on its own but with an eye toward how they position themselves against others.

A thread through every part of this assessment is *What are the implications for CSUCI?*

Competitors/Comparators

The following 9 CSU institutions (left) were provided by the University along with the primary local private institution and community college (right).

- Northridge
- Los Angeles
- Long Beach
- San Marcos
- San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly)
- San Francisco
- San Diego State University
- Chico State University
- Dominguez Hills
- Cal Lutheran
- Ventura County Community College District

* *CSU institutions*

Context: Data for all Institutions

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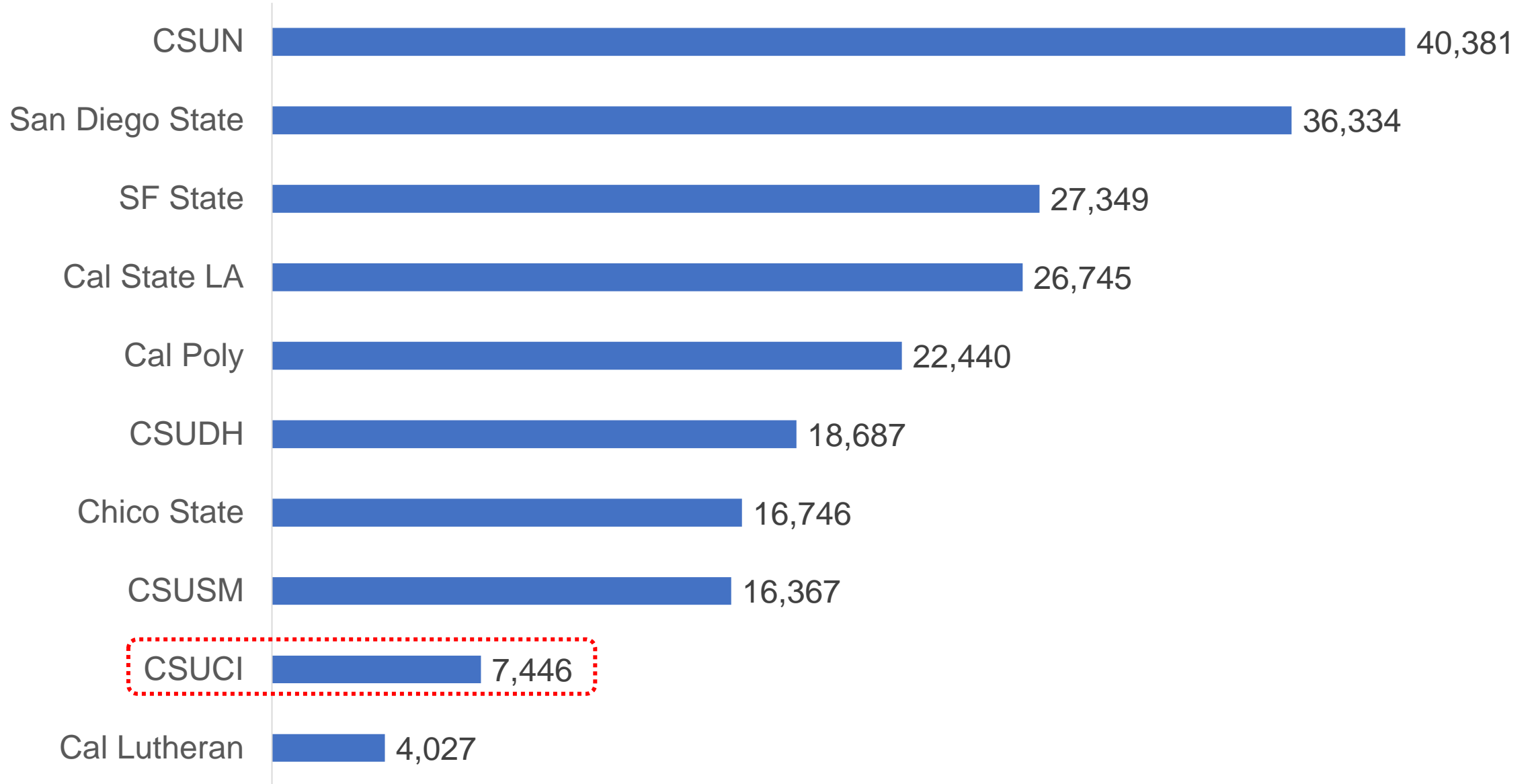
Total Enrollment

The universities included in this assessment have an average total enrollment of 21,652 students (2020).

- CSUN and San Diego State are far and away the largest with over 35k students

CSUCI's 2020 total enrollment of 7,446 ranks 9th among these 10 universities.

TOTAL ENROLLMENT (2020)



Enrollment Change

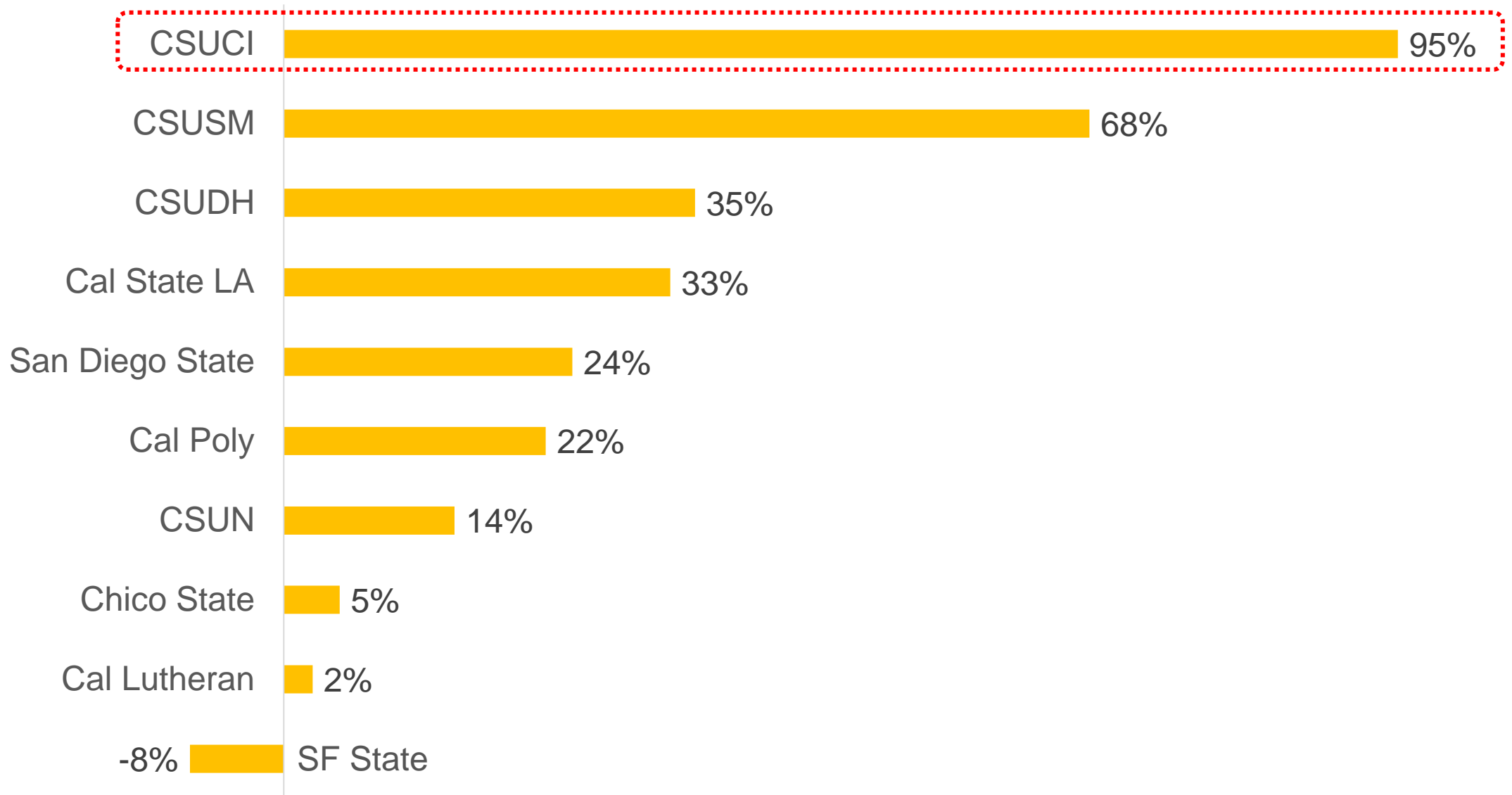
Between 2010 and 2020, enrollment increased at these universities by a combined 36,500 students, amounting to a 20% collective increase in enrollment.

CSUCI led the competition in enrollment growth between 2010 and 2020 by nearly doubling total enrolling during that decade. The only other university to come close to CSUCI's rate of growth was CSU San Marcos, which grew 68%.

All competitors increased enrollment throughout the past decade except for San Francisco State University, which declined -8%.

ENROLLMENT CHANGE

% Change in Total Enrollment, 2010-2020



Enrollment Composition

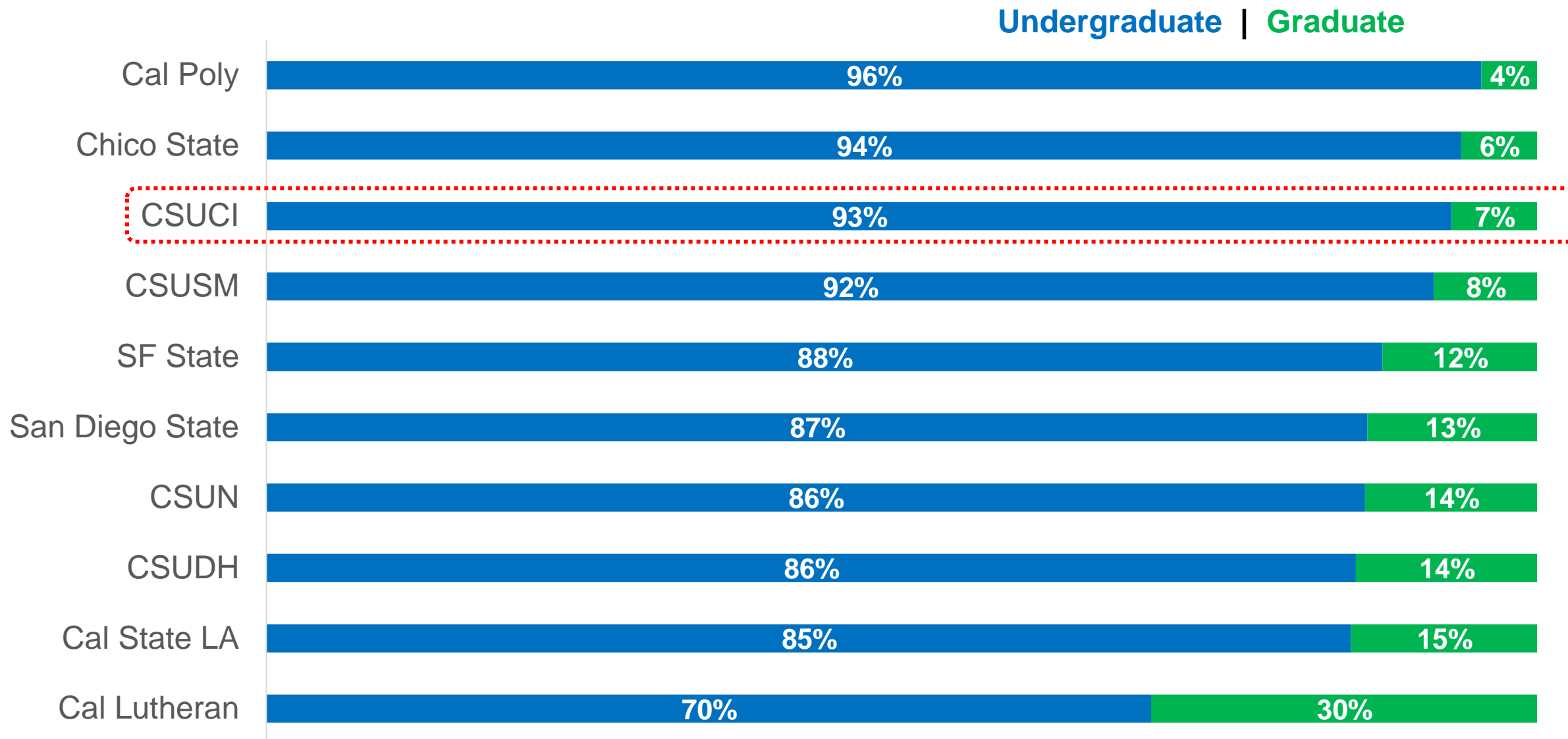
Collectively, undergraduate students account for 88% of all students enrolled at these universities.

CSUCI, Cal Poly, Chico State, and CSUSM are more dependent on undergraduate enrollment than others with undergraduates accounting for 90%+ of all students.

Only at Cal Lutheran do graduate students account for a substantial share of enrollment.

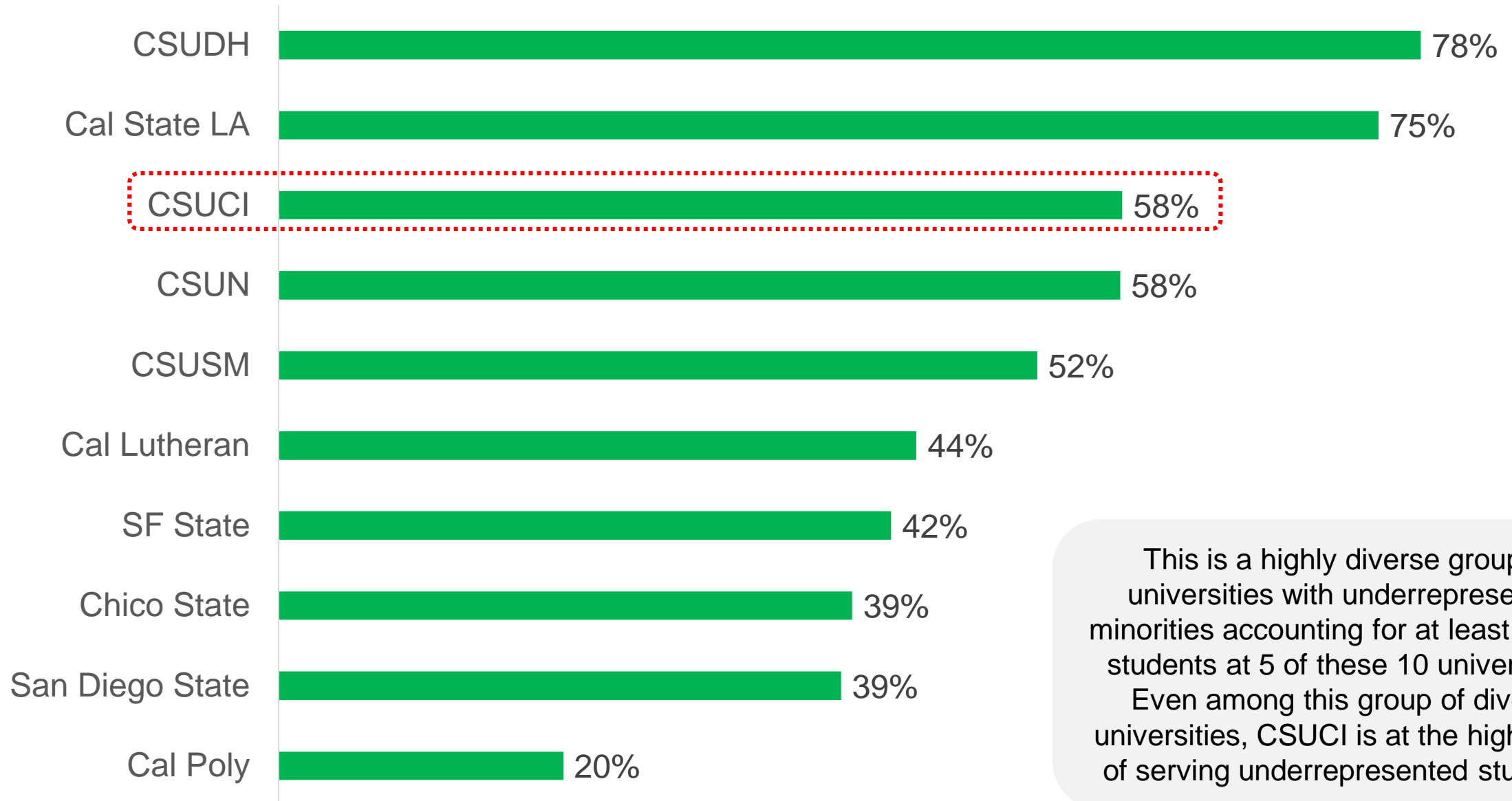
Distribution of Enrollment

Undergraduate vs Graduate Share of Total Enrollment (2020)



STUDENT DIVERSITY: RACE/ETHNICITY

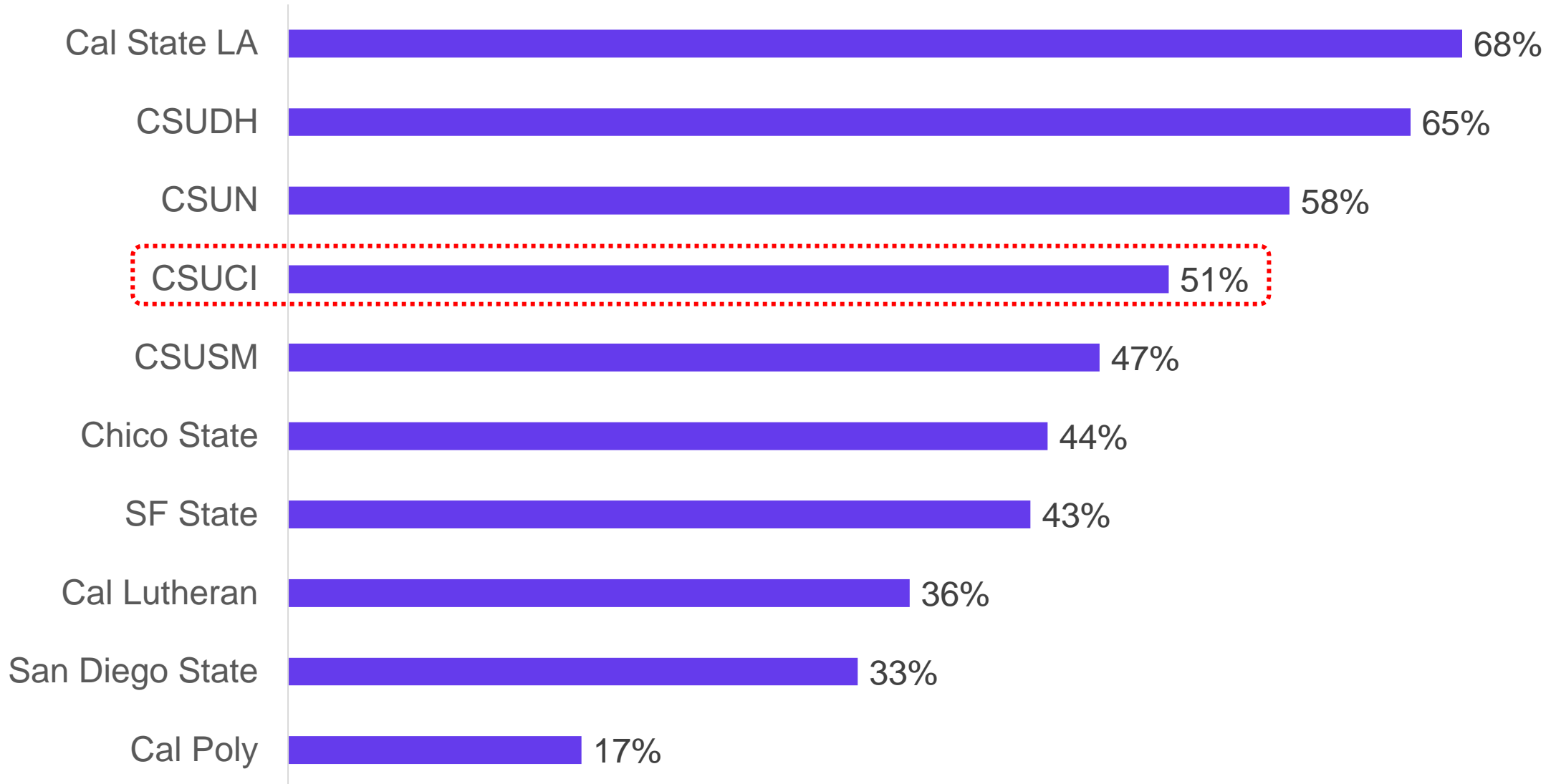
% of students identifying as an underrepresented minority in higher education (2020)



This is a highly diverse group of universities with underrepresented minorities accounting for at least 50% of students at 5 of these 10 universities. Even among this group of diverse universities, CSUCI is at the higher end of serving underrepresented students.

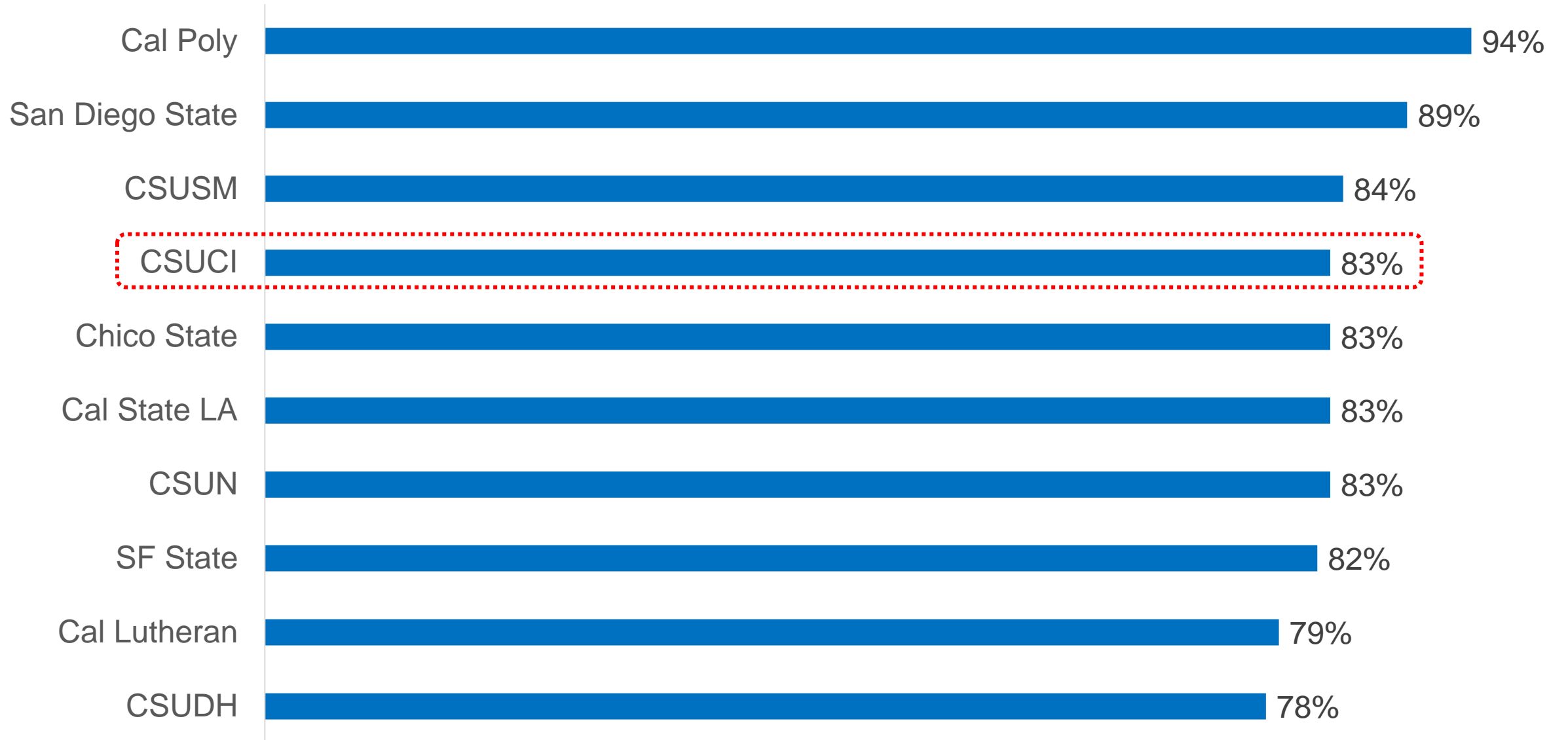
STUDENT DIVERSITY: PELL ELIGIBILITY

% of students receiving Pell Grants (2020)



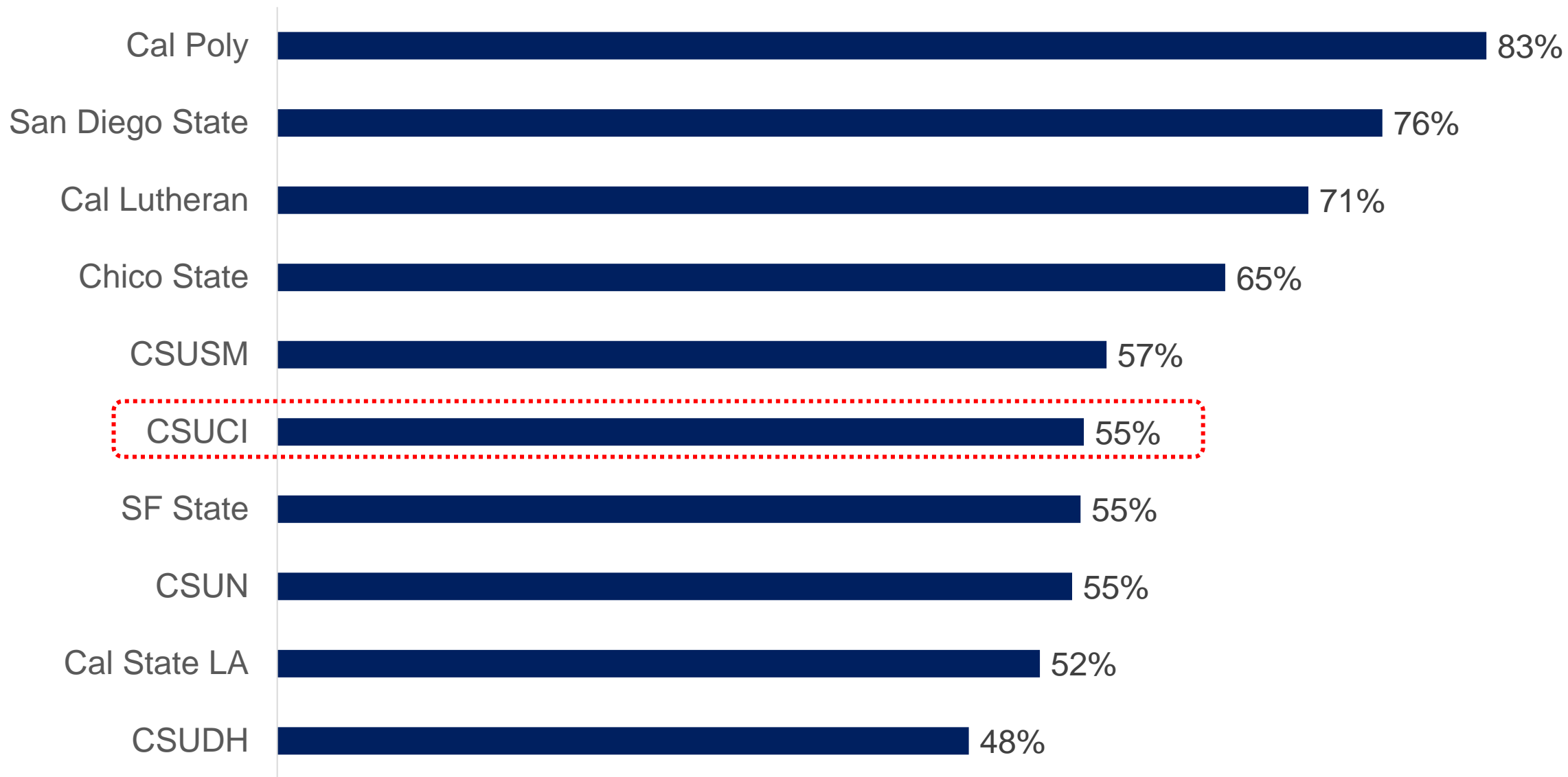
RETENTION

% of full-time students retained from first to second year (2020)



GRADUATION RATE

% of **ALL** students graduating within 6 years (2020)



Social Mobility

For additional insight into these universities, we compiled data from Third Way, an education-focused think tank that recently published social mobility data and rankings for four-year universities in the U.S. More information [can be found here](#).

The table on the following slide contains three pieces of information for each university:

1. Price-to-Earnings Premium (PEP): This measures the number of years it takes a graduate of each university to pay for the total net cost of attending the university. The value of this metric is that it takes into account both how much a university costs to attend AND how much graduates earn. The unit of measurement is years – i.e., it takes the typical CSUCI graduate 2.72 years to earn the amount of money that it cost to get a degree from CSUCI.
2. Low-Income PEP Rank: This is the university's ranking among all 1,320 universities in the dataset on the price-to-earnings premium (data point #1) for low-income students. In other words, this reflects how long it takes a low-income student to earn a salary that equals the amount of money it cost them to get a degree from the university. As an example, CSUCI ranks 371 out of 1,320 on this metric.
3. Economic Mobility Index Rank: This ranking goes further to take into account how many low-income students the university serves *in addition to* how long it takes them to recoup the cost of attendance. With this information incorporated, CSUCI ranks 60th among all 1,320 universities on economic mobility – i.e., enrolling lower-income students, providing them an affordable cost of attendance, and delivering strong returns in starting salaries upon graduation.

Social Mobility

University	Price-to-Earnings Premium (yrs.)	Low Income PEP Ranking	Economic Mobility Index Ranking
Cal State LA	0.43	27	1
CSUDH	0.51	32	2
CSUN	1.21	114	14
Cal Poly	1.36	139	595
San Diego State	1.51	151	137
CSUSM	1.63	177	39
Chico State	1.69	186	46
SF State	1.81	201	49
CSUCI	2.72	371	60
Cal Lutheran	3.21	469	418

Notably, Cal State LA and CSUDH rank #1 and #2 nationally among all 1,320 universities on economic mobility.

Competitors

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CSU-Northridge

The screenshot shows the top portion of the CSUN website. At the top left is the CSUN logo in red, followed by the text "CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE". To the right of the logo is a search bar with the word "Search" inside. Further right is a horizontal list of links: "Skip to Content", "Skip to Portal", "Accessibility", "Directory", "Calendar", "A to Z", and "Webmail". Below this is a red navigation bar with white text links: "ABOUT", "ADMISSIONS", "COLLEGES", "ACADEMICS", "STUDENTS", "INSIDE CSUN", and "GIVE". The main content area features a carousel of three portrait photos of individuals. The first photo is of a man with glasses, with the text "Distinguished Alumni" overlaid. The second photo is of a woman, with a "Read More" link and arrow overlaid. The third photo is of a man, with a "Pause" button and navigation arrows overlaid. At the bottom of the carousel are four dark buttons with white text: "MYNORTHTRIDGE PORTAL", "ALUMNI", "ATHLETICS", and "LIBRARY".

CSU Northridge

Tagline	None on the website, but a campaign of <i>Through CSUN We All Rise</i> exists
Primary Brand Attributes	Size (38K students), some global connections
Secondary Attributes	VERY tertiary mentions of research, academic breadth, value, location, diversity
Primary Data Evidence	None – there is no institutional “Why CSUN?” section
Missed Opportunities	So much; outcomes/success among everything else – overall, very poor positioning
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>CSUN is a vibrant, diverse university community of 38,310 students and more than 4,000 faculty and staff, sited on a 356-acre campus in the heart of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley. As you explore the university's web site, you will find ample evidence of our commitment to the educational and professional goals of students, and its extensive service to the community.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>At CSUN, every day is a success story. Filled with resilience and pride. A sense of never settling for satisfactory. We celebrate the inner spirit and self empowered individuals. Because the ones motivated by an urge to impact their own lives as well as their surrounding communities are the reason, we've effected change in our region. This is where more than 100 languages are spoken, but no one understands the word “can't.” Our hard-working and dedicated faculty and staff believe “Whatever it takes” is a state of mind — not a tactic. Because we believe leaving a mark means leaving no one behind. CSUN provides more than a work force — we are a force of work. Those who in advancing themselves, elevate us all.</i>

CSU Northridge: Notables for CSUCI

The only strong brand reference about ROI is to potential adult students:

At CSUN, we believe in outcomes. Through our award-winning courses and programs, you'll gain the freedom to define your next step – and all those that follow.

Institutionally, six distinct characteristics are said to make up who CSUN is. None are explained in detail, and most are not easily understood by external audiences:

- Elevating
- Multifaceted
- Catalytic
- Resilient
- Integral
- Genuine



CSU Northridge: Notables for CSUCI

For all the discussion of CSUN being CSUCI's biggest rival based (understandably) on location, it is hard to see what make CSUN special.

Clearly the proximity to CSUCI is an obvious reason, but CSUN is 5 ½ times larger, offers many but not necessarily any exceptional majors, and promotes no compelling point-of-view on its website.

Note the CSUN website offers one of the worst higher education user experiences in existence today.

- The website leads with insular news stories, COVID news and policies, and processes.
- Finding out anything about what it's like to be a student at CSUN is impossible.

CSUCI should be able to convey a stronger brand position than CSUN by simply doing a better job of storytelling.

Cal State-Los Angeles



SECURE YOUR SPOT AT CAL STATE LA

Cal State-Los Angeles

Tagline	None (there is a fund-raising campaign, We Are LA)
Primary Brand Attributes	Social mobility, equity, HSI, MSI, AA'/NAPI institution, heart of LA location, supportive of student success
Secondary Attributes	Academic breadth, value, California Promise, service
Primary Data Evidence	Top U nationally for social mobility
Missed Opportunities	At no time is there a sense of what it is like to attend the University; and for all the “social mobility” rhetoric, there are no obvious examples
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>Choose Cal State LA, the premier public comprehensive university in the heart of Los Angeles. Explore a broad array of majors, minors, programs and academic opportunities, and be supported by a University-wide commitment to Student Success...We prepare students to become leaders locally, nationally, and globally through inquiry and innovation with real-world application inside and outside of the classroom.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>Cal State LA is the premier comprehensive public university in the heart of Los Angeles and is dedicated to engagement, service, and the public good. We are ranked number one in the United States for the upward mobility of our students.</i>

Cal State LA: Notables for CSUCI

Campus Facts on the website is a link to intricate data tables rather than a narrative.

The California Promise is an interesting offer (commitment to timeline graduation = preferential scheduling) although it is not elevated to the top pages of the website.

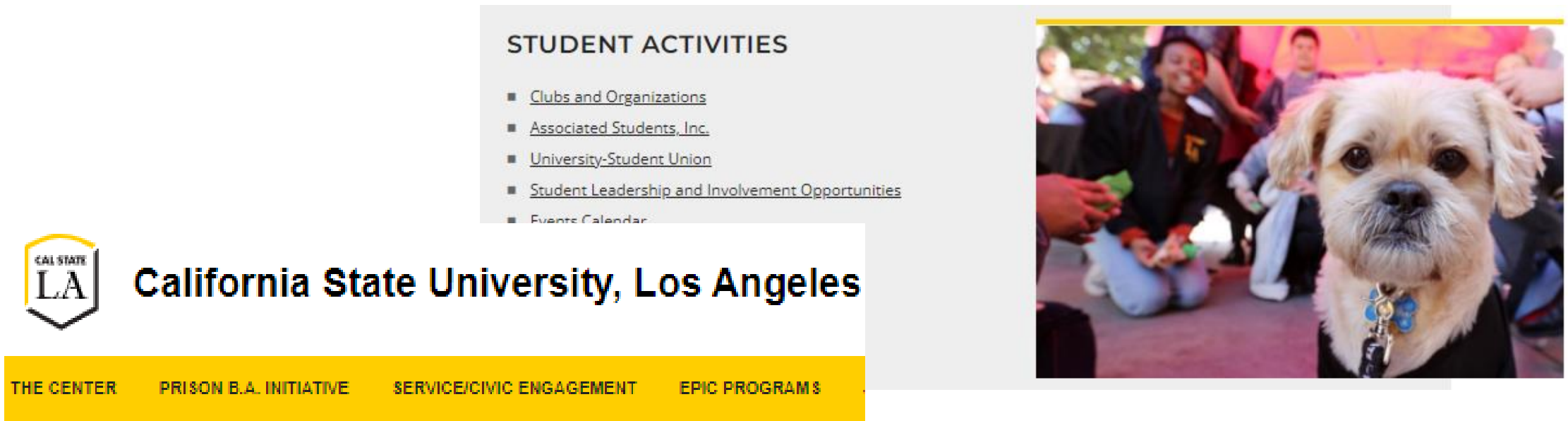
Cal State LA's Mission (below top) and Vision (below bottom) are in line with the brand and vice versa. However, nowhere in subsequent messaging does the University prove its claims:

Cal State LA transforms lives and fosters thriving communities across greater Los Angeles. We cultivate and amplify our students' unique talents, diverse life experiences, and intellect through engaged teaching, learning, scholarship, research, and public service that support their overall success, well-being, and the greater good.

Cal State LA will be internationally recognized as the premier comprehensive public university in greater Los Angeles. We are dedicated to delivering cutting-edge academic programs that prepare students to be innovative leaders in both their professional and civic lives and to serving the public good through initiatives that engage local, regional, and global communities in mutually beneficial partnerships.

Cal State-LA: Notables for CSUCI

There are some avoidable oddities about their institutional promotion. A powerful lead-in to community service goes to a broken link (lower left) and the build-up to all-important student life “in the heart of LA” is showcased by a confusing photo choice (lower right) and lists of clubs and organizations but little storytelling.



The screenshot displays the website for California State University, Los Angeles. At the top, the text "STUDENT ACTIVITIES" is followed by a list of links: [Clubs and Organizations](#), [Associated Students, Inc.](#), [University-Student Union](#), [Student Leadership and Involvement Opportunities](#), and [Events Calendar](#). Below this is the university's logo and name, "California State University, Los Angeles". A yellow navigation bar contains the following links: [THE CENTER](#), [PRISON B.A. INITIATIVE](#), [SERVICE/CIVIC ENGAGEMENT](#), and [EPIC PROGRAMS](#). On the right side, there is a photograph of a small, fluffy white dog with a blue collar, sitting in front of a group of people.

CONTACTS

The requested page "/engagement/iservela" could not be found.

Cal State-Long Beach



Cal State-Long Beach

Tagline	Not a tagline, more of an attitude: <i>The Beach</i>
Primary Brand Attributes	Teaching, public good, diversity, creativity, 40K students (positioned as an asset)
Secondary Attributes	Academic breadth (190+ majors)
Primary Data Evidence	Rankings in several categories around DE&I
Missed Opportunities	For all the bluster and rankings, CSULB doesn't offer any student stories, humanity, or faculty/student relationships.
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>Cal State Long Beach is one of the best valued schools in the nation with low tuition fees, high social mobility rate and earning potential after graduation.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>California State University, Long Beach is a 322-acre campus home to top-notch professors, successful alumni and a diverse student population ready to take on the world with a highly regarded education.</i> <i>Cal State Long Beach will be a force for good at the forefront of public education in California and the world.</i>

Cal State-Long Beach: Notables for CSUCI

The Beach brand attitude has an interesting feel in its varied uses (example top right).

It's unusual for us to see a downloadable visitor's guide (lower right). And while the content of the guide is impressive, it seems odd to have to download a PDF today to get what should be easily found on the University's website (rankings, awards, numbers). Some rankings – while not explained – are impressive (below).

**No. 8 in the nation
for campus diversity**

(Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education)

**Ranked No. 2
Master's-level university
in the nation**

(Washington Monthly, September 2021)

The Beach is a force for good
at the forefront of **public education**
in California and the world



Download Beach Facts

Cal State-Long Beach: Notables for CSUCI

The eight hidden gems of campus in the home page teaser are an eclectic bunch:

- Japanese Garden
- Graduate Study Space
- Lee Brown Reading Room
- Great Views
- The Gap
- Art Gallery In The USU
- Lunch Bench
- All-Gender Restrooms, Free Tampon, Changing Station Locations

[Coloring the Beach](#) Download, print and color your favorite CSULB coloring sheet. Share it on social media, and remember to tag @csulbalumni and use the #OneBeach hashtag.

A curious top link entitled *Nomenclature* explains the University's wording including: the Beach, Beach Athletics, Dirtbags, Elbee (the shark mascot), Long Beach State, and '49ers.

Alumni are encouraged to color The Beach (right) on downloadable sheets.

Cal State-Long Beach: Notables for CSUCI


The University uses more and better photography than anyone else on their website addressing location/setting, activities, and all forms of humanity. A good lesson for CSUCI.



CSU-San Marcos

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS



CAMPUS APPS 

ABOUT

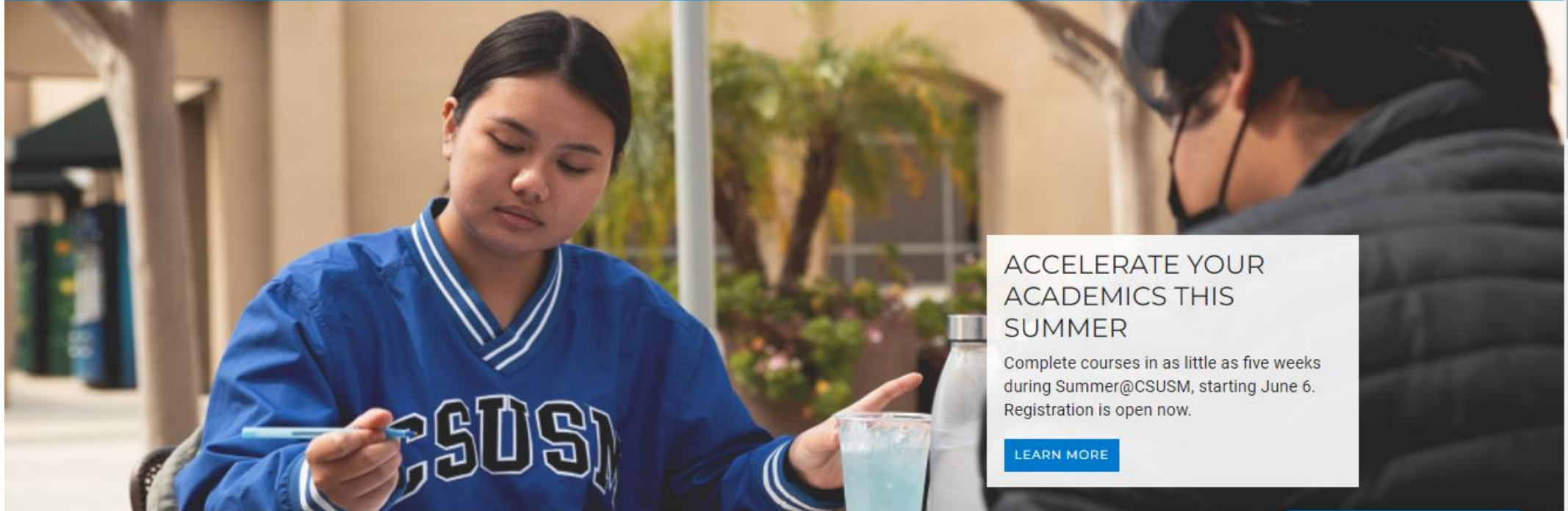
ACADEMICS

CAMPUS LIFE

ADMISSIONS & AID

GIVING

RESOURCES



ACCELERATE YOUR ACADEMICS THIS SUMMER

Complete courses in as little as five weeks during Summer@CSUSM, starting June 6. Registration is open now.

[LEARN MORE](#)

CSU San Marcos

Tagline	None nor any singular theme
Primary Brand Attributes	Beaches and more beaches (CSUSM makes your use of “beaches” pedestrian). In their Strategic Plan there is much about social mobility and first-generation students, which is laudable, but none of that tone or content can be found public-facing.
Secondary Attributes	Trailblazer/innovator, but no evidence other than a few stories in “News”
Primary Data Evidence	None.
Missed Opportunities	Most everything. There is no sense of purpose, people, or anything compelling.
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>Located in North San Diego County, Cal State San Marcos’ unique location offers endless opportunities for exploration and activities. Minutes from the area’s best beaches and an hour from both the desert and the mountains; discover the sights near our vibrant campus in the idyllic foothills of San Marcos.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>Building on an innovative 30-year history, CSUSM is a forward-focused institution, dedicated to preparing future leaders, building great communities and solving critical issues. Located on a 304-acre hillside overlooking the city of San Marcos, the University is just a short distance from some of Southern California’s best beaches and an hour from the U.S.-Mexico border.</i>

CSUSM Notables for CSUCI

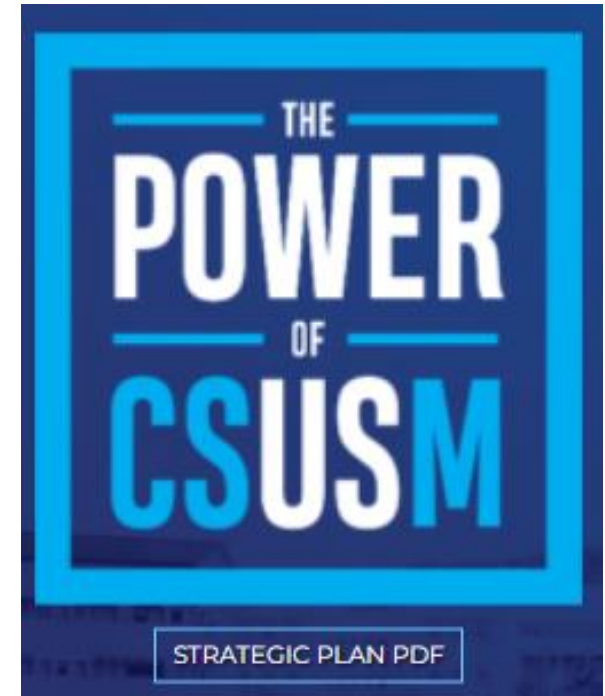
Candidly, there isn't much to offer here. The lack of a brand position both visually and verbally doesn't allow much insight.

We appreciate the best messaging is around a decently built strategic plan (right). It touches on several themes (a mission built on student success, CSUSM as a transformational force for hope and opportunity.) But none of this is represented on the entirety of their website.

The following is about the only other proactive brand message about CSUSM not on the previous slide of sample language – and the only one that doesn't reference beaches:

We are a forward-focused university of innovators and trailblazers.

Join us as we prepare tomorrow's leaders, build great communities and solve the critical issues of today.



CSU-San Luis Obispo

LEARN BY DOING

ONCE YOU'RE ACCEPTED EXPLORE OUR CAMPUS ROADMAP FOR A HEALTHY CAMPUS

VISIT / APPLY / GIVE MENU

Cal Poly

Tagline	<i>Learn By Doing</i>
Primary Brand Attributes	Doing, innovation. Impact, academic breadth (more than 150 programs), diversity
Secondary Attributes	Student life and location but only because everything else is primary
Primary Data Evidence	Many, including 27 straight years as best public, master's-level university in the West (<i>U.S. News</i>); top public masters-level university in CA (<i>Forbes</i>)
Missed Opportunities	Not really anything seems to be missing
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>Learn by Doing means that we don't see a difference between the education we provide and the "real world." Here, experiences are part of the curriculum. That's because knowledge is inextricably linked to the world around us.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>Cal Poly students, faculty and staff are constantly playing an active part in helping solve some of California's — and the world's — most complex challenges.</i> <i>Learn By Doing. Ready Day One. We know people learn best when they do the work themselves. For more than a century, we've taught our students to work together using their heads and their hands to find solutions to some of the world's biggest problems. It's why our alumni are prepared to hit the ground running and empowered to make a better future for California, our nation and our world.</i>

Cal Poly Notables for CSUCI

[A branded video](#) about *Learn By Doing* does a visually strong job of telling the Cal Poly story. The narration doesn't match the power of the video, but it is satisfactory.

Rankings promoted by Cal Poly are impressive in breadth and national accolades. From best university to work in student life, to student wins in national competitions (logging, technology, etc.), to various academic rankings, Cal Poly clearly is a confident, purposeful brand.

Rather than beaches, sunshine, and mountains, Cal Poly's brand defines location this way:

Centered In / Central to California

Cal Poly is located in San Luis Obispo on California's Central Coast, about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Our location gives students access to opportunities for hands-on research in agriculture, winemaking and distinctive coastal ecosystems as well as close proximity to tech, industry and the culture hubs in Southern California and the Bay Area. Given California's status as a world leader in many areas and industries, our students have an opportunity to do work that makes an impact around the globe.

Cal Poly Notables for CSUCI

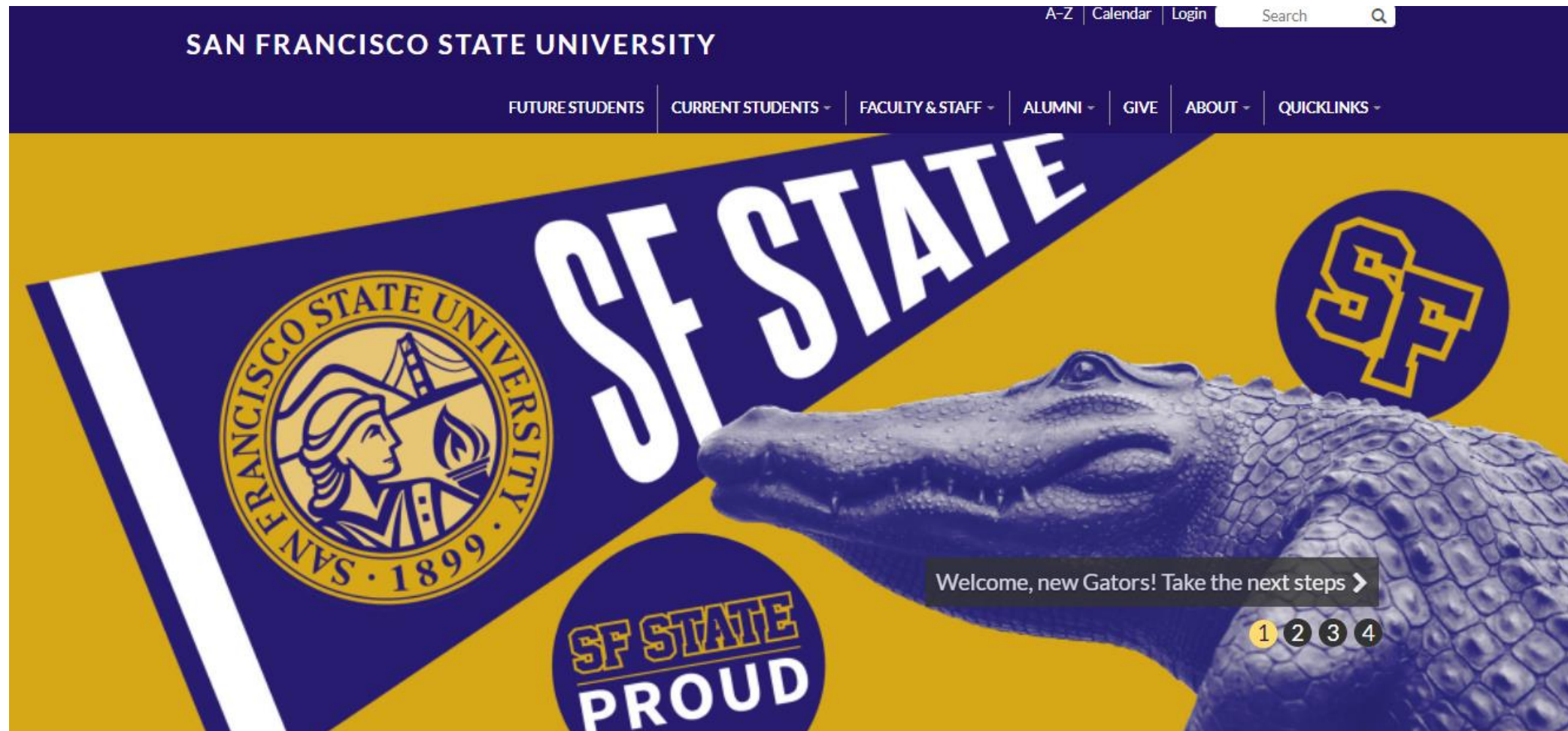
It is obvious and understandable that Cal Poly has a strong hold over the academic realm of your region. CSUCI cannot offer the breadth, depth, or prestige of Cal Poly's portfolio (yet), but to move CSUCI's brand ahead really is a matter of finding the *right* opportunities to connect with audiences in relevant ways be it with programs, modality, and/or the focus you offer.

The brand position of CSUCI must stand on your own merits which – we believe – won't overlap with a nearby polytechnic with a national brand presence.

Cal Poly cannot offer every program, degree/certificate level, and modality needed in your region, even with 150+ stated programs. And many of the programs they offer are “general” and already a form of duplicate to something CSUCI does or could offer (re: business, psychology, education, basic sciences, etc.)

To sum, what is important is that you find programs that Cal Poly doesn't offer or does offer but in some limited form and determine if there are viable opportunities to expand your academic offerings. It is doubtful you will grow enrollment as much as you wish within the confines of your current portfolio.

San Francisco State University



SF State

Tagline	None (nor any suggested themes)
Primary Brand Attributes	Support (advising), faculty, hands-on opportunities, science, academic breadth
Secondary Attributes	Affordability, diversity, “community”
Primary Data Evidence	Top 25 film schools nationally, great alumni profiles
Missed Opportunities	Little is said about San Francisco; vapid quotes/narration (below) sound more like a community college than any other type of institution
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>Welcome to San Francisco State University, where nearly 30,000 students enroll each year and every day our network of more than 275,000 graduates contributes to the economic, cultural and civic life of the Bay Area and beyond. We look forward to helping you become a new Gator!</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<p><i>From San Francisco State University, you can go anywhere.</i> <i>SF State was ranked in the top 25 for U.S. universities on CollegeNet’s Social Mobility Index...we’re among the best at making it affordable for our students to graduate and obtain good-paying jobs. Our graduates are now leaders in fields from journalism, creative writing and film to technology, science, business, government and education.</i></p> <p><i>“Your experiences are super important.” – student in Why SF State? video</i></p>

SF State Notables for CSUCI

A modestly paced, nicely narrated video introduces one to SF State through student voices. The editing and visuals are sound, too. The only issue – at 2 ½ steady minutes there is little excitement generated and it offers no clear path of message leading to a call-to-action. It’s a “nice” film but not a compelling one.

SF State has an alphabetical program search engine, but like many larger universities, it also asks prospective students to search for academic programs by colleges. Virtually no students know or care how a university is structured, and most (especially those first generation) know how to navigate higher education silos and lexicons.

We’ve never seen this – a *Facts* link goes to a historical repository of “University Facts” documents published at the beginning of each year. Why a prospective student (or most anyone) in 2022 would want to access anything other than this year is unknown – and the last *Fact Sheet* is from 2020-21.

- The sheet is only a simple template that is updated annually. For example, alumni numbers change with each year. It’s hard to see how they chose this method over a current comprehensive overview of data that really tells a powerful story.

SF State Notables for CSUCI

The Good – Gator Greats searchable alumni profiles (right) is outstanding, one of the best we've seen.

The Odd – the *Why SF State?* top attribute about alumni success (an impressive list including Apple, Google, etc.) is visually represented by this image (below).



Gator Greats (University Communications)

- Home
- Choose a category:
- Activism
- Art
- Broadcasting & Journalism
- Business
- Education
- Film & Television
- Literature
- Music
- Public Service
- Science & Technology
- Sports
- Theatre

Art

Alex Anderson
Quilter/teacher/author
The host of HGTV's "Simply Quilts" for more than a decade, she discovered her passion at SF State, when she completed a quilt as part of her work toward a degree in art. Today her award-winning quilts are displayed across the country.

Judy Dater
Photographer
One of contemporary art's leading photographers, this Guggenheim-winning artist was part of the Visual Dialogue Foundation, the SF State-based school that grew out of the ferment of the 1960s.

Roy De Forest
Artist
Known for their rich, colorful palette, this art major's paintings hang in major museums worldwide. His "Country Dog Gentlemen" is a popular work at the San Francisco MOMA.

Rupert Garcia

San Diego State University

SDSU San Diego State University

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MENU



San Diego State University

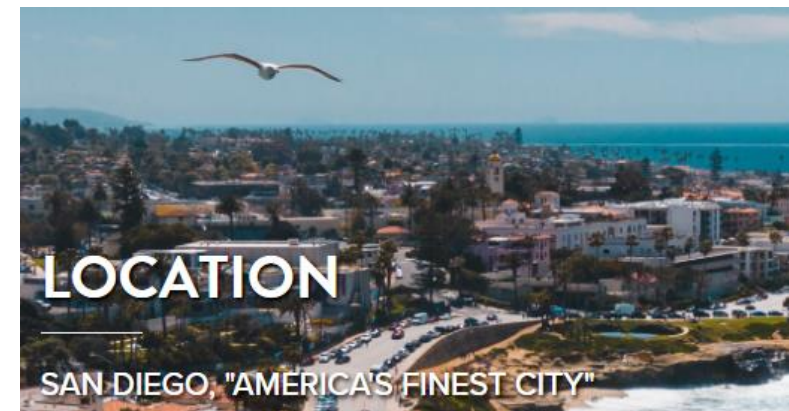
Tagline	<i>Transform Your Tomorrow (lead) / Change the World With Us</i>
Primary Brand Attributes	Location (i.e., the opposite of SF State for one), diversity, future-focused, research
Secondary Attributes	Oldest higher ed institution in San Diego
Primary Data Evidence	#9 nationally in grad rate performance, high rankings in business and other majors
Missed Opportunities	Really none other than storytelling/profiling so one can understand what it is like to be at SDSU. Despite a lot of photography and some video, SDSU doesn't fully capture the student experience.
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>Prepare for a vibrant learning experience both inside and outside the classroom. At SDSU, you'll find dynamic classes, great internships, unique study abroad programs, and opportunities to do research alongside our faculty, who are experts in the field.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>Since its founding in 1897, the university has grown to become a leading public research university, and a federally-designated Hispanic-serving Institution. Each year, SDSU provides more than 36,000 students with the opportunity to participate in an academic curriculum distinguished by direct contact with faculty and an international emphasis that prepares them for a global future.</i>

SDSU Notables for CSUCI

A five-year strategic plan, “We Rise We Defy: Transcending Borders, Transforming Lives,” was launched in 2020. In it, SDSU is refining the way it leverages its location and/or reach:

- *SDSU Mission Valley, a mixed-use, medium-density, transit-centered development will expand the university’s educational, research, entrepreneurial, and technology transfer programs.*
- *The expansion of the border-connected SDSU Imperial Valley has been infused with new investments to introduce new programs and student services.*
- *SDSU Global Campus is growing access to adult learners through new degree programs.*

Then there is a focus on the fun of location (below) where it is “always flip-flop weather:”



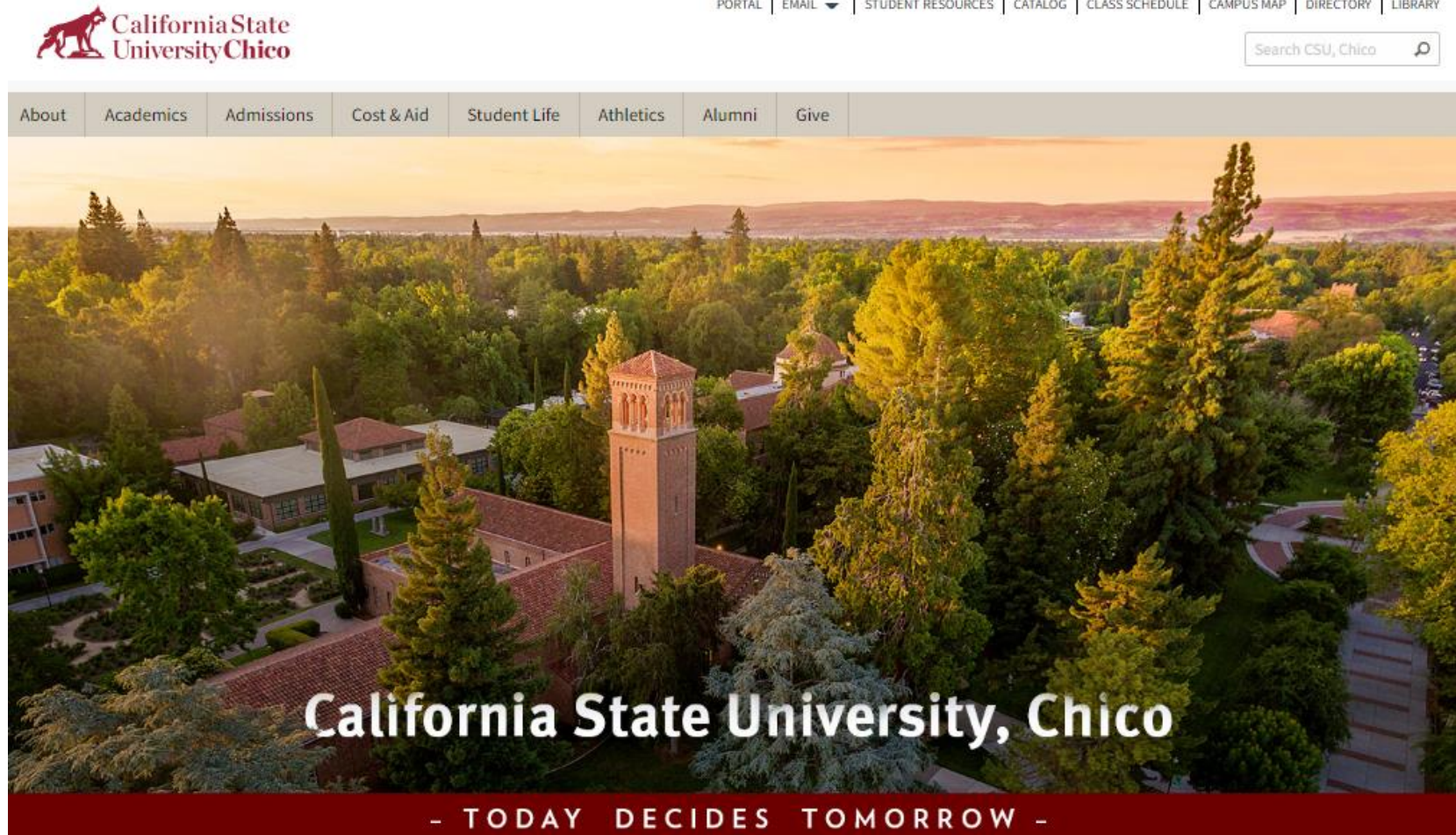
SDSU Notables for CSUCI

There are some interesting/bold claims, **a couple with issues.**

- Academic breadth claims are balanced with a focus on personal attention *With bachelor's degrees in 97 areas, master's degrees in 84 fields, 23 doctoral degrees and 82 certificate programs, **our students get the best of both worlds – individualized attention and infinite resources.***
- Photography on the College of Engineering web pages show almost exclusively women – **an accurate ratio reflective of enrollment?**
- *SDSU is the permanent home for academic excellence and research in the study of comics. The Center for Comics Studies was co-founded by the scholars who developed the Comics Working Group in 2019.*

There is a strong and well-presented message for parents of prospective students, explaining the role of Aztec parents in all things SDSU. While explaining the history of such an emphasis is odd (no one today needs an organizational history lesson from 2003-04), the tendrils of SDSU into the parents' lives is laudable.

Chico State/CSU Chico



Chico State/CSU Chico

Tagline	<i>Today Decides Tomorrow</i>
Primary Brand Attributes	Location, convenience (90% of students live on campus or close enough to bike/walk), beautiful campus, overall community feel, academic breadth (an unbelievable 343 programs?)
Secondary Attributes	Research, outcomes (in a general sense)
Primary Data Evidence	Top 7% Best Colleges, Top 10 for one-year study abroad opportunities, various rankings about social mobility, cost/value, ROI (top 8% nationally)
Missed Opportunities	Specific human stories, clearly a theme in this review of CSU institutions. Also, tagline is never explored after its introduction.
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>Welcome to Chico State. Your story begins here. Our tradition of academic excellence dates back 130 years, and we pride ourselves in helping today's students develop into tomorrow's successful citizens.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>California State University, Chico has been building a reputation for high-quality, high-value education for more than 130 years. Better known as Chico State, we are a Hispanic-Serving Institution that offers more than 100 degrees in undergraduate and graduate studies.</i>

Chico State Notables for CSUCI

It is hard to reconcile the system claim (next) with the provided supporting data and messaging (below). An interesting attempt to stand out in the CSU rhetoric:

We are unique among the CSU system for our high graduation rates and beautiful campus, as well as our dedicated faculty and friendly community who offer a personal touch that really makes students feel at home.

Provided evidence **falls short** of such bravado:

- With **one of the** highest 4-year graduation rates in the CSU system and lowest average student debt amounts in the country, we are committed to helping you graduate on time with a budget you can afford.
- 77% of students receive financial assistance **(not the highest in the system by far)**
- **Named one of the greenest schools in the nation** [as opposed to beautiful] in The Princeton Review's "Guide to Green Colleges," *most Wildcats live, learn, and work within walking or biking distance of campus.*

Finally, a “best of both worlds” claim of a large university with a personalized education is not evidenced by the three factoids provided (below). Notably though, 343 academic offerings is truly amazing within the CSU System if true.

30

Average Class Size

23:1

Student-to-Faculty Ratio

343

Academic Offerings

Chico State Notables for CSUCI

Touting 100% job placement in “many majors” without further evidence is suspiciously vague.

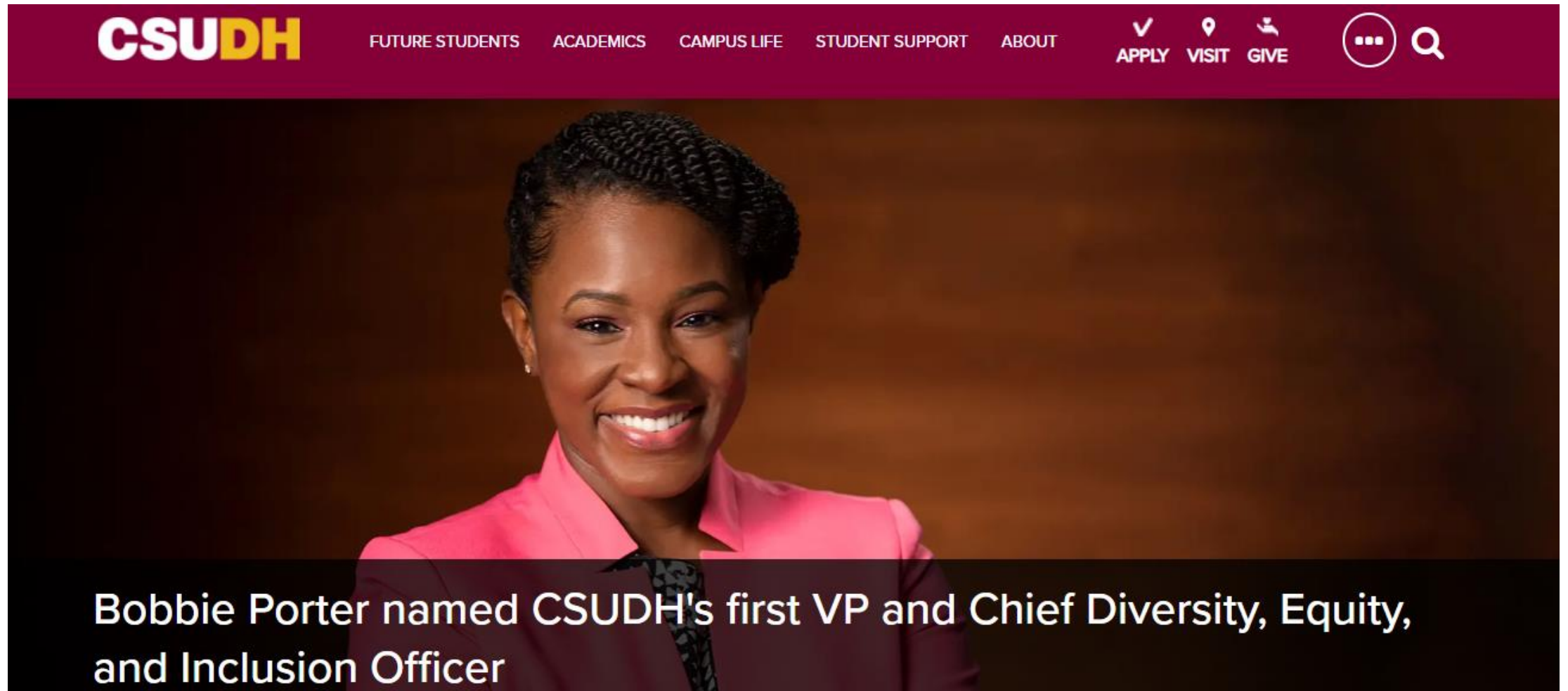
CSUCI is criticized for mentioning nearby beaches; Chico State uses the map (right) to visually bookmark the long list of natural and man-made destinations of note close by.

The CSU system’s lack of consistency in its members’ institutional naming structures and their resulting branding efforts is frustrating by this point.

- CSU Chico is “informally” known as Chico State; other CSU schools adhere to CSU [Name], non-CSU name (San Diego State U), and everything in between regarding punctuation and short-form abbreviations.
- Most U.S. systems have more consistent requirements that allow for leveraging the brand of the larger consortium.



CSU Dominguez Hills



The image shows a screenshot of the CSUDH website. The header is a dark red bar with the CSUDH logo on the left. Navigation links include FUTURE STUDENTS, ACADEMICS, CAMPUS LIFE, STUDENT SUPPORT, and ABOUT. On the right side of the header are icons for APPLY (with a checkmark), VISIT (with a location pin), GIVE (with a hand icon), a menu icon (three dots in a circle), and a search icon (magnifying glass). Below the header is a large hero image of Bobbie Porter, a Black woman with short braided hair, wearing a bright pink blazer over a dark patterned top. She is smiling warmly. At the bottom of the hero image, there is a dark red text box with white text.

CSUDH FUTURE STUDENTS ACADEMICS CAMPUS LIFE STUDENT SUPPORT ABOUT APPLY VISIT GIVE

Bobbie Porter named CSUDH's first VP and Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer

CSUDH

Tagline	<i>Be the...</i>
Primary Brand Attributes	Diversity, location in the LA area, a variety of associations with area groups and special programs in the LA area, all-Steinway School, Dignity Health Sports Park
Secondary Attributes	Faculty
Primary Data Evidence	https://www.csudh.edu/about/campus-facts/national-rankings-awards/
Missed Opportunities	Specific human stories, strong campus visuals (more on that ahead)
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>We are building a better future for each other, our communities, and all of California. We're proud of our responsibility to help grow and foster the next generation of leaders. Each and every Toro is unique in pursuit and personality, but all are united in their drive to make a difference and give back. Unlock your full potential.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>Centrally located in the South Bay and the heart of Los Angeles, CSU Dominguez Hills is a diverse, welcoming community of learners and educators collaborating to change lives and communities for the better. Through our strong and relevant academic programs, dedicated faculty mentors, supportive staff, attractive campus, and student amenities, CSUDH is committed to connecting our students to an affordable, high-quality, and transformative education.</i>

CSUDH Notables for CSUCI

Academic programs are presented in a broad, boastful way that is not followed by a strong narrative. The introduction:

CSUDH offers a wide selection of affordable degrees respected by leading employers, and reflecting today's most relevant, dynamic and in-demand fields. Our undergraduate majors, options, and concentrations and graduate degree programs and options, undergraduate certificate programs, and credential programs provide flexible options that let you customize your education to meet your academic and professional goals.

No program at any level is then detailed as proof of “in-demand” nor is there any outcomes information provided for any discipline at the upper levels of the website.

All academic messaging requires one to know the College, School, and then Division to reach the appropriate program. Given the vast number of first-generation students, this navigation seems rather unlikely.

CSUDH Notables for CSUCI

Impressively, 65% of CSUDH students participate in community service projects each year.

The [rankings page](#) is staggeringly impressive in the range of types of categories in which CSUDH is recognized. But little of this is highlighted at the top of the website in any manner, and one needs to basically stumble upon these here and there, by chance.

Branding missteps for CSUCI to recognize from CSUDH include both the verbal (storytelling) and visual (environmentals).

We know the campus in Carson is quite nice, full of green spaces and interesting spots for its nearly 17,000 students. Also, CSUDH's brand is human, its programs and impact are real and purposeful throughout Carson, Compton, and other LA communities.

Therefore, the use of these images (next slide) as headers on their most important web pages is so confounding. And stories simply don't exist to bring the University to rich and energetic life.

Sadly, great moments that should be highlighted are difficult to find (two slides ahead).

CSUDH Notables for CSUCI



CSUDH Notables for CSUCI



California Lutheran University



Cal Lutheran

Tagline	<i>Purpose Changes Your Perspective</i>
Primary Brand Attributes	Lutheran underpinnings, tradition, academics, service, size, Centers and Institutes
Secondary Attributes	Experiential learning
Primary Data Evidence	For all the posturing on purpose, there are no rankings on social mobility, community impact, or any behavior measurable
Missed Opportunities	Nothing is mentioned about location at all (Thousand Oaks), the tagline is not expanded upon other than several mentions of “purpose”
Introduction to Student Prospects	<i>As part of that 500-year-old Lutheran tradition, we believe that understanding our purpose as individuals will help us make our best possible contribution to the world. We encourage students to follow their own passion to uncover their purpose. This prepares them for a life of success in which they always offer their very best to others—family, community, and the world. This happens as part of a diverse, open-minded, and challenging academic environment.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>Founded in 1959 and recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution in 2016, California Lutheran University is home to more than 2,592 undergraduate and 1,174 graduate students who come from more than 59 countries and represent a wide variety of faiths.</i>

Cal Lutheran: Notables for CSUCI

Considering the smaller size of Cal Lutheran relative to any CSU school, its focus on personal attention is not particularly strong in messaging. Quite the opposite – it’s almost as if they are trying to seem larger, more university-like (resources, opportunities). The intro reference to academics is the extent of the effort:

Cal Lutheran is an open-minded community of scholars. As a student, you’ll receive individualized attention and support to help you reach your academic goals.

Our dedicated and accomplished faculty works with small classes of undergraduate and graduate students who are open-minded — about ideas, about people, and about faith — and are seeking to grow as individuals while they pursue their passions and discover their purpose.

The attempt to make student life seem compelling is modest:

Join in. Have fun. Make memories.

There's more to life at Cal Lutheran than just academics. Sure, we work hard—but we know how to have a good time, too! You'll find a ton of events during the year to help you take a break from your studies.

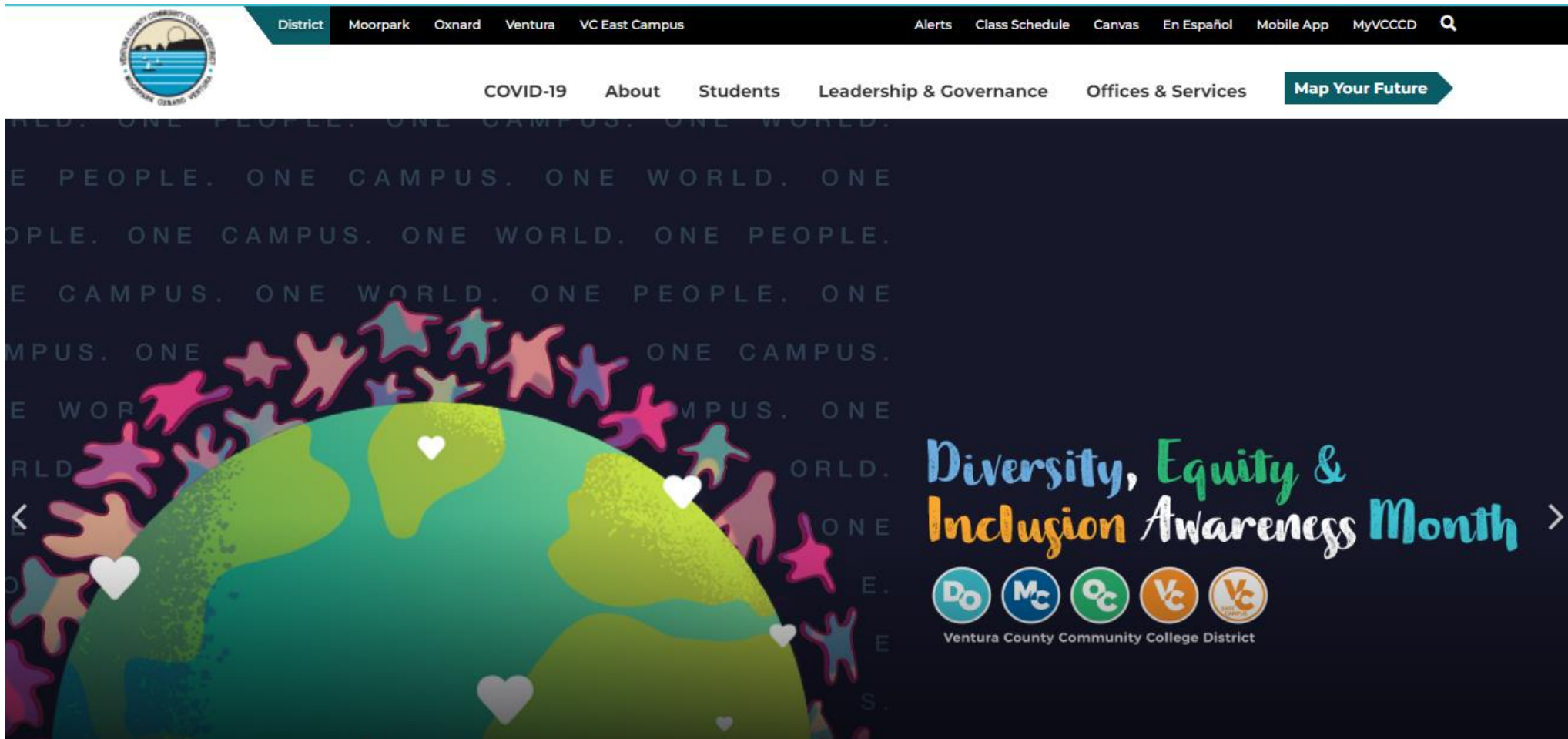
Cal Lutheran: Notables for CSUCI

A smaller private institution should be the most individual and relationship story-laden brand in CSUCI's backyard. Other nearby such institutions like Whittier College and Occidental College do a good to very good job of representing the liberal arts, being private, and essentially urban-setting or –serving.

Cal Lutheran seems reluctant to boast or even portray itself as a confident power. Perhaps that is simply the way of Lutheran institutions. Consider:

- The Student Life section of the website leads off with a calendar feature putting three Symposiums (including one on Perspectives on Finnish Education) and drop-in advising ahead of a student film festival and PRIDE's Drag Show.
- The Giving section of the website gives details on how to give and where to give, but never addresses *why* one should give. It is solidly transactional.
- The Alumni presence on the website is minimal. There is no link to Alumni in either the main nav or drop downs, but it is in the top nav. Other than noting there are 30,000 alumni, the sole reason for the current page is to house a calendar of events such as a senior art show and ceramics showcase.

Ventura County Community College



VCCC

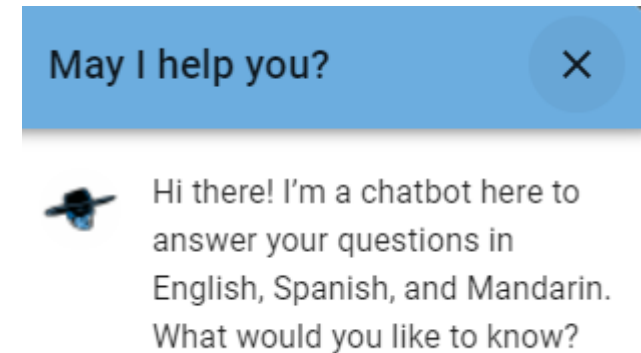
Tagline	None
Primary Brand Attributes	Affordable, convenient – the usual expectations; each campus has its own set of attributes but one common to all is diversity, equity, and inclusion.
Secondary Attributes	Academic breadth
Primary Data Evidence	Oxnard College (high dental assistant pass rates) and each college has data about enrollment and audiences. Ranked #19 of 20 LA area community college districts.
Missed Opportunities	As with all CSUs, there are no stories about people despite having tens of thousands of students of all ages and from all backgrounds
Introduction to Student Prospects	<i>Program mapper is designed to help students explore our various certificate and degree offerings and ensure a timely path to completion. Please see a counselor to create a customized education plan to meet your educational goals.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>Ventura County Community College District (VCCCD) is a public community college district serving residents throughout Ventura County. VCCCD's three colleges - Moorpark College, Oxnard College, and Ventura College - offer programs for transfer to four-year colleges and universities; career technical training; basic skills instruction; as well as community service, economic development, and continuing education for cultural growth, life enrichment, and skills improvement.</i>

VCCC: Notables for CSUCI

Evidence of the district's diversity is apparent from the first moment one navigates the VCCC website. The chatbot helper is built to serve an eclectic audience (right).

The three physical campuses that make up the district do a reasonable job of addressing their audiences on their own individual websites (following slides).

The District's Program Mapper tool (below) is very easy to use and yields detailed results that were genuinely accurate per keywords and/or input used.

A screenshot of the VCCC Program Mapper tool. At the top, a dark teal bar contains the text "What are you interested in?" followed by navigation options: "ALL", "Degrees", "Certificates", "Transfer", and "Courses". Below this, there are two input fields: "SEARCH" with the placeholder "Enter your keywords" and "COLLEGE" with a dropdown menu currently set to "All". To the right of these fields is a dark teal "SEARCH" button.

Oxnard College: Positioning v. CSUCI

OXNARD COLLEGE is a fully accredited public community college providing quality academic and career programs since 1975. Ideally situated on California's Central Coast and within two miles of Ventura County beaches, Oxnard College was founded on 118 acres in south Oxnard and is experiencing major reconstruction as part of the Measure S Bond-funded expansion of the Ventura County Community College District.

Admission to the college is open to any adult who is able to profit from instruction and opportunities for enrichment. High School juniors and seniors may also attend Oxnard College concurrently, tuition free.

Oxnard College offers 18 certificate programs, 17 Associate degrees for transfer and 37 Associate degrees with classes in over 60 disciplines.



Ventura College: Positioning v. CSUCI

Ventura College has content in both English and Spanish language (right) reflecting its two leading populations (below right).

The College's introductory language is rather vague about a brand position, however:

The faculty and staff of Ventura College welcome you to campus!

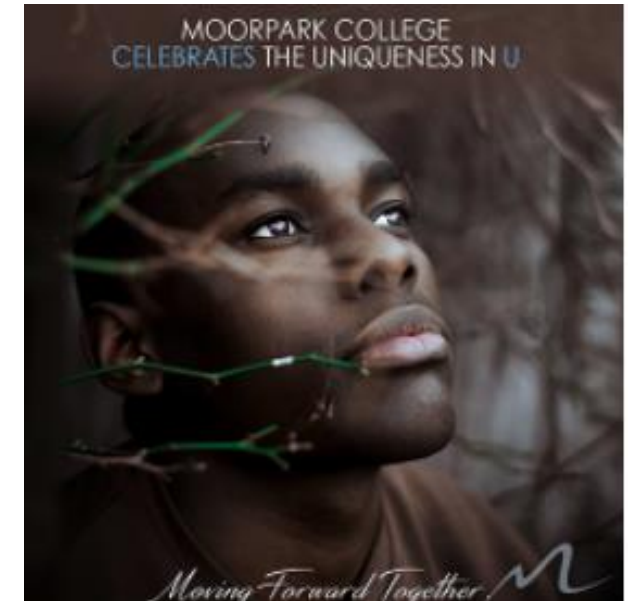
Ventura College, an accredited two-year institution of higher education, has been a part of this beautiful seaside community since 1925. It is conveniently located approximately 60 miles north of Los Angeles and 30 miles south of Santa Barbara. The 112-acre campus, set in the rolling hills of Ventura, has an enrollment of 14,500 students.



Moorpark College: Positioning v. CSUCI

Moorpark's introductory messaging is in the form of a lengthy letter from the College's president that has good intentions embedded within such as:

- *Since we first opened our doors in 1967, Moorpark College has been dedicated to a mission that embraces social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion and you will see those values integrated in all we do on our campus.*
- *[We are] widely recognized for our commitment to excellence and affordable costs. We offer a rich and vibrant campus experience, as well as providing online and hybrid classroom environments to accommodate the needs of all students in these ever-changing times.*
- *[Our] students are primed for success. When you attend our college, you are joining the ranks of more than 50 years of highly successful students that have in transferred to four-year institutions, transitioned into exciting new careers, and who are now engaged in life and work in our communities.*



CSUCI

Academics

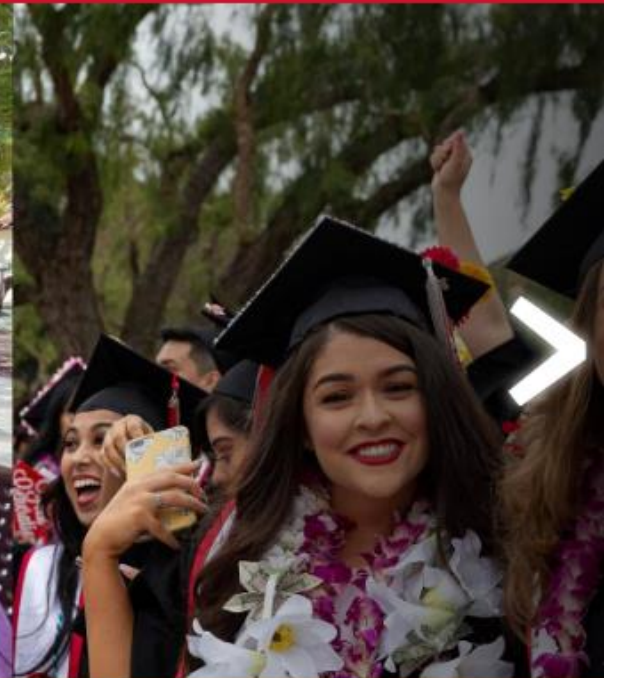
Admissions & Costs

Visit Campus

Student Life

About

Give



CSUCI

Tagline	<i>Channel Your Potential</i>
Primary Brand Attributes	Location (the beaches, proximity to things), diversity, community/family, financial aid (as opposed to “value”)
Secondary Attributes	Campus
Primary Data Evidence	15 th or 17 th nationally in social mobility depending on the source and year, 6 th best surfing university (from 2018), 4 th best value for transfer students nationally (again, from 2018), 9 th safest campus in the nation
Missed Opportunities	There are not strong personal or outcomes/academic/research stories
Intros to Student Prospects	<i>Imagine a big family—one that’s warm, welcoming, smart and fun. That’s California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI), a four-year, public university in Camarillo, California. Established in 2002, we’re the youngest of 23 campuses in the CSU family.</i>
Best Sample Brand Text	<i>While our name suggests we’re surrounded by water, relax. You won’t need a ferry to get here. Camarillo is midway between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles and just 25 miles from Malibu. CSUCI is nestled against the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains—and close to the Pacific Ocean and the Pacific Coast Highway.</i>

Notables for CSUCI

CSUCI's laudable centering idea here is strong, although examples would be helpful:

Our mission statement boils down to this: No matter which [academic program] you choose, you'll be at the center of your educational experience. Your education rests on our Four Pillars:

Community engagement — valuable experience you need and a chance to make the world better

Integrative — CSUCI's signature interdisciplinary approach

International — an internationalized curriculum, a diverse campus community, and studying abroad opportunities

Multicultural — a campus that reflects the real world; a curriculum that prepares you for it

These infographics are interesting vis-à-vis other CSUs, though some have clearer benefits implied than others (e.g., what is the purpose of highlighting the acceptance rate?).

22:1 
**STUDENT TO
FACULTY RATIO**

79%
**ADMISSION
RATE**

83% 
**RECEIVE
FINANCIAL AID**

62%
**FIRST GENERATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Notables for CSUCI

Our work ahead with CSUCI is based, in part, on bringing the University's story to inspiring life. Like most other institutions in this report, you have a brand that has not been fully and compellingly realized. We will help CSUCI do what these others are not doing.

The "Reimagining Higher Education" link and leading story on the home page of your current site leads to an article based on your past president (more problematic as she's now the President now of your CSU System rival).

Despite many good insights, it should not be there.

- President Yao needs to offer his own vision of education and CSUCI's place in it given the nation's past two years and Ventura County's 2022 and beyond needs and wants.

There *are* strong brand elements that exist, ones that should help make the case for CSUCI in a confident and provable way. Our survey research is going to be essential to find the right vocabulary, tone, and content to use, and help us prioritize.

Notables for CSUCI

We considered CSUCI’s approach to messaging to different audiences; the below infographics are targeting the important adult market.

Unfortunately, *Affordability* and *Convenience* – two very important topics to adults – don’t link to anything that helps your adult audiences. *Affordability* should address how CSUCI helps adults with aid; *Convenience* should detail the modality options.

The *Accessibility* link to the “growing online catalog” leads to the entirety of the CSUCI online offerings – three programs (BS Business, MBA Foundations, Business Admin Certificate). That message contrasts with the claims in Convenience.



Affordability—A great education at an affordable price in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties



Accessibility—Locations in [Camarillo](#), [Goleta](#), and a [growing online catalog](#)



Convenience—With online, daytime, evening, and weekend classes, learn around your schedule

Notables for CSUCI

Leveraging your youth as an institution and as a brand attribute of note, your leading introduction in *Facts* makes a strong position claim but with no other mention of “innovation” and no evidence of “innovative behavior” in the content that follows.

A history of innovation

Student-centered. Innovative. Creative. Since opening our doors in 2002, that’s the kind of education we’ve aimed to provide at California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI).

There is another “innovation” section, but it is not easy to find.

Collaboration. Innovation. That’s CSUCI.

At CSUCI, you’ll never hear us say, “That’s how we’ve always done it.” We’re young—and innovative—which means we’re not stuck in outdated modes of teaching and learning.

Take our signature interdisciplinary approach to courses and programs. Because of it, you might take a course that combines, say, art with science or history with business.

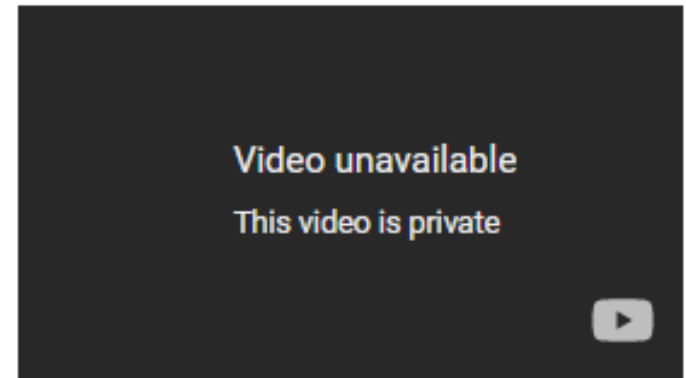
The four brief examples that then follow are more list fodder than evidence of purposeful benefit. Visual stories would be appreciated if “innovation” is truly a CSUCI centerpiece.

Notables for CSUCI

Many interesting stories about CSUCI are news stories rather than in the permanent fabric of the site's pages. For example, [this story about a recent chemistry conference](#) is a good read but one we just happened upon as opposed to being intentionally guided to it.

We know you're replacing the website in the coming months; in the near term, know these brand-related content issues exist:

- You promote a “Day In the Life...” (right) on a critical, high-traffic web page but then the video is private. A 404 is never good, especially when you told me to go there.
- Upcoming Foundation Events promotes a 2021 speaker series. While archiving these and the 2020 and earlier speakers is a good idea, the “Upcoming” label is an issue.
- [This article about Chemistry students](#) is another strong story but appears on a top page as a current item when it is from over two years ago.



**Day in the life of CSUCI
Student**

Notables for CSUCI

Finally, when considering brand from a student's perspective, there aren't really stories or videos that show more what it's like to be a CSUCI student.

Notable in the Student Life section – the first part of this overview is new; the latter half is a message repeated in several ways throughout your messaging.

CSUCI's campus: Stunning. Your life here: Incredible. CSUCI's beautiful campus in Camarillo is midway between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles and just 25 miles from Malibu. We're nestled against the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains—and not far from the Pacific Ocean.

The below excerpt is yet **another reminder** of what CSUCI *is not*. Moving ahead, we'll focus first on the benefits of what CSUCI does have and how you confidently deliver it to the world.

No Ferry Required. Despite our name, *CSUCI is surrounded by lemon groves and strawberry and raspberry fields. With Spanish-style buildings and courtyards, our peaceful campus is an ideal place for you to immerse yourself in your studies.*

Implications for CSUCI

ADV

MARKET RESEARCH
& CONSULTING

CSUCI Decisions to Make

The most important decision CSUCI must make in establishing a new and firm brand position is where is your end point, your ultimate marketplace position goal. Only then can you create an appropriate plan to reach that end point by way of planning. In short, this entire brand project is first about brand as behavior, *not its promotion*.

You need to weigh the following elements to define what kind of institution you seek to be:

- You are a one-of-a-kind resource for Ventura County, but how can you best leverage that role and the best of CSUCI to extend to all audiences? (re: conveniently located is great for your backyard but won't attract LA and other more distant students)
- Are you a strong academic institution that is fun, or a fun institution with strong academics?
- Better align with the current external audiences (prospects, influencers, donors) or shift to other audiences (and by what measurables)?
- What is the role of student research?
- Accessibility (selectivity) vs. who should you serve?
- Reputation locally, regionally; what interest do you have in international or national audiences?
- Cost (does a low CSU cost hinder a push for academic reputation building?)

Brand Foundations for CSUCI

Even without determining an end marketplace position goal, it is important to touch on several important foundational elements that ADV believes CSUCI needs to keep in mind as you evolve your brand position. There are six here that rise above all other still-relevant brand tenets.

1. Brand is built more on what is special about you, not different.

Being good at something is more important to potential students, donors, and partners than being different, especially for seemingly similar public universities.

Your comparators in this deck do NOT leverage what they do well with evidence presented in any of three ways: data points, lists, and stories. None do a good job of totally owning “special”.

Note that those institutions here who try to make any case for differentiation appear to be more boasting than believable.

Brand Foundations for CSUCI

2. Benefits before features.

Those in this assessment who do passable messaging frame topics of benefit with features such as rankings, data points, and lists. This balance engages audiences at a relatable level be it “this ranking is great, here’s what it means for me” OR “that’s a great benefit to me, this supporting evidence is compelling.” Your messaging (especially outcomes, applied opportunities, and research) needs to always be benefit-driven and mostly second-person.

Inspire people, don’t just inform them.

3. Brand is internal first.

Simply, your stakeholders (including alumni) come first. What you want to convey externally must be shared with internal audiences first, not for their full approval – an impossible standard – but for their awareness and understanding. Testing our coming brand tenets and potential brand enhancements internally and gaining support will help external audiences see the refreshed messaging as genuine.

Brand Foundations for CSUCI

4. Perception is the ultimate reality.

Most institutions in this study have made poor choices with most visuals they use or have simply not properly invested in excellent visuals to consider. Either way, institutions in today's highly-visual world full of communications of color, emotion, and wonder need to establish a consistent visual theme to stand out to important audiences. They expect the excellence you tout to be fully represented in the visuals they see.

While CSUCI has a good deal of photography and much of it seems used appropriately, it is clear there is not a singular, purposeful visual approach that defines the University's brand. In technical style and content, you need to establish a CSUCI look in photos and videos.

Brand Foundations for CSUCI

5. Brand is behavior...not a tagline, motto, or ideology.

How CSUCI acts is critical to your success. This includes programs offered (what, where, how, when), co-branding relationships, intentional associations, initiatives, research grants and other funding, and even employee hires – *every action is brand-based*. Ventura County and regional California are watching, and how you act is everything.

Brand is based on this premise: *when one hears “CSUCI” they think of what?* Building brand is based on awareness (more than just hearing your name) and relevance (how do you provide something I need?). Taglines are important brand *expressions*, but they do not on their own convey the substance of a brand for mindshare.

Too often a tagline becomes a crutch that feels contrived and forced. Note that no institution in this study that has a tagline leverages it successfully.

CSUCI must *think beyond slogans*.

Brand Foundations for CSUCI

6. Outcomes, not output.

There is a clear need to bolster the outcomes/success attribute of the CSUCI brand, and we feel it will need to become a leading message.

What your students do is relevant and important; seeing where that immersion leads is critical. Don't confuse generating proof of lots of activity (output) with stirring outcomes – this must be about simply proving the success of your purpose.

No one in this study tells personal stories. Or shows them. CSUCI can easily be a master at outcomes/success storytelling, and there is no reason you can't find your own inspiring voice. The long-form storytelling in your news articles is a sign you *can* humanize the CSUCI experience, now we must focus and refine everything to match to audiences.

We will help you find your distinctive voice as our project evolves, but for now be thinking about how you might build a focused, discipline structure on how to tell this story.