

Date of Hearing: March 27, 2012

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
Marty Block, Chair  
AB 2133 (Blumenfield) – As Amended: December 25, 2012

SUBJECT: Veterans: priority registration.

SUMMARY: Requires the California State University (CSU) and California Community Colleges (CCC), and requests the University of California (UC), to grant priority registration for enrollment for student veterans within 15 years of discharge. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Titles this section the Combat to College Act of 2012.
- 2) Increases the amount of time for which a student veteran may receive priority registration for enrollment at CSU and CCC from four years to 15 years after discharge from the military.
- 3) Clarifies that existing law granting priority registration for enrollment for student veterans at CSU and CCC applies to all degree and certificate programs offered by the institution.
- 4) Requests UC comply with these provisions.
- 5) Creates a reimbursable state mandate if so determined by the Commission on State Mandates.

EXISTING LAW requires CSU and CCC, and requests UC, to grant priority registration for enrollment to a member or former member of the Armed Forces, as defined, who is a resident of California and who has received an honorable discharge, a general discharge, or an other than honorable discharge for any academic term within four years of leaving state or federal active duty, provided the campus administers priority enrollment. (Education Code § 66025.8)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: This bill is double-referred to the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee.

Background. As the withdrawal from Iraq nears completion and the withdrawal from Afghanistan expected over the next two to five years, service members are returning home in significant numbers. In California, an approximate 30,000 troops annually are leaving service and returning home, and many are pursuing education. Student veteran enrollment has increased at UC, CSU and CCC in recent years: CCC enrolls 44,000 students who utilize some form of veteran tuition/fee benefit, while CSU enrolls 6,540 and UC enrolls 949 students who are using GI benefits.

Recent hearing on student veteran issues. To prepare for the influx of veterans, on February 28, 2012, the Assembly Higher Education and Assembly Veterans Affairs Committees held a joint oversight hearing on the challenges facing California student veterans. Several students and representatives from the higher education institutions spoke for the need for more resources for veterans services, including more transition assistance, improving outreach and campus-based programs, and easing the matriculation of prior military learning.

Need for the bill. According to the author, the existing priority enrollment of four years is not enough time because it does not mirror the timeline that veterans have to use their GI Bill benefits and because many veterans are not ready to pursue higher education within four years of separation from the military due to brain injuries, trauma, or life circumstances.

Value of priority registration enrollment. Priority registration enrollment decisions are made at the campus level at each segment. This process allows specified students access to classes ahead of the general student population. As state support for higher education has decreased while enrollments have increased at the three segments, classes have become increasingly impacted—unable to accommodate all students who enroll in the course. Thus, students who have priority registration enrollment status have a significant advantage over other students, particularly at CCC. In general, the systems provide priority enrollment for students with disabilities, participants in Educational Opportunity Program Students, and continuing students nearing their education goals.

Other priority registration efforts. After a year of study and research, this January the CCC Student Success Task Force (created by SB 1143, Liu, Chapter 409, Statutes of 2010), issued a report with 22 recommendations to improve CCC students' success in completing their certificates, degrees and educational goals. The report identifies core priorities—basic math and English instruction, transfer preparation, career technical training and degree attainment—and refocusing policies and future investments to support these priorities. A key recommendation is to give priority to returning and first-time students who have taken a diagnostic assessment, participated in orientation and have developed an educational plan. All students will need to identify a program of study within three semesters or they will lose their priority.

Priority registration for all degree programs. It is staff's understanding that existing law and practice provide priority enrollment for veterans and active duty military regardless of the course or degree program.

Related legislation. SB 813 (Committee on Veterans Affairs), Chapter 375, Statutes of 2010, extended priority enrollment for veterans from two to four years. AB 194 (Beall), Chapter 458, Statutes of 2010, granted priority enrollment for five years to foster youth. SB 272 (Runner), Chapter 356, Statutes of 2007, as chaptered, established priority registration for two years for members of the military.

#### REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

##### Support

Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges  
National Association of Social Workers

##### Opposition

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