

Date of Hearing: April 19, 2016

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 2786 (Chávez) – As Introduced February 19, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Public postsecondary education: Donahoe Higher Education Act: 4-year baccalaureate degree.

**SUMMARY:** Requires the California State University (CSU) Trustees, and requests the University of California (UC) Regents, to offer to eligible students, as specified, an agreement guaranteeing that a student, who meets certain conditions, as specified, may complete a baccalaureate degree within 4 academic years. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the CSU Trustees, and requests the UC Regents, to offer eligible students an agreement guaranteeing that a student who meets certain conditions may complete a baccalaureate degree within 4 academic years.
- 2) Specifies that a campus may provide for a longer period of completion for programs such as engineering or teacher training that may require more than 4 academic years to complete, but under no circumstances may the time to baccalaureate degree agreed to under the parameters established in this measure extend beyond 5 academic years.
- 3) Delineates that the agreement entered into shall comply with all of the following:
  - a) A student who scores in an unspecified percentile or above on any standardized college readiness assessment test, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, ACT, or any other widely administered college readiness examination, shall be presumed to be eligible to enter into the agreement; and, a student who scores below the top unspecified percentile, but above an unspecified percentile may take another test chosen by the campus, and the campus shall establish a cut-off score for eligibility for the program pursuant to that test;
  - b) The agreement shall be executed by a student and an authorized representative of the campus before the end of the student's first semester or quarter of enrollment at the campus;
  - c) The agreement shall outline a general pathway for the coursework that the student must complete in order to continue to be qualified for the guarantee and receive his or her baccalaureate within the agreed-upon time;
  - d) The student shall not be required to declare a major field until the spring semester or quarter of the student's sophomore year;
  - e) The student shall be required to be a full-time student, and maintain academic standards equivalent to those required for receipt of Cal Grant awards;
  - f) A student may also be required to attend orientation sessions and student success workshops in order to remain eligible for the guarantee;

- g) A student who executes an agreement shall be granted priority for enrollment for each course that is part of the general pathway outlined as part of the agreement, as specified; and,
- h) A student who meets all of the requirements of the agreement and, through no fault of his or her own, is unable to complete his or her baccalaureate degree within the guaranteed period shall pay no tuition to take the additional coursework required to complete that degree.

4) Defines "campus" as a campus of the CSU or UC, as applicable.

**EXISTING LAW:** Declares that it is the policy of the Legislature that all resident applicants to California institutions of public higher education, who are determined to be qualified by law or by admission standards, as established by the respective governing boards of the institutions, should be admitted to either a community college, CSU, or UC campus (Education Code Section 66011).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *Need for the measure.* According to the author, "given the recent trends in rising tuition costs, the conclusions to be made are that students are having a hard time graduating in four years and are paying more for it."

*Background.* Graduation rates on college campuses have become an important national issue. In 2010 President Obama called for raising the college graduation rate among 25 to 34 year olds to 60% by 2020, a 20% increase in just ten years. Governor Jerry Brown has set as a goal for each of the State's public universities a 10% increase in the proportion graduating in four years.

According to the January 2014 report, "California's Future: Higher Education, by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), three of every four bachelor's degrees awarded annually come from either a CSU or UC. PPIC found that compared to other states, California's college-bound high school graduates are more likely to enroll in community colleges than in four-year colleges or universities. However, according to PPIC, lack of preparation for college-level work and lack of financial resources keep many students from advancing in the higher education system.

PPIC found that only about half of CSU students graduate within 6 years of entering as freshmen and that 4 of every 5 students earn a degree within 6 years at the UC.

*Four-year degree programs.* This measure requires the CSU Trustees and requests the UC Regents to offer to eligible students, as specified, an agreement guaranteeing that a student who meets certain conditions may complete a baccalaureate degree in 4 years.

- 1) *CSU.* According to the CSU's systemwide Degree-Seeking First-Time Full-Time Freshmen Report, the number of CSU first-time freshmen systemwide in fall of 2007 was 50,866; after 4 years, 15.9% graduated, with 45.7% continuing on to additional year(s) of study. Additionally, first-time freshmen systemwide in fall of 2008 was 51,409; after 4 years, 16.2% graduated, with 47.5% continuing on to additional year(s) of study.

Currently, according to the CSU 2014-15 Admission Handbook, the CSU encourages all students who wish to graduate in four years to take advantage of CSU's 4-year degree programs. Each CSU campus has developed a four year program responsive to the needs of the campus community. The common core component for all 4-year degree plans is a strong advisement program. Students are expected to meet with advisors each term to plan a program of study that will assure appropriate progress toward meeting degree requirements.

Students participating in the CSU 4-year degree program must: (1) Arrive with English and mathematics skills needed to handle the demands of university study; (2) Declare a major at the time of admission (or shortly thereafter) and not change majors; (3) Enroll in a minimum of 15 semester/quarter units each term; (4) Fulfill all academic, grade, and coursework requirements; (5) Meet with an academic advisor on a regular basis and heed advice given; (6) Follow required administrative and academic policies and procedures; and (7) Meet the unit requirement (120-132 semester/180-198 quarter units) for the baccalaureate degree sought. Campuses must: (1) Ensure regular academic counseling; (2) Provide required courses; and, (3) Schedule sufficient class offerings.

Presently, it is unclear how many CSU students are taking advantage of the CSU 4-year degree program and how many of the 23 campuses are actively promoting their 4-year degree program. However, four CSU campuses (Fresno, San Bernardino, Fullerton, and Cal Poly Pomona) currently have active 4-year pledge programs.

According to the CSU Chancellor's Office, the various pledge programs of the CSU have varying results. The 4-year graduation rates for program participants can be much higher than the undergraduate students who do not participate the program, but attrition rates are also high, often times 50% or more. Additionally, CSU Fullerton's 4-year pledge program has had five cohorts of students that graduated with 4-year graduation rates that range from 30.4% to 45.5%. However, student participation in these programs has been small. For example, at CSU San Bernardino, 620 students participate in the 4-year pledge program, but that only represents 4% of the undergraduate student population.

To note, several campuses have discontinued similar types of programs due to low participation rates of students.

*UC.* According to the UC, their first-time freshmen 4-year graduation rates (systemwide roughly 60% of entering freshmen graduate in 4 years), are well above the national average. However, UC Riverside (UCR) has a significantly lower percentage of their entering freshmen graduating in 4 years.

UCR is presently considering an initiative to create a 4-year graduation contract with their students. It is unclear as to when UCR will determine if indeed they will launch this initiative.

*Committee considerations.* This measure allows students participating in the created 4-year completion program to not have to declare a major field of study until the spring semester or quarter of the students' sophomore year. If students wait this long to declare their major field of study, will this truly allow for them to graduate in 4 years?

***Committee staff recommends that the author amend this provision to instead: specify that each campus shall determine the latest possible time for a participating student in the 4-year***

*degree contract program to declare a major, but that a participating student shall declare his or her major no later than the fall semester/quarter of his or her sophomore year.*

As aforementioned, it is presently unclear how many of the campuses are encouraging their students to sign up for their 4-year graduation program. Instead of codifying the 4-year graduation program, *the Committee may wish to consider amending this measure to require the CSU to increase their efforts in ensuring entering freshmen are aware of the CSU's 4-year degree program.*

*Previous legislation.* AB 2092 (Chávez) of 2014, which was held on the Suspense File in the Assembly Appropriations Committee, was very similar in nature to this measure.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

None on file.

**Opposition**

None on file.

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