

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2013

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Das Williams, Chair
AB 944 (Nestande) – As Introduced: February 22, 2013

SUBJECT: Distance learning.

SUMMARY: Requires the Trustees of the California State University (CSU) and the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges (CCC) and requests the Regents of the University of California (UC), to report to the Legislature, by January 1, 2016, and every two years thereafter, on workload and key performance data on distance learning courses. Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Defines "distance learning course" for purposes of data collection and reporting by the CCC, CSU, and UC, to mean a course conducted with a majority of the instructional content delivered when faculty and students are in different locations and instruction is delivered through the use of technology.
- 2) Requires CSU and CCC, and requests the UC, by January 1, 2016, and every two years thereafter, to report to the Legislature on workload and key performance data on distance learning including the number of students enrolled at each campus categorized by the type of delivery method for the distance learning course, completion rates for distance learning courses, and program completion rates for degree programs that include exclusively distance learning courses. Requires the data to be made available by student demographics such as age, gender, and ethnicity.
- 3) Repeals the provisions of this measure on January 1, 2020.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Distance Learning Policy, which sets forth the guiding goal and principles for the utilization of technology in California postsecondary education (Education Code § 66940).
- 2) Establishes, until January 1, 2014, the California Virtual Campus, under the stewardship of the CCC Board of Governors and pursuant to annual Budget Act funding to, among other things enhance the awareness of, and access to, highly engaging online courses of study, increase access to next generation Internet services, 21st century workforce development programs, and e-government services for students and staff served or employed by education entities and students served primarily online through partnerships with public libraries and community-based organizations (EC § 78910.10).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: Background. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) 2013-2014 Analysis of the Higher Education Budget, distance learning offers numerous benefits. These include providing greater access to educational and training opportunities due to increased

scheduling flexibility, as well as allowing campuses to serve more students without needing additional physical infrastructure.

According to the, LAO there is no common definition of distance learning among California's public postsecondary institutions, making it impossible for the Legislature and segments to measure workload and track enrollment trends.

Governor Brown has encouraged state colleges and universities to expand their online offerings. The 2013-2014 budget allocates \$16.9 million to CCC and \$10 million to both the CSU and UC systems for online education. All 112 campuses of the CCCs offer online education, and the California Virtual Campus provides course information and class schedules for all CCCs. CSU Online, an initiative focusing on helping students finish course work to obtain degrees, was launched in January 2013. The UC system launched UC Online last year, which offers courses to non-UC and UC students for credit.

Purpose of this bill: According to the author, without a common definition of distance learning among California's public postsecondary institutions, it is basically impossible to measure workload and track enrollment trends. This will become increasingly problematic because alternative instruction methods including an online component, such as massive open online courses and flipped classrooms, are becoming more common. Although research suggests that students who complete online courses learn as much as those taking traditional face-to-face courses, the author contends that students tend to drop online courses at higher rates than traditional courses. The author states, "Given the 'no strings attached' funding for online courses in the Governor's budget, it is important to verify that these courses are accessible to all higher education students, that students successfully complete such programs, and that new and emerging online instruction methods facilitate learning." This measure seeks to ensure distance learning programs provide access to all students.

Other measures to address online education. There are several online education related measures pending Legislative action this session:

- 1) AB 386 (Levine), which will be taken up today in the committee hearing, would require that by the beginning of the 2015-16 academic year, students enrolled at the CSU be provided an opportunity to enroll in online courses available at other CSU campuses, would authorize any CSU student enrolled at a CSU campus to enroll in an online course provided by another CSU campus, and would require the CSU Trustees, on or before January 1, 2015, to establish an easily accessible online database of online courses available at the CSU.
- 2) AB 387 (Levine), which will be taken up today in the committee hearing, would require the CSU to have a uniform definition of online education, beginning January 1, 2017; would require the CSU Trustees to report performance data about online education to the Legislature every two years until 2021; would require, in the development of new programs and instruction at each CSU campus, that not less than 10% of new course offerings be online courses; and, would require the CSU Trustees, on or before January 1, 2015, to report to the Legislature on the feasibility of developing an accelerated bachelor's degree completion program consisting of online courses, aimed at students who started college, but never obtained a degree.

- 3) AB 895 (Rendon), which will be taken up today in the committee hearing, would establish the California Postsecondary Online Education Task Force to evaluate and collect data on the current status of postsecondary online education.
- 4) SB 520 (Steinberg), which will be taken up on April 24, 2013, in the Senate Education Committee, would, among other things, create the California Online Student Access Platform under the joint administration of the UC President, the Chancellor of the CSU, and the CCC Chancellor, with the academic senates of the respective segments, and would require the platform to provide an efficient statewide mechanism for online course providers to offer transferable courses for credit and to create a pool of these online courses.
- 5) SB 547 (Block), which will be taken up on April 24, 2013, in the Senate Education Committee, would, among other things, require the academic senates of the UC, the CSU, and the CCC to jointly develop and identify online courses that would be made available to students of each of the three segments for enrollment by the fall of 2014.

Prior legislation. AB 626 (Blumenfield, 2011), which remained in this committee, would have established a definition for "distance learning." AB 851 (Nestande, 2011), which was similar in nature to this bill, failed passage in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Coachella Valley Economic Partnership

Opposition

None on file.

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