

Date of Hearing: April 2, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2152 (McCarty) – As Introduced February 6, 2024

SUBJECT: California State University: University of California: graduation requirements: service learning pilot program

SUMMARY: Commencing with the 2026–27 academic year, would require each California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) campus to provide on its internet website information on service learning programs and opportunities for undergraduate students. The bill, commencing with students graduating in the 2033–34 academic year, would require the CSU and the UC, for at least 3 campuses each, as specified, to adopt a pilot program making the completion of a service learning program a graduation requirement. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires each postsecondary educational institution on its internet website, commencing with the 2026–27 academic year, to provide information on service learning programs and opportunities for undergraduate students.
- 2) Requires the CSU and the UC to, for at least three campuses each, as a pilot program commencing with students graduating in the 2033–34 academic year, to adopt the completion of a service learning program as an undergraduate graduation requirement. Requires the CSU and the UC to not increase the total number of units required to graduate from their universities with a baccalaureate degree by the enforcement of this requirement.
 - a) Requires CSU Sacramento; CSU Fresno; and CSU San Diego to participate in the pilot program for the CSU, and authorizes CSU to include additional campuses in the pilot program.
 - b) Requires the UC to determine, in consultation with the Legislature, which campuses participate in the pilot program, and authorizes the UC to include additional campuses in the pilot program.
- 3) Specifies that the graduation requirement for the pilot program will not apply to a postbaccalaureate student who is enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program at a one of the participating campuses if the student has satisfied either of the following:
 - a) Completion of a baccalaureate degree from a higher education institution accredited by a regional accrediting agency; and,
 - b) Completion of a service learning requirement at a higher education institution accredited by a regional accrediting agency.
- 4) Authorizes the pilot program at each participating campus to be based, in full or in part, on the Service Learning Institute at CSU Monterey Bay (CSUMB).
- 5) Requires the Legislative Analyst’s Office, by February 1, 2036, to review and submit a report to the Assembly Committee on Higher Education, the Senate Committee on Education, and

the respective education finance budget subcommittees of the Assembly and the Senate on the pilot program. The report must include recommendations on whether and how the pilot program should be extended or expanded.

- a) The recommendations must take into consideration relevant information including, but not limited to, the following:
 - i) Effects on student academic and civic engagement.
 - ii) Effects on campus graduation rates.
 - iii) Campus success in meeting the timeline as specified and, if any campus was unsuccessful, what challenges prevented the campus from successful implementation.
 - b) The Legislative Analyst's Office shall make the report publicly available.
 - c) Requires the CSU and the UC shall consider the report.
- 6) Makes the following definitions:
- a) "Postsecondary educational institution" means a campus of the CSU or the UC.
 - b) "Service learning" means an educational approach that intentionally combines meaningful community service activities with instruction and reflection to support student progress toward academic and civic engagement learning objectives while meeting societal needs.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the University of California (UC) as a public trust to be administered by the Regents of the UC; and, grants the Regents full powers of organization and government, subject only to such legislative control as may be necessary to ensure security of its funds, compliance with the terms of its endowments, statutory requirements around competitive bidding and contracts, sales of property and the purchase of materials, goods and services (Article IX, Section (9)(a) of the California Constitution).
- 2) Establishes the Donahoe Higher Education Act, setting forth the mission of the UC, California State University (CSU), and California Community Colleges (CCC) (Education Code (EDC) Section 66010, et seq.).
- 3) Confers upon the CSU Trustees the powers, duties, and functions with respect to the management, administration, control of the CSU system and provides that the Trustees are responsible for the rule of government of their appointees and employees (EDC Sections 66606 and 89500, et seq.).
- 4) Requires the CSU, commencing with the 2021-22 academic year, to 1) provide courses in ethnic studies at each CSU campus; and, 2) require, as part of the CSU graduation requirements commencing with students graduating in the 2024-25 academic year, the completion of, at a minimum, one three-unit course in ethnic studies. (EDC Section 89032)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* According to the author, “service learning has positive effects on academic performance, [grade point average (gpa)], student development, and leadership skills when implemented at the undergraduate level, while simultaneously, serving the community at large. [CSUMB] has successfully implemented service learning as a graduation requirement and incorporated it into the curriculum and culture on campus. We should turn to their success story into a model for CSU and UC campuses.”

“Service learning has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance (including GPA), values, self-efficacy, and leadership when implemented at the undergraduate level. Service learning also benefits the community that is being serviced as a result local non-profits who take on a student for their service learning requirement, for example. There are programs aimed at placing the student in service that exist, such as the College Corps, but limited slots are available to students, and the monetary incentive for students, while incredibly beneficial to the student, does not allow the state to expand this program; particularly in a tough budget year. In order to encourage students to pursue service learning, there must be a requirement, similar to CSUMB’s structure, to fulfil service learning. The ideal setting for service learning is both curricular and co-curricular; particularly in a setting where the student can process the service learning experience.”

CSUMB service learning. CSUMB is the only public university in California, and one of the few nationwide, that has made service learning a graduation requirement for all undergraduate students. Students generally complete two components of the CSUMB service learning requirement: lower division Civics/Service Learning; and, upper division Service Learning. Students entering CSUMB as lower division students will need to complete both requirements; however, students entering as upper division transfer students only need to complete the upper division requirement.

The lower division Civics/Service requirement is a three unit course that requires 25 hours of community service. This class meets the CSU general education Area D requirement for social sciences. This class is intended to provide a foundation in civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes to inform service and civic action work in the community. All Civics/Service Learning classes require students to complete 25 hours of service off-campus with a local organization. In addition, students complete a Civic Action project.

The upper division Service Learning classes require students to complete 30 hours of service off-campus with a community organization in a field related to their major. Focusing on the student’s field of study and/or professional application, upper division Service Learning is intended to help students learn firsthand about real social challenges that communities face, while also examining and learning to ways to address underlying issues of systemic inequality such as: racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and ableism, among others.

Each semester, the various CSUMB departments offer over 50 upper division Service Learning classes. Some fields of study, such as Liberal Studies, Environmental Studies, and Human Development & Family Studies, require two service learning classes.

Arguments in opposition. The UC Student Association wrote in opposition, noting that, “UCSA seeks to ensure that the most vulnerable students at the UC have an equal opportunity to complete their degrees in a timely manner, AB 2152 would impose inequitable barriers for disproportionately impacted students.

The UC provides existing service learning opportunities at many of its campuses, and UCSA is in support of ensuring students are given access to these opportunities, however, we believe that requiring service learning for graduation is antithetical to the mission of closing equity gaps. Many students at the UC already work multiple jobs outside of their academics and participate in extracurricular activities to gain work experience and meet their financial needs. Imposing an additional graduation requirement would burden students who already experience barriers to their education, such as low-income students of color. For these reasons, UCSA opposes AB 2152 unless amended to remove the “graduation requirement” for service learning, and instead encourage the UC and CSU to create more service learning opportunities for their students.”

Committee comments. Staff notes that, pursuant to Article IX Section 9 of the California Constitution, the provisions of AB 2152 (McCarty) would only apply to the UC if the Regents of the UC adopt an appropriate resolution to implement the policies included.

Even as a pilot, the concerns raised by CSU in last year’s bill still apply to the scaled-down pilot proposed in AB 2152 (McCarty). They are:

- 1) *Curricular concerns.* The CSU expressed that they strongly believe that decisions regarding curriculum and graduation requirements should remain in the purview of university faculty and administration. They noted that many STEM and Business students are already tightly scheduled to complete their degrees in four years, fitting in another requirement could add more time to degree completion.

At UC, the Academic Senate sets systemwide graduation requirements and this bill conflicts with the Academic Senate’s role over setting these requirements. Moreover, graduation requirements are determined locally by UC campuses. Therefore, AB 2152 this bill could significantly impact these academic policies and the important role of faculty and campuses in establishing graduation requirements for students.

- 2) *Impact on students and graduation rates.* CSU noted that most CSU students already have part- or full-time employment commitments, and that many balance jobs with family commitments, such as raising a child. CSU also suggested that AB 2152 (McCarty) could create challenges for many undocumented students, as a number of community partners require background checks.

AB 2152 states that CSU and UC must not increase the total number of units required to graduate from their universities with a baccalaureate degree for schools in the pilot. With this language, the service learning graduation requirement could potentially take away from the number of graduation credits that would be directed towards other requirements or to a student’s major.

- 3) *Costs and implementation.* CSU believes that service-learning programs are costly because they require additional faculty as well as a significant amount of administrative time to find

and manage community partners. Each community partner must undergo a site assessment and enter into an agreement with each university.

Academic freedom. While academic freedom may mean different things to different individuals, at the core of academic freedom is the establishment of faculty members' right to remain true to their pedagogical philosophy and intellectual commitments; it preserves the intellectual integrity of our higher education systems. Additionally, academic freedom means that the political, religious, or philosophical beliefs of politicians, administrators, and members of the public cannot be imposed on faculty or students.

As currently drafted, this bill would require the CSU and, if the Regents of the UC adopt an appropriate resolution, require the UC to complete service learning as a pilot program for undergraduate graduation requirement at certain campuses.

The Committee should consider the precedent that would be set with this bill and determine whether it infringes on academic freedom and, conversely, whether the decisions on curricula and graduation requirements should remain in the hands of faculty and administrators.

Although this measure specifies that the amount of units to graduate shall not be increased, *the Committee should consider whether an additional course requirement would result in many degree programs having to be restructured, particularly those in high unit majors (such as Business, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).*

Prior legislation. AB 506 (Mike Fong) of 2023, would have required the CSU to collaborate with the CSU and CCC Academic Senates and the CCC and CSU Council on Ethnic Studies to develop a process for CSU to approve community college ethnic studies course requirements for meeting CSU's ethnic studies graduation requirement for CCC students transferring to CSU. AB 506 was held in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 1040 (Muratsuchi) of 2021, which was held in the Senate Committee on Education, would, in part, require, commencing with the 2022-2023 AY, each community college district to offer courses in ethnic studies at each of its campuses; and, would require, beginning with the 2024-2025 AY, each CCD to require the completion of at least one course in ethnic studies of at least three-units as a requirement for a student to obtain an associate degree.

AB 1460 (Weber), Chapter 32, Statutes of 2020, requires the CSU, commencing with the 2021-22 academic year, to 1) provide courses in ethnic studies at each CSU campus; and, 2) require, as part of the CSU graduation requirements commencing with students graduating in the 2024-25 academic year, the completion of, at a minimum, one three-unit course in ethnic studies.

AB 3310 (Muratsuchi) of 2020, which died for a lack of hearing by this Committee, was substantially similar AB 1040 (as described above).

AB 2408 (Shirley Weber) of 2018, which was held by this Committee, per the request of the author, was very similar in nature to AB 1460 (as described above).

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

UC Student Association

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