

Date of Hearing: April 2, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2305 (Mike Fong) – As Amended March 19, 2024

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary education: community colleges: statewide baccalaureate degree program

SUMMARY: Requires that a Community College district (CCD) is permitted to apply for a baccalaureate degree program during a specified annual time. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Specifies that a CCD is provided with one timeline in which to apply for a baccalaureate degree program per year. A CCD may submit an application to the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges (CCC) by no later than August 15 and shall receive notice of approval or rejection on or before June 15 of the following year.
- 2) Requires that a CCD is provided with one timeline in a calendar year in which to apply for a baccalaureate degree program, with a total of 30 baccalaureate degree programs approved per academic year, and that a minimum of 90 days is taken to validate the submitted information and assess the workforce value of the proposed baccalaureate degree program.
- 3) Provides that the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC) have 105 days after receipt of the proposal to submit written objections with supporting evidence and the chancellor has 90 days after receipt of written objections to convene with the applicant and the segment or segments that raised an objection to collaborate and establish a written agreement before the program is approved.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Specifies that the mission and function of the CCC is the offering of academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level, including those persons returning to school, and that the CCC are authorized to grant the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees. Additionally specifies that the CCCs are required to offer additional learning supports to close learning gaps, English as a Second Language instruction, adult noncredit instruction, and support services which help students succeed at the postsecondary level. Specifies that a primary mission of the CCCs is to advance California's economic growth and global competitiveness through education, training, and services that contribute to continuous workforce improvement. (Education Code (EDC) Section 66010.4)
- 2) Establishes the CCC, under the administration of the board of Governors (BOG) of the CCC, as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in this state. (EDC Section 66700, et seq.)
- 3) Existing law requires the BOG to appoint a chief executive officer, to be known as the Chancellor of the CCC. (EDC Section 71090, et seq.)
- 4) Authorizes the BOG of the CCC to establish permanent district baccalaureate degree programs, and provided that only 15 baccalaureate degree programs are approved during

each application period allowing for a total of 30 baccalaureate degree programs per academic year.

- a) Specifies that CCDs, as part of the baccalaureate degree program, will have the additional mission to provide high-quality undergraduate education at an affordable price for students and the state.
- b) Requires the Chancellor of the CCC to consult with and seek feedback from the Chancellor of the CSU, the President of the UC, and the President of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) on proposed baccalaureate degree programs, as specified, and establishes a mechanism for the assessment, consultation, and approval of programs where duplication is identified, as specified;
- c) Requires a CCD to continue to offer an associate degree program in the same academic subject for which baccalaureate degree program has been approved, unless the CCD has received approval from the CCC Chancellor to eliminate the associate degree program, and requires the CCC Chancellor to evaluate both changes to the labor market viability of an associate degree and changes to the minimum education required to maintain program accreditation when making a decision to authorize the elimination of an associate degree program; and,
- d) Specifies that the total number of baccalaureate degree programs offered by a CCD, at any time, does not exceed 25% of the total number of associate degree programs offered by the CCD, including associate degrees for transfer. (EDC Section 78040, et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* According to the author, “Proposed programs that have resulted in objections by the four-year segments have required more time than specified in the law. Moreover, the [CCC Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO)] and the CSU Chancellor’s office have reported that the requirement to review proposals two cycles in a year within a short time period is cumbersome and hectic. AB 2305 revises the submission and approval process by reducing the submission cycle to once a year and lengthening the review timeline for each step of the process. The total number of approvals remains 30 per academic year. Consolidating the two cycles and allowing more time for each step of review will hopefully result in a more thorough process for all parties.”

Background - the Master Plan for Higher Education. As outlined in the Master Plan for Higher Education and by state statute, the CCCs are designated to have an open admission policy and bear the most extensive responsibility for lower-division undergraduate instruction. Its three primary areas of mission include; education leading to associates degrees and university transfer, career technical education, and basic skills. The primary mission of the CSU is undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master’s degree. The UC was granted the sole authority to offer doctoral degrees.

Existing law specifically establishes that the CCCs must, as a primary mission, offer academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level for both younger and older students, including those persons returning to school. The Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees are used to recognize those students who have completed courses of study at the lower

division level. The Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) may also be awarded to students who complete 60 units of lower division coursework in articulated pathways – ADT recipients can transfer to CSU campuses as upper division students in their field of study.

Baccalaureate degree pilot program. Senate Bill 850 (Block, Chapter 747, Statutes of 2014) authorized the CCC BOG, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish a baccalaureate degree pilot program. The pilot program allowed up to 15 participating community college districts to offer one baccalaureate degree program to meet the local workforce needs as long as it does not duplicate a baccalaureate degree program already offered by the CSU or the UC. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) conducted interim and final evaluations of the pilot program.

The LAO found that assessing whether programs met industry needs was difficult based on the information provided by colleges in their initial applications. Generally, colleges provided documents citing broad support for the proposed programs with little concrete evidence of the benefits to employers. In most of these cases, the LAO found that graduates were using their bachelor's degrees to enter management positions where a bachelor's degree is a minimum requirement. The LAO found little evidence that graduates from these pilot programs were better prepared to fill these positions compared to those with other bachelor's degrees or that pilot program graduates were helping employers fill hard-to-staff positions.

The most common benefit of the pilot cited by students was the relatively low cost of attending the community college bachelor's degree programs. In a survey conducted by the pilot community colleges, 51% of respondents stated they would not have pursued a bachelor's degree if their community college program had not been offered. The pilot programs particularly benefited students with an associate degree in the same major and related work experience in the industry.

Pilot made permanent. Assembly Bill 927 (Medina and Choi, Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021) made the SB 850 (Block) pilot program permanent, perpetually approving the original pilot programs. The bill increased the number of potential programs to 30 annually and set up two application cycles per academic year: January 15 with notice of approval or rejection on or before May 31; and August 15 with notice of approval or rejection on or before December 31. A limit of 15 programs may be approved each cycle. As of publication of this analysis there are a total of 39 approved programs. Most participating campuses currently offer one program, while with seven campuses offer two baccalaureate degree programs.

The current approved cycle established in existing law is as follows:

- 1) CCDs submit baccalaureate degree program proposals to the CCCCCO by January 15 or August 15.
- 2) The CCCCCO reviews the applications within 30 days and seeks feedback from the CSU Chancellor's Office, the President of the UC, and the President of the AICCU.
- 3) The CSU and UC have 30 working days after receipt of a proposal to provide written objection if they determine that the baccalaureate degree program is duplicative of existing baccalaureate programs offered by the CSU or the UC.

- 4) Upon receipt of the objection, the CCCCCO has 30 working days to convene with the CCD and the segment(s) that raised the objection to collaborate and establish a written agreement.

Committee comments. As noted in the author's statement, AB 2305 (Mike Fong) revises the submission and approval process by reducing the submission cycle to once a year and lengthening the review timeline for each step of the process. The total number of approvals remains 30 per academic year. The bill proposes the following:

- 1) CCDs submit baccalaureate degree program proposals to the CCCCCO by August 15
- 2) CCCCCO has 90 days to review applications and seek input from the four-year institutions
- 3) The CSU and have 105 days from receipt of the proposals to respond with written objections based on duplication of existing baccalaureate degrees offered at the CSU or UC.
- 4) Upon receipt of the objection, the CCCCCO has 90 days to convene with the CCD and the four year segment(s) to develop written agreements.
- 5) Notification of approval or rejection of a proposed program must be provided by June 15 of the following year.

Committee staff notes that leaders from the CCCCCO and CSU have expressed that the timeline established in AB 927 (Medina and Choi) was difficult to sustain, and collaborate with the author to establish the timeline reflected in the March 19, 2024 amendments.

Arguments in support. The CSU wrote in support of this bill, noting that "the CSU has worked closely with the [CCCCCO] to implement this [the community college baccalaureate program], and significant work has been done in the past year to make improvements to the review and consultation process. AB 2305 will provide much needed timeline adjustments which have been agreed upon by the CSU, CCCCCO, and other partners that will allow for a more thorough process."

The Faculty Association of the California Community Colleges (FACCC) wrote in support of AB 2305 (Mike Fong), noting that "FACCC strongly supports AB 2305 because it simplifies the application process for community colleges looking to offer baccalaureate degrees while maintaining a rigorous review to ensure program quality and avoid duplication with existing offerings at state universities. The bill facilitates a more thorough and efficient evaluation process by establishing a single annual application deadline and extending the review period."

Related legislation. AB 2044 (Chen) requires the Chancellor of the CCC to evaluate whether baccalaureate degree holders are paid more than associate degree holders in the same field when conducting a review to approve the elimination of an associate degree program. AB 2044 (Chen) is scheduled to be heard by the Assembly Committee on Higher Education on April 2, 2024.

Prior legislation. AB 927 (Medina and Choi), Chapter 565, Statutes of 2021, removed the cap on the total number of baccalaureate degree programs allowed within the CCC system and eliminates the January 1, 2027 sunset date of the statewide baccalaureate degree pilot program, thereby permanently authorizing the offering of baccalaureate degree programs at CCCs.

SB 874 (Hill) of 2020, would have extended the operation of the statewide baccalaureate degree pilot program indefinitely. The bill would have removed the requirements that the program consist of a maximum of 15 community college district programs and for a student to commence a program by the end of the 2022–23 academic year. SB 874 was held in the Senate Committee on Education due to bill restrictions from COVID-19.

SB 769 (Hill) of 2017, would have extended the operation of the statewide baccalaureate degree pilot program until July 1, 2028. SB 769 was held in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

SB 577 (Dodd), Chapter 603, Statutes of 2018, established the CCC Teacher Credentialing Partnership Pilot Program, awarding grants to collaboratives of one or more teacher-credentialing higher education institutions partnering with one or more community colleges for the purpose of offering teacher credentialing programs at community colleges.

SB 850 (Block) Chapter 747, Statutes of 2014, authorizes the BOG of the CCC, in consultation with the CSU and the UC, to establish baccalaureate degree pilot programs, at up to 15 community college districts, with one baccalaureate degree program each, as specified, to be determined by the CCCCCO.

AB 661 (Block, 2011) authorized Grossmont-Cuyamaca and the San Mateo Community College districts to offer one baccalaureate degree pilot program per campus. AB 661 was heard and passed in the Assembly Higher Education Committee by a vote of 6-0 but was moved to the inactive file on the Assembly Floor.

AB 2400 (Block, 2010) authorized the San Diego, Grossmont-Cuyamaca and San Mateo Community College districts to establish baccalaureate degree pilot programs. No vote was taken and AB 2400 was held in the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California State University, Office of the Chancellor
Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
Rio Hondo College

Opposition

None on file.

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