

Date of Hearing: April 8, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 1093 (Solache) – As Introduced February 20, 2025

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary education: California-Mexico Higher Education Development and Academic Exchange Program.

SUMMARY: Establishes, until January 1, 2032, the California-México Higher Education Development and Academic Exchange Program for 400 students who attend a campus of the University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU), or the California Community Colleges (CCC) to attend universities in México and for 400 students who attend a university in México to attend a campus of the UC, CSU, or CCC, each year and establishes the California-México Higher Education Development and Academic Exchange Program Fund to be housed in the California State Treasury. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes, commencing with the 2026-27 school year, the California-México Higher Education Development and Academic Exchange Program; stipulates that 400 students who attend California public universities will attend a university in México and 400 students who attend universities in México will attend a California public university.
- 2) Establishes the California-México Higher Education Development and Academic Exchange Program Fund housed in the California State Treasury as a regional matching fund.
- 3) Specifies that it is the intent of the Legislature that \$40 million of the Fund, as enumerated in (2) above, must be provided by California, and \$20 million of the fund, must be provided by México, for a total of \$60 million.
- 4) Stipulates that no matching fund requirement by México must be imposed as a condition of implementation of the Program.
- 5) Requires that, upon appropriation by the Legislature, moneys in the Fund must be allocated to student exchange programs in California public universities for purposes of the Program.
- 6) Specifies that the participating students in the Program may be exchanged between California public universities and universities in México on a one-to-one basis and must not be charged tuition or fees by the exchanging universities.
- 7) Stipulates that each participating student must receive up to \$15,000 for travel and living expenses.
- 8) Stipulates that the measure becomes operative only upon an appropriation of funds for its purposes.
- 9) Sunsets the provisions of this measure on January 1, 2032.
- 10) States the following findings and declarations of the Legislature:

- a) The California-México region is composed of 170,000,000 residents and represents the 5th and 12th largest economies of the world, respectively;
- b) There are very few policies or a long-term plan to remain as one of the most productive and competitive megaregions; and,
- c) A most critical issue is the almost nonexistent higher education exchange of students, faculty, researchers, and policymakers in the California-México megaregion, despite the prime financial relationship that binds them as each other's top economic partner.

11) Defines "California public universities" as the UC, the CSU, and the CCC, and their respective campuses.

EXISTING LAW: Establishes the Donahoe Higher Education Act and assigns the missions of the CCC, the CSU, and the UC (Education Code Section 66010, et seq.).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: *Purpose of the measure.* The author states that, "the California-México bilateral relationship directly impacts the lives and livelihoods of tens of millions of people. Strengthening, our bi-national relationship in the higher education sector is necessary to achieve multiple co-benefits. This measure would formally institutionalize cross-border education partnerships and build out the infrastructure for consistent, robust academic exchange. These programs are crucial to identifying the emerging needs of shared workforce and economic drivers."

The author further contends that, "a most critical issue is the almost nonexistent higher education exchange of students, faculty, researchers, and policymakers in the California-México megaregion, despite the prime financial relationship that binds them as each other's top economic partner. This bilateral relationship directly affects the lives and livelihoods of tens of millions of people."

The author notes that, "despite the dynamic economic, public health, environmental, and cultural ties along with proximity to México, other countries have more robust study abroad program[s]. Our CA-Mex symbiotic relationship would greatly benefit from enhanced educational and cultural exchange programs across higher education institutions. The current Mexican President Shienbaum [Pardo] spent time as a scientific researcher at UC Berkeley. This further highlights the benefits of building our robust academic exchange programs."

This measure, in part, seeks to establish the California-México Higher Education Development and Academic Exchange Program for 400 students who attend a campus of the UC, CSU, or CCC, to attend universities in México and for 400 students who attend a university in México to attend a campus of the UC, CSU, or CCC, each year.

Current higher education partnerships between California and México (MX). The UC Institute for México and the United States (UC MEXUS), established in 1980, and serves as an academic research institute dedicated to encouraging, securing, and contributing to bi-national and Latinx research and collaborative academic programs and exchanges. The main focus of UC MEXUS is to contribute substantially to improving bi-national scholarly understanding and providing

positive contributions to society in both MX and the UC, particularly in the graduate and professional areas.

The UC MEXUS has provided faculty and research grants, graduate student and postdoctoral fellowships since 1997 under the UC-CONACYT Agreement of Cooperation in Higher Education and Research. Since 1998, UC MEXUS-CONACYT Collaborative Grants provide \$25,000 in funding support for one year, to a team comprised of one UC researcher and one researcher from a MX partner institution. Each team completes a bi-national project in basic or applied collaborative research, instructional development, or public service and education.

In addition to the overall quality of the proposals, awards are weighted toward collaborative parity, student opportunities in research and training, and the potential for institutional or extramural support beyond the project period. Numerous awardees have used the UC MEXUS collaborative grant to develop projects that are later funded by their own institutions or by other large funding agencies.

Additionally, La Casa de la Universidad de California en México (Casa de California) was established in 1995, and seeks to be an example of academic and intellectual commitment to the promotion and exchange of ideas and knowledge between the diverse campuses of the UC system and México, and with initiatives that can translate the expertise into practical solutions for the benefit of the State of California and MX. Casa is dedicated to promoting understanding and cooperation through its various programs and academic activities. It is a meeting place where scholars, government officials, and practitioners can come together through seminars, conferences and workshops, and courses.

Further, the UC-México Initiative was established by then UC President Janet Napolitano, in 2014, to create a sustained, strategic and equal partnership between the UC and institutions in México, in order to address common issues and educate the next generation of leaders. It was designed to provide an opportunity to think broadly and to develop strategies for a robust and enduring relationship that could encompass student and faculty exchanges, celebration of shared heritage and populations, and research and scholarly activity that solves problems and advances knowledge on issues of mutual importance.

Building upon the long history of strong partnership between the UC and MX, in 2019, Alianza UCMX was formed through the integration of the preexisting UC Systemwide Programs (as discussed above), UC MEXUS, Casa de California, and the UC-MX Initiative. UC Riverside serves as the host campus for Alianza MX, whose mission encompasses the following: (1) Mobilize talent and funding for research teams from the UC and MX that create new knowledge across diverse areas from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, to the social sciences, the arts, and humanities; (2) Engage with diverse stakeholders in the US and MX in order to promote action research and innovative solutions for resilient and informed public policies on issues relevant for the bi-lateral cooperation agenda; and, (3) Foster a bi-national workforce by supporting the two-way mobility of students and professors, including those of Latinx origin.

Lastly, according to information provided by the author, “the UC campuses already have a campus in Mexico City that is in partnership with the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM). For 2026-2027, they have received seed money of \$50,000 for each UC campus allocated for study abroad to Mexico.”

While not in the higher education space, just last month California's Governor and the Governor of the MX State of Sonora hosted a bilateral meeting and signed an memorandum of understanding (MOU) to strengthen climate and economic ties between the states including through advancing the development of clean energy, building resilient supply chains, and collaborating on clean transportation efforts.

Committee comments. While this measure will not become operative until the Legislature funds the Program, it is presently unclear if a budget request has been submitted.

Further, this measure appears to align to ongoing efforts of the State in developing and cultivating educational opportunities for students; and also appears to align to various objectives of the Assembly Select Committee on California-México Bi-National Affairs.

However, as currently drafted, while recognizing the potential of tremendous benefits, several policy questions remain unanswered.

Moving forward, the author should add more specificity to this measure, including, but limited to, addressing all of the following:

- 1) How are students made aware of the Program if they do not know to look for the program on their campus website?
- 2) How are students selected to participate in the Program?
 - a) Will there be an even split between CCC, CSU, and UC students to participate?
 - b) Or is it first come first admitted to the Program, regardless of which segment the student represents?
- 3) Who administers the Program?
- 4) Will participation in the Program align to students' time to degree? That is to say, will students graduate within four to five years of beginning their collegiate journey?
- 5) Will students receive full academic credit for all courses successfully completed while in the Program? Will articulation agreements be in place for all course offerings? Will only specified courses within specified majors be offered and all of those courses articulated?

Committee Staff notes that absent articulation agreements, there will not be a guarantee for students who participate in the Program that the courses taken will be credited to them when they return to their home campus of origin. This could significantly impact students' time to degree and increase their costs for earning a degree because they would have to repeat courses that they may have taken while abroad.

- 6) What entity ensures participating students receive the \$15,000 for travel and living expenses and in what currency is the award provided to students?
- 7) If CCC students participate, will Proposition 98 funds be used?

Committee Staff notes that the Community College League of California expressed concerns around the potential use of Proposition 98 funds; that if Proposition 98 funds are used for this Program, it could negatively impact the educational opportunities of all CCC students.

- 8) The measure has a sunset clause, but no mechanism to collect data on the outcomes of the Program. A report on the Program should be included in this measure, and the report should be due to the Legislature at least one year prior to the sunset of the provisions of the measure.

Arguments in support. The Latino Education and Advocacy Days (LEAD) letter of support stated, “LEAD supports AB 1093, which seeks to enhance cross-border educational collaboration by enabling encouraging students from California public universities to attend universities in Mexico and students from Mexican universities to attend California public universities each year. This initiative acknowledges the importance of international academic exchange in enriching educational experiences, promoting cultural understanding, and preparing students for a globalized workforce. Providing opportunities for cultural exchange and understanding across the United States and Mexico.”

Further, according to LEAD, “collaborative initiatives offer students an invaluable opportunity to access new intellectual resources, innovative ideas, and novel perspectives, thereby enriching the students’ academic and social experience, to prepare them for success in a globalized economy. The California-Mexico bilateral relationship directly impacts the lives and livelihoods of tens of millions of people. Strengthening our bi-national relationship in the higher education sector is necessary to achieve multiple co-benefits. This measure would formally institutionalize cross-border education partnerships and build out the infrastructure for consistent, robust academic exchange. These programs are crucial to identifying the emerging needs of shared workforce and economic drivers.”

Prior legislation. AB 2852 (Eduardo Garcia) of the 2023-24 Legislative Session, which was held on the Suspense File in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, was substantially similar to this measure.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

CA Federation of Teachers, AFT, AFL-CIO
 Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
 Latino Education and Advocacy Days (LEAD)
 The California-Mexico Studies Center

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Jeanice Warden / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960