

Date of Hearing: January 7, 2020

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 968 (Cristina Garcia) – As Amended January 6, 2020

**SUBJECT:** Community colleges: naturalist workforce model curriculum

**SUMMARY:** Requires the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to establish a naturalist workforce model curriculum and related vocational programs on or before July 31, 2022, for the 2022-23 academic year. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the CCCCCO to establish a naturalist workforce model curriculum and related vocational programs.
- 2) Requires the CCCCCO, working in collaboration with the Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges (ASCCC), to develop a naturalist workforce model curriculum and related vocational programs to be offered by community college districts commencing on or before July 31, 2022, for the 2022-2023 academic year.
- 3) The model curriculum will reflect regional needs, and will be developed in consultation with numerous entities, as defined.
- 4) Requires the California Community Colleges (CCC) to coordinate and provide appropriate accredited classes for students enrolled at its colleges for creating pathways for naturalist careers in various areas that correspond with related governmental agencies and departments, relevant conservation for-profit and non-profit organizations, and private sector industries.
- 5) Specifies that the ASCCC shall approve, modify, or reject the final contents of the naturalist workforce model curriculum. For this purpose, the ASCCC may rely upon its internal course identification and numbering system.
- 6) Requires, to the extent practicable and feasible, the naturalist workforce model curriculum and related vocational programs do the following:
  - a) Provide professional training working within natural and cultural history of the environment and open spaces;
  - b) Provide professional training to work in state parks and in areas such as conservation and monitoring public health;
  - c) Provide instruction and professional development relating to work within county and state agencies with the task of communicating with the public on various environmental, conservation, and public health concerns;
  - d) Provide professional development and instruction related to data collection and communicating findings through writing reports and scientific papers or journals;
  - e) Provide experience and professional development for presentations on environmental issues with an emphasis on conservation of resources for schools, clubs, interest groups, and park interpretive programs; and,

- f) Incorporate existing stackable credentials and sequences of modularized training or credentials that prepare students and make them competitive for jobs in emerging industry sectors related to the environmental sciences and conservation.
- 7) Establishes the intent of the Legislature that funds be appropriated in the annual Budget Act or another statute for allocation by the CCCCO for purposes of implementing the model curriculum as outlined in a manner that reflects regional needs.
- 8) Requires the CCCCO to distribute funds allocated for the purposes of this bill to community college districts that offer coursework in accordance with the model curriculum developed pursuant to the bill. Requires a community college district to use these funds for costs of implementing the provisions of this bill including, but not limited to, costs of participation in vocational programs related to coursework offered in accordance with the model curriculum.
- 9) Requires the Chancellor of the CCC to submit a report to the Governor and Legislature on or about March 1 of every year following the finalization of the naturalist model curriculum and related vocational programs, as specified. The report will:
  - a) Provide assessments on the naturalist model curriculum and related vocational programs;
  - b) Include, but not be limited to, participation rates of students in the naturalist model curriculum and related vocational programs, and, to the extent feasible, the percentage of participants who pursued careers providing public access to, or preserving, restoring, and enhancing, outdoor areas;
  - c) Include relevant information and data, including information on workforce needs in the environmental and conservation industries; and,
- 10) Makes various findings and declarations.
- 11) Makes the following definitions:
  - a) “Chancellor’s office” means the CCCCO;
  - b) “Naturalist” means an expert in the natural and cultural history of public parks and open space who communicates to visitors of public parks through formal and informal education and interpretive programming; and,
  - c) “Outdoor areas” includes, but is not limited to, parks, beaches, or recreational areas.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the mission and function of the CCC is the offering of academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level and the CCC are authorized to grant the associate in arts and the associate in science degree. The community colleges are also required to offer remedial instruction, English as a Second Language instruction, and adult noncredit instruction, and support services which help students succeed at the postsecondary level. (Education Code (EDC) Section 66010.4)

Establishes the California Community Colleges, under the administration of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in this state. (EDC Section 70900)

Requires the board of governors to appoint a chief executive officer, to be known as the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. (EDC Section 71090)

Establishes community college districts, administered by governing boards, throughout the state, and authorizes these districts to provide instruction to students at the community college campuses maintained by the districts (EDC Section 72000 et al.)

Establishes the Strong Workforce Program as a K-14 state education, economic, and workforce development initiative for the purpose of expanding the availability of high-quality, industry-valued career technical education and workforce development courses, programs, pathways, credentials, certificates, and degrees. (EDC Section 88820, et seq.)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown.

**COMMENTS:** *Need for the bill.* According to the author, “This measure addresses California’s need for an expanded, skilled, and diverse workforce from disadvantaged communities that pursue careers in conservation efforts of our state’s natural resources, increases access to the outdoors for disadvantaged communities, and increases efforts in restoring, preserving, and enhancing public land.”

“The deficiency in current law surrounds the unclear pathway for prospective students with an interest in pursuing a naturalist career – this emerging workforce and related careers will support, enhance, maintain, conserve, protect, and restore California’s scarce natural resources for generations to come. California prides itself on its progressive environmental regulations and policies, land management practices, and protection of the state’s public land and natural habitats. The effort outlined under this measure would establish a naturalist model curriculum and related vocational programs aimed to support an emerging and important workforce and provide students with a valuable opportunity and career pathway that promote awareness of careers in this field. The bill also incorporates critical engagement with county and city governments, sanitation/water districts, environmental groups, non-profits during the development of this curriculum.”

“Finally, AB 968 would help promote both environmental stewardship as well as job opportunities that are meaningful and rewarding. Not only would these jobs benefit our state’s natural resources, but it would also provide economic benefits to areas in the state lacking resources needed to pursue conservation.”

*Background.* A naturalist is a type of biologist who studies the impacts of living species on each other and the environments in which they live. An Interpretive Naturalist, as defined in this bill, is an expert in the natural and cultural history of public parks and open space who communicates to visitors of public parks through formal and informal education and interpretive programming. According to 2015 data, the largest employer of naturalists and all biological sciences was state government with 33 percent. They work for state parks and in areas such as conservation, monitoring and public health. They may also work in public outreach and with local environmental groups funded or employed by state government. Similarly, the federal

government employed 21 percent of all biological scientists including naturalists. They work for federal agencies such as the National Park Service and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Naturalists must begin their careers with a strong foundational knowledge of biology, ecology, chemistry, math, and geography. For a naturalist at the beginning of his or her career, the job description may include the following:

- 1) Observe plants and animals in their natural habitats, assessing effects of environment and industry on living matter, recording findings in field notes and by taking photographs.
- 2) Inventory or estimate plant and wildlife populations.
- 3) Organize and conduct experimental studies in natural surroundings.
- 4) Collect data and communicate findings by writing reports and scientific papers or journal articles, and by making presentations for schools, clubs, interest groups and park interpretive programs.
- 5) Prepare collections of preserved specimens or microscopic slides for scientific study.

*How are community college courses typically created?* Generally, community college districts, in partnership with their local Academic Senates, create their own academic courses locally, with the CCCCO required to review and approve all courses for degree completion purposes. The California Community College Curriculum Committee makes recommendations and provides guidance to the Chancellor's Office on local and regional implementation of curriculum policy and regulations, including general education and workforce development.

When establishing new career technical education (CTE) or workforce programs, community college district governing boards are required to conduct a job market study of the labor market area, and determine whether or not the results justify the proposed program. Further, community college district governing boards must review their existing workforce programs every two years to ensure they meet labor market demands. Further, as a condition of receiving funding under the Strong Workforce Program, community college districts must collaborate regionally to plan how they will meet their workforce training needs.

*Community Colleges Strong Workforce Program.* As mentioned above, existing law establishes the Strong Workforce Program to improve the availability and quality of CTE leading to certificates, degrees, and credentials.

For community colleges, the program requires neighboring community colleges to form eight regional consortia, with the purpose of coordinating CTE activities among colleges in the region. Each consortium must collaborate with various regional stakeholders, including local workforce development boards, industry leaders, and LEAs, to develop a four-year plan for how they will address regional workforce needs. Consortia use labor market data to direct Strong Workforce funds toward one or more of ten priority industry sectors. Funding is allocated based on the number of unemployed adults, projected job openings, and performance meeting regional workforce needs.

Once a consortium's funding amount is determined, the funds are divided with community college districts receiving about 60 percent of program funds directly and the consortium receiving the other 40 percent. Both pots of funding support regionally prioritized initiatives aligned with Strong Workforce plans.

*Existing environmental science programs.* According to conversations with the CCC Sector Navigator for Agriculture, Water, and Environmental Technologies, existing natural resources and environmental science programs provide education and training for students to become interpretive rangers. Furthermore, programs currently exist that can provide pathway development in natural resources and currently serve disadvantaged communities, to include the U.S. Youth Conservation Corps, the California Conservation Corps, and many community nonprofit organizations throughout the state.

According to the author, the model curricula that would be created by this bill would differ from the content in existing environmental science programs, and a broad coalition of stakeholders would collaborate to ensure the curriculum incorporates the following components to protect, conserve, and restore California's natural resources and public land. While the naturalist workforce is, in part, a refinement of existing portions of curriculum found in several campuses in California, there is no complete, explicit naturalist workforce training opportunity in existence in California today. Having a workforce with the skills identified in this bill will significantly expand the pipeline of workers who can engage in the various elements of the naturalist profession.

*Committee comments.* Committee staff recommends, and the author has accepted, several amendments to AB 968. If passed, these amendments will be processed in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

- 1) Striking intent language in Section 78070(c).
- 2) Striking Section 78072(a), because the development of the model curriculum is explicitly laid out in Section 78072(b)(1).
- 3) Striking Section 78072(c), which explicitly requires colleges to coordinate and offer courses.

*Arguments in support.* The California Native Plant Society wrote, "...given our organization's mission, we appreciate the effort that AB 968 makes in providing California community college students with meaningful pathways to careers as naturalist that work to protect and enhance outdoor areas. We believe that these types of opportunities are uniquely valuable in an educational setting because they promote awareness among students about the availability of careers in this field, and we are especially supportive of the emphasis on disadvantaged communities. By directing the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to develop and implement a Naturalist Pathway Pilot Program at a community college located in a disadvantaged community in the state, this bill would help promote both environmental stewardship as well as job opportunities for youth that need it the most."

*Prior legislation.* SB 462 (Stern, 2019), required the CCCCO, working in collaboration with the ASCCC, to develop a forest and woodlands restoration workforce model curriculum and vocational programs to be offered by community college districts commencing on or before July 31, 2021. SB 462 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

California Native Plants Society  
East Bay Regional Park District

**Opposition**

None on file.

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