

## Recipe for failure?

# “Student success” task force threatens mission of community colleges

Economic collapse and three years of deteriorating state budgets brought drastic cuts to higher education, and the Legislature commanded the California Community Colleges to do better. Following decimating cuts to student services, the Legislature threatened, for 2011-12, to cut still deeper by withholding an additional \$100 million from the system to be doled out to districts that showed improvement in student success, primarily defined in terms of completion rates. It sounded crazy, but community colleges have often been asked to do more with less.

This time, the system deflected the knife of additional budget cuts with the promise that its Student Success Task Force, mandated under SB 1143, should be given the opportunity to come up with a student success plan. This bill, introduced by Senator Carol Liu (D-Pasadena), threatened to fund community colleges based on the number of students who “succeeded,” rather than on the basis of the number of students served.

Despite the focus on “success,” nowhere in SB 1143, or in the work of the Task Force that followed the bill, appears a clear definition of “success.” And that has been problematic all along.

Effective advocacy nearly killed the bill, but the author worked with the System Office to resurrect it as a mandate to study student success in the community colleges.

To this end, the State Chancellor and California Community College Board of Governors were empowered to form the task force, and a diverse group of twenty representatives was assembled. The Academic Senate was granted four faculty seats that joined slots allocated to district chancellors and other administrators, members of the Board of Governors, and local trustees to represent the system. In addition, the group included community and workforce representatives as well as several analysts, both supportive and critical, who have written about community colleges in recent years. The State Chancellor attended as an ex-officio member, and Senator Liu also sent a representative in her place as a Task Force member. Various Chancellor’s Office staff attended Task Force meetings in an advisory capacity.

## “Experts”

The Task Force has been meeting monthly since January in its effort to prepare a report due to the Legislature by March

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2012. The first six months were spent hearing from student success “experts” from around the country. Most of these addressed a topic mandated under SB 1143: the outcomes-based funding that had been the motivation of the original bill.

A brainstorming retreat in July outlined the basic framework of the proposal, and the August meeting formulated a point-by-point list of its components. Each component consisted of a recommendation; a list of legislative, regulatory, or structural actions that would be required for implementation; and a description of how the goal would be achieved. From the outset, it was clear that while the group might be able to settle on a set of recommendations, it would never be able to end debate over how they were to be implemented.

To move the project forward, the group agreed that the details

of implementation would be excluded from the draft brought to the September meeting because they were too divisive. At that meeting, some of the recommendations faced up-or-down votes, and several were eliminated. In the end the proposal is not a consensus document.

Nevertheless, a final draft went public on September 30, and the process entered a two-month vetting period in which community college constituencies and interested members of the public are encouraged to study the recommendations and voice their opinions. The Task Force will not meet in October and will, instead, assist Chancellor’s Office staff in presentations at meetings throughout the state [see sidebar on this page]. There are two open forums, one north and one south, but most of the presentations will be given at meetings and conferences already scheduled by statewide organizations. The proposal and a list of presentations is available on the Chancellor’s Office web site: <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/PolicyInAction/StudentSuccessTaskForce.aspx>.

The last two meetings of the Student Success Task Force are scheduled in November and December. At these meetings, the group will consider feedback from the presentations. The recommendations may be revised, and the draft proposal document will without doubt be edited. The final version will go to the Community College Board of Governors for a first reading at its January meeting. At its March meeting, approval of a final report is expected for delivery to the Legislature.

## Counter austerity message

As this process plays out, it is essential that faculty review

Continued on page 6

Date/Time	Event	Location
November 3-5, 2011	Academic Senate Fall Plenary	San Diego, Sheraton Hotel
November 4-6, 2011	Student Senate Fall Assembly	San Jose, Doubletree Hotel
<b>November 9, 2011</b>	<b>Student Success Task Force Meeting</b>	<b>Sacramento</b>
November 10, 2011	Association of Community and Continuing Education	N. Orange County CCD, Anaheim Campus
<b>November 16, 2011</b>	<b>Northern California Town Hall</b>	<b>Oakland, Elihu M. Harris Building</b>
November 17-19, 2011	Community College League of California – Annual Convention	San Jose, Fairmont Hotel
<b>December 7, 2011</b>	<b>Student Success Task Force Meeting</b>	<b>Sacramento</b>

With the exception of the town halls and legislative hearings, conferences hosted/sponsored by membership associations may not be open to non-members.

For an update of places and times of these meetings, to read the documents associated with the Task Force, and to deliver online comments, go to <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/>

## Task force recommendations of special interest to ESL instructors

The current recommendations are critical for anyone teaching basic skills or ESL, in particular, and any students within those populations. They paint a picture of a successful student who attends full-time, takes only the courses necessary to the completion of his/her degree, certificate or transfer goal, and places as high as possible in terms of remedial education. They recommend that Title V and the Education Code be changed to reflect such a picture, and that financial aid and FTE be aligned with it.

Such recommendations will drastically alter community college education in California. They will limit access to such an education to new immigrants, older students, the poor and the developmentally disabled. They will eliminate many credit bearing remedial and ESL programs and replace them with tutoring, with technology, by training faculty in other disciplines to handle such issues within their courses, with noncredit or adult school courses, or by putting the financial burden on those students who need them to pay for them themselves. Moreover, they will limit the power of faculty and increase the power of the Chancellor’s Office to make such decisions. Is this your vision of success? If not, make your voices heard now.

By Kristine Fertel, LRCFT, AFT Local 2279



## Legislative Update

Judith Michaels, CFT Legislative Director

# Coalitions work

**co-a-li-tion:** 1 a) the act of coalescing; union b) a body formed by the coalescing of originally distinct elements: combination. 2: a temporary alliance of distinct parties, persons, or states for joint action.

Our locals have been rapidly moving on Webster's second definition: temporary alliances for joint action. We spend time and energy building coalitions to amass the power necessary to accomplish goals that the locals of the CFT cannot attain alone. Complex issues increasingly require large numbers of people and many resources to win, or at least gain ground, on critical battles playing out in our locals and in the state legislature.

### California leads the way

This year we joined with higher education institutions, cities, unions, student associations, and community-based organizations to advance the cause of access to higher education, and send two bills of national significance to Governor Brown.

According to the University of California, around 65,000 undocumented students graduate every year from high school. California statute allows these students to pay in-state tuition if they have lived and attended school in California for the past three years. In the years since Governor Gray Davis signed that bill into law, we have continued legislative efforts to help undocumented students financially, only to see them stall, get caught up in the general immigration debate, or be vetoed by then-governor Schwarzenegger.

On July 25, 2011, Governor Brown signed AB 130 to allow undocumented college students to access privately funded financial aid. A companion measure, AB 131, opened Cal Grants and other state funded financial aid to them. They are still not eligible for federal loans, and, without federal legislation, their future, especially after college, remains in shadow because California alone cannot legalize the status of these young adults.

### A toll booth on the road to course access

As California constricts funding for our colleges, legislators propose "creative" approaches to fees, enrollment restrictions and student success, often aimed at pushing additional students through the system more rapidly, whatever the cost. We formed a coalition to help slow down, if not actually defeat, one of the most harmful, AB 515 by Assemblywoman Brownley. The bill proposed linking access to courses to the ability to pay by authorizing credit extension courses in community colleges. This first step toward privatization, amended many times since its introduction last February, passed the Assembly; when it moved to the Senate, the Senate Education Committee recognized that AB 515 signaled a significant departure from community colleges' open access mission, and, after an extensive hearing in that Committee, the Assemblywoman decided in July to leave it there until 2012 rather than risk a negative outcome.

We succeeded in stopping AB 515 for now because of activity by the California Nurses Association, the NAACP, and the California Labor Federation joining with community college-based groups, who made legislators aware of the threat. Local unions alerted and energized Central Labor bodies. Individuals and groups fanned out, contacting the bill's author, committee members, and their own representatives while a diverse lobbying team paced Sacramento's halls. While we succeeded in stalling AB 515, we will remain vigilant on this issue.

### Taxes and ballots

As the session drew to a close, CFT worked with allies on bills aligned with our goals and philosophy. A last-minute flurry demonstrated the importance of continuing lobbying coalitions. Governor Brown signed

AB 155, ending a summer-long threat by online retailing giant Amazon to launch a self-serving ballot referendum. Amazon dropped 10,000 local sales affiliates as part of its blackmail strategy to avoid collecting and paying to the state sales taxes *it legally already owed* when Brown promised to enforce California sales tax law. In this coalition we were joined by relatively unusual allies like local chambers of commerce. In return for the one-year tax-collection delay, Amazon will abandon its referendum campaign.

Governor Brown also signed Senate Bill 202, requiring all statewide initiatives to be placed on November general election ballots, concurrent with either a presidential or gubernatorial election, in addition to delaying until 2014 the vote on the proposed constitutional change requiring a rainy day fund. SB 202 posits that, if Californians must decide essential policy matters at the polls, the larger, more representative general electorate should be asked to decide them. Thus, on the very last day of session, legislators sent the bill to the governor to chill the efforts of proponents of ballot measures who try to manipulate the system by placing liberal or conservative initiatives on a given ballot.

These two examples illustrate our ability to effectively act in concert when circumstances dictate. As we did to secure a majority-vote budget, we will continue to work with other groups on a realistic solution to California's persistent revenue shortfall. Successful efforts rely on surveys and focus groups, and these are not inexpensive. Although it takes time and resources, coalitions can provide the opportunity for your local to work on state or national issues, thus expanding the scope and impact of your work. ☐

By Judith Michaels

### Building the Union *Continued from page 3*

he explains. "The district increasingly relies on part timers, hiring them when times are good, and letting them go when they're bad. This just perpetuates exploitation, which management describes as the 'need for flexibility.'"

The new communications strategy is basically a means to strengthen the base of the union, he believes, so that it can push back. "It gives us a stronger membership, and establishes clearer and closer ties between our leaders and the rank-and-file," he says. "Management pays attention. They even read our newsletters, which we know because we hear from them after we criticize them. It helps when they know what we're thinking."

The bargaining unit includes about 1000 instructors, nurses, librarians and counselors, of whom 750 are union members. "We get lots of email from them too," Goldstein says. General membership meetings, twice each semester, rotate from campus to campus, and the executive board meets twice a month. All meetings are open to members. Now union reps on each campus are preparing to send

out a survey in preparation for the next round of bargaining.

"We're not just worried about what happens to us in our own district," Goldstein notes. "We're eager to take part in larger political struggles. Our new state leaders are taking the union in a very activist direction, which we think is very healthy. Organized labor is being punched in the mouth, and it's important to respond in an aggressive, sophisticated and organized way."

The PFT already has a long record of participating in larger statewide efforts, including last year's March for California's Future up the central valley, and demonstrations in San Francisco, the East Bay and Sacramento to defend education. "We're reaching out to the No Cuts groups on our campuses," he says. "We're putting our money where our mouth is. We have very good folks in our union, who are trying to function under desperate and staggering teaching loads. So it's not easy. But that's where we want to go." ☐

By David Bacon



Goldstein meeting with Peralta Federation of Teachers executive board.

### Student Success *Continued from page 5*

the document and voice their opinions. Implementation of the proposal in its present form will have a significant impact on the nature of our community colleges. Open access and our students' freedom to engage in an exploration of their interests and abilities are at stake. There is considerable momentum already driving these recommendations with many in the public, some in the legislative leadership, and even a few in the community college system arguing that "California cannot afford to maintain the status quo."

Faculty must deliver a counter to this austerity message. Present economic stagnation cannot be

allowed to dictate the future of higher education in California. We must not give up the fight for investment in the future of our state. Through our unions and the academic senate, faculty have several opportunities to make a difference. We can raise our voices during these two months of task force presentations, we can carry our own vision of the future to the Board of Governors meetings early next year, and we can advocate for our community colleges when the Student Success Task Force proposal is debated in the Legislature. Faculty must prepare for these efforts now. ☐

By Richard Hansen