



2021-2022

# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES


**STUDENT SENATE FOR  
CALIFORNIA  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

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# ABOUT US

The Student Senate for California Community Colleges (SSCCC) is recognized by the California State Legislature, Office of the Governor, California Student Aid Commission, and other state agencies as the official voice of 2.1 million community college students in legislative and policy advocacy. The SSSCC annually develops its legislative priorities based on the resolutions passed by the Delegate Assembly.

This assembly's membership includes representatives from all 116 community colleges and diverse perspectives from all around California. These resolutions provide the SSSCC with direction, guiding the SSSCC towards critical community college issues that need to be addressed through legislation or other means. The SSSCC then implements these resolutions by authoring and supporting legislation.

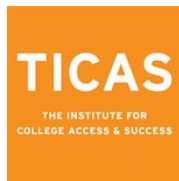
What follows are the 2021-2022 legislative priorities that guide our policy agenda for the year.

## Mission

The mission of the Student Senate for California Community Colleges (SSCCC) is to pursue policies that will improve student access, promote student success, engage and empower local student leaders, and enrich the collegiate experience for all California community college students.

## Our Advocacy Partners

The SSSCC maintains strong relationships with the partners below and routinely collaborates with them to address key issues within the California Community College system and to advance important policy.



# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

## State Priorities

The SSCCC primarily focuses on legislation that affects California Community College students.

Informed by adopted resolutions and in consultation with its regions and Legislative Affairs Committee, the SSCCC developed the following state legislative priorities for the 2021-2022 legislative cycle.

- COVID-19 Relief
- Financial Aid
- Basic Needs
- Underrepresented Students
- Student Enfranchisement
- Continuing Advocacy



## Federal Advocacy

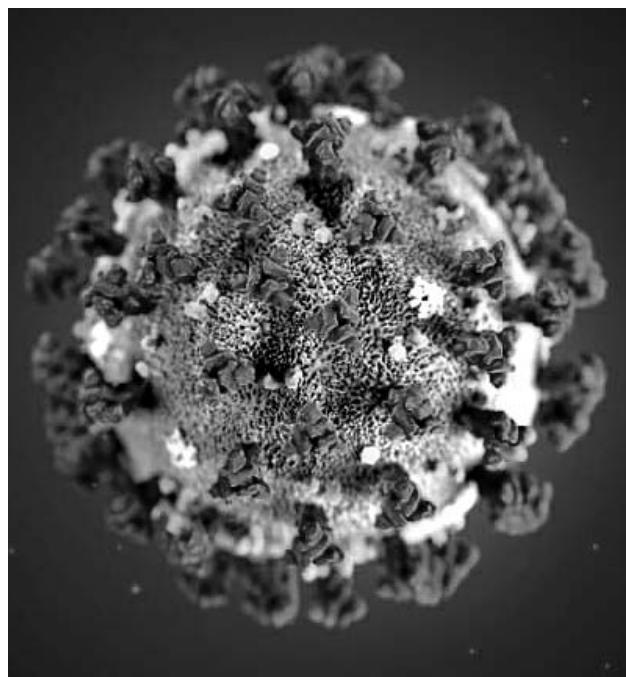
In addition to state legislative priorities, the SSCCC advocates for federal priorities that provide more support for California community college students. The SSCCC identified the following federal legislative priorities in consultation with its Legislative Affairs Committee and informed by adopted resolutions:

- Undocumented Students
- Financial Aid Programs
- Foster Students
- International Students

# COVID-19

## Relief for Disproportionately Affected Students

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many groups of students have been disproportionately affected by the sudden transition to online learning. A large number of students do not have access to basic needs and adequate internet connections, while others have put a halt to their education entirely. Between food and housing insecurity, the COVID-19 pandemic presents a multitude of new challenges for students who already experience such uncertainties. The SCCC is dedicated to fighting for much-needed resources that allow students to succeed during this unprecedented time.



## FINANCIAL AID

### The Total Cost of Attendance

Despite lower tuition costs compared to UCs and CSUs, California community colleges have the highest net cost of attendance. State financial aid vastly underserves community college students with hundreds of thousands of students struggling with food and housing insecurity, mental health, and homelessness. Students cannot focus on their academic success when they live paycheck to paycheck. We stand by our student population to fight for a future that

- recognizes the magnitude of basic needs for all college students;
- addresses the *full cost* of college, not exclusively tuition;
- increases and more equitably distributes state aid through financial advocacy; and
- offers more support for summer enrollment.

# BASIC NEEDS



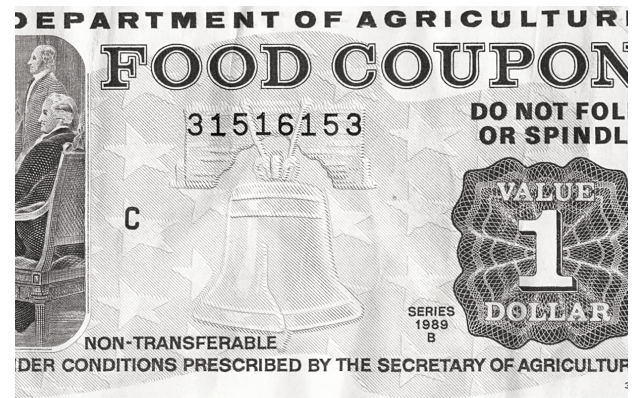
## Food Insecurity

Seventy percent of students in the California Community College system are experiencing food insecurity. Not only did COVID-19 affect the educational structure of community colleges, but it also led to a surge of students seeking food assistance. The SSCCC is asking the legislature and the governor to make a serious investment in addressing food insecurity on our community college campuses. No student should have to make the choice between their education and sustaining themselves.



## Housing Insecurity

Sixty-one percent of California community college students experience housing insecurity with an additional 16% of students completely homeless, which amounts to more than 200,000 students housing insecure. With the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 70% of students have also lost some or all their income resulting in a number of community college students forced to leave college without completing their education and struggling to find affordable housing. We urge the legislature to address the housing epidemic affecting students by making serious investments in programs that address housing for students in the California community college system.



## Transportation

A large number of college students rely on public transportation as their primary means of commuting to and from classes. Although instruction is remote, basic needs are difficult to acquire for students who do not have access to adequate transportation. Once in-person instruction resumes, students who already experience non-academic barriers will struggle to get to and from class. Transportation should be counted among the many barriers that prevent students from attaining their educational goals.

# BASIC NEEDS

## OER Book Advocacy

Textbooks are one of the major costs of college with the cost of textbooks comprising 40% of tuition at a two-year community college, and 13% at a four-year public university. Between 2006 and 2016 college textbook prices increased by 88%. Meanwhile, a Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) 2020 national survey of students found that 70% of students had skipped buying books due to cost. The survey also noted that 94% of students who had foregone purchasing a textbook were concerned that doing so would hurt their grade in a course, and 35% of students indicated they did not have sufficient resources to afford books and supplies. Textbooks that are required for the study programs are often changed, and libraries having limited books on reserve increases the gap in achievement for students who need to access books. The SSCCC emphasizes that the governor and legislature must work towards reducing and reversing the prohibitive costs textbooks add to a college education.



## Menstrual Equity

Pads and tampons are basic hygiene and wellness necessities that all college campuses should provide for free, similar to toilet paper and soap, which are readily available in campus bathrooms. In 2020, 1 in 5 California community college students have struggled to afford period products or were not able to purchase them at all. The SSCCC Delegates passed a resolution this year in support of period product accessibility in order to accurately reflect the current need for free period products. The resolution asked that the SSCCC make period poverty a legislative priority and advocate for free period products in all community college bathrooms and other campus venues, such as the food pantry or health centers, and urges the legislature to take initiative on supporting inclusive, equitable, and accessible period products.

# UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

## Disabled Student Awareness

Many students with disabilities are precluded from participating in student body associations because of the minimum unit requirement noted in California Education Code §76061a. This code section also includes language stating “or its equivalent” for unit requirements, which has allowed some California community colleges to raise the unit and GPA requirements to an inequitable level that has reduced access for students of all backgrounds to participate in the student body associations. One of the legislative priorities in this area is to change the law to allow students with disabilities to participate fully in the student body association so they have a voice in policy decisions that affect them. Students with disabilities also participate in fewer extracurricular activities, like clubs or on-campus events, than non-disabled peers. One reason for their lack of participation is a lack of social inclusion. The SSCCC will hold an annual town hall titled “*Disability Awareness Brought to the Forefront*” to increase disability awareness, highlight resources available, and share models of effective practices in this area.

## Foster Youth

Foster students face greater risks of behavioral health and academic challenges than their peers and often do not have an emotional support system to aid them in achieving their academic goals. Legislation derives definitions of homelessness from the federal statute which uses outmoded concepts of homelessness, often limiting the definitions of homeless individuals to below the ages of 25 or 26. Approximately 42% of California community college students are over 26 years of age, which represents nearly half of the student population. Many foster students do not enroll in postsecondary education until age 26 and are left out of critical academic and homeless support programs because they do not fit the traditional conception of a homeless individual. Congress must take action to create a new understanding of homelessness and ensure no student is left behind.



# UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

## Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Students

Inmates who participate in educational programs are 43% less likely to return to prison and every dollar invested in prison education programs saves nearly five dollars on incarceration costs. At Folsom Lake College alone, over 750 students have participated, which has removed over 2,600 hours from sentences at an estimated savings of \$2.5 million to taxpayers. Providing ongoing funding for prison education and reentry programs is not only a cost saving measure but one which will continue to fundamentally transform the lives of incarcerated students and enable them to sustain themselves and improve their communities.



## Undocumented Students

As a result of their status, many undocumented students are left out of receiving federal financial aid and other resources. California has the opportunity to step in where federal support is absent and provide critical resources to undocumented students including financial aid, legal resources, and specialized counseling. Many undocumented students are fearful that their status will jeopardize their educational aspirations and their livelihood. California must continue to affirm its humanity and provide support to these community college students.

## Veterans

We value the sacrifices made by those who have served our nation. California would not enjoy the freedoms we have today without the brave men and women of the United States military. Many of our veterans return home with inadequate resources to succeed during the transition back to civilian life. The SCCC recognizes that the veteran population on our campuses is currently underserved and is asking California lawmakers to support our student veterans with legislation that will address the needs of veteran students.



# STUDENT ENFRANCHISEMENT

## Nursing Lottery

Since 2007, the system for accepting students into community college nursing programs has been conducted through a computer system that randomly selects applicants with little to no merit given towards any factor other than prerequisites. According to a study by Nightingale College during the 2019-2020 academic year, 75,000 students within the United States have been rejected due to the nursing lottery system and the lack of adequate program capacity to accept all verified applicants. As predicted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health (DHHS) Resources and Services Administration Bureau of Health Workforce, there will be an estimated shortage of 44,500 registered nurses by 2030 in the state of California. In order to accurately reflect the demand for nurses in the medical field, the randomized lottery system should be eliminated and increase current resources for students who wish to pursue a nursing career.

## Non-credit students

In the Spring of 2020, there were 306,580 non-credit full-time equivalent students enrolled in the California Community College system. As evidenced in a 10-year study, 90% of non-credit students never transferred to credit courses, with countless others abandoning their goals of obtaining certificates, highlighting an inability of colleges to meet their unique needs and the negative impact of the lack of representation of non-credit students in participating in policy conversations about their academic success. The SSCCC advocates for a change to the California Education Code to allow non-credit students to serve on student body associations.

## Board Term Limits

Serving as a school board member should not be a career and term limits would close the door for career politicians, big-money, and special-interest groups from obstructing the best interests of students, educators, and the community by creating space for evolving perspectives that reflect the diverse student population school boards serve. In the November 2018 election, Southwest Community College District voters in San Diego County approved Measure CC: Term Limits for Governing Board Members with 116,125 votes (88.22% of the electorate) to limit members to three terms of office (twelve years), and, in the March 2007 election, Los Angeles Unified School District voters in Los Angeles County approved Measure LAUSD-L: Term Limits, Campaign Finance Rules, Compensation Review with 113,920 votes (67.8% of the electorate) to limit members to three terms of office (twelve years). A resolution passed by the SSCCC Delegates called on the SSCCC to seek legislation to limit the term limits for members on Boards of Trustees.



# CONTINUING ADVOCACY

## Mental Health

The 2018 National College Health Assessment reported that 63% of California college students surveyed felt overwhelming anxiety, 42% felt so depressed that it was difficult to function, 62% felt lonely, and 12% seriously considered suicide. California community colleges are woefully unequipped to provide a reasonable level of care to the many health issues that affect students. The International Association of Counseling Services advises there to be "one professional for every 1,000 to 1,500 students with the staffing ratios at the UC and CSU close to that ratio (about 1,100 students per counselor at UC and 2,000 students per counselor at CSU); however, ratios at the CCC exceed more than 7,000 students per counselor." This issue exists at the intersection of numerous inequalities and primarily affects defenseless students who are already struggling with various challenges. The SSCCC urges legislators to prioritize funding for a wide range of health services including mental health.



## Unemployment

Over 70% of students have lost their income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these students rely upon critical aid through the state unemployment insurance system for the remainder of the crisis. Students who were forced to relocate and stop working when their on-campus dormitory closed, but whose place of unemployment remained operational, should be considered eligible for benefits. More broadly, the state's unemployment compensation eligibility requirements need to be reformed, so that they no longer preclude any part-time, full-time, or contracted working students and allow unemployed students to remain unemployment insurance beneficiaries while pursuing a larger range of educational and training programs. We also urge our state to forego levying any state taxes on Californians that are recipients of unemployment benefits (UI or PUA) and on California student federal work-study (FWS) earnings.



# CONTINUING ADVOCACY

## Financial Aid Programs

As Congress continues to deliberate on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, it is essential that the financial aid programs students rely on are protected. During the 2017-2018 academic year, nationally seven million students received pell grants. Programs like the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) and Work Study helped millions more achieve success at colleges and universities across the United States. More recently, we support the Second Chance Pell Experiment that was introduced to a cohort of colleges that grants financial support for incarcerated students pursuing their education. Additionally, low-interest Stafford Loans allow students to fill gaps in funding contrary to private options with higher interest rates. Without this vital federal support, millions of college students would struggle to complete their academic programs. We urge Congress to ensure that these programs are protected and reinforced for America's next generation of college students.



## Undocumented Students

Undocumented youth who entered the United States through no fault of their own, are an integral part of the American fabric and should be given the affirmation that they will always be welcome in our country. A major barrier for undocumented students (with or without DACA) is the lack of access to federal financial aid such as work-study programs, federal student loans, and the Pell Grant. Immigrant students are integral members of California's higher education system, economy, and future. Extending the opportunity to DACA recipients to receive federal Pell Grants is a critical step towards a more equitable higher education system that supports students, regardless of their immigration status, by making college more affordable. We continue to urge Congress to pass legislation that would grant legal status for DACA recipients and put an end to the uncertainty created by the status quo.

# CONTINUING ADVOCACY

## International Students

We must also reexamine ICE's relationship with higher education and its role in both F-1 and M-1 visa policymaking, and question if ICE should continue to possess such authority. International students are the most intensively tracked category of visa holders in the United States, and face severe and immediate consequences if they fall out of status. Many international students already live with fears and concerns of ever-changing travel and visa policies. A more just and humane system must be created that provides international students access to educational opportunities and assurances of legal security that neither forces current international students out of the country nor bars the entry of new international students and potentially place responsibility for international students within the Department of Justice's purview, not ICE/Department of Health Services.



## Campus Safety

Under the U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 2576a, the Department of Defense is authorized to transfer excess military-grade equipment to local authorities, including a large portion of state peace officers trained by community colleges. With very little oversight, the acquisition of this equipment can lead to more violent police responses, unaccounted inventory, and potential situations of mayhem on and off of our campuses. The alarming provisions of this program, along with a lack of accountability, give the opportunity to easily turn safe environments into places of turmoil and disorder. Therefore, the SSCCC recommends

- pursuing campus demilitarization and prohibiting acquisition and use of military weaponry by California community college police training forces through ending our systems and colleges relationships with the US Department of Defense and involvement in the LESO Program; and
- system-wide collection of police-stop demographic data to determine if and where racial biases exist in CCC policing forces.