



2020-2021

# 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 SSCCC 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 SSCCC with direction, guiding the SSCCC towards critical issues in the community college system that need to be addressed through legislation or other means. The SSCCC then implements these resolutions by authoring and supporting legislation. What follows are the 2020-2021 legislative priorities which 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 SSCCC 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. The Student Senate, in consultation with the Regions and the Legislative Affairs Committee, has developed the following state legislative priorities for the 2020-2021 legislative cycle.

- Basic Needs
- COVID-19 Relief
- Equity Training
- Financial Aid
- Increasing Resources
- Student Enfranchisement
- Technology
- Unemployment



## Federal Advocacy

In addition to state legislation, the SSCCC advocates for federal priorities that provide more support for California community college students. The SSCCC has identified the following federal legislative priorities in consultation with the Legislative Affairs Committee to continue advocacy for:

- Campus Safety
- DACA 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 connection, 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 Student Senate is dedicated to fighting for much needed resources that allow students to succeed during this unprecedented time.

# EQUITY

## Cultural Sensitively Training

While cultural understanding between peers is a key element to fostering healthy and diverse communities, the same is required from instructors and administrators. LGBTQIA+ students and students of color frequently experience microaggressions and discrimination which creates an unwelcoming environment and greatly impedes student success. It is critical that our professors are equipped with the sensitivity and understanding to promote an equitable atmosphere and are properly trained to deescalate classroom situations.



# TECHNOLOGY

## Expanding Access

Forty-nine percent of community college students across California are struggling or unable to maintain consistent internet access. Amidst the online modality required across the state to prevent the spread of COVID-19, technology and internet access are essential. This is especially true for rural community college students. Community colleges need to show their commitment to meeting students where they are and increase access to critical online resources that help students succeed online. This is why students need investments that

- enable more students to have access to technology that will assist them in their pursuits of higher education, like computers and internet hotspots.
- create the technology infrastructure required to support a virtual California Community College system.

# UNEMPLOYMENT

## 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.



# FINANCIAL AID

## The Total Cost of Attendance

Despite lower tuition costs compared to UCs and CSUs, community colleges have the highest net cost of attendance. State financial aid vastly under serves 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 Cal Grant reform; and
- offers more support for summer enrollment.

# STUDENT ENFRANCHISEMENT

## Student Trustee Full Vote

Students are under represented on their local board of trustees. While boards are required to have student members, they are only granted the ability to participate in discussion and denied most privileges that other board members receive. Student trustees are only trustees in name. The SSCCC is seeking legislation that would secure a full vote for student trustees to empower student voice and ensure adequate student representation in district decision making processes.

## Student Representation on the Student Aid Commission

The California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) is composed of two rotating student members charged with representing the interests and needs of students of all four higher education segments in California. While each higher education segment enjoys undivided administrative representation, students are divided in their representational capacity as members. For example, a single student cannot be fully in tune with the complex financial situations of students at both community colleges and the University of California. Student representation from all four segments is needed to ensure that all student voices are heard and adequately represented.



## Student Vote on the CCC Board of Governors

Two California community college student members serve for two years on the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges (BoG). The student in the second year of their term is afforded a vote, but the first-year student is not. The student members on the CSU Board of Trustees and the student member on the UC Regents are entrusted with the rights and privileges of other members, including the right to vote. If a student proceeds through the intensive recommendation process conducted by the SSCCC and is ultimately selected by the Governor of California, they should be trusted and empowered with the charge bestowed to them upon assuming office. Currently, they are forced to wait an arbitrary period while their leadership is desperately needed by 2.1 million community college students.

# BASIC NEEDS

## Student Health Services

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 are 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 exist 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.

## Transporation

A large number of college students rely on public transportation as their primary means of commuting to and from classes. Although instruction is being taught remotely, basic needs are difficult to acquire for students who do not have access to adequate transportation. Once physical 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.

## Housing Insecurity

Sixty-one percent of California community college students experience housing insecurity. An additional 16% of students in the California Community College system are completely homeless, amounting to more than 200,000 students. Now that more than 70% of students have lost some or all their income, a number of community colleges students are forced to leave campus and finish their education. Many are scrambling to find affordable housing. The legislature must address the housing pandemic affecting students and make serious investments in programs that address housing in the California community college system.

## Food Insecurity

Seventy percent of our students in the California Community College system are experiencing food insecurity. Not only did COVID-19 affect the educational structure of community colleges, it 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.



# INCREASING RESOURCES

## Low Income Students

A low income student, living alone off campus, would have to work an average of 30 hours a week to attend a California community college. However, community colleges are seen as a ladder of economic mobility, but that is a hollow promise for low income students who do not have access to the resources they need to attend college. The legislature should invest in the community colleges as an engine of economic recovery and support low income students, especially in light of the pandemic.

## 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 their humanity and provide support to these community college students.





# INCREASING RESOURCES



## Foster Students

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. To face these challenges, only 45 of the 116 community colleges have a NextUp program which provides critical assistance to foster students including academic supports, child care, housing, and other non-tuition costs. The SSCCC urges the legislature to make continued investments in foster students by implementing NextUp programs at every California community college and raise the age limit for homeless assistance and other foster student services.

## 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 SSCCC 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.

## Homeless Students

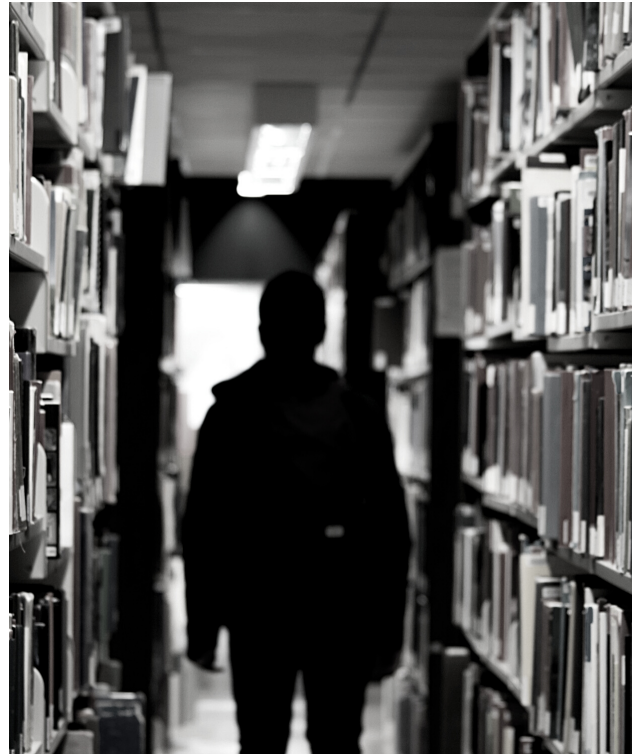
Eighteen percent of California community college students experience homelessness to some degree, whether that be couch-surfing, living on the streets or in their car. This has prevented students from accessing higher education because homelessness often accompanies a lack of consistent access to food, internet, and other resources to support their educational pursuits and emotional and mental needs. The legislature must take action to address student homelessness and prioritize legislation which recognizes the reality of homeless students, addresses the root cause of student homelessness, and prioritizes a housing first model.



# 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 which grants financial support for incarcerated student 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.



## DACA Students

The Trump Administration's decision to revoke President Obama's executive order granting protection to over 800,000 young Dreamers has created uncertainty and fear for college students across the nation. While the legality of the administration's decision continues to be litigated in the courts, DACA recipients face uncertainty for their future in the only country many of them have ever known. Additionally, the Trump Administration took action to end DACA, but it was struck down by the Supreme Court. These young people, 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. 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 policy making, and question if ICE should continue to possess such authority. International students are the most intensively tracked category of visa holders in the US, 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 opportunity 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 places responsibility for INTL students within the DOE's purview, not ICE/DHS.



## 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 in and out of our campuses. The alarming provisions of this program, along with a lack of accountability, gives 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 system and its member institutions' 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.

# CONTINUING ADVOCACY



## National Unemployment

Complex federal eligibility guidelines for unemployment aid often preclude students from assistance at the state-level. The exceptions of the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program provide some access to aid for formerly working students, but exhaustion of PUA funds, the program's impermanence, and Congressional inaction will create hardships for many students in the coming months. On the federal level, we advocate for continuation of the \$600 PUA weekly benefit, the inclusion of students in beneficiary categories for the duration of the crisis, and permanent reform of federal unemployment guidelines so that they no longer exclude working students. The SSCCC also recognizes that many students were employed in Federal Work Study (FWS) positions on currently closed college campuses. We urge conversion of FWS funds into non-taxable grants be disbursed directly to students. We also urge that for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, neither independent nor dependent FAFSA applicants are required to report unemployment benefits as part of their adjusted gross income (AGI).

## Foster Students

State legislation derives definitions of homelessness from federal statute which uses outmoded concepts of homelessness, often limiting the definitions of homeless individuals to below the ages of 25 or 26. These definitions are not representative of the homeless crisis facing the California community college student population. 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.

