

Academic Senate CSU
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www.calstate.edu/acadsen

April 4, 2013

The Honorable Darrell Steinberg
President Pro Tem
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, California 95814-4900

RE: SB 520 - Oppose Unless Amended

Dear Senator Steinberg:

On behalf of the Academic Senate of the California State University (ASCSU), which serves as the official voice of the faculties of the CSU in matters of systemwide concern, I write to report that the Executive Committee has voted unanimously to take a formal position of oppose unless amended with regard to SB 520.

The primary purpose of the ASCSU is to promote academic excellence in the California State University. It is our carefully considered belief that SB 520 does not promote academic excellence. Instead, SB 520 in its current form proposes a process that bypasses extant curricular quality assurance procedures. Currently, disciplinary and university faculty determine the appropriateness of curricula and ensure ongoing quality through regular institutional review processes. The California Open Education Resources Council (COERC) referenced in SB 520—whose members have been nominated by the respective system academic senates but which has yet to be funded—is being established in response to SB 1052 for the purpose of reviewing open source educational materials and promoting their use. The COERC does not encompass the disciplinary faculty expertise required for the purposes outlined in SB 520, and thus would not be suitable to replace existing quality review processes. Discipline faculty on the individual campuses are vested with determining curricular quality, and articulation approval should begin there.

Furthermore, contrary to isolated anecdotes, the ASCSU is not aware of reliable data demonstrating that students have widespread problems accessing lower division courses in the CSU. We work very hard to ensure that our freshman and sophomore students are enrolled in courses that are appropriate for them and

CSU Campuses

Bakersfield
Channel Islands
Chico
Dominguez Hills
East Bay

Fresno
Fullerton
Humboldt
Long Beach
Los Angeles
Maritime Academy

Monterey Bay
Northridge
Pomona
Sacramento
San Bernardino
San Diego

San Francisco
San José
San Luis Obispo
San Marcos
Sonoma
Stanislaus

that meet their needs. CSU faculty from the academic department to systemwide level employ a wide variety of strategies to ensure student access and success, including double counting classes for major and general education requirements, course substitutions, credit-by-exam, cross and concurrent enrollment and ongoing program review to evaluate major requirements against disciplinary standards and available resources.

In response to studies indicating that retention was an issue, CSU campuses have in recent years developed first-year programs to facilitate student success, and we note that the majority of those programs include mechanisms that emphasize student connection to the campus and to the faculty, something with which online courses struggle. The faculty of the CSU are certainly committed to continuing our role as leading innovators in the application of technology to the educational process; however, we would be remiss in our duties to our students if we chose to ignore the body of research addressing retention and student success strategies. This research demonstrates that we should be doing more of what we already do to ensure student success, rather than adopting new strategies that, studies show, run counter to student success for the very population of students targeted by SB 520.

More specifically, the ASCSU has serious concerns about increasing access to California's higher education system for lower division students through the use of online courses of study. CSU is a leader in online course delivery for upper division and graduate students. However, research has shown that online courses are not as effective for lower division students, underprepared students, or lower income students. Targeting lower division courses for online delivery puts these very students at greater risk for failure rather than facilitating their access to academic success.

The ASCSU shares your commitment to providing access to higher education to California's citizens as envisioned in the Master Plan. We do see value in continuing the California Virtual Campus, in developing web-based resources identifying open online courses meeting lower division degree requirements under IGETC, in expanding opportunities for credit by examination, and in assisting students in cross-enrollment across campuses or segments to facilitate progress. However, we have serious concerns that SB 520 as currently envisioned will undermine existing and well-established quality control processes in the three segments of California higher education. We support the goal of providing access to the CSU, but students must have access to courses that match their instructional needs. Empirical evidence suggests that the wholesale expansion of online courses—especially lower division courses—is not the most effective or efficient way to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,

Diana Guerin, Ph.D.
Chair, Academic Senate CSU
Professor, California State University, Fullerton

C:

[Senate Standing Committee on Education](#), California State Legislature

Chancellor Timothy White

Academic Senate of the California State University

Campus Senate Chairs

Office of Advocacy and State Relations, California State University

California Faculty Association

California State Student Association

Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates

Electronic Attachments:

[Resurrecting California's Public Universities](#)

[Adaptability to Online Learning: Differences Across Types of Students and Academic Subject Areas](#)

[Distance Education Report](#), California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office