

November 9, 2011

Dear Chairman MacDougall:

The Community College Council of the California Federation of Teachers appreciates the efforts of the Student Success Task Force (SSTF) to develop recommendations for ways to make our state's community colleges even more vital and effective institutions for the millions of students who attend these colleges.

Title 5 identifies "standards or policies regarding student preparation and success" as an academic and professional matter subject to collegial consultation with the academic senate. We commend ASCCC for the thoughtful and comprehensive series of resolutions on the SSTF recommendations that emerged from the Fall Session in San Diego Nov. 3-5, and urge the Task Force, the Consultation Council, the State Chancellor and Board of Governors to pay close attention to these resolutions and also to ensure that ASCCC and the other faculty organizations play the leading role in the implementation of any recommended changes. I will not restate here the points covered by the ASCCC resolutions. Instead, I will focus on a few broad observations about the SSTF report and some specific points of concern for our locals.

First, though it's not acknowledged in the SSTF report, the primary cause of the "student success problem" that the Task Force sought to address is the budget-induced staffing crisis in the California Community Colleges. Our system's main strategy for managing underfunding has been to dramatically downsize the fulltime faculty and rely increasingly on underpaid and often unbenefited part-time contingent faculty. There is ample evidence that this staffing structure, despite the best efforts of our talented and committed part-time faculty, negatively impacts student success. The budget and staffing crisis has also led to grossly inadequate levels of counseling staff and terrible cuts in matriculation and other student services and key categorical programs.

Second, it's been many years since access was truly "open." For most of the past decade, students have struggled to find classes (and pay for educational expenses). Particularly during the last few years, as underfunding has become even more acute, the contingent nature of the part-time workforce, combined with the recent series of "workload reductions" incorporated into the funding mechanism, has allowed our system to cope with dramatic budget reductions by dismissing thousands of contingent faculty and drastically reducing instructional offerings. As a result, community college students across the state, who for many years had been unable to find seats in many of the classes they needed, are increasingly unable to find seats in any classes at all, and are thus denied any access to our community colleges.

The SSTF report begins by identifying the California Community Colleges as the "quintessential 'open access' college system" and arguing that "we can no longer be satisfied with providing students open access and limited success." But if access is properly understood as a student's opportunity to secure a space in all the courses that student needs, the California Community Colleges have not really operated as "open access" institutions for almost a decade. It's worth noting that this decade includes the period studied by researchers who have concluded that the system, as stated in the report, "provides access to education without the policies and practices that ensure students succeed in meeting their educational goals." We believe that this formulation exaggerates the degree of access that has existed and

underestimates the extent to which constricted access and cuts to student services, rather than policies and practices, have impeded student success.

Third, we are concerned about the system's approach to the SB 1143 timeline. The language of SB 1143 requires the CCBOG to "report the contents of the plan, and the recommendations of the taskforce, to the Senate Committee on Education and the Assembly Committee on Higher Education at a joint hearing that shall be convened on or before March 1, 2012." We expect that many important SSTF recommendations will be ready for presentation at that joint hearing. However, the issues that the Task Force is grappling with are quite complex. We strongly caution the Task Force against rushing forward recommendations that require additional analysis, discussion and modification. Only recommendations that directly relate to student success and that have been thoroughly vetted and approved should be presented at the joint hearing.

Some of the most problematic recommendations in the draft report have little direct connection to student success. Such recommendations include, but are not limited to, the following: the proposal to consolidate categorical grants as block grants; the discriminatory proposal to allow only students who can pay full cost to take classes outside their Student Educational Plans; the proposed restrictions on eligibility for BOG waivers, etc. These types of proposals should not be presented to the CCBOG or at the joint legislative hearing.

There are also SSTF recommendations that do relate to student success but that we believe are impractical – because they require resources unlikely to be available and/or because they are built upon unrealistic assessments of the capacity of modern technology to perform functions or provide guidance that can only be effectively provided by faculty and staff. Any recommendations dependent on significant additional resources should be presented only with explicit caveats about cost.

Finally, there are important recommendations that do relate to student success and that may be practical but that require additional analysis and work before it is determined whether they should go forward and, if so, in what form. In the case of such recommendations, the CCBOG should be notified that additional time is needed and these recommendations should not go forward in February to the joint legislative committee.

In closing, let me urge you again to pay close attention to the ASCCC resolutions, which are comprehensive and represent the best thinking of our faculty statewide.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Carl Friedlander, President

Cc: Dr. Jack Scott, Chancellor
Amy Supinger, Executive Director
SSTF members