

January 2, 2012

Dear Governor Brown:

I am opposed to the recommendations of the Student Success Task Force.

Chancellor Jack Scott, on November 16, 2011, in Oakland, repeatedly drew a contrast between certificate/degree programs and quilting classes for older adults. In doing so, he was presenting a model of college courses divided between those leading to academic goals and others, which he saw as recreational activities. This model is too simple to adequately describe the ways in which colleges support certain American workplace values.

In the December 1, 2011 Task Force document, of the four Student Success Outcome Metrics, three centered on certificate/degree programs and one measured successful course completion. Again, I feel that this model is too simple to be congruent with the role the colleges play in relation to the American workplace.

As Americans, we are proud of being part of a society with social and economic mobility. A person's family situation at birth does not entirely determine the course of his or her life. Another feature of our culture is the possibility of making a successful mid-life career change. In some countries a middle-aged person with a new career would not be accepted or trusted, but in our country he or she can be. Because of the current economic situation, these two values, of mobility and re-invention, are now very important. The community colleges play an integral role in their growth and development.

I have no quarrel with supporting students who are seeking degrees or certificates. Certainly some of them are expressing the values described above. However, there are others whose work and study express these same values, but are excluded from the Task Force model. Many people, when making plans for their work future, take classes at community colleges to better understand unfamiliar fields. They are studying, not to get a degree immediately, but in order to make intelligent choices for themselves. This exploratory non-degree study is the first step. Career changers, rather than pursuing a degree, may choose to build on training and experience they have already and take classes which target areas outside of their expertise. Enrolling in a few carefully selected courses may be preferable to entering a certificate/degree program.

Change the Task Force model so that it describes all the students who are expressing these American workplace values, not just those seeking certificates or degrees.

Sincerely,

Ann Overton
aoverton@ccsf.edu,
ESL Instructor, City College of San Francisco