

Successes, Failures, and Forward Momentum: A Look Back at the 2021–2022 Legislative Session

By Stephanie Goldman, FACCC Associate Director

Between the record-breaking funding levels and the prolonged pandemic, the 2021–2022 Legislative Session was one for the history books.

Despite fears that the pandemic would cause a significant recession, California prospered and the Department of Finance, Legislature, and governor worked hard to allocate funds and avoid the archaic Gann Limit. In addition to appropriating unprecedented funding to our system, the Legislature and governor supported some faculty and student-centered bills while also passing controversial bills at odds with the recommendations of system stakeholders.

Proposition 98 was flush with money leading to fully funding long-time FACCC priorities, including full-time faculty hiring, part-time faculty office hours and health care, and the growth of true student equity groups, like Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), and California Community College Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) programs.

FACCC's carefully crafted bill packages also saw some significant wins. In 2021, the governor signed FACCC-sponsored AB 1326 (Arambula), which requires a county human services agency to designate at least one employee as a staff liaison to serve as a point of contact for academic counselors and other professional staff at a campus of an institution of public higher education located within the county.

This year, Gov. Newsom signed AB 2315 (Arambula), a bill requiring community colleges to allow students, faculty, and staff to use their chosen name on all non-legal documentation. AB 2315 is the result of faculty contacting us after they had to fight their own battle with their district to use their chosen name.

FACCC also sponsored Senate Resolution 45 (Min), a resolution recognizing the importance of academic freedom, and an audit relating to full-time faculty hiring funding and how districts have used that funding. Both measures were passed.

While FACCC is incredibly excited about those successes, we faced some challenges with our cosponsored legislation.

AB 375 (Medina 2021) and AB 1856 (Medina 2022) were nearly identical bills that would have increased the percentage of hours a part-time faculty member could work from 67% of a full-time schedule to 80–85%. Both bills flew through the Legislature but Gov. Newsom consecutively vetoed AB 375 and AB 1856 on the grounds of part-time healthcare coverage and costs.

Frustrated but encouraged by the historically large state budget, FACCC and the other members of the Council of Faculty Organizations prioritized advocating for \$200 million for part-time faculty healthcare throughout the 2022 budget year. The \$200 million survived the spring's budget hearings and was a part of the 2022–2023 budget package; however, despite arguments to the contrary, the governor believed that

more funding is required to support increasing the part-time faculty load.

FACCC also cosponsored several part-time faculty equity bills, a faculty obligation number bill (FON), and a bill to defund Calbright. The part-time faculty equity bills, AB 1269 (Garcia 2021) and AB 1752 (Santiago 2022), died in Assembly Appropriations. AB 1505 (Rodriguez 2022) would have rebenched the FON to current levels had it not died in the Senate Appropriations Suspense File. AB 2820 (Medina), the annual bill to defund and dissolve Calbright, died before being taken up in the Senate Education Committee. These were frustrating setbacks, but we will continue to fight for part-time faculty equity and the elimination of Calbright.

Sponsoring and cosponsoring bills is just part of FACCC's advocacy efforts. With the rise of influential outside advocacy groups, FACCC has had to channel significant energy into opposing misguided transfer-related legislation. Among the bills FACCC opposed were AB 928 (Berman 2021), AB 1111 (Berman 2021), and AB 1705 (Irwin 2022).

AB 928 created yet another transfer oversight body attempting to streamline students into associate degree for transfers programs, regardless of their goals, while requiring the development of a single transfer pathway for the California State University and University of California systems. Despite opposition from all faculty

groups, the Chancellor's Office, and other stakeholder groups, this bill was signed into law and is currently being implemented. AB 1111, the common course numbering system bill, was similarly signed into law despite major concerns with implementation.

This year is best defined by the battle over AB 1705, which was inaccurately touted as an AB 705 "clean up" bill. Most faculty groups, including FACCC and the Academic Senate, fought tooth and nail against this bill, which would require almost every student to take transfer-level courses, regardless of their academic goals and whether or not they would be successful in those classes. Furthermore, the bill did not include any support for faculty, despite efforts from faculty groups. We utilized data taken from the Chancellor's Office Dashboard and the experiences of our incredible faculty; however, most of the Legislature disregarded our concerns and passed the bill to Gov. Newsom's desk where he signed it on Friday, September 30.

Watching misguided bills become law was frustrating and continues the trend of Sacramento-induced "initiative fatigue," but we can't stop fighting for our students. Wins and losses are inevitable in the Capitol, but it's up to us to continue making our voices heard.

Have a great bill idea that would improve the California Community Colleges for the better? Now is the time to let FACCC know. Email us at info@faccc.org. ■

YEAR IN REVIEW