

# The California Higher Education Legislative Machine: From Sputter to Full Speed Ahead

by Elizabeth Norvell

**W**hen I started my full-time articulation officer (AO) position at San Diego City College in 2014, California's system of higher education had already profoundly enriched my life.

My first experience was as a young undergrad at UCLA in the 1980s, then as a lifelong learner at San Diego City College where I was lucky to land an adjunct non-classroom faculty position as a curriculum writer in 2001. I truly aspire to give back to a system that has provided so much enrichment to my own life.

And, like all CCC AOs I know, I feel profoundly responsible for "getting it right" for students, doing all I can to facilitate their pathway to a CSU, a UC, or a private college or university. Truthfully, this responsibility was much easier to uphold before the emergence of what I am currently calling the California Higher Education "legislative machine." In fact, this machine, largely fueled by various corporate foundations that fund its legislative agenda, has kept the California Community Colleges (CCC) so tied up in implementing the legislation du jour and resolving the ancillary problems it creates, that it has greatly increased the difficulty of serving our students' transfer needs on a daily basis. And, at this point, it seems almost impossible to turn it around.

When SB 1440, the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act of 2010, was implemented at the CCCs, the California higher education "legislative machine" was just warming up and quite frankly, it sputtered a bit. The law required that each CCC develop two Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADTs) in two different majors. Upon completion of the degree, students would be guaranteed admission to a California State University (CSU), but not necessarily to their CSU of choice and not necessarily to the major of choice. Rather, students transferring with an ADT may be placed in a major similar to the one they had chosen.

With very few teeth, SB 1440 made no sense for a CCC instructional or counseling faculty member to recommend it to students when the smoothest pathway to a CSU or a University of California (UC) campus was to complete the preparation for the major for the desired university through one of the three general education patterns (CSU GE Breadth for transfer to a CSU; IGETC for transfer to a UC; or IGETC for CSU to leave your options open).

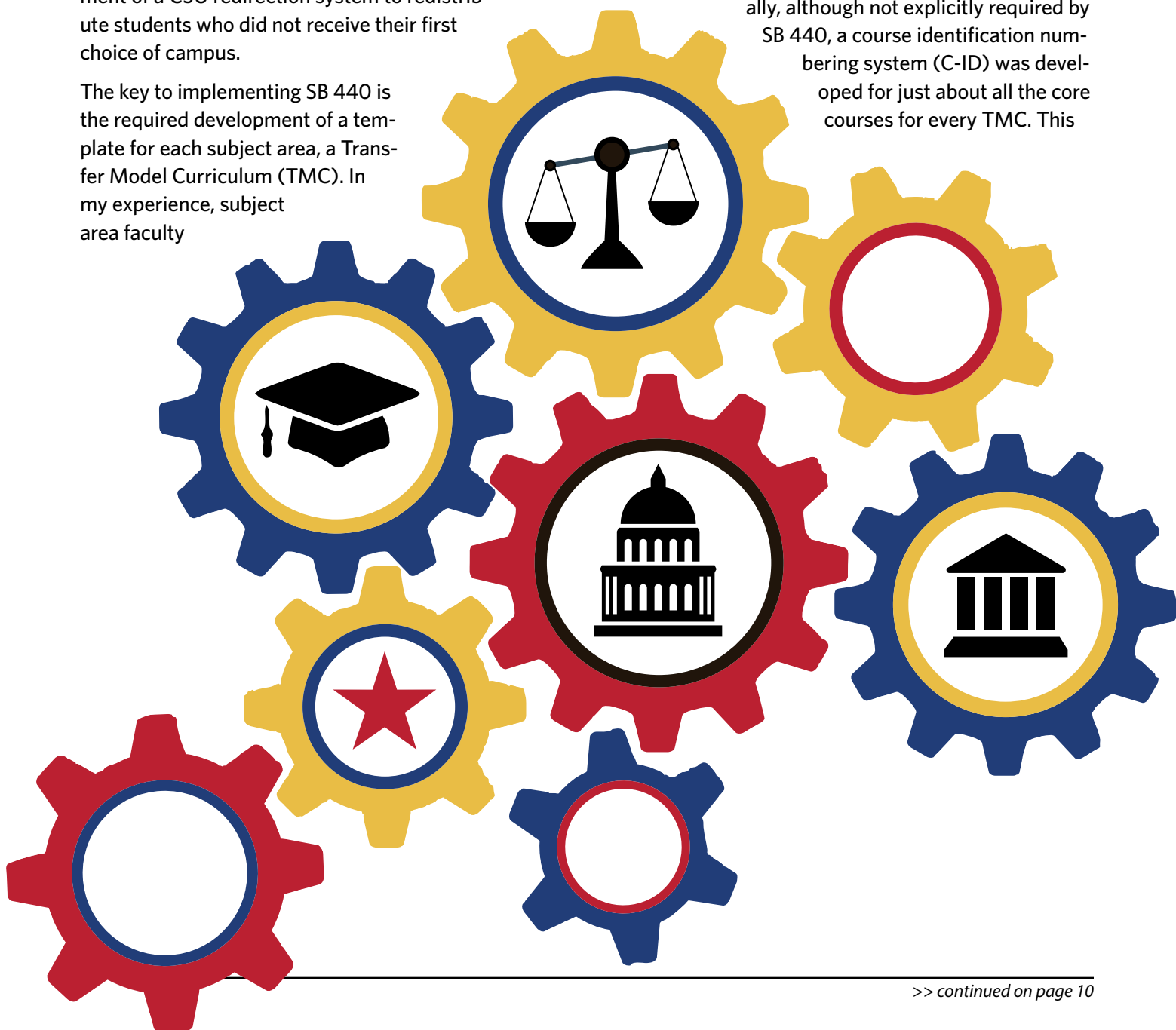
Apparently, however, the California higher education legislative machine was equipped with an intelligence capacity allowing it to modify itself in order to rev up production,

as illustrated by the creation of SB 440, the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act of 2014. Realizing that to generate its desired CCC ADT outcome, it could establish a specific, predictable pathway in which all transfer students in a given major would complete the same courses on the same pathway within the same two-year timeline. It even learned how to sweeten the deal by adding a .2 GPA bump for students receiving an ADT. This addition is particularly helpful when applying to impacted CSUs, with results varying based on the level of impact. Additionally, it required development of a CSU redirection system to redistribute students who did not receive their first choice of campus.

The key to implementing SB 440 is the required development of a template for each subject area, a Transfer Model Curriculum (TMC). In my experience, subject area faculty

members from both segments meet for a day to hammer out which core courses are a must for any given major. Once the core is established, the faculty team decides on courses that may be optional in categories, such as “any course articulated to a CSU” in the major, or “any GE course in a given general education area,” or, in some cases “any CSU transferable course.”

Each TMC is assigned a California Taxonomy of Programs (TOP) code. Any CCC with a currently active associate degree that carries the same TOP code is required to create an ADT in that major. Additionally, although not explicitly required by SB 440, a course identification numbering system (C-ID) was developed for just about all the core courses for every TMC. This



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process involves faculty experts from the CSUs and CCCs coming together, this time to develop course templates to which CCC faculty must match their campus CORs. This is labor-intensive as CCC faculty often must revise the Course Outline of Record (COR) to meet the C-ID descriptor requirements. The revised CORs are then submitted to C-ID for CSU subject area faculty review. If the COR requires revision, that can take up to a year to go through the CCC campus curriculum review process. If a COR sits for more than 45 days waiting for a CSU faculty expert to review, it may be used in a TMC. Once it is reviewed, it may require revision. Some CORs submitted to C-ID have never been reviewed.

Currently, ADTs are widely recommended to students for the GPA bump, especially when students are applying to impacted campuses or impacted majors. CCC counselors also recommend the ADT when it is deemed similar to a student's desired CSU major at the local campus, because most CSU campuses prior-

itize local area students with an ADT. From there it varies, depending on the receiving CSU's priority admissions policy as policies differ among campuses.

In 2020, about 43% of CCC students continued to choose the simplest, most direct route to transfer to a CSU: preparation for the major and one of the three general education patterns mentioned above.

Should the reader assume that I decided to employ the metaphor "California higher education legislative machine" as a 21st-century production assembly line churning out CCC students to be finished off at a CSU or UC, this was not my creative mind at work.

In fact, the images are spelled out in AB 928 (Berman), the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act of 2021. In the first paragraph of the Legislative Counsel's Digest, the wording used to explain the CCC system to the reader states, in part, that the CCC system "among other things, provides its students with a

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transfer pathway, facilitated by mechanisms, such as the associate degree for transfer, allowing students to apply academic credit earned at a community college toward receipt of a bachelor's degree at a four-year post-secondary educational institution."

Four paragraphs down from that, the Associate Degree for Transfer Intersegmental implementation Committee is introduced as "the primary entity charged with the oversight of the ADT." That is interesting in and of itself, but what caught my eye was the wording at the end of the same paragraph requiring the committee "on or before December 31, 2023, to provide the Legislature with recommendations on certain issues impeding the scaling of the ADT and streamlining transfer across segments for students."

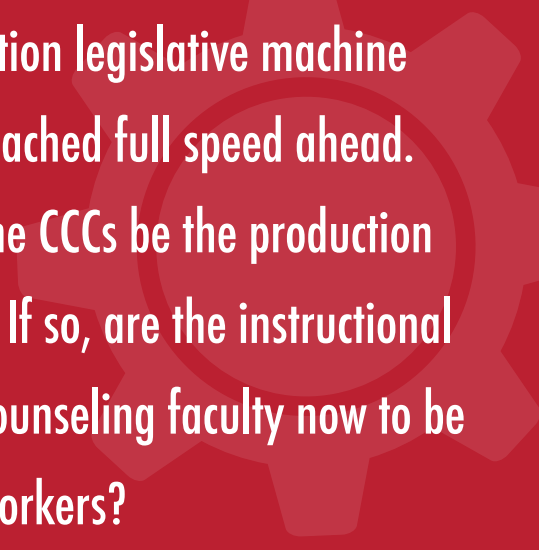
Clearly, the California higher education legislative machine has reached full speed ahead. Will the CCCs be the production lines? If so, are the instructional and counseling faculty now to be line workers?

As an AO reading AB 928, I know I will be provided with specific details regarding my "role in communicating the value of the ADT pathway" once the Associate Degree for Transfer Intersegmental Implementation Committee has decided what those details will be.

As for AB 1111, Common Course Numbering System, the California higher education legislative machine has clearly recognized a glitch in its production of AB 440 and is attempting to autocorrect. AB 440 required the development of the TMP templates, and each of those templates is an extension of the law.

When students take courses at a variety of CCCs, their transcripts must be evaluated at the CCC at which the student is attempting to complete the ADT to determine whether or not a particular course is C-ID approved for the same course. If it is, then the course may be used. If it is not C-ID approved for whatever reason, then the course must be researched further to attempt to find out whether or not it articulates to the major at the CSU to which the student is planning to transfer—or any CSU, if it comes to that. If articulation is in place, then the course is generally approved to be used toward completion of the ADT.

Yes, this is complicated. These situations arise all the time. They take a lot of time to resolve. If all CCC courses had the same number, that would be helpful,



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but there are complications. Numbers can be used only once at any given campus. If a campus reuses a number, a student who took the course that originally carried that number may be penalized if and when that student needs their transcript evaluated for any reason. It's complicated, and so potentially confusing that the California higher education legislative machine may just blow a fuse.

Please contact your local state legislators' offices. Create a relationship with the legislator and the staff. Tell your story. Listen to theirs. Slow the machine down. ■