

**CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE**

1102 Q STREET
SACRAMENTO, CA 95811-6549
(916) 445-8752
<http://www.cccco.edu>



Date: January 22, 2010

To: Chief Instructional Officers
Chief Student Services Officers

From: Barry A. Russell, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

Subject: Avocational, Recreational, and Personal Development Courses ... Some Suggestions

In fall 2009, messages concerning some possible funding changes for certain courses at California community colleges began to surface from a variety of sources. After much discussion, several phone meetings, and some investigative activities, the Chancellor's Office makes the following observations and suggestions to guide colleges.

Why Is There Confusion?

In the 2009-10 Budget Act¹, language was provided that directed community colleges to

“the greatest extent possible, shall implement any necessary workload reductions in areas other than basic skills, workforce training, and transfer.”

Although this language was clear about the classes to be included in the focus for 2009-2010, it gave no specific direction about all the other courses and programs being offered at community colleges. The budget was reduced \$120 million without identifying specific cuts that must be made or courses that must be eliminated. Subsequently, colleges are looking for direction. In addition, it is important to note that this limitation (at this point) is only attached to the 2009-2010 budget language. Budget language is still being crafted for the 2010-2011 year and it is yet to be determined if there will be a continued focus directly communicated by the Legislature or if more general language will be used. Whatever the action, it is probably fair to say that the Legislature has communicated an overall priority for colleges during this budget crisis...however long it should last.

For 2009-2010 it is safe to assume all courses that are outside of transfer, basic skills, or career technical are potential courses for scrutiny as community colleges limit class offerings in response to large budget cuts across the state. In addition to focusing on these three areas, community colleges also must continue to respond to local community need and workforce issues through the noncredit offerings which are already restricted to 10 areas of identified content (California Education code 84757(a)).

¹ Budget Act of 2009, Section 482, item 6870-101-0001, provision 29, page 617

So, the questions are:

- Where do colleges draw the line between the three categories and those outside?
- What courses do colleges exclude and what courses do they include?
- Do colleges discontinue very popular courses should they fall outside the designated areas?

What's Next?

The Legislative Analyst Office, legislators, and others are looking closely at both credit and noncredit offerings throughout the state and have found a variety of courses that seem to fall outside of the accepted areas listed above. There could be legislation or other actions taken to remove some local control of course offerings if colleges are not responding to the expressed intent of the budget language.

This is not a new question. In a review of documents all the way back to 1982, there have been several instances where recreational, avocational, and personal development courses have been addressed. In fact, in a letter dated January 31, 1984 to all Chief Instructional Officers, clear direction was provided that still remains appropriate today. The difference is that at that time, the Legislature mandated that the Chancellor's Office develop a list for a \$30 million reduction and at this time, there is no mandate from the current Legislature. Here is a quote from this 1984 memo:

- “Recreational, avocational, and personal development courses are those which:
- (a) are not required courses or suggested electives leading to the completion of the requirements of a major offered by the college,
 - (b) are offered primarily to provide recreational or avocational pursuits for students.
 - (c) are of greater private than public interest.
 - (d) should be offered as a community service class for a fee which covers the cost of instruction.”²

It should also be noted that the language is very general intentionally so as not to focus or marginalize one specific sector of the curriculum. These types of courses can occur in virtually every curricular area of the campus.

How can community colleges respond?

While not giving colleges specific direction, the Chancellor's Office would highly recommend that each college visit their course offerings and review them for three priorities: basic skills, transfer, and career technical. If courses do not fit into one of those three categories, then further analysis should be done according to the four points (a through d) listed above. Note that option “d” provides a way to continue offering a course as a community service class without affecting the state budget.

It is the opinion of the Chancellor's Office that this is a local decision and not one that should be made at the state level. The reality, though, is that if courses that are perceived as recreational, avocational, or personal development are not voluntarily removed from the credit/noncredit offerings, the Legislature or others may choose a more intrusive method.

² Letter to Chief Instructional Officers by Allan L. Petersen, Dean, January 31, 1984.

It would be prudent for colleges to also focus on communication with their local communities and governance groups as these changes take place. The budget message should be clear to all sectors (boards, administration, faculty, staff, and students) that the necessary limited focus on basic skills, transfer, and career technical education requires subsequent changes in scheduling and course offerings.

Where will this take us?

In the next Legislature, the issue of funding community college courses will inevitably include some review of courses which the Legislature interprets as outside the scope of the community college mission. If California community colleges have proactively changed or removed the offering of these courses voluntarily, there will be less evidence to support further reductions in state funding based on this one point of contention.

As you study your offerings and take action to reduce course offerings to meet workload reduction goals, please focus first on sustaining basic skills, transfer, and career/technical courses and programs. With a statewide response to this reduction of \$120 million, hopefully the chance of further state budget reductions based on this issue can be minimized. If you have any questions or concerns throughout this process, please feel free to contact the Chancellor's Office Division of Academic Affairs at 916.322.6881.

cc: Chief Executive Officers
Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges