March 3, 2016

Board of Trustees

I attended the Community College League of California’s (CCLC) Annual Legislative Conference on January 31- February 1, 2016, in Sacramento, California.

I attended the following sessions:

**The California Promise: Working Together to Reduce Financial Barriers to College**

Last year, President Barack Obama announced the America’s College Promise initiative and he reiterated this goal as a key priority for 2016. It was a proposal to make community college free and universal for all responsible students. At the national level, this has started a conversation about college affordability and the importance of making the first two years of college accessible to everyone. Through experience, California has learned that tuition is only a small part of a student’s total cost of attendance. A conversation about affordability must include financial aid for students to cover cost of living, including books, food, and other critical expenses. Using the national framework, the California College Promise will take advantage of our unique student financial aid funding model and connect to other initiatives to increase student success.

**Cal Grants and the California Promise**

While most of California’s community college students do not pay tuition and those that do pay the lowest fees in the nation, the full cost of attending college can present significant barriers to access and success for community college students. Yet while California’s community college students comprise two-thirds of the college students in the state, they receive less than ten percent of Cal Grant dollars. The California Promise is intended to reform Cal Grants to better serve community college students. Hear from our panel of experts about the current financial aid landscape in California, the various elements the California Promise and the cost barriers community college students continue to face in California.

**Community College Budget and Fiscal Update**

Governor Brown’s proposed budget plan builds upon colleges’ efforts to create a strong California workforce through responsive educational programs. While fewer major policy changes were presented in this year’s January budget proposal than last, workforce, basic skills reforms, and textbook affordability appear as high priorities. Hear from key legislative staff, community college fiscal experts, and administration representatives as they discuss the pragmatic approach to implementing and embedding the programmatic reforms of the past few years into the Governor’s 2016-17 budget. Engage in a discussion about the fiscal priorities of the community college system and the Legislature; and the opportunities and challenges facing state and local decision makers.

**An Hour with Belle Wheelan on Accreditation**

Understand the process of accreditation from an in depth perspective of peer evaluation and an ongoing program of improvement by Belle S. Wheelan, president of the Southern Association of
Community Colleges and Federal Policy: How Are We Faring?
This is an important year for community colleges. Congress is currently in the process of extending and modifying the Higher Education Act (HEA), which will have enormous implications for community colleges. Further, America’s College Promise continues to top news headlines, bringing the importance and value of community colleges to the forefront of American political dialogue. What can community colleges expect from Capitol Hill in this 2016 election year? David Baime, a key architect of federal policy and strategy, will address some of the most relevant policy topics at play in Washington, D.C. Baime will discuss efforts to reinstate the year-round Pell Grant to better reflect today’s student population, and provide a national perspective on policies impacting California community colleges.

A Renewed Focus on Affordability: Textbooks and Open Educational Resources (OER)
The interest in open textbooks is on the rise, particularly for policy makers focused on affordability. Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use by others. Learn how some institutions and faculty are exploring the use of open educational resources to reduce student expenses for materials, as well as textbooks. Engage in a discussion about the Administration’s emphasis on OER in the 2016-17 budget, and efforts that colleges can take to increase the knowledge, and use, of lower-cost open resources.

A Conversation with Legislative Leaders
Conversation with Assemblymember Jose Medina
Assembly District 61, Chair, Assembly Higher Education Committee

Cultivating Engagement: A Look at the Road Ahead and the Role for Higher Education
The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is a non-partisan civic engagement research and outreach initiative established to engage public dialogue on representative governance in California. Founder and director Mindy Romero will discuss how civic engagement is critical to addressing disparities in state and regional patterns of opportunity, including outcomes in education, health and employment. A key focus of CCEP data analysis is identifying inequalities and providing solutions for civic participation across place and population in the state. Explore non-traditional measures of civic engagement, particularly among groups historically underrepresented in our civic and political institutions, and the important role of higher education in cultivating a healthy democracy.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Watters