

Lobbying Begins in Your Own Back Yard

FACCCTS About Local ADVOCACY

Lobbying is essential in influencing decisions made at the state Capitol. Why is affecting the political climate in

Sacramento so necessary for community college faculty, staff, and students?

Since the late 1970s, in California politics the phrase “local control” has become little more than an election slogan. The passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 limited the taxing authority of state and local governments, as was intended. But Prop 13 also shifted decision-making power for almost all aspects of California public education from local boards and elected officials to state legislators—because the Legislature increasingly controls education funding and policy. This political paradigm shift has created phenomenal change for California’s system of previously independent community colleges.

It is imperative that faculty and others committed to educational quality and educational access get involved—and stay involved—in the state-level political processes that now dictate fate for higher education. Effective advocacy begins in your own back yard.

WHY IT MATTERS Guiding Policy and Principles

FACCC is an active advocate on behalf of the community colleges. Specific FACCC values also support

faculty lobbying efforts, these including:

Academic Policy Development. FACCC believes that the determination of academic policies and programs is a faculty responsibility, and that the Legislature should not mandate specific academic policies and/or requirements not sponsored by faculty. Furthermore, non-legislative policy making bodies should involve faculty in all decisions about educational philosophy, goals, and techniques.

Professional Standards and Qualifications.

FACCC is committed to maintaining the highest professional standards and qualifications for faculty at the California Community Colleges. FACCC is also committed to the concept of development and maintenance of high quality standards for administrators.

Funding for Higher Education. FACCC believes the community colleges should be funded at levels sufficient to assure broad access to quality education. Community college funding should be administered in accordance with program-based funding standards.

Financial Aid. FACCC believes that all academically eligible students with significant financial need should be provided sufficient grant aid to complete their educational programs.

Educational Equity. FACCC believes that community college campuses, academic programs, and extracurricular activities should be open to all individuals, and that increased diversity and multicultural understanding should be encouraged. Special attention should be devoted to achieving student equity and improving the success rate of underrepresented as well as other students.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The influence of FACCC and like-minded advocacy organizations depends to a great degree upon the

positive personal and political relationships developed by individuals and groups within a legislator's district.

The point is to involve legislators with, and inform them about, local community colleges. However you choose to introduce legislative leaders to the issues affecting the community colleges, keep in mind that the primary purpose is to establish an informal, reliable working relationship—so that later, when a “crisis” occurs, legislators will be much more receptive to your concerns and proposed solutions.

FACCC is a nonprofit professional organization that promotes unity and professionalism among California Community Colleges faculty—counseling faculty, instructional faculty, and library faculty—and advocates on behalf of faculty to encourage policy makers to provide adequate resources and appropriate laws and regulations to assure Californians broad access to quality community college education.

Sustained lobbying efforts pressure the Legislature to address the needs of California Community Colleges' students, faculty, and staff.

For effective grassroots advocacy, concerned individuals must be consistent and persistent in applying the simple yet powerful principles of political influence.

Legislators often view community college faculty as local "opinion leaders." This is fortunate, since so many state leaders are surprisingly misinformed about the community colleges and their students. In the Capitol corridors, many still view community college students as teenagers supported by their parents. Some legislators also believe that community college students are somehow "less smart" than those attending the universities, and that the quality of education they receive is lower.

To counter these and other falsehoods, it is essential that faculty host campus visits to familiarize legislators with the realities, and the unique challenges, of the community college system. A successful campus visit increases the likelihood that the community colleges will become important on your legislators' agendas. Whether taking elected representatives on a campus tour or inviting them to be guest lecturers, you are *lobbying* on behalf of all community colleges.

Identify Your Local Legislators

Don't be embarrassed if you can't recite the names of your local Assembly and Senate representatives. With recent redistricting and the advent of term limits, the names and faces have changed—and will continue to change even more rapidly. Identifying your district's legislators is as easy as opening up the local telephone book. (Keep in mind that larger or more populous community college districts often are represented by several different legislators.) In your local white pages, look for the "State Government Offices" section of the **Government** listings. Locate the *Assembly* and *Senate* listings, then note the phone numbers under "District Offices." When you call, tell the legislator's staff person that you are phoning to find out exactly who your college's representatives are. (To assist you, she or he may ask for relevant zip codes and addresses.) Once you've identified your local legislators, be sure to verify their current District Office and Sacramento addresses and telephone numbers, since listings may not be accurate.

Make A Plan—And Act On It

To develop a specific local action plan, follow the guidelines below for organizing District Office and On-Campus visits. Then *act* on that plan.

Organizing District Office Visits

Meetings in a legislator's District Office—as opposed to Sacramento—are removed from the daily chaos of the Capitol, and tend to be more personal and more productive.

- 1. Do your homework.** Find out about the people you're trying to influence. Know your issues—including the specifics of bills and budget items.
- 2. Establish A Goal Or Purpose.** Focus on a specific purpose for your visit, then plan your agenda accordingly. Understand your representative's "realm of influence" and expertise, so you can clearly state just how that legislator's influence can assist you. Be specific.
- 3. Small—And Brief—Are Beautiful.** Bring a small, well-briefed group to the meeting. Every faculty member should have an "assignment"; role play everyone's part in advance. Leave something tangible behind. Offer to become a resource. Ask how *you* can help your legislator. Keep in touch.

Organizing On-Campus Visits

A legislator's first impressions will be lasting, so make sure that his or her experiences on campus accurately reflect the realities—and the unique value—of your college and your community.

- 1. Timing Is Important.** Visits are best during the fall legislative recess, at the beginning of the school year, or in January or February.
- 2. Be "In Control," And Plan Your Agenda.** Select days and times which offer the most advantageous overview. Choose several alternatives, *then* contact the District Office to arrange a visit. Emphasize the diversity of people as well as programs. Dramatize the impacts of legislative decisions. Invite legislators to sit-in on basic skills and ESL classes as well as unique events.
- 3. Debrief—And Follow-Up.** Discuss the visit with other on-campus hosts. If legislators had questions you could not answer, be sure to follow-up. At minimum, thank them for coming.

For more information, request a free copy of "Lobbying In Your Own Backyard," which contains step-by-step tips on lobbying, setting up district office and campus visits, and organizing letter-writing and phone campaigns.

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