



Veterans Caucus Meeting Minutes

California Community Colleges Veterans Caucus (CCCCVC)

The Community College League of California's

2024 Annual Trustees Convention

Burlingame, CA

November 22, 2024 | Time: 4:00pm – 5:00pm

[Hybrid] Room: Bayside A

Attendees via Zoom: *Bill Withrow; Larry Kennedy; Todd Steffan; Adam Runyan; Evelyn Andrews; Sonia Gonzalez; La Shawn Brumfield; Carmen Lozano; Paul Beckworth; Grace Perez; Desiree Campos; Esteban Penamaza; Marina Varela; Ricki Hall; Jeejun Bertuso; Shell Mora; Maria Buffo; Bernard Luskin; Connie Konsavage; Imelda Lares; Lakyshia Perez; Estelina Munoz; Kala Jones; Ligla Polio; Martha Romano; Dr. Brenda Estrada; Obianuju Nzewi*

Attendees in Person: *Dr. Rick MacLennan; Matt Besmer; Lee Lambert; Richard Teagarden; Ryan Cornner; Dr. Keri Then [Additional in-person participants]*

1. Welcome and Introductions:

Co-Chair Bill Withrow called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM and turned it over to Co-Chair Dr. Rick MacLennan who called for introductions. Meeting participants introduced themselves. The Co-Chairs expressed that it was a great turnout – the most expansive turnout the caucus meeting has had. Dr. Rick MacLennan thanked everyone for attending, and for the active work they are doing for veterans in their respective institutions.

2. Strategic goals planning:

Dr. Rick MacLennan provided some background and update on the caucus' commitment and activities as it relates to advocacy for veterans. He informed meeting participants of the caucus' decision to focus the advocacy agenda on a fairly narrow list of objectives so as to have an active pathway to achieve them. He stated that the chief among the areas of focus as agreed by the caucus, is the Veteran Resource Centers ("VRC"), and the support provided to veterans through those - particularly around funding for the VRCs, as well as navigating how to work with the Chancellor's office to address the funding issues. He referenced the grant opportunities released by the Chancellor's office for mental health services for veterans as a step in the right direction.



Veterans Caucus Meeting Minutes

California Community Colleges Veterans Caucus (CCCCVC)

He apprised participants of the outcome of the productive conversation that the Executive Committee had during the fall, with the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor about support for veteran students. He noted that there were interests coming out of the Chancellor's office which include credit for prior learning - a priority and a big feature of Vision 2030. He stated that following the conversation with the Chancellor's office, the Executives agreed to begin work on an application to increase funding; considering the categorical funding route or other pathways. He noted that the application which is still in draft form, addresses the interests around credit for prior learning and speaks to the criteria and vision 2030 goals.

He noted that the criteria that the current funding is tied to, have requirements that virtually none of the colleges are able to meet, for example, every campus is required to have a Director and some rules regarding Certified Official roles so there is a need to link those positions to the vision 2030 roadmap. He expressed that he does not know the impact the political shift will have on the work being done come January 2025.

He informed the caucus that he and Ryan Conner will share the application with the caucus and the chancellor's office.

Following the debrief, Dr. Rick MacLennan called for participant's reactions and comments.

- Dr. Keri Then stressed the need for clarity when the caucus has an ask for funding, on the aspect of veteran affairs - be it the Veterans Administration, Veterans Hospitals, Department of Veterans Affairs as it refers to the G.I. bill, etc. as there is a spider web of everything that fall under veteran affairs – both federal and state level – with the understanding of the impact a political shift could bring to the federal level and if/how it may impact the state; as well for clarity on where the funds are going, as intermingling creates problems in allocation.
 - o On that note, Ryan Cornner volunteered to reach out and include this issue as part of the advocacy talking points in the ACCT National Legislative Summit to be held in February 2025 in D.C.



Veterans Caucus Meeting Minutes

California Community Colleges Veterans Caucus (CCCCVC)

- Esteban Penameza shared that his institution's VRC is understaffed as is the case with most of the VRCs and as such, he would recommend that where there are sections for "requirements" and "recommendations", staffing should not fall under "recommendations" as it will not be abided by.
 - o To which Dr. Rick MacLennan clarified that the Caucus is not looking to make such changes but to leverage what is there and develop funding mechanisms to build more capacity.
- Dr. Brenda Estrada noted that since funding is based on how many veterans are certified and not the total number of folks that are served, a lot is not being accounted for.
 - o On this issue, Dr. Rick MacLennan stated that it would be great to have numbers/ data that reflects this.
- Maria Buffo informed the Caucus that there are about a dozen colleges that have extended balances that are not being utilized, so it creates a challenge to ask for an increase where several colleges still have outstanding balances. She noted that in addition to the database, it is important to find ways to ensure that allocated funds are utilized.
- Paul Beckworth stated that it is imperative to have students register as veterans.

Discussions were had on programs and possible ways to address issues where there are funds not being utilized, given that it would involve a local decision-making process.

Todd Steffan raised the need for more frequent Caucus meetings. In agreeance, Dr. Rick MacLennan noted that the infrequency of meetings poses a challenge and called for input and ideas on how the caucus can meet more frequently. Dr. Brenda Estrada recommended that the meetings should be held on a monthly basis; as well as the need to bring the Chancellor's office on board more frequently to keep them apprised of what the caucus is doing and know where their office is headed. She also recommended having sub-groups to accomplish projects.

Larry Kennedy stated that the executives should let the word out that individuals can enroll via the league website.



Veterans Caucus Meeting Minutes

California Community Colleges Veterans Caucus (CCCCVC)

Dr. Rick MacLennan acknowledged the roles Bernard Luskin, Larry Kennedy, Bill Withrow and others played in establishing and structuring the Caucus in 2016. Bernard Luskin noted the progress the Caucus has made thus far, since its inception.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the May 4, 2024 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:00 PM.
