

# An all-online community college: A solution to working class needs, or a dangerous move?



[Adolfo Guzman-Lopez](#) | November 13, 2017

---

[A proposal](#) that advocates hope will use online courses to help the job prospects of about 2 million working class Californians got its first hearing in Sacramento on Monday.

The California Community College's Board of Governors heard three proposals aimed at helping a population of Californians who have some college under their belt, may not have earned their high school diploma, and don't feel community college's current offerings address their needs.

"Our work is to figure out how to help stranded workers begin to transition for themselves and their families into the next economies as things change around us," Van Ton-Quinlivan, a vice chancellor in the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, told the board.

One proposal would create a brand new California community college just to offer online classes for this working-class population. Another plan would house the effort at an existing college, and a third would create a consortium of campuses to create the new classes. The point, Ton-Quinlivan said, is to help these non-traditional students overcome obstacles that keep them from community classes that could help them.

"Do we know a Maria, who came out during the downturn, attended one year of a nursing program at a for-profit institution but had to drop out before completing and now has \$13,000 in student loans... has a difficult time finding reliable child care... and would love to enter a higher paying wage but can't figure out how to go back to school full time?" she said.

The flexibility of online courses, she said, would help this type of student overcome some of the obstacles that keep people from signing up for community college classes.

The proposal is the latest major overhaul proposed to public higher education in California to address a major shift toward more technical work skills and some college training.

"If done poorly, we will do more harm than good and nobody wants that," said Julie Bruno, president of the California community college's academic senate, which represents 56,000 community college faculty on class content issues.

She complained that the California Community Chancellor's Office didn't consult her group enough to help shape the proposals.

There's a dizzying amount of proposed change in California higher education, she said, and she hopes policymakers can give this proposal the time it deserves.

Community colleges are also in the process of doing away with the tests to determine if incoming students need to take remedial classes. Campuses are increasingly partnering with public schools to offer high school students community college classes on high school campuses. These overhauls address the needs of students headed toward a two year or four year degree.

The online class proposal addresses students not necessarily headed in that direction – but some campus leaders said their schools are already working to help those students.

"There is a need," said Mt. San Antonio College President Bill Scroggins. "I'm not sure this is the right solution."

His campus is creating new classes this year that will give blue collar workers skills – such as word processing – that'll improve their job prospects.

Scroggins points to the \$57 million dollar [Online Education Initiative](#) – underway now at California community colleges – that is meant to help students improve their online learning.

And then there's the issue of years of evidence that not all students do well online.

"It's actually harder online, because there's a lot more writing you [have to] do because the instructor has to verify that you're attending class, doing work," said Morrie Barembaum, an astronomy professor at Santiago Canyon College.

Whatever effort moves forward, Barembaum said, he hopes students will receive the training, support, and counseling for online classes that most students receive now.

The three proposals are set to go to Governor Jerry Brown at the end of the month. The governor is expected to signal his preferred plan in January when his finance office releases the first draft of his budget.