

California Community College faculty groups vote no confidence in chancellor



Faculty complains about little consultation and new online college.

Larry Gordon <https://edsource.org/2019/california-community-college-faculty-group-votes-no-confidence-in-chancellor/612474>

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The California community college's [faculty association](#) has voted a measure of no confidence in the administration of statewide chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley, citing what the professors' organization said was a lack of proper consultation and concerns about college funding and the new online college.

The unanimous vote last week was aimed not just at Oakley but at the entire central administration of the chancellor's office and how officials there are making major decisions without enough faculty input, according to Evan Hawkins, executive director of the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC).

The no confidence vote is only the second in the organization's 66 years and was intended to "send a message loud and clear," Hawkins told EdSource.

Oakley's office insists the chancellor and his top deputies pay attention to faculty opinions and said they recognize that reforms can be "challenging" to traditional practices at the colleges.

The 9,000-member faculty association is primarily a lobby and policy group separate from labor unions which bargain for contracts and separate from the Academic Senate which represents faculty at all 114 colleges, and among other roles, helps establish curricula and majors.

The association insists that Oakley's administration must listen to faculty voices more as part of shared governance in the 115-college system, Hawkins said. "Certainly faculty interact with the students the most. So that viewpoint would

be very important, especially with the major initiatives that have come to our system over the past couple of years,” he said.

On May 3, the executive council of the California Federation of Teachers, the labor union representing 30,000 community college employees, including many faculty members, also approved a resolution of no confidence in Oakley. The statewide Academic Senate complained as well last fall but now says communication with the chancellor is better.

The tension between community college faculty and central administration comes at a time of much change, often pushed by the governor and legislature to improve student performance. For example, colleges increasingly are being rewarded or punished financially by the state based on their students’ rates of graduation and transfers. The enormous system of no-credit remedial education is being overhauled amid some turmoil; more students otherwise headed for remedial classes in math and English will be getting the option in the fall to take for-credit courses instead.

Lines of authority are murky since individual colleges are more directly governed by local elected district boards while Oakley’s statewide administration and the state board of governors do not wield as much power as the central leaders at the state’s public universities.

Among the controversial issues is the establishment of a separate [online community college](#) that is expected this fall to start offering workforce training to adults without college degrees. Many faculty and local campuses fear that the new school will duplicate existing programs around the state and drain money and resources that should remain local. “We believe those resources would be more effective put to other uses,” Hawkins said.

That online college is expected to receive \$240 million over the next seven years. Particularly upsetting to some faculty is the \$385,000 annual salary of the school’s new president, Heather Hiles. That salary is higher than Oakley’s (\$311,928) and tops nearly all executives’ pay at community colleges statewide.

Another issue is the new statewide [Student Centered Funding](#) Formula that will give extra state money to community colleges that have larger numbers of low-income students and to those that achieve better track records in graduation and

transfer rates. The faculty association said it fears that schools, hoping to boost their statistics, will focus on students who are close to completion and possibly abandon students who need much more help to earn a certificate or degree. “We are worried that students will be left behind,” Hawkins said. The faculty also thinks there won’t be enough state money appropriated for the program.

In response to an EdSource question, Oakley’s office said the chancellor has had a lot of consultation with faculty and takes their concerns seriously. The chancellor’s office forwarded a statement from Tom Epstein, who is chairman of the statewide system’s board of governors. The statement said:

“California Community Colleges, under the leadership of Chancellor Eloy Oakley, are committed to reforms enacted in recent years by strong bipartisan majorities in the legislature. These reforms are necessary to transform a system that has failed to propel its students quickly to successful completion of their studies and career advancement. Legislatively mandated programs creating clear academic pathways for students, eliminating unfair placement tests, revising the funding formula and launching a new online college for adult workers challenge the status quo and drive innovation with the urgency that is necessary.

We recognize that the pace and scale of change we are pursuing to enhance student success is sometimes challenging to college faculty, but it is vital to the future of the more than 2 million students who attend our institutions. The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges calls upon faculty groups to continue to share their views with the Chancellor’s Office through the extensive and longstanding statewide participatory governance process. The faculty’s input and active engagement is vital to the creation and execution of a strategy that will provide our students with the excellent education and job training they deserve.”

Oakley became statewide chancellor in December, 2016 and previously headed the Long Beach Community College District since 2007. He has been pushing the community colleges statewide to improve their completion and transfer rates and to be more transparent about their successes and failures.

In a prepared statement, the faculty association president Adam Wetsman said: “The faculty have attempted to offer their input and expertise to the

Chancellor's Office, but efforts have been largely ignored. Rather than engage us early in policy conversations, faculty have been forced to react to an onslaught of initiatives that haven't moved the needle for our students. This prescriptive approach has been detrimental to our colleges, as we can see with the chaotic rollout of the funding formula and online college."

Last fall, the statewide Academic Senate issued a formal complaint about the chancellor over similar issues of not listening to faculty voices on major topics. But then in March, the Senate president John Stankas noted that communications and relations with the chancellor had improved noticeably even if things were not perfect. In a letter to the faculty, Stankas wrote "that this year is an improvement over last year and that we are approaching the level of collaboration and collegiality expected from a chancellor that was selected to implement systemic change."