

Date of Hearing: March 17, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 1552 (Jackson) – As Amended March 10, 2026

SUBJECT: Public postsecondary education: American Institutions and Ideals courses: civic engagement, civic discord, democracy, and democratic institutions: recommendations report

SUMMARY: Requires each campus of the California State University (CSU) and each community college of a community college district (CCD), and requests each campus of the University of California (UC), in consultation with each of their respective academic senates, to review and update, if necessary, its relevant American Institutions and Ideals courses to ensure that those courses include an emphasis on civic engagement, civic discord, and the key components of preserving democracy and its vital institutions. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires, before the commencement of the 2029–30 academic year and in consultation with each of their respective academic senates, each campus of the CSU and each community college of a CCD, to update, if necessary, its relevant American Institutions and Ideals courses, as specified, to ensure that those courses include an emphasis on civic engagement, civic discord, and the key components of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system.
- 2) Requests, before the commencement of the 2029–30 academic year and in consultation with each of their respective academic senate, each campus of the UC update, if necessary, its relevant American Institutions and Ideals courses, as specified, to ensure that those courses include an emphasis on civic engagement, civic discord, and the key components of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system.
- 3) Requires, before the commencement of the 2028–29 academic year and in consultation with each of their respective academic senates, each campus of the California State University and each community college of a community college district to report to the Legislature, as specified, recommendations on how to facilitate greater knowledge of American democracy and meaningful civic engagement opportunities for students on campuses, and any necessary support from the Legislature to achieve those recommendations.
- 4) Requests, before the commencement of the 2028–29 academic year and in consultation with each of their respective academic senates, that each campus of the UC report to the Legislature, as specified, recommendations on how to facilitate greater knowledge of American democracy and meaningful civic engagement opportunities for students on campuses, and any necessary support from the Legislature to achieve those recommendations.
- 5) Specifies that the provisions will sunset on January 1, 2033.

- 6) Specifies that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that these provisions contain costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs will be made, as specified.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the UC as a public trust to be administered by the Regents of the UC; and, grants the Regents full powers of organization and government, subject only to such legislative control as may be necessary to insure security of its funds, compliance with the terms of its endowments, statutory requirements around competitive bidding and contracts, sales of property and the purchase of materials, goods and services. (Article IX, Section (9)(a) of the California Constitution)
- 2) Confers upon the CSU Trustees the powers, duties, and functions with respect to the management, administration, and control of the CSU system and provides that the Trustees are responsible for the rule of government of their appointees and employees. (Education Code (EDC) Sections 66606 and 89500, et seq.)
- 3) Establishes the CCC under the administration of the Board of Governors of the CCC, as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in this state, and specifies that the CCC is comprised of community college districts. (EDC Section 70900)
- 4) States the intent of the Legislature that public institutions of higher education in California will provide a collegiate experience which gives each student the skills of communication and problem solving, the ideas and principles underlying the major areas of modern knowledge, the ability to consider ethical issues thoughtfully, the understanding that learning is a continuous lifelong process, and the knowledge of democracy necessary for good citizenship. (EDC Section 66050)
- 5) Requires that CSU students, in order to qualify for graduation, must pass comprehensive exams or complete coursework covering topics of American history and American government, including the historical development of American institutions and ideals, the Constitution of the United States and the operation of representative democratic government under that Constitution, and the processes of state and local government. (Title V Section 40404 of the California Code of Regulations)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* According to the author, “Californians are struggling to participate in civil discourse, resulting in a need for improved education in civic engagement, civic discord, and the key components of preserving democracy and its vital institutions...the natural guardians of our democracy are the citizens themselves. Whether it’s the California Community College, the CSU, or UC systems, there are thousands of young people who take general education courses and have a real opportunity to learn about the tenets of a functioning democracy and an engaged citizenship. Our goal shouldn’t only be to prepare students for the workforce, but to cultivate informed, engaged citizens who help sustain our democracy.”

Civics knowledge. The Annenberg Center for Public Policy at the University of Pennsylvania annually conducts a Constitution Day Civics Survey. This survey, which is comprised of a nationally representative sample and has a sample error ± 3.5 percentage points, found that:

- 1) Over two-thirds of Americans (70%) can name all three branches of government, up from 65% in 2024.
- 2) Asked what specific rights are guaranteed by the First Amendment, nearly 4 in 5 (79%) respondents say freedom of speech. Less than half of Americans mention each of the other four rights: the next most-often cited, freedom of religion, is named by 48%.
- 3) Four in 10 respondents (40%) can name a majority of rights (three or more), up sharply from 30% in 2024. Nearly 9% of respondents can name all five First Amendment rights, while 32% can name three or four (up from 23%) and 42% can name one or two. About 1 in 5 people (18%) cannot name any, about the same as last year.

There was no significant difference in the number of branches or First Amendment rights recalled by respondents based on party affiliation – self-described Republicans and Republican-leaning independents knew about the same number as self-described Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents. But people in both of those two party-affiliated groups were more knowledgeable than independents who said they did not lean toward either party.

The author cites Pew Research Center data, noting that Americans are becoming increasingly polarized – with 61% saying in 2023 they find political conversations with those they disagree with stressful and frustrating, 15 points higher than in 2016. The author writes that “this polarization creates an environment where citizens are less likely to consider the merits of policies they oppose and gaps in those they support.”

Academic freedom. While academic freedom may mean different things to different individuals, at the core of academic freedom is the establishment of faculty members’ right to remain true to their pedagogical philosophy and intellectual commitments; it preserves the intellectual integrity of our higher education systems. Additionally, academic freedom means that the political, religious, or philosophical beliefs of politicians, administrators, and members of the public cannot be imposed on faculty or students.

As currently drafted, this bill would require campuses of the CCC, CSU and, if the Regents of the UC adopt an appropriate resolution, require the UC to review and update courses to specifically include course content on civic engagement and democracy.

The Committee should consider the precedent that would be set with this bill and determine whether it infringes on academic freedom and, conversely, whether the decisions on curricula should remain in the hands of higher education faculty and administrators.

Arguments in support. A coalition of organizations that included the the UC Student Association, Young Invincibles, among others, wrote a joint letter in support of AB 1552 (Jackson), noting that “California’s public higher education institutions have a long history of civic engagement and democratic participation. Students across the state continue this legacy by participating in student government, organizing in their communities, engaging in public service, and advocating for change on their campuses. These experiences help develop the skills necessary for active participation in our democracy. However, not all students have equal access to opportunities that foster civic learning and engagement.”

The coalition continues that, “while many students complete general education coursework that teaches the structure of government and historical context, they are not always equipped with the tools needed to engage in the difficult conversations and civic participation that democracy requires. At a time when civic literacy is declining and political polarization is increasing; students benefit from stronger preparation to engage respectfully and productively with people who hold different perspectives. Colleges and universities play a critical role in ensuring students graduate not only with workforce skills, but also with the civic knowledge and capacity needed to sustain a healthy democracy.”

Arguments in opposition. The Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC) expressed concerns with AB 1552 (Jackson), writing that, “while FACCC shares the goal of ensuring that students develop a strong understanding of civic engagement and the principles of a healthy democracy, AB 1552 raises significant concerns regarding academic freedom and curriculum and instructional design.”

“In the California community college system, academic senates are responsible for curriculum, instructional design, and academic standards. Faculty subject matter experts develop course content through established processes with the goal of academic rigor, disciplinary expertise, and responsiveness to student needs. Maintaining faculty authority over curriculum is essential to protecting academic freedom and ensuring that curricular decisions remain grounded in disciplinary expertise. California Community Colleges maintain robust processes for this through local curriculum committees, academic senates, and faculty leadership, which evaluate and update the curriculum.”

Committee comments. The Committee recommends, and the author has accepted, amendments that would remove provisions of the legislation requiring a review and modification of courses, and would instead make findings and declarations, while also legislative intent. The amendments would also clarify that public higher education segments will report to Legislature collective, as opposed to reporting by campus. The amendments read:

~~66054. (a) Each campus of the California State University and each community college of a community college district shall, and each campus of the University of California is requested to, before the commencement of the 2029–30 academic year and in consultation with each of their respective academic senates, review and update, if necessary, its relevant American Institutions and Ideals courses, including, but not limited to, the courses described in Section 40404 of Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations, to ensure that those courses include an emphasis on civic engagement, civic discord, and the key components of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system.~~

(a) The Legislature finds and declares that an essential element of public higher education is to build the knowledge of democracy necessary for good citizenship.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that public institutions of higher education in California, when delivering courses that build the knowledge of democracy necessary for good citizenship, give consideration to the importance of civic engagement, civic discord, and the key components of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system.

(bc) ~~Each campus of the~~ The Chancellor of the California State University, ~~and each community college of a community college district and the~~ Chancellor of the California Community Colleges shall, and ~~each campus~~ the President of the University of California is requested to, before the commencement of the 2028–29 academic year and in consultation with each of their respective academic senates, report to the Legislature, consistent with Section 9795 of the Government Code, recommendations on how to facilitate greater knowledge of American democracy and meaningful civic engagement opportunities for students on campuses, and any necessary support from the Legislature to achieve those recommendations.

(ed) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2033, and as of that date is repealed

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Alliance for a Better Community
Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California
California Center for Civic Participation
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Equality California
Genup
UC Student Association
Young Invincibles

Opposition

Faculty Association of California Community Colleges

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