

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 2572 (Fong) – As Amended March 16, 2026

SUBJECT: California State University: joint degrees

SUMMARY: Authorizes the California State University (CSU) to award doctoral degrees jointly with one or more independent institutions of higher education without approval by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC). The bill additionally would authorize the CSU to jointly award doctoral degrees with accredited international institutions of higher education without limiting it to professional or applied doctoral degrees that do not duplicate University of California (UC) doctoral degrees, as specified. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes the CSU to award doctoral degrees jointly with one or more independent institutions of higher education without approval by the CPEC.
- 2) Authorizes the CSU to award undergraduate and graduate degrees jointly with one or more independent institutions of higher education.
- 3) Authorizes the CSU to jointly award doctoral degrees with accredited international institutions of higher education without (1) limiting it to professional or applied doctoral degrees that do not duplicate UC doctoral degrees, and (2) complying with the specified review and approval process.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Differentiates the missions and functions of public and independent institutions of higher education. Under these provisions:
 - a) The primary mission of the CSU is to offer undergraduate and graduate instruction through the master's degree in the liberal arts and sciences and professional education including teacher education. The CSU is authorized to establish two-year programs only when mutually agreed upon by the CSU Trustees and the CCC Board of Governors (BOG). The CSU is also authorized to jointly award the doctoral degree with the UC and with one or more independent institutions of higher education.
 - b) The UC is authorized to provide undergraduate and graduate instruction and has exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education over graduate instruction in the professions of law, medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine. The UC is also the primary state-supported academic agency for research.
 - c) The independent institutions of higher education are authorized to provide undergraduate and graduate instruction and research in accordance with their respective missions.
 - d) The mission and function of the CCC is the offering of academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level, and the CCC are authorized to grant the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees. The community colleges are also required to offer learning supports to close learning gaps, English as a Second Language

instruction, and adult noncredit instruction, and support services which help students succeed at the postsecondary level. (Education Code (EDC) Section 66010.4)

- 2) Authorizes the CSU to award professional or applied doctoral degrees statewide, provided that only 10 degree programs are approved per academic year and do not duplicate doctoral degrees offered by the UC. Additionally, existing law:
 - a) Requires the Chancellor of the CSU to consult with and seek feedback from the UC President, and the President of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) on proposed doctoral programs, as specified, and establishes a mechanism for the assessment, consultation, and approval of programs where duplication is identified, as specified;
 - b) Requires that enrollment in CSU professional or applied doctoral degree programs do not diminish enrollment in CSU undergraduate programs, and fees for professional or applied doctoral degree programs are comparable to, but no higher than, those fees charged for UC doctoral degree programs; and,
 - c) Specifies that the total number of baccalaureate degree programs offered by a CSU campus, 25% of the total number of undergraduate, graduate through the master's degree, and professional and teacher education programs offered by the CSU campus. (EDC Section 66046, et seq.)
- 3) In addition to the above authorization to offer doctoral degrees, the following:
 - a) Authorizes the CSU to independently award the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree focused solely on preparing administrative leaders for California public elementary and secondary schools and community colleges and on the knowledge and skills needed by administrators to be effective leaders in California public schools and community colleges. (EDC Section 66040, et seq.)
 - b) Authorizes the CSU to offer the Doctor of Audiology (Au.D) degree; and, specifies that the Au.D degree programs at the CSU will focus on preparing audiologists to provide health care services and shall be consistent with the standards for accreditation set forth by the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology. (EDC Section 66041, et seq.)
 - c) Authorizes the CSU to offer the Doctor of Physical Therapy (D.P.T.) degree, and specifies that the D.P.T. degree programs at the CSU will focus on preparing physical therapists to provide health care services, and be consistent with meeting the requirements of the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. (EDC Section 66042, et seq.)
 - d) Authorizes CSU to offer the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree programs, and specifies that the DNP offered by the CSU will focus on the preparation of nursing faculty to teach in postsecondary nursing education programs and may also train nurses for advanced nursing practice or nurse leadership. (EDC Section 89280, et seq.)

- e) Authorizes CSU to offer the Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) degree, and specifies that OTD degree programs offered by the CSU will focus on preparing occupational therapists to provide health care services and to be consistent with the standards for accreditation set forth by the appropriate accrediting body. (EDC Section 66043, et seq.)
 - f) Authorizes CSU to offer the Doctor of Public Health (Dr.PH) degree, and specifies that Dr.PH degree programs offered by the CSU will focus on health and scientific knowledge translation and transformative community leadership, and will be designed to address the community public health workforce needs of California and prepare qualified professionals to be leaders and experienced practitioners who apply their advanced knowledge in service to California's diverse communities in areas such as community health administration, health education and promotion, and public health advocacy. (EDC Section 66044, et seq.)
- 4) Establishes CPEC composed of 17 members representing the higher education segments, the State Board of Education, and nine representatives appointed by the Governor, Senate Rules Committee, and Assembly Speaker to coordinate public, independent, and private postsecondary education in California (EDC Section 66900, et seq.).
- 5) Establishes the California Education Interagency Council (Council) within the Government Operations Agency (GovOps) to align education and workforce systems, support adult skill development, and address the changing nature of work and the economy. The Council will adopt strategic and workforce plans, issue recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, and create a faculty and employer advisory committee. (Government Code Section 11900, et seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: *Purpose.* According to the author, "AB 2572 makes several updates to current law, ensuring that CSU campuses can offer joint undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programs with independent institutions and international institutions of higher education. CSU campuses serve the largest and most diverse student body in the country, including many first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students who otherwise might not have access to graduate or doctoral programs. AB 2572 supports CSU's efforts to deliver relevant and necessary education to California's students."

Background on CPEC and the new California Education Interagency Council. As specified in the "Existing Law" section of this analysis, CPEC was established to coordinate postsecondary education in California and to provide independent policy analyses and recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor on postsecondary education issues. However, CPEC's budget and responsibilities were reduced over time, casting doubt on its effectiveness and triggering calls for its restructuring. In the 2011-12 Budget Act, Governor Brown vetoed funding for CPEC citing the agency's ineffectiveness in higher education oversight. In his veto message, the Governor acknowledged the well-established need for coordinating and guiding state higher education policy and requested that stakeholders explore alternative ways these functions could be fulfilled.

In fall 2011 CPEC shut down, transferring its federal Teacher Quality Improvement grant program to the California Department of Education (CDE) and extensive data resources to the CCC Chancellor's Office.

Following nearly 15 years of legislative efforts, the AB 1098 (Fong), Chapter 446, Statutes of 2025, established the California Education Interagency Council within the Government Operations Agency to align education and workforce systems, support adult skill development, and address the changing nature of work and the economy. The Council will adopt strategic and workforce plans, issue recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, and create a faculty and employer advisory committee. The bill also creates the Office of the California Education Interagency Council as a neutral administrative body.

Unlike CPEC, the Council does not currently have a program approval authority. AB 2572 (Fong) removes the requirement that the CSU receive approval from CPEC to jointly offer doctoral degrees, updating existing law to reflect CPEC's shut down and eliminating any confusion that the Council might be responsible for this function.

Joint degrees. The author has indicated that AB 2572 (Fong) is intended to serve as follow-on and cleanup legislation for AB 2633 (Alvarez), Chapter 729, Statutes of 2024, which authorized the CSU to award undergraduate and graduate degrees jointly with international institutes of higher education.

Committee staff notes that jointly-offered degrees create opportunities for institutions to collaborate and identify opportunities to best serve their student body. AB 2572 (Fong) recasts certain elements of existing law, making clear that, in addition to graduate education, CSU has the capability to jointly offer programs at all levels of education with independent and international institutions of higher education. Existing law clearly authorizes:

- 1) Two-year programs, when mutually agreed upon by the Trustees of the CSU and the Board of Governors of the CCC;
- 2) Joint undergraduate and graduate degrees, which may be awarded jointly with international institutions of higher education;
- 3) Joint doctoral degrees with one or more independent institutions of higher education, provided that the proposed doctoral program has approved by the CPEC;
- 4) Joint doctoral degrees with UC; and,
- 5) Joint doctoral degrees with institutions of higher education, if the doctoral program is an existing CSU doctoral program.

Committee staff notes that, under the provisions of this bill, jointly offered doctoral degrees would not fall under the same duplication restrictions as independently-offered CSU doctoral degrees.

Trans-national higher education (TNHE). The author has indicated that this measure is part of a package of legislation supporting from the Select Committee on California-Mexico Bi-National Affairs. An article published in the Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education in

2021 titled “Understanding International Joint and Dual Degree Programs: Opportunities and Challenges during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic” by Professor Roy Y. Chan, Ph.D explored the policies, perspectives, and practices of building and developing cross-border and TNHE programs, with a particular emphasis on international collaborative academic degree programs between the United States and Mainland China.

The article more specifically identified that, “TNHE has been able to provide a reliable, bona fide education, with a flexible, cost-efficient tuition. TNHE programs can help students obtain international qualifications or degrees that promote transnational learning, collaborative research, and global mobility. TNHE can also play a crucial role in enhancing international strategic planning, global learning, and institutional prestige to help institutions position themselves for a world-class status to improve their academic rankings and to increase the quality of national higher education systems and academic programs worldwide.”

The article also contained several policy recommendations, which included:

- 1) Establish clear expectations and maintain shared governance on general education requirements.
- 2) Improve communication between academic affairs and student affairs offices concerning international student housing.
- 3) Create policies that foster inter-institutional collaboration and cooperation.
- 4) Create a top-down approach to policy decisions (as international programs require buy-in from the most senior leaders).
- 5) Engage with governmental associations and governmental agencies.

Prior legislation. AB 1098 (Fong), Chapter 446, Statutes of 2025, established the Council within the GovOps to align education and workforce systems, support adult skill development, and address the changing nature of work and the economy. The Council will adopt strategic and workforce plans, issue recommendations to the Governor and Legislature, and create a faculty and employer advisory committee. The bill also creates a managing entity as a neutral administrative body

AB 2633 (Alvarez), Chapter 729, Statutes of 2024, would authorize the CSU to award undergraduate and graduate degrees jointly with international institutions of higher education, and authorizes the CSU to award professional or applied doctoral degrees jointly with international institutions of higher education, as specified.

AB 656 (McCarty), Chapter 663, Statutes of 2023, authorized the CSU to award professional or applied doctoral degrees statewide, provided that only 10 baccalaureate degree programs are approved per academic year and do not duplicate doctoral degrees offered by the UC, as specified.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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