

SENATE THIRD READING  
SB 928 (Cervantes)  
As Amended March 24, 2026  
Majority vote

## SUMMARY

Requires that the instructor of record for a California State University (CSU) course be a person who is qualified to serve as a faculty employee and explicitly requires that a CSU faculty employee be a person.

### Major Provisions

- 1) Requires that the instructor of record for a CSU course of instruction be a person who meets the rule to serve as a faculty employee teaching credit or noncredit instruction.
- 2) Requires that a CSU faculty employee be a person who meets the rule to serve in that position.
- 3) States the bill's provisions do not prohibit CSU employees from using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to assist in the operations of the CSU or in providing services to CSU students.
- 4) States that "faculty employee" includes, but is not limited to, an employee of the CSU who is a professor, lecturer, librarian, counselor, or coach. These positions include instructional and non-instructional positions as well as full-time, part-time, probationary, tenured, temporary, and extension for-credit positions.

## COMMENTS

*AI in Higher Education background.* AI refers broadly to computer systems designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence — such as understanding language, generating text, writing code, or analyzing data. While AI has existed as a field of research for decades, recent advances in "generative AI" - tools like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and others that can generate human-like text, images, and other content in response to user prompts - have brought the technology into everyday use at unprecedented speed. According to Stanford University's *AI Index 2026 Annual Report*, a comprehensive, independently sourced annual assessment of global AI trends, generative AI reached approximately 53% population-level adoption within just three years of its introduction — a pace faster than the adoption of the personal computer or the internet. Globally, organizational adoption of AI tools reached 88% in 2025, and the estimated value of generative AI tools to U.S. consumers reached \$172 billion annually by early 2026.

Higher education has been one of the most visible arenas for AI's rapid adoption. The Stanford report found that four out of five U.S. high school and college students now use AI for school-related tasks, and that usage in higher education reached approximately 67% in the United States and 67% in the United Kingdom — with some countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, reporting usage above 80% among university students. The most common uses among university students include research, brainstorming, editing essays, and — most notably — understanding academic concepts. A separate analysis by Anthropic, cited in the Stanford report, found that students primarily use AI for higher-order thinking tasks: 39.8% for creating content and 30.2% for analysis. At the same time, the report cautions that students themselves have concerns — a

survey referenced in the Stanford report found that 55% of U.S. college students believe generative AI tools have had a mixed effect on their critical thinking skills.

California's higher education segments has been navigating these trends. In April 2026, the CSU released findings from its first-ever systemwide AI survey, *Ahead of the Curve*, drawing on more than 94,000 responses from students, faculty, and staff — the largest survey of its kind in higher education to date. The survey found that AI use is already widespread across the CSU community, with most students, faculty, and staff reporting regular engagement with AI tools, alongside near-universal exposure to at least one AI tool. At the same time, respondents expressed a cautious approach: while many see AI as essential to future careers, they also emphasized the need for verification, ethical guidelines, and transparency. There is strong demand for formal AI training - especially among faculty and staff—and notable concern about job security and academic integrity. Importantly, most students reported discomfort with submitting AI-generated work as their own, and many faculty are actively incorporating AI guidance into their teaching, signaling a shift toward structured, responsible adoption rather than unrestricted use.

*CSU AI-Empowered Initiative.* On February 4, 2025, the CSU system announced their AI-Empowered Initiative. In their press release, the CSU indicated that their goal was to "leverage the power of artificial intelligence to create an AI-empowered higher education system that could surpass any existing model in both scale and impact." Among the various elements of this initiative included the systemwide deployment of an AI tool developed by OpenAI - ChatGPT Edu – that would enable "...students, faculty, and staff to use AI to accelerate learning, optimize workflow efficiency, and foster cross-departmental collaboration." The initial contract for ChatGPT Edu was \$16.9 million, and runs from February 2025 through July 2026.

Although "ChatGPT" has become a somewhat ubiquitous term for generative AI tools, many different technology companies have deployed AI products that are now embedded in common e-mail, word processing, and document production systems. An element of CSU's AI-Empowered Initiative also highlights partnerships with some world's leading tech companies, including Adobe, Alphabet (Google), AWS, International Business Machines (IBM), Instructure, Intel, LinkedIn, Microsoft, and NVIDIA, in addition to OpenAI.

On May 19th, 2026, the CSU announced that the ChatGPT Edu contract has been extended for three years, securing access through FY 2028–2029, at a cost of \$13 million annually. The agreement has been expanded to include continued use of ChatGPT Edu for new graduates for up to one year following graduation. CSU indicated it plans to evolve toward a broader, multi-vendor AI ecosystem over time.

*Student response.* The California State Student Association (CSSA) released a white paper regarding the CSU's AI-Empowered Initiative on February 24th, 2026. The whitepaper noted that, while students broadly recognize AI's potential to enhance creativity and learning, the implementation has been rushed, inconsistent, and lacking adequate training and awareness. Many students are unaware of the tool or unsure how to use it, and there is no unified guidance across classrooms, leading to confusion about acceptable AI use. This inconsistency is compounded by conflicting faculty approaches—some encourage AI while others penalize it—along with unreliable AI-detection tools that have led to false accusations and increased anxiety.

Beyond implementation challenges, the white paper highlights major concerns about privacy, transparency, sustainability, and governance. Students worry about how their data is collected

and used, expressing distrust in the system despite the availability of an official platform. Students also question the financial transparency of the initiative and its alignment with broader CSU budget cuts. Environmental concerns are prominent as well, with many students criticizing the lack of attention to AI's energy and water consumption and its conflict with CSU's climate goals.

Additionally, the paper raises ethical and mental health concerns, including risks from harmful AI outputs and overreliance on the technology. Across all areas, a central theme emerges: students feel excluded from decision-making and call for greater oversight, clearer policies, and consistent inclusion in governance to ensure AI is implemented responsibly, ethically, and in alignment with student needs.

*Committee comments.* This bill creates a new definition for "faculty employee," which would include, but not be limited to, an employee of the CSU who is a professor, lecturer, librarian, counselor, or coach. This language mirrors the scope of the 'faculty unit employee' definition found in California Faculty Association (CFA's) February 3, 2022 collective bargaining agreement with the CSU Board of Trustees, which encompasses professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors, coaches, and related appointment types.

### **According to the Author**

According to the author, "In February 2025, the [CSU] announced a \$17 million contract with OpenAI to provide ChatGPT Edu to all faculty, staff, and students on its 22 campuses as part of a larger 'AI Powered University' initiative. The contract between the CSU and OpenAI is the largest contract ever established between a university system and an artificial intelligence (AI) company, and was ratified without faculty consent. While there is room for technology tools like AI to contribute in CSU, human faculty are still necessary and best suited to teach human students."

The author continues, noting that SB 928 (Cervantes) "...would erect guardrails to prevent instructional and non-instructional faculty employees at the CSU from being replaced by AI. The bill would require that faculty positions—which includes professors, lecturers, librarians, counselors, and coaches—must be held by an individual who meets all the minimum qualifications as determined by the Trustees of the California State University. This bill would also require that the instructor of record for a course of instruction shall be a person who meets the rule to serve as a faculty employee teaching credit or noncredit instruction. SB 928 builds upon the work I did in Assembly Bill 2370 (2024) and Senate Bill 241 (2025) to provide similar faculty protections within the California Community Colleges."

### **Arguments in Support**

The California Faculty Association (CFA) and the California Federation of Labor Unions, the Sponsors of SB 928, jointly wrote in support, stating that AI "...has seen incredible advancements in recent years. The growing use of AI in educational settings has left many faculty employees concerned about the impact on their work. As AI tool adoption has expanded, its impact on human workers and jobs has grown, and the need to enact guardrails has become more pressing. As AI threatens to replace human work, faculty reasonably fear that institutions of higher learning might attempt to have AI tools perform duties that have historically been performed by human faculty members."

The sponsors also wrote that "Faculty employees play a critical role in student success by providing academic instruction, mentorship, and support that directly impacts student retention,

engagement, and personal growth. They work hard to teach students critical-thinking skills, the technical know-how, and the cultural insights they need to be thoughtful, productive, and artistic participants in our society. This bill recognizes the personal connection, guidance, and the expertise CSU faculty provides to students that simply cannot be replaced by AI. This bill is essential to protect jobs and preserve the human element that makes our educational institutions the best in the world."

**Arguments in Opposition**

None on file.

**FISCAL COMMENTS**

This bill is keyed non-fiscal.

**VOTES****SENATE FLOOR: 37-0-3**

**YES:** Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Weber Pierson, Wiener

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Ochoa Bogh, Reyes, Wahab

**ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 10-0-0**

**YES:** Fong, DeMaio, Boerner, Ellis, Jackson, Muratsuchi, Patel, Celeste Rodriguez, Sharp-Collins, Tangipa

**UPDATED**

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