

Date of Hearing: April 30, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 500 (Quirk-Silva) – As Amended April 2, 2025

SUBJECT: University of California: admissions changes

SUMMARY: States the intent of the Legislature that the University of California (UC) Board of Regents undertake specified procedures prior to a vote to determine a change in the undergraduate admissions criteria or standards for admission to the UC. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) States it is the intent of the Legislature that any proposed change to the conditions for undergraduate admissions at the UC become operational only after the following procedures have been fulfilled:
 - a) The admissions change proposal has been provided to the official student organization representing the student body of the UC, the State Board of Education (SBE), and the Trustees of the California State University (CSU) for consideration and discussion;
 - b) The admissions change proposal has been identified as an item for discussion and has been discussed in a public meeting of the SBE and the CSU trustees;
 - c) Notice of the UC Board of Regents' meetings at which the admissions change proposal is to be considered has been provided to each Regent;
 - d) Information and materials affiliated with the admissions change proposal, including disclosure on the impact of the change on K-12 school districts, the UC, and the CSU has been provided to each Regent in advance of the UC Board of Regents meeting where the admission change proposal is to be considered;
 - e) The intention to vote on the admission change proposal at a meeting of the UC Regents has been included in a public meeting notice;
 - f) The admission change proposal has been made available prior to the public meeting of the UC Board of Regents, at which the admission change proposal is to be considered;
 - g) The admission change proposal has been voted on by the Regents as a final open session action item; and
 - h) The admission change proposal has been adopted by the majority vote of the Regents through the making of a motion. States that nothing is to preclude the Regents from having a discussion in open session of the contents of the admission change proposal as to the reasons why the admission change proposal should or should not be adopted.
- 2) Defines a "change to the conditions for undergraduate admissions" to mean any of the following:
 - a) A change to the policy for undergraduate admissions to the UC as adopted by the UC Regents;

- b) A reclassification or modification of which type of high school course meets the A-G subject matter requirements for admission to the UC; and
 - c) A change to the admissions requirements criteria used in the review and certification of high school courses as meeting the A-G subject matter requirements for admissions to the UC.
- 3) Defines a “local education agency (LEA)” to mean a school district, county office of education (COE), or a charter school.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the UC as a public trust administered by the Regents of the University of California (Regents) and endows the Regents with full powers of organization and government. Clarifies the UC is only beholden to Legislative control as necessary to ensure the security of funds, compliance with the terms of the endowments of the university, and competitive bidding procedures where applicable to the university by statute for construction contracts, sales of property, and purchasing of materials, goods and services. (Article IX, Section 9, subdivision (a) of the California State Constitution).
- 2) Authorizes the Board of Regents to be comprised of seven ex-officio members, 18 members of the public appointed by the Governor, one student appointed by the Regents, and one faculty appointed by the Regents. The seven ex-officio members on the Board are the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the Assembly, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), the president and vice president of the UC alumni association, and the acting president of the UC system (Article IX, Section 9, subdivision (a) of the California State Constitution).
- 3) Stipulates the UC is to be entirely independent of all political or sectarian influence and kept free in the appointment of its Regents and in the administration of the UC’s affairs. Prohibits the UC from barring a person from being admitted to any department of the UC based on the person’s race, religion, ethnic heritage, or sex. Gives the Regents legal title, management, and disposition of UC property. Authorizes the Regents to do the following:
 - a) Use the UC seal (enter into contracts);
 - b) Sue or be sued; and,
 - c) Delegate any function of the university to committees of the Regents or the faculty of the University or others, as deemed wise by the Regents (Article IX, Section 9, subdivision (f) of the California State Constitution).
- 4) Mandates the meetings of the Regents be public with exceptions and notices as authorized by law (Article IX, Section 9, subdivision (g) of the California State Constitution).
- 5) States it is the intent of the Legislature for the academic standards for a high school course to meet the model uniform set of standards for admission to the CSU and UC (A- G course criteria) to align with the standards developed by the Academic Content Standards Commission in 2010 and adopted by the SBE. Requires the CSU and requests the UC to do the following:

- a) Establish a model uniform set of standards for high school courses (A-G course criteria) for the purpose of determining eligibility for admission to undergraduate programs offered by the UC and CSU;
 - b) When developing the A-G course criteria, the faculty of the CSU and UC may work in consultation with administrators and faculty from K-12 schools. Requires K-12 schools who are consulted to establish advisory boards with specified membership, including parents, classroom teachers in career technical education (CTE), business and industry representatives, to provide additional input;
 - c) Develop and implement a process for approving high school courses meeting the A-G course criteria by January 1, 2006. The courses will be approved by August 1 of each school year and a notification will be provided to the high school of the approval or denial of the course as meeting the A-G course criteria;
 - d) Develop a procedure to evaluate a high school career education course as meeting the A-G course criteria, as defined;
 - e) Take into consideration any previous work conducted to approve a high school course as meeting the A-G course criteria; and
 - f) Develop guidelines for high school computer courses to be approved as meeting the A-G course criteria (EC 60605.8).
- 6) Requires the Legislature to provide for the appointment or election of the State Board of Education (SBE), and requires it to adopt textbooks for grades one through eight. (Article IX, Sections 7 and 7.5 of the California Constitution)
 - 7) Establishes requirements for graduation from high school, including three courses in English, two courses in mathematics, two courses in science, three courses in social studies, one course in visual or performing arts or world languages or CTE, two courses in physical education, a one-semester course in ethnic studies, and a one semester course in personal financial education. (EC 51225.3)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “Every student deserves a fair chance to pursue higher education. AB 500 ensures that changes to UC admissions do not leave students behind by requiring an open and transparent process. When universities engage educators, students, and policymakers before making decisions, we create a system that reflects our values of fairness, equity, and opportunity for all.”

Key provisions of this bill for K-12 education. This bill states the intent of the Legislature that any proposed change made by the UC to the conditions for undergraduate admissions (defined to include the reclassification of A-G courses or changes to the criteria used to review them) become operational only after:

- It has been provided to the SBE and the proposal has been identified as an item for discussion and has been discussed in a public meeting of the SBE; and
- Disclosure on the impact of the change on K-12 school districts has been provided to each Regent in advance of the UC Board of Regents meeting at which the admissions change proposal is to be considered.

These changes are intended to promote coordination and collaboration between the K-12 and UC systems, which are governed by two policymaking bodies:

- The SBE is California's K-12 policy-making body for academic standards, curriculum, instructional materials, assessments and accountability, for the state's 6 million public school students. Its 11 members are appointed by the Governor and serve for four year terms. The SBE adopts content standards and curriculum frameworks each subject and in each grade, and adopts instructional materials for grades K-8. State graduation requirements are set in statute by the Legislature and Governor, and school districts have the authority to add local requirements as they see fit.
- The UC Regents adopts admissions criteria for K-12 students, including the required "A-G" course sequence, which exceed the state's graduation requirements. These changes are developed by the UC Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS). The membership of UC BOARS includes one faculty representative from each of the 10 UC campuses, two additional faculty acting as Chair and Vice Chair, and two student representatives. The UC BOARS oversees all matters relating to the admissions of undergraduate students, and regulates the policies and practices used in the admissions process that directly relate to the educational mission of the UC and the welfare of students. The UC BOARS also recommends and directs efforts to improve the admissions process.

"A fragmented and antiquated governance structure for education in California." As noted above, the SBE is responsible for adopting the curriculum of the public schools in California. The UC Regents set admissions criteria based in part on the preparation they believe is necessary for academic success in their institutions.

While the K-12 system is responsible for implementing the California K-12 curriculum, school districts have little choice but to align their course secondary course offerings – and content - with the eligibility criteria of the UC. This is true even though only 8% of California public high school graduates will attend a UC campus. Some school districts even align their high school graduation requirements with UC's A-G requirements, with the result that no student – college bound or not - is able to earn a high school diploma without meeting the UC's requirements.

The Committee may wish to consider that, when there is a conflict between the K-12 curriculum and the UC's admissions criteria, the UC's criteria will prevail.

In spite of the interconnected nature of these two systems, current law does not explicitly require the two systems to consult or collaborate on qualifications for admissions to the UC or CSU. At times, this disconnected relationship results in conflict and confusion.

At an October, 2024 joint hearing of the Assembly Education and Higher Education Committees regarding a recent change made by the UC BOARS to the Area C Mathematics admissions criteria, SBE President Linda Darling-Hammond testified that:

The acronym BOARS stands for the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools, and while BOARS decisions are connected to UC admissions (as well as those of CSU since CSU agreed to abide by BOARS decisions), **BOARS effectively has no relationship with K-12 schools. There is no governance or required consultative relationship with the K-12 system.** [emphasis added]

BOARS is a unique committee. There is no other state in the nation that has a higher education body which prescribes and approves the content of specific courses for high schools, like the A-G courses. This set of courses must be met by all in-state applicants in order to be eligible for admission. (Ironically, out-of-state applicants to UC do not have to meet these requirements. Although they are asked to use the A-G requirements as a guide, there is no approved course list for them or their schools to follow.)

The SBE President described, as an illustration of this fragmented relationship, the disruption caused in the SBE's of adoption of the 2023 Mathematics Curriculum Framework, after three years of development:

The State Board was informed only a few days before its meeting in July 2023 that BOARS had held a non-public meeting the Friday before our Wednesday meeting and wanted to request changes to the framework, which had been revised several times in response to extensive public commentary over 3 years. The Board staff reached out multiple times to try to get clarity on what had been decided in the Friday meeting, which was not public and did not have clearly recorded decisions, and received competing accounts from various people present at the meeting.

Our goal at that time was that the University's decision be accurately represented in the vote on the framework. Finally, on the morning of the vote (July 12th), while in the process of considering the item, the Board's staff was able to get a formal statement from the University... I read this statement - which was handed to me as we were deliberating for our vote - aloud to the board as we made in-the-moment changes to the text of the framework so that it could be as accurate as possible at the time of the vote.

At the hearing, both the SBE President and K-12 representatives spoke of poorly timed and inconsistent messaging from the UC on the Area C decision, resulting in, as described by the SBE President, "a rushed and confusing aftermath." A representative of the Kern County Superintendent of Schools testified that the decision left school staff "scrambling to comply in the middle of summer when a majority of staff and students were on break:"

With master schedules set and students enrolled, many schools were under the impression they had to make quick decisions about their 2023-24 course offerings, leading to inconsistencies in how districts handled the changes. Some school sites rolled back data science courses entirely, while others sought temporary solutions, creating confusion for teachers, administrators, students, and families alike.

The SBE President characterized the broader governance problem as follows:

I want to be clear that these problems are not of BOARS making – nor of the efforts of the committed faculty members who have been involved in this process. **We have inherited a fragmented and antiquated governance structure for education in California. There is**

no established mechanism to coordinate between and among higher education segments and K12, or to do so with business and labor with both an educational and an economic lens on what our curriculum should be to prepare students to succeed in this rapidly changing world. **Nor is there an established mechanism for BOARS to coordinate with K12 colleagues, to hear from the public, or to hold open hearings or receive comment in the way that the legislature, State Board and other public bodies must do in making decisions.** [emphasis added]

So, we find ourselves in a situation where important curriculum decisions about the types of courses to be offered to our high school students, and the specific content of those courses, are driven not by local governing boards, nor by the Legislature or the State Board of Education, but rather by a committee of professors that changes annually and which can change policies at any time with these rapid changes in membership. These professors, and those who review courses using their criteria, may be making the absolutely right decisions, but they do not have the benefit of the structured public engagements and drafting processes that include a wide range of experts, educators from K-12 and post-secondary institutions, and K-12 parents and students who help sensitize us to the realities of the work on the ground that needs to be considered when changes are made.

UC Regents and Academic Senate recognize need for consultation process with K-12. After this joint hearing, the Chairs of the Education and Higher Education Committees sent a letter to the UC Regents expressing concern over the effects of the Area C mathematics decision and the need for consultation between the UC and K-12 systems.

In February of this year, the UC Regents Chair and Vice Chair responded with a letter affirming their commitment to “greater collaboration between the University and its K-12 partners, as well as increased consultation between BOARS and the State Board of Education regarding admissions policy changes.” The letter also stated that the Regents have “requested that BOARS and University undergraduate admissions personnel review their consultation processes and present to the Regents a proposed new process for robust K-12 consultation as well as provide an opportunity for public comment on any changes to admissions policy or its implementation.”

On April 23, 2025, the Academic Senate voted to amend the Academic Senate Bylaws to include, in the duties of the UC BOARS, “The committee shall consult with representatives from the State Board of Education and K-12 subject matter specialists on proposed changes to course requirements for undergraduate admissions.” *The Committee may wish to consider* that the response of the UC Regents and the Academic Senate is consistent with this bill, and that this bill would establish a durable statement of Legislative intent that the systems consult on these issues of importance to both systems.

Which content is used in the approval of UC A-G courses? This bill states the intent of the Legislature that any proposed change by the UC to the conditions for undergraduate admissions, including a criteria used to review A-G courses become operational only after it has been discussed in a public meeting of the SBE, among other requirements.

Since 1965, the UC has required high schools to submit high school courses for review and approval as A-G courses for purposes of meeting the admission requirements for the CSU and UC. The UC Enrollment Services Unit reviews and approves high school course as “A-G” and maintains a list of approved A-G courses. A 2016 State Auditor report, *College Readiness of*

California's High School Students, described the process for approving high school course as A-G as follows:

- 1) All college preparatory courses must be certified by UC as A-G approved. Courses that are approved by UC meet both UC and CSU admission requirements. UC is the only state entity that certifies if a course is A-G approved. CSU adopted the same basic college preparatory curriculum (A-G course sequence) and relies on UC to approve the courses.
- 2) To certify a course, California high schools submit college preparatory courses in the seven A-G areas to the UC.
- 3) UC evaluates the course submissions based on criteria developed by the UC BOARS.
- 4) UC maintains an A-G list for each school and instructs schools to update the lists regularly. The A-G course lists for each school should include all courses available to students for the upcoming academic year that have been approved by the UC.

According to the UC, the courses that high school students take to fulfill A-G admissions requirements must be on their school's A-G course list, and they are listed on UC's A-G Course List Website. California high schools maintain their A-G course lists in the A-G Course Management Portal. Course lists are also used to populate the UC and CSU applications for undergraduate admission, so that students may select from pre-loaded courses instead of entering courses manually. Each school or district has a designated list manager who is the primary administrative A-G contact for their institution and who ensures that the course list is updated for the next academic year during the annual A-G course submission period, which runs from February through June of each year. Schools are encouraged to update their lists during the primary phase to ensure that approved courses are available in the UC application when it launches on August 1.

High schools and other local education agencies that serve students in grades 9–12 submit individual course outlines to UCOP for review. The High School Articulation team (HSA) reviews submissions on behalf of UC faculty. Each A-G course submission consists of basic course information and a course description. The course description provides information about what students learn and do in the course and helps the HSA team understand how the course fulfills A-G course policy and criteria. Each course description includes:

- Course overview: A brief summary of overarching content and goals of the course;
- Unit summaries and assignments: For every unit, a summary and at least one sample assignment; and
- Unit labs (only for area D science courses): For every unit, a description of a laboratory activity that involves inquiry, observation, analysis and write-up.

According to the UC, courses are assessed using subject-specific rubrics against the content and skills guidelines for the subject. The HSA team also engages in periodic norming processes, which helps to facilitate timely review of submissions as well as consistent outcomes. Courses that are not approved after an initial submission are returned to the school via the A-G CMP with guidance on how to revise the course. Many course submissions are automatically approved for the purposes of a school's A-G list.

In the 2024–25 submission period, 90% of courses submitted for A-G review were ultimately approved (not including auto approvals). The UC reports the following data for 2024–25 course submissions:

- Submitted for review: 6,307
- Approved: 5,680
- Not approved: 627
- Auto-approved: 12,088
- Total submissions (includes resubmissions of not approved courses): 18,395

This process has become more efficient over time. The State Auditor’s report found that in the four years from 2012–13 through 2015–16, UC improved its process of approving college preparatory courses and increased the percentage of new courses it approved from 57% in 2012–13 to 90% in 2015–16. During that same period, UC also substantially lowered the average time it took to issue certification decisions from 50 days to 14 days. In addition, in 2015 UC changed the format for course submissions and the new format reduced the length of most course proposals it receives from 10 to 25 pages to about five pages.

As noted above, current law requires the CSU and requests the UC to establish a model uniform set of standards for high school courses for the purpose of determining eligibility for admission to undergraduate programs offered by the UC and CSU. The UC also reports, as noted above, that courses are assessed using subject-specific rubrics against the content and skills guidelines for the subject. However, *the Committee may wish to consider that* it is unclear which content is used in these rubrics. It could be the content standards approved by the SBE, or it could be different standards established by the UC. It is also unclear whether these rubrics are made available to school districts.

A companion bill to this measure, AB 1217 (Fong and Muratsuchi) of this Session states the intent of the Legislature that, in determining the standards and criteria for undergraduate admissions the University of California and the CSU develop the standards and criteria based on the content standards, frameworks, and model curriculum adopted by the SBE for the applicable subject area.

What happens when the K-12 standards and UC’s standards conflict? As noted above, K-12 schools have little choice but to align their curricula with the admissions criteria of the UC. Failure to do so could render their students ineligible to apply to a four-year public university in California.

At the joint hearing, the SBE President testified about the consequences of a conflict between the standards of the two systems, raising as an example recent proposal to create a new Ethnic Studies course requirement:

The many public laws and regulations we have designed to ensure a coherent, transparent process with accountability can be rendered moot by this nonpublic process. For example, if, as BOARS has proposed recently, an entirely new subject area requirement is added as Area H (which would require for admissions and determine the content of Ethnic Studies courses), local high schools would have to make significant course, curriculum and professional development changes rapidly. If not, they would place their students in jeopardy of being ineligible for UC and CSU. And many districts require all of their students to meet these

requirements in order to graduate. The A-G (or potentially A-H) course content requirements do not have to be consistent with policies adopted by the State Board of Education or the Legislature. This can wreak havoc on the complex and multifaceted course offerings and schedules in high schools.

Arguments in support. The Kern County Superintendent of Schools writes, “AB 500 (Quirk-Silva) proposes that any changes to the admission standards and criteria for undergraduate admissions at the University of California become operative only after thorough consideration and discussion by key stakeholders, including the University of California Student Association, the State Board of Education, and the Trustees of the California State University. This inclusive approach will ensure the admissions process is fair, easily understandable, and reflective of diverse communities within California.

Furthermore, AB 500 (Quirk-Silva) will help address the challenges faced by students with uncontrollable course deficiencies and promote broader consultation with California’s diverse communities. By implementing these measures, the University of California will be better equipped to provide opportunities for all eligible students, regardless of their background or circumstances.”

Arguments in opposition. The Council of UC Faculty Associations writes, “The State of California, through Article IX, Section 9 of the California Constitution, has entrusted the Regents of the University of California with the responsibility of governing the university, including developing its admissions criteria. This system was designed to prevent the politicization of university admissions, ensuring academic integrity and institutional autonomy.

These bills undermine the independence granted to the University of California by imposing legislative mandates on its admissions process. As recent actions at the federal level demonstrate, politicizing the university risks harming the institution's credibility and excellence and sets a concerning precedent for future political interference in its governance.

Please reconsider these legislative efforts and instead respect the autonomy and governance structure established for the University of California. Preserving the integrity of our higher education system is crucial for maintaining its credibility and excellence.”

Related legislation. AB 684 (Patel) of the 2025-26 Session would make meetings of the UC BOARS subject to the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act.

AB 1217 (M. Fong and Muratsuchi) of the 2025-26 Session would establish Legislative intent for how the UC Office of the President determines if a high school course is a college preparatory course.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office

Oppose

Council of UC Faculty Associations

1 individual

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