

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY  
Academic Senate

**Resolution Regarding the Proposed Changes to the  
Title 5 American Institutions Requirement**

#33-10/11-EX – May 8, 2011 – First Reading/Waiver

**RESOLVED:** The Academic Senate of Humboldt State University (HSU) reaffirms its commitment to the principle that all graduates of our institution should demonstrate an understanding of “American democracy and of the society in which they live” so that they may “contribute to that society as responsible and constructive citizens;” and be it further

**RESOLVED:** That the CSU should not recognize transfer AA degrees that fail to satisfy the American Institutions requirement within the constraints of SB 1440 degrees -- as being too dissimilar to our own degrees; and be it further

**RESOLVED:** That the CSU should request that the Legislature amend “The Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act” (SB 1440) to clarify that American Institutions requirements should be fully maintained during the implementation of the law; and be it further

**RESOLVED:** That HSU will not waive the American Institutions requirement for any baccalaureate degrees; and be it further

**RESOLVED:** That copies of this resolution be distributed to the Chancellor, to the Board of Trustees, to the Academic Senate California State University, to all campus senates, to the Chairs of all CSU History and Political Science Departments, the Assembly Committee on Higher Education, and the Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges.

***RATIONALE:** The state of California was right to institute the requirement that all graduates of its state university system learn enough about American Institutions to become literate, contributing members of the polity. It would be wrong to weaken this requirement now, particularly for the sake of expediency, particularly at a time when higher education in California is in a state of ongoing crisis. Ever since the founding of the United States, and particularly since Alexis de Tocqueville assessed the state and prospects of American democracy in his landmark *Democracy in America* (1835-40), the dependence of a democratic society on the education of its citizenry has been widely recognized. Evidently the framers of the California Code were thinking of just this when they instituted the American Institutions requirement, aimed at providing California State University graduates with the “knowledge and skills that will help them to comprehend the workings of American democracy and of the society in which they live, to enable them to contribute to that society as responsible and constructive citizens.” Now, by proposing to waive that requirement for some majors in order to ease the transfer of community-college credits, the Board of Trustees and Chancellor are undermining one of the central claims higher education can make to the allegiance of its public.*

*“Of what use is a college training?” The American philosopher William James posed this question in an address called “The Social Value of the College-Bred” in 1907, when roughly 3% of the American population graduated from college. James believed that “a democracy like ours should have its sons and daughters skilful,” not only in the way of trades, but more particularly in the skillful identification of the types of characteristics in potential leaders that will predict sound policy. College graduates both choose and become future leaders, a responsibility that, according to a recent study by the Social Science Research Council, is already imperiled by universities that have too little impact on college graduates’ ability to think critically, read comprehendingly, and collaborate constructively.<sup>1</sup> “Democracy is on its trial,” James warned, “and no one knows how it will stand the ordeal.”*

*Of what value to society is the training provided in college? We must ask the question all the more urgently now that approximately one-third of the American population completes the B.A. The current defense of higher education on the ground of the usefulness of its graduates to industry is only one part of the social benefit of college training. True, faculty in their separate departments train majors in fields of study that will make them competitive in the marketplace and effective in their industries. By turning out a diversely equipped body of college graduates, the CSUs power the economy of the state and contribute to the vitality of the nation. But our national motto, e pluribus unum, calls on us to remember that diverse learning outcomes are only positive if graduates also share a common ground, which the American Institutions requirement creates. Right now, despite all the years of budget cuts and fee increases and other painful realities of the contemporary political and economic climate of California, every graduate of the CSU system knows where the American experiment came from and what its rules are, which give them both a stake in its future and the necessary tools for building that future—collectively. We resist any erosion of this common ground in the strongest possible terms.*

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<sup>1</sup> See the College Learning Assessment longitudinal study (2010):  
[http://highered.ssrc.org/?page\\_id=28](http://highered.ssrc.org/?page_id=28)