The California Legislative Process

There are a number of online guides to the California legislative process that explain how it works in detail. A good introduction prepared by the California Department of Finance can be found at:
http://www.dof.ca.gov/fisa/bag/legprocess.htm

There are also a number of others. [Simply search for California Legislative Process.] What follows here is a brief overview.

The Legislative Calendar:
The legislative meets in a two-year session that is tied to the election cycle. These are referred two as regular sessions. The Governor may also call a special session of the legislature to deal with specific subjects.

Legislation:
There are six classes of legislation, or measures, considered by the legislature. The most common form is the bill, which establishes, repeals, or in some other way modifies state law. If a bill is to become law it must be passed by a simple majority of both houses and signed by the Governor. Laws ordinarily take effect on the January 1st following their passage.

Briefly, a bill progresses through the following steps:

1. A bill is introduced by its author in the member’s house (i.e., a member puts the bill “across the desk”). Bills are the numbered in the order they are received.

2. The bill is heard in the appropriate policy committee as determined by the bill’s subject matter.

3. If passed by the policy committee the bill is then sent to that house’s fiscal committee if there are fiscal considerations.

4. If it passes out of committee(s) it goes to the floor of the house for a vote. If it passes out of the house it is send to the other house (i.e., Senate → Assembly, or Assembly → Senate).

5. Steps 2 & 3 are repeated in the other house.

6. If approved by both houses the bill goes to the governor for signing. The Governor has 12 days to act on a bill (sign or veto) once he receives it. (But see url above.) If he fails to act it automatically becomes law.
### A General Calendar of the Legislative Process

| January-February: | -- Bills are introduced in their houses of origin. Most bills first go to the Legislative Counsel’s Office where they are drafted into formal legislative language.  
-- Deadline for introducing bills to be heard that year is the end of the 3rd week of Feb.  
-- Bill is given “first reading” in its house of origin. |
| March – April: | Bills are heard in their respective policy committees. Bills with a fiscal impact must be out by the beginning of May, bills without fiscal impact by the beginning of the second week of May. |
| May: | -- Fiscal committees in house or origin hear bills.  
-- Last week of May, bills go to “the floor” (voted on by full house). |
| June-August: | Process is repeated in other house. (June to mid-August in policy committees; second half of August consideration by fiscal committees). |
| September: | Floor sessions held in both houses; all bills must be out of the legislature and to the Governor’s desk by end of second week of September. Governor has end-of-September deadline to act on bills. |

**During the legislative process a bill may be:**

**Amended:** Technically, the author can “take amendments” at any time during the process.

**Withdrawn:** The author may remove the bill from consideration.

**Held in Committee:** Technically, the committee chair refuses to allow the bill to come up for consideration, so the bill cannot move forward. It effectively kills the bill.

**Held Over as a Two-Year Bill:** the author takes the bill out of consideration during the first year of a regular session with the intent of taking it up again during the second year. If so the bill is taken up in January where it left off the previous year.

**Implications for Advocacy:** The above actions can take place at any point in the process and without advance notice. Effective advocacy, therefore, requires that interested parties (such as the ASCSU) be prepared to speak to legislation of interest at any point throughout the legislative cycle.

**Enrolled:** A bill is said to be “enrolled” when it is sent to the Governor for action.
Chaptered: A bill is said to be “chaptered” when it becomes law, either because the Governor signed it or allowed it to occur by choosing not to act.