June 13, 2006

The Honorable Jack Scott  
Chair, Senate Education Committee  
State Capitol, Room 2082  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Scott:

I am writing on behalf of the Academic Senate of the California State University (ASCSU) to express our opposition to AB 2168 (Liu), which would call on the California State University to work with our colleagues in the University of California to create a set of common lower-division general education requirements. Our objection to this legislation is not with its ultimate goal -- to make transfer easier for students -- but rather is based on the following concerns.

First, a common lower-division general education transfer pattern already exists: the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC). While most students who transfer to the CSU do not complete this curriculum, but instead complete our own CSU GE Breadth requirements, a student who is unsure as to whether s/he will be transferring to the UC or CSU can follow the UC IGETC pattern and be assured that both systems will accept this work for lower division general education. Developing a new common lower division general education pattern will duplicate already existing options.

Second, in response to SB 1785 (Scott), legislation passed in 2004, the faculty of the CSU have devoted a substantial amount of time working towards the development of common lower division transfer patterns (LDTP) for more than forty different undergraduate majors. Major-specific general education requirements are included in these patterns. The proposed legislation could impact the agreements that have been reached on these transfer patterns and impede future progress on this important program, which promises to greatly facilitate the effectiveness and efficiency of the transfer process.

Third, the legislation, as it is currently written, would permit certain courses to be used to satisfy lower division for one system but not the other. This seems to us to be less desirable than the current IGETC transfer pattern in which courses are assured to be counted to satisfy both UC and CSU lower division general education.

Fourth, while it may appear that having a common lower division general education pattern is worthwhile, in reality there are differences in the backgrounds and needs of students transferring to the two systems. The faculty of the CSU has developed our lower division transfer pattern, GE Breadth, with the best interests of our students in mind.
We believe that a “one size fits all” approach to general education has the potential of doing a disservice to our students and may discourage qualified students from pursuing the baccalaureate degree at the CSU. As stated above, however, we do accept IGETC for transfer so that students who may have thought they wished to transfer to the UC are not disadvantaged.

Fifth, the legislation will require resources to accommodate its goals and it is unclear to us where these resources will come from.

I am taking the liberty of enclosing a resolution passed by the ASCSU at our May Plenary Meeting expressing our opposition to AB 2168.

Let me close by saying that the faculty of the CSU have been and will continue to be committed to work with our colleagues in the UC and Community College systems to best serve the needs of our students and to ensure that educational opportunities are available to all qualified Californians. One example of this cooperation has been the participation of faculty from the three systems in the IMPAC project, which has successfully identified and implemented ways to facilitate transfer. Another example is the work done by the UC and the CSU over the past three years in aligning the high school requirements for admission to both systems. We have made significant progress in this area and we expect by the end of the year to have nearly identical requirements in the A) through G) high school course structure.

These efforts did not come in response to a legislative mandate, but rather were initiated because our faculty genuinely believes that we need to serve our students in the best way possible. While we cannot support AB 2168 due to the reasons stated above, we are committed to what we believe is the ultimate goal of facilitating effective and efficient transfer opportunities, and we will continue to strive to improve the educational experience of our students.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Marshelle Thobaben, Chair
Academic Senate of the California State University

cc: Charles B. Reed, Chancellor
Karen L. Zamarripa, Assistant Vice Chancellor
Carol Liu, Chair, Assembly Higher Education Committee
Mary Gill, Consultant, Assembly Higher Education Committee
Testimony on AB 2168 (Liu) to the Senate Education Committee

June 28, 2006

Professor John Tarjan, CSU, Bakersfield

First of all, on behalf of the faculty of the California State University, I would like to thank the members of the Senate Education Committee for their interest in California university students and their academic preparation. My name is John Tarjan. I am a professor of management at CSU, Bakersfield. I am beginning my fourth year as chair of the CSU General Education Advisory Committee. Today I am speaking as a representative of the Academic Senate, CSU.

I would like to begin by summarizing the points contained in a letter from the Chair of our faculty senate, Marshelle Thobaben of Humboldt State University, to Chair Scott.

1) A common transfer general education curriculum already exists. It is known by the acronym IGETC or Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum. While there are several differences between the requirements for UC and CSU transfers, they are relatively minor and easily understood. They also pose few problems for our transfer students. The online transfer advising Web site called ASSIST lists over 100,000 community college courses that are transferable to the CSU—nearly 28,000 of those courses are certified as meeting GE requirements. Students know well the value of the ASSIST web site. In 2005, more than 800,000 users of different computers viewed these transferable courses, visiting the site 7.6 million times. ASSIST is jointly sponsored by the three segments of higher education, and like IGETC, is evidence of our shared commitment to protecting academic quality while ensuring smooth transfer between the community colleges and the four-year institutions. We have worked hard to ensure that students who begin their academic careers at a community college following either version of IGETC and transfer to the CSU will have every course they take counted towards their general education requirements, even if they ultimately choose to complete the CSU Area-Breadth pattern.

2) 47 sets of discipline faculty from across the state have come together to develop common transfer curricula for our most popular majors. This effort is known as Lower-Division Transfer Patterns, or LDTP, our attempt to address the requirements of SB 1785. Common to these patterns is instruction on how students are to complete their general education requirements—typically with one or more prescribed courses to enhance preparation for the major. Each of the 47 LDTPs provides a clear roadmap for community college students who wish to transfer to and graduate from the CSU. To change our GE package at this juncture would likely mean not only delay, but also undoing much of the work accomplished to date.

3) Even if the legislation, as written, is enacted, it is possible that courses used to satisfy the pattern for the California State University system will not be accepted by the University of California.

4) The students transferring to the UC and CSU overlap in terms of level of preparation and abilities, despite our distinct missions. However, there are differences in their levels of preparation and the
expectations of students once they transfer. This is reflected in the minor differences in the CSU and UC versions of IGETC. These differences were designed intentionally. The respective faculties of the two systems felt that the slight variations would make the curriculum better suited for their respective students. For example, our faculty strongly agrees that a course in oral communication is extremely important for our students. I have had many CEOs from the Bakersfield area address my classes on the preparation they look for in students. Chancellor Reed has done the same on a state level. To a person, they mention effective oral communication as one of the most important traits they look for in new employees. Our faculty also maintains that our students will be better prepared as citizens after a baccalaureate exposure to federal, state and local governmental institutions and processes and United States history. We believe our students would not be well served if we were forced to eliminate or amend these aspects of our curriculum.

You should not take this to mean that our faculty is opposed to curricular change. In fact, our General Education Advisory Committee is in the process of analyzing a comprehensive campus survey regarding the Area-Breadth package. We have temporarily put on hold any suggested revisions to the package pending the outcome of AB 2168.

The idea of discussing further alignment of general education between the UC and CSU has a lot of merit. Still, a study of the scope and nature of the problem should probably be a precursor to any deliberations. Consider the experience of ASSIST. There are annual reports detailing student complaints about articulation not being honored between systems. There are only a handful of complaints filed in any given year. In almost every case, the complaints arise due to misunderstandings or a lack of planning on the part of students rather than a lack of clear information or campuses not honoring their agreements. In almost every case, these incidents are resolved to the satisfaction of the student when a report is filed. Yet the perception persists in some circles that campuses do not honor their articulation agreements.

Let me end by stating that we hope that no legislative mandate would force us to undo the good work we have done in developing a package that meets the needs of our students or the historic work we are engaged in to align major preparation across our 23 campuses. Thank you.