**California Takes Steps to Offer Bachelor’s Degrees at Community Colleges**

California, the state with largest community college system in the country, could become the 22nd state to authorize community colleges the ability to offer bachelor’s degrees. As employers demand more college-educated and skilled workforce that holds at least a bachelor’s degree, allowing community colleges to offer bachelor’s degrees is seen as a cost effective way for states to produce the skilled workforce they demand.

Last month, California Governor Jerry Brown signed [Senate Bill 850](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB850) which authorizes the establishment of a statewide pilot program where 15 community college districts will each offer a bachelor’s degree program. The pilot program will commence in the 2017-2018 academic year. The Chancellor of the California Community Colleges will be in charge of identifying the programs to be considered for approval by the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges.

The degrees offered will be based on the state’s workforce demands and will not overlap with degrees already being offered by the California State University or the University of California systems. Additionally, students that begin the pilot program are expected to complete their bachelor’s degree by the end of the 2022-23 academic years.

As legislators worked on SB 850, a California Community College Baccalaureate Degree Study Group was formed to present a [report](http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/AcademicAffairs/BaccalaureateDegreeStudyGroup.aspx) on what it would mean for California’s community colleges to incorporate this educational degree model. According to their findings, authorizing community colleges to offer additional bachelor’s degrees for in-demand fields, such as health care and technical disciplines that the CSU and UC systems do not offer, will help to meet the projected demand of college educated workers estimated for 2025. The Public Policy Institute of California’s report on [*Closing the Gap: Meeting California's Need for College Graduates*](http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=835) states that California will face a shortage of one million college graduates by 2025. Their projection is based on the 150,000 bachelor’s degree students that public and private institutions graduate annually (110,000 public institutions and 40,000 private institutions), the large number of college educated workforce that will be retiring in the next decade, and the shift in demographics of groups with historically lower college degree attainment rates.

After reviewing the existing community college programs offering bachelor’s degrees in other states, the Study Group further concluded that community colleges do not detract from their primary mission and it’s a feasible way for students to gain their bachelor’s degree. Currently, there are more than 465 bachelor’s degrees offered by more than 50 community colleges across the country.

New York was the first state to offer community college bachelor’s degrees in 1970. Among Western states, Utah adopted this model in 1992, Nevada in 1998, Hawaii in 2003, New Mexico in 2004, Washington in 2005, and Colorado in 2009. If California adopts the community college bachelor’s degree model, it would become the fifth western state to offer them.