

SPECIAL ELECTION



CANDIDATE STATEMENTS FOR 2020 VICE PRESIDENT OF REGIONAL AFFAIRS

JUNE 2020



Benjamin Blevins
Grossmont College
Region X



Jacob Couch
American River College
Region II



Ernesto D. Garza Lopez
Santiago Canyon College
Region VIII



Francesca Mejia
Napa Valley College
Region II

Benjamin Blevins

for

Vice President of Regional Affairs

I. After reviewing the job description for the position, what student activities and special skills qualify you for the position and why are you running for this position?

- I. VPRA is one of the most essential positions within SSCCC as they help the RADs and Regions fulfill their true purpose, representing students. I was recently elected as Student Trustee of my Governing Board and as Regional Affairs Director for my Region, Region X. I have also served as the Vice Chair of Region X, in that position I have picked up the skills needed to give back to my fellow students, I'm running for VPRA in order to make real, long lasting change for our fellow students.

II. What statewide issues are you most interested in or most concerned about and why?

- I. Basic needs, all students should be entitled to the resources they deserve, such as online textbooks, internet, laptops, and all things necessary to complete their studies. COVID-19 has changed the structure of our education system, as student leaders it is our job to make sure that our students have what they need to succeed.
- II. The need for overnight parking for students who live in their cars, creating a safe space that students can focus more on their education rather than starvation. With this, creating a plan that also meets physiological needs for students facing housing insecurities to fix inequity gaps.

III. What would your first three priorities be if you are elected and why?

- I. To create standing transition reports for Regions to make resignations and vacancies easier for Regions and for the new officers. Coming from a resignation heavy Region, it is important for incoming officers to understand what is expected of them as they enter these positions.
- II. Full activation of all college ASOs across the state, we can all agree that the student voice is heard more loudly when all colleges participate, that's why I would make activating all inactive colleges one of my biggest priorities. As a RAD, full activation of all nine of my region's colleges is one of the biggest priorities to increase student involvement and the student voice. RAD's are essential for lifting the student voice and as VPRA I promise to support all RAD's and Regional Officers.
- III. The creation of institutional memory within all of our Regions. Institutional memory is the very bedrock of any successful organization and as VPRA I would create the framework and foundation for successful implementation of institutional memory policy. As RAD, it is my duty to build the memory in order for our region to continue after we're gone, and as your VPRA, I will do exactly that so that we can insure for years to come that the student voice will not be neglected.

Join me on our journey at www.benforvptra.com!



Jacob Couch

Education

A.A., POLITICAL SCIENCE CANDIDATE

American River College

Cumulative GPA 3.955

Major GPA 4.0

Relevant coursework:

- Introduction to Government: CA
- Public Speaking
- Anthropology
- Advanced Computational and Critical Thinking

Work Experience

STRATEGIC EDUCATION SERVICES

Intern | April 2020 - Present

Monitored hearings and prepared written reports on the deliberations of the State Longitudinal Data System Implementation Committee.

CORFFEE STONE LAW CORPORATION

Intern & Assistant | October 2018 - January 2019

Responsibilities included opening and closing the office, conducting client intake interviews, updating case files, basic accounting duties, coordinating and executing company marketing strategies, as well as various other tasks that supported office operations.

Persisting Issues

While the SSSCC has improved tremendously over the last few years, there are a few problems that persist. One, as made apparent by the current makeup of the incumbent executive board, is diversity among board members. Generally the SSSCC has been cognizant of ethnic diversity, but executive officers of regional and statewide boards have tended to come from the centers of jurisdictions indicating that the SSSCC hasn't found an effective way to maximize its reach and influence. Additionally, I have encountered many Associated Student Organizations (ASOs) that are hesitant to participate in SSSCC activities indicating that ASOs have needs or desires not currently being addressed by the SSSCC.

Plans if Elected

If elected I plan on using my company marketing experience to extend the reach and influence of the SSSCC to the farthest corners of California. While doing so, I will work to establish pathways for our leaders from boarder colleges to attain roles in regional and statewide shared governance. This will also give me the connections needed understand and address concerns from local ASOs as well.

Why me?

My experiences heading marketing operations at Corffee Stone Law Corporation and promoting participation amongst colleges in Region II have given me the tools I need to ensure the SSSCC not only incorporates the voice of students from all 115 colleges, but the students themselves. My diverse set of experiences also allow me to develop intuitive ways to address issues often not seen by my colleagues. Finally, I'd like to say that simply because someone else is from a boarder college, doesn't mean they would be better at promoting participation from those schools than I. I have already developed knowledge on the issue and devised ways to address it as well. If I can convince businesses to have a small business represent them over a large law firm with a simple letter, then I can convince ASOs to coordinate with the SSSCC because it will amplify both of our voices and further their students' leadership careers.

Leadership Experience

STUDENT SENATE FOR CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Vice Chair | Region II | October 2019 - Present

Encouraged regional participation to ensure student voice was heard when making policy. Worked with representatives of local ASOs to restructure the region's governing documents. Lobbied for bills affecting CCC students. Worked to promote institutional memory within through the development of packets for incoming members of the Region II Delegate Assembly. Authored resolutions regarding mental health services and rapid rehousing initiatives.

AMERICAN RIVER COLLEGE ASSOCIATED STUDENT BODY

Director of Legislative Affairs | September 2019 - Present

Represented the American River College Associated Student Body to local, state, and federal officials. Organized a lobbying trip in conjunction with the other Los Rios Community College District schools. Performed an overhaul of the governing documents. Ensured student opinions were heard in the renegotiation of American River College's food service contract. Helped develop a course informing teachers of open educational resources to reduce the cost of learning materials for students. Currently working to establish a scholarship for students facing basic needs issues and to organize an advocacy event titled "Get Involved, Get Relief" in which students get involved legislation and in turn receive aid.

Greetings from Orange County,

My name is Ernesto Daniel Garza Lopez, a fourth-year community college student (going on my fifth-year). My major is in political science with an emphasis in political theory. My ultimate goal is to become a community college professor and contribute back to the CCC system. I am no stranger to failure, as I believe it is great for building character and allows for a strong effort in all facets of work. My service as a student representative at my college as provided me a different outlook on participatory governance; which is how vital and critical it is to student success and equity. I am a driven person, who does not stop until an objective is complete or a compromise that benefits all parties is achieved. At my college, I revitalized an initiative for fair and equal representation at district-level governance (one student trustee from each college within district to be on the Board of Trustees.). In addition, I aided the effort of reorganizing our associated student organization's structure and governance.

Why Am I Running? What Makes Me Best Fit?

One of the main reasons I am running for this position to increase regional activity across the state and to strengthen each region by providing them with the necessary resources as possible. The training I received from my college's ASO has enriched me in dialoguing with difficult or opposing parties in a calm and collective manner. This skill also being the particular skill I dominate.

Most Concerning Issues

Basic Needs

As community college students, we sometimes face troubling times—even more so with the COVID-19 pandemic—whether it is financial or personal crises. A lack of basic needs can hinder any student's educational goals. That is why it is important for our government, in an attempt to contribute to further student equity, to provide for basic needs as best they can.

Priorities

1. Regional Activity

Some regions have faced periods of inactivity or difficulty in reaching out to their colleges, as some are distrustful of the Student Senate. I will provide myself as a resource in the campaign for increased regional activity. Working with each region's executive board, we as the Student Senate will see more college ASO's at each region's Delegate Assembly. Regional activity is important, not only for the regions themselves, but the Student Senate as a whole as regions are the backbone of the Student Senate.

2. Regaining Trust and Confidence

As I previously stated, some college ASO's are distrustful of the Student Senate or lack confidence in its abilities. It is important that the Student Senate tackle this in a manner most befitting: communicating with each college's ASO. Distrust among our ASOs will hinder the Student Senate's mission for student interests.

3. Continuity

The transition of power and duties is critical to the Student Senate's mission and success. Without this smooth and proper transition in our Regions, the Student Senate can be left weakened and its influence can shrink.



FRANCESCA MEJIA

FOR VICE PRESIDENT OF REGIONAL AFFAIRS

My name is Francesca Mejia and I am running to be the next Vice President of Regional Affairs (VPRA) for the Student Senate for California Community Colleges. I currently serve as a Senator on the Associated Students of Napa Valley College, and a delegate for Region II of the SSSCC, as well as Vice Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee for my region. I have a passion and dedication for advocacy, and I would be humbled and honored to continue my service for the SSSCC and serve on the Executive Committee.

My choice to attend a community college was like that of many other minority and low-income students who could not afford to go straight to a four-year university. As a student in the California Community College (CCC) system, I learned that it was often more expensive for students to attend the CCC's instead of the UC's or CSU's due to the high cost of housing expenses. CCC students are more likely to experience homelessness or housing insecurity. As someone who has experienced the difficulties of maintaining a minimum wage job, attending school full-time, and making rent payments, I want to help the millions of students like me who are struggling to afford college.

I was fortunate enough to be the SSSCC delegate for my college, where I had the opportunity to lobby at the capitol for bills that sought to make the CCC system more equitable and accessible. These bills included AB302, a bill that allows homeless students to sleep in campus parking lots in their cars overnight, and SB291, a bill that seeks to cover the true cost of attending a community college. It was over the year that I spent in my position at the SSSCC that I learned the importance of advocacy and the impact and power of the student voice. The state-wide issues that I am most concerned with are covering the full cost of attendance for community college students, legislation for undocumented students, and funding basic needs centers.

I feel an obligation to continue my journey in advocating for the 2.2 million CCC students whose voices so desperately need to be heard. I am running for Vice President of Regional Affairs because I want to empower student leaders like myself to connect with students from other colleges and build a strong network of advocates who will shape educational policy and legislation.

If I were elected, my first three priorities would be the following: Firstly, to ensure that each of the 115 CCC's has a delegate to represent their college in the SSSCC, I would communicate frequently and directly with the advisors of each college, as well as the Regional Affairs Director for each region and provide them with informative resources on the SSSCC, such as our history and mission. Secondly, I would frequently attend meetings of each SSSCC region in order to ensure direct communication and support from the executive committee year-round. Lastly, I would organize and provide webinars and presentations that would provide delegates with an overview and orientation to their role in the SSSCC.

Dedication

Advocacy

Leadership