



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY (LWVSLO) HIGHER EDUCATION STUDY

MAY 6, 2016

**PREPARED BY CINDY MARIE ABSEY
LWVSLO HIGHER EDUCATION STUDY CHAIRPERSON**

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF REPORT:

In January 2014, the League of Women Voters of California (LWVC) approved a statewide study of Higher Education in California with a focus on the following topic areas: the purpose of higher education, equitable access, funding and affordability, preparedness, and opportunities and barriers to success. The purpose of the study was twofold: 1) to help educate league members throughout the state about higher education in California and the current challenges and ideas for reform; and 2) to provide information to assist the LWVC in updating its positions on policy and legislation pertaining to higher education. LWVSLO and numerous other local leagues in California convened study committees to research, discuss and reach consensus on statements about higher education in California. The results of those studies are due to the LWVC by May 15, 2016.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

See Attachment 1: LWVSLO's Higher Education Study Committee 2015-16 Responses to Consensus Questions and Comments

BACKGROUND:

Through a formal study process, the LWVC adopts positions on a number of topics that allow it to advocate for policy and legislative change. Because the LWVC currently does not have a position on higher education that includes the CSU and UC systems, the LWVC cannot effectively advocate on matters related to higher education in California. To remedy this situation--- and in response to daily news articles and reports about public higher education in California and the need for reforms--- the LWVC proposed a statewide study of higher education in California at its annual convention in 2013.

In January 2014, the LWVC Board of Directors approved the study and began work to develop a study guide and consensus questions for use by local leagues interested in participating with the study. Approximately 43 local leagues, including the LWVSLO, participated in the study, with a deadline of May 15, 2016 for submission of study results to the LWVC. The consensus results reached by study committees will provide the basis for LWVC positions on policy and legislation in the near and foreseeable future.

PROCESS:

The LWVSLO study of higher education was launched at the 2014 Opening Meeting held in the fall at Cuesta College. That meeting featured a panel presentation by local education leaders including Cal Poly University President Jeff Armstrong, Cuesta College President Gil Stork, Cal Poly ASI President Joi Sullivan and Cuesta College Student President Scott Chedester. Following the panel, attendees were invited to enroll in the study committee, with LWVSLO members Cindy Marie Absey serving as chairperson and Boyd Horne as resource member.

During the year that followed, the LWVC developed the study guide and consensus questions for local leagues, while the LWVSLO provided resource and background materials to committee members in preparation for formal meetings. Updates on the Study Committee were featured in LWVSLO VOTER newsletters and the website for the benefit of all members and the public.

Formal meetings of the LWVSLO began in October 2015 when the LWVC issued the study guide and consensus questions. In the next 7 months, the committee met monthly for 2 hours to discuss the specific study topic areas and reach consensus when possible. The chairperson or a committee member facilitated the discussion of topics and the chairperson recorded the votes on consensus questions and comments. Agendas and minutes of meetings were sent to committee members prior to each monthly meeting.

Between 6 and 11 committee members and guests attended the monthly meetings. The majority of attendees were LWVSLO members with past or current careers in higher education, plus members of Cuesta College and Cal Poly administrations and a scholarship coordinator with the Community Foundation of San Luis Obispo County. The chairperson invited a number of additional higher education “experts” and community members to participate, but in most cases those invitations were declined.

As instructed by the LWVSLO Board of Directors, the results of the Study Committee will be presented to the LWVSLO Board at its meeting on May 6, 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Please see Attachment 1: LWVSLO Higher Education Study Committee 2015-16 Responses to Consensus Questions and Comments

OTHER SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Attachment 2: Higher Education Study Committee Members (Active and Invited)

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