

Bill would allow LTCC to offer 4-year degree

By Kathryn Reed

Lake Tahoe Community College needs to find ways to make money. Offering four-year degrees is one way to do so.

The University of California and California State University systems need to find ways to accommodate more students. Allowing community colleges to offer four-year degrees would do that.

Today the state is not in a position to educate all of the people who are seeking bachelor's degrees because programs and schools are impacted. And more jobs are requiring a bachelor's. The Public Policy Institute of California earlier this year reported that by 2025, 41 percent of jobs will require at least a bachelor's degree, but only 35 percent of working-age adults will meet that qualification.

A bill circulating in the Legislature could solve the problem for the three public education institutions. Senate Bill 850 would allow each of the 112 community colleges to offer one applied baccalaureate degree in an eight-year pilot program. The Senate Education Committee on April 24 will discuss the item.

It's a bill Kindred Murillo, president of LTCC, is completely behind. One of her goals when she was hired nearly three years ago was to offer baccalaureate degrees at the South Lake Tahoe institution.

What the degree or degrees would be in remain to be seen. There have been discussions on campus of having an accelerated teaching credential program where students would earn their bachelor's and credential in four years. There could also be a

special bilingual component to it.

Public safety, environmental studies and fire are other possibilities.

Part of the thinking at the state level is not to allow community colleges to duplicate what the UC and CSU offers.

Already the California Community College system with its 2.4 million students is the largest postsecondary education system in the United States.

This is hardly groundbreaking legislation. Twenty-one states currently allow community colleges to offer four-year degrees.

The price structure would still need to be worked out. CSUs cost \$5,970 a year in tuition, while community colleges charge \$1,300 a year.

The last major change to higher education in California was in 2005 when CSUs were granted the right to offer doctorate degrees.