



# CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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## CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

### PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Paige Marlatt Dorr

Office: 916.327.5356

Cell: 916.601.8005

Office E-mail: [pdorr@cccco.edu](mailto:pdorr@cccco.edu)

BlackBerry: [PMarlatt@comcast.net](mailto:PMarlatt@comcast.net)

## **California Nisei College Diploma Project Efforts Underway at California Community Colleges to Honor Former Students Imprisoned in World War II**

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – After nearly 70 years, many former California Community College students who were unable to complete their studies due to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II will finally be honored. As part of the California Nisei College Diploma Project, the University of California, California State University and California Community Colleges are undergoing massive efforts to locate these individuals and bestow them with a degree.

Assemblymember Warren Furutani, sponsor of Assembly Bill 37, today attended the California Community Colleges Board of Governors meeting to address board members about the bill and its importance to all Californians. "Every now and again a special opportunity comes along for an elected official to right past wrongs," said Furutani. "This is our chance to complete unfinished business. The vast majority of former students eligible for the higher education diplomas are from the California Community Colleges. This is our opportunity to learn from history."

On October 11, 2009 Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law AB 37. The bill requires the Trustees of the California State University and the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, and requests the Regents of the University of California, to work with their respective colleges and universities to confer an honorary degree upon each person, living or deceased, who was forced to leave his or her postsecondary studies as a result of federal Executive Order 9066 which caused the incarceration of individuals of Japanese ancestry during World War II.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office is actively working with Assemblymember Furutani's office and the California Nisei College Diploma Project to inform community colleges about the provisions of AB 37 and facilitate efforts to identify, conduct outreach, and honor their Nisei former students. Implementation efforts will draw upon the experience of several community colleges in California that have conferred special recognition to Nisei students prior to the signing of AB 37.

AB 37 extends the scope of AB 781 (Lieber, Statutes of 2003), earlier legislation that authorized a high school or district, unified school district or county office of education, to retroactively grant a high school diploma to a former pupil who was interned in the U.S. by order of the federal government during World War II.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 in February 1942, more than 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were forcibly removed from their homes and communities, sent to remote internment camps, and denied all constitutional rights. Sixty-two percent of these men, women and children were American-born citizens who were Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans) or Sansei (third generation Japanese Americans).

In 1941, 2,567 Japanese American students were enrolled in California's higher education institutions, both public and private. The California Nisei College Diploma Project, a nonprofit program affiliated with the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, asserts that of this number, more than 1,200 Nisei students attend 44 junior and community colleges during the academic term immediately prior to Executive Order 9066.

Members of the Nisei generation are presently in their 80s or may have passed away so there is urgency for California colleges and universities to fulfill the intent of AB 37. The bill stipulates that in cases where an honorary degree is conferred upon a person who is deceased, the person's surviving next of kin, or another representative chosen by the person's surviving next of kin, may accept the honorary degree on the deceased person's behalf.

In fall 2000, Sierra College initiated a campus-wide interdisciplinary, multicultural learning experience called the *Standing Guard Project* to create a legacy of education about the impact of World War II internment on the Japanese American community in and around Placer County. In 2004, Sierra College was honored by the Board of Governors with the John W. Rice Diversity Award for being the first community college in California to honor Japanese Americans whose college careers were cut short by internment. Sierra College conferred honorary degrees to 86 Nisei former students or their families during a special celebration marking the opening of the Standing Guard Remembrance Garden on the Rocklin Campus in April 2007.

In late May 2009, during its respective graduation ceremonies, the College of San Mateo and City College of San Francisco gave special recognition to Nisei students who attended the colleges during academic year 1941-42. Most, if not all, of the remaining 41 community colleges will hold ceremonies honoring the Nisei students in late spring 2010.

"I'm grateful for the efforts of Assemblymember Furutani and all those involved in the California Nisei College Diploma Project," said California Community Colleges Chancellor Jack Scott. "Obtaining a college degree is a very important occasion. This is especially true for those Japanese Americans who were forced to put their education on hold and sacrifice future employment opportunities. I'm pleased our colleges are bestowing these honorary degrees to so many deserving Californians."

*The California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the nation comprised of 72 districts and 110 colleges serving 2.9 million students per year. Community colleges supply workforce training and basic skills education and prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions. The Chancellor's Office provides leadership, advocacy and support under the direction of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges. For more information about the community colleges, please visit [www.cccco.edu](http://www.cccco.edu).*

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