

Written public comments received by 1/15/2025

Hello.

I am a student in the FSE program and would like to share how important it is for me personally to complete it successfully. I'm not the youngest student (I am 53), and changing my career pass is hard at my age. Changing the country, life style and carrier at the same time is even harder. I chose Canada College for my education in Funeral services, and I am focused on completing it fully and on time. I am working full-time now, and can't change my location. This program is helping me to improve my life and establish myself in a new place.

I hope I (with all my fellow FSE program students) will be able to continue with Canada College education and finish as a certified specialist, with the possibility of taking the national exam as a Funeral Director.

This program is preparing much-needed specialists, as Funeral Directors and embalmers, and I can see the demand for them all around California.

I wish the program to continue in full.

Thank you

Olga Matveeva

Richard J. McCown
Vice President of Operations, Western Region
NorthStar Memorial Group, LLC
PO Box 5070
San Mateo, CA 94402

July 11, 2024

Board of Trustees
San Mateo County Community College District
3401 CSM Drive
San Mateo, CA 94402

Dear San Mateo Community College District Board of Trustees,
Thank you for taking an interest in keeping the Funeral Service Education (FSE) Program at Cañada College. I am writing in response to your request for additional information regarding the funeral profession in the San Francisco Bay Area, specifically employment and job openings, pay and whether or not the available jobs pay a livable wage. You also asked what private industry may be willing to contribute to keep the program going. I appreciate the opportunity to present this data for your review and look forward to the support of this program at Cañada College by the Board of Trustees.

Employment and Job Openings

There are several current job openings that underscore the need for funeral professionals in the San Francisco Bay Area. Positions include, but are not limited to: Funeral Service Assistants, Funeral Arrangers, Funeral Directors, Apprentice Embalmers, Embalmers, and Mortuary Managers, with varying levels of experience required in each open position. There is no question that a high current demand exists with a simple online search. Quite often these roles, in my own personal experience and observation, sit open for months and some up to a year due to a serious shortage of qualified, educated candidates. Quite often we must offer relocation assistance to bring in people from outside of the area.

Importantly, the industry need extends far beyond the needs of today, with annual demand for funeral professionals exceeding current supply from the programs at American River and Cypress College. The lack of new funeral professionals is exacerbated by a declining population of Funeral Directors and Embalmers in the state. Further, we also do not have enough cohorts being accepted into existing funeral service education programs in the state to keep up with the increase in apprentice embalmers needing an ABFSE certified degree.

With regard to annual demand for licensed funeral professionals, you were presented data by staff in the last Board of Trustees Meeting that defies common sense, contradicts state specific research, and contrasts with my own personal experience having worked in California in this profession over the past 10 years. As presented, staff would lead you to believe that in 50 states, we only have 136 embalmer jobs opening per year – less than 3 per state, per year. This is simply not accurate, and ignorant to the individual licensing requirements of each state, and our own situation here in California. We have more annual openings available in the state of California alone than what was presented. According to the Centers for Excellence (COE) for Labor Market Research Occupational Projections Demand Tool, formulated specifically for community college decision making in California, there are 202 annual job openings projected for “Morticians, Undertakers, and Funeral Directors” in the state of California requiring an associate degree, and 30 of those are in the Bay Area. The demand for licensed funeral professionals is high and projected to increase in the foreseeable future. To posit a local FSE Program is not needed at Cañada College based on data that is not representative of state or local conditions is irresponsible at best, and intentionally deceptive at worst.

The way to licensure includes graduation from an American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) accredited program in most states. California requires an associate degree for licensure as embalmers and funeral directors; specifically an ABFSE-accredited degree, National Board of Education (NBE) examination, and two year apprenticeship for embalmers. Accordingly, we have 202 licensed funeral professional job openings projected annually by the COE where a degree is required by the state of California.

The two current FSE Programs in California at Cypress College in Los Angeles, and American River College in Sacramento, cannot supply enough graduates to meet the projected demand for licensed funeral professionals. According to the ABFSE, these two programs only graduate about 50 students per year between the two. Note that American River in Sacramento only accepts one cohort per year of about 30 students (with 2 full time faculty). This is not nearly enough graduates to keep up with the demand for licensed funeral professionals in California and doesn't account for the increasing number of apprentice embalmers in the state that would need an ABFSE accredited program to become licensed (332 in 2023).

It should also be noted we have a declining population of both licensed funeral directors, and embalmers in California. According to the California Cemetery & Funeral Bureau (CFB) 2024 Sunset Report, in 2018, there were 2,281 active licensed funeral directors in the state, and that number has reduced by 70 in 2023 to 2,211. That same report shows 1,543 active licensed embalmers in the state in 2018, which has decreased 121 to 1,422 in 2023 (7.8% decrease). For reference, according to CalHHS, total deaths in California have increased from 268,818 in 2018, to 340,526 in 2023 (27% increase).

When one considers the number of projected job opening for licensed funeral professionals in California, the educational requirements to be licensed in California, the current amount of graduates supplied by the existing programs ,the declining amount of licensees in the state, increasing amount of apprentices, and increasing death rates, it is imperative we keep the Cañada College Funeral Service Education Program going. This is particularly impactful to our San Mateo community and the greater Bay Area since the next closest programs are 123 miles away in Sacramento, and 385 miles away in Los Angeles.

Average Pay

The average salary for a Funeral Director in San Francisco, CA is \$84,673 as of January 26, 2024. However, there are variations in this figure. For instance, Indeed reports an average salary of \$49,517 per year, while SalaryExpert reports an average salary of \$126,028, or an equivalent hourly rate of \$61. These variations could be due to differences in job responsibilities, years of experience, and other factors. According to Salary Expert, data for San Francisco suggests that the average salary for an embalmer is approximately \$77,423, or an equivalent hourly rate \$37.22/hr, which is significantly higher than the state average. The salary range can vary widely depending on factors such as education,

certifications, additional skills, and the number of years spent in the profession.

Livable Wage

A livable wage in the Bay Area is a subjective term and highly variable depending on where you are located. It can cost much less to live in parts of the East Bay than it does in parts of the Peninsula – think Richmond vs Atherton. Many employees in this profession and others choose to live in lower cost areas and commute in. That being said, San Francisco is estimated to be around \$28.74 per hour for a single adult, according to the MIT living wage calculator. For a more local reference, The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday approved a resolution that increases the base wage for regular County employees to \$30 an hour, after a task force performed a "livable wage" analysis. Current open positions for embalmers in the Bay Area advertise \$35-\$40/hr, plus benefits. A current Care Center Manager position in the Bay Area is advertised for \$120,000 per year, plus fully paid benefits. Comparing estimates of livable wages to average salaries and currently open positions, the profession provides a livable wage in the San Francisco Bay Area for both licensed Funeral Directors and licensed Embalmers.

Private Industry Contributions

While it's challenging to quantify the exact amounts that private industry would be willing to contribute, it's clear that many local funeral homes and related businesses are committed to supporting their employees, the FSE Program at Cañada, and the broader community. This support can take various forms, including competitive salaries, comprehensive training programs, use of facilities for students, paid internships, and other benefits. I am actively working on gathering other industry leaders to see what donations can be made to a trust or similar instrument to support the accreditation requirement of two full time faculty, but will need more time to get a number.

I hope this information is helpful as you consider the future of funeral service education at Cañada College. Please feel free to reach out if you have any further questions or need additional information.

Best regards,

Richard J. McCown
Vice President of Operations, Western Region
NorthStar Memorial Group, LLC

There's nothing more in life that I want than to be than a Mortician, It's all I've dreamed of being since I was 13 years old. Now I'm 17 and a Cañada college middle college student hoping that the program gets accredited. Funeral Service is incredibly meaningful and important to me in every aspect, I want to help families through the difficult process of losing a loved one from tending to the deceased loved one to the counseling of the family and ensuring that they can have lovely service for their loved ones. However, the fact that the closest community college that has an accredited program is three hours away makes accomplishing my dreams difficult. While the distance certainly won't stop me from pursuing my dream, it adds a barrier to over come with trying to figure out how I'm going to get there or if I can even afford to live near that area. Having the program at Cañada would make getting my degree and being certified much easier once I enroll in the program so that I can achieve dreams and make an impact on the Funeral Service profession without having to face so many barriers.

Justin Gonzalez Rios

Hello All. I am currently a student at Cañada College studying funeral directing and embalming. I previously worked as an ad ops manager at a marketing company and wanted to work in a collaborative and empathetic environment that works with bereaving families. Marketing to funeral service is not a common shift, but I have a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (Business), so I wanted to use my science background to shift to a career that helps people. Advertising is a very niche industry and many of the skills I possess are very technical or administrative, such as server communications or processing returns. I know I don't have the same skills as people who started in adjacent or other similar service careers since I served clients and not

individuals. I will work diligently to develop the skills required to help families process their grief and provide families the opportunity to grieve together with their loved ones in meaningful ways. I have not followed the traditional student path and took 10 years off from school. The FSE department and all your staff have been extremely kind and helpful. I am currently working in marketing and the FSE program is one of the few in the country that allows lower-income students to enter such a service field.

I hope to work towards a career in Funeral Service. I am looking forward to meeting you in the future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Aryssa Montano

To the Task Force,

I am writing to express my strong support for establishing a funeral service program at Cañada College. For many years, it had been my dream to work in the funeral service industry. This passion started when my children were toddlers, and I made the decision to pursue formal education in this field.

At the time, the only program available was an accelerated course. While I was accepted and excited to begin, the structure of the program made it nearly impossible for me to succeed as a mother of young children. Between the daily in-person classes 20 miles from my home and limited childcare support, I had to make the heart-wrenching decision to withdraw. I felt like I had failed, even though I knew I was prioritizing my family.

Years later, I had the opportunity to work part-time in the funeral industry, but not in the capacity I had originally envisioned. My dream was to become a licensed embalmer and funeral director, but the lack of accessible education options held me back. I explored other programs, but they were either too far away, lacked flexibility, or required travel out of state for clinical work—something I could not manage as a mother of teenagers.

If Cañada College were to offer a funeral service program with an online or hybrid model, it would open doors for individuals like me who are passionate about this field but need flexibility to balance their responsibilities. Although I may not attend the program myself at this stage of my life, knowing that it exists for others would bring me immense joy.

This program would allow aspiring funeral professionals to achieve their goals without sacrificing their roles as caregivers, employees, or community members. It would also address a critical need for accessible training in this essential industry.

I urge you to consider how impactful such a program would be—not just for individuals, but for the broader community. Please take this opportunity to empower people who, like me, have long dreamed of serving others in the funeral industry.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Lisa R Pappas
Funeral Director

I would like to ask that you keep this program up and running to the fullest ability. As I am in Santa Cruz County, Single mom, working full time. I CAN'T be going Sacramento or LA to take classes. That is ridiculous. Even if it is once a month. I will have to bring my daughter with me, rent a hotel room. So now you are asking me to spend more money that I don't have because you don't want to keep the classes on this side of California. It was very sad when the school in San Francisco shut down it was so exciting when I found out that one opened up in Redwood City.

Ashley Strangio-Vollers

I can't believe this is even up for debate! A funeral services course is essential because it provides individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to support families during one of the most challenging times in their lives. The well-developed course covers topics such as grief counseling, embalming, funeral law, and the logistics of organizing services, ensuring that professionals in the field are equipped to handle the practical and emotional aspects of funerals with sensitivity and professionalism. It prepares students to manage cultural and religious diversity, enabling them to cater to various customs and traditions respectfully.

Moreover, courses like this foster ethical practices and instills the importance of compassion and dignity in honoring the deceased. By understanding the intricacies of memorial planning and bereavement care, graduates are better able to guide families through the decision-making process, providing comfort and clarity during moments of uncertainty. This not only creates meaningful experiences for the bereaved but also upholds the standards of a vital and deeply personal industry.

Sandy I.

The following public comment received by the PIV Task Force on 1/15/2025 is a copy of a letter sent to Dr. Thompson in April 2024

Greetings Dr. Thompson –

Thank you so much for providing information about the status of the Funeral Service Education program at Canada College during the Advisory Committee meeting today. I appreciate the level of detail presented covering the process of sunshining and the future for this program. From some of the remarks made and sentiments shared, I thought I might add just a bit of clarity into the structure and operations of the American Board of Funeral Service Education along with the periodic review of standards process. I believe you will find that the Committee on Accreditation (COA) operates very similarly to the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), especially in regard to the periodic review and revision of standards.

The ABFSE is an organization of educational institutions (58), professional associations (3), and public members (2), first and foremost, with several committees that have developed over time to serve the interests of members. Over the past 20+ years, the United States Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) have required the Committee on Accreditation (COA) to become completely autonomous and self-sufficient to the extent that ABFSE officers are not allowed to serve on the COA nor participate as site visitors or evaluators while in office (conflict of interest), and the budgets of the ABFSE and COA are completely separate, though staff members are shared in relation to the duties performed (i.e., Executive Director, 80% COA/20% ABFSE). In terms of representation, the member schools have 7 positions on the COA, along with two public members, and one representative each from each association (i.e., NFDA, NFDMA), for a total of 12 voting members, 7 of which are elected by accredited programs.

(<https://www.abfse.org/docs/ABFSEDirectory.pdf> - page 78)

For comparison, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), has 19 members, all of whom are elected by ACCJC member institutions. While Commissioners bring perspectives from various institutions, backgrounds, geographical regions, and related organizations, they act as independent decision makers and are not representatives of a certain constituent category, institutional role, or organizational affiliation. (<https://accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/ACCJC-Commissioner-Categories-and-Definitions.pdf>)

When ACCJC conducts its periodic review of standards, it follows this process:

The Commission makes available to its member institutions and the public information announcing the Review, the Commission's means of soliciting input on Accreditation Standards, and a proposed timeline for completing the review and implementation of any new or revised Accreditation Standards. During the review process, the Commission will provide periodic updates to its member institutions and the public on its progress in reviewing and developing the Accreditation Standards through electronic communications, notices on its website, and other media and news outlets.

The process for review of Accreditation Standards:

1. Examines whether the Standards are adequate to evaluate institutional and educational quality;

2. Examines whether the Standards are relevant to the educational needs of students and adequately evaluate student learning and achievement;
3. Examines each standard and the Standards as a whole;
4. Solicits suggestions from internal constituencies such as Commissioners and Commission staff; member institutions, their staff, and governing board members; and persons who serve as evaluation team members and team chairs;
5. Solicits suggestions from communities of interest or others with special expertise in accreditation related matters; and
6. Solicits suggestions from external constituencies such as students, business leaders and other members of the public served by member institutions.

Of particular note is the similarity with which ACCJC ultimately issues revisions as determined by the 19 commissioners, without a vote of the entire ACCJC institutional membership:

Once any revised Accreditation Standards have been drafted, the Commission will provide opportunities to its member institutions, their staff and governing board members; college systems to which they may belong; students; business leaders and other members of the public; and other higher education associations, to comment on proposed changes to Accreditation Standards. These individuals and groups are invited to send written comments to the Commission and/or to testify at public hearings and meetings scheduled by the Commission.

The comments gathered are taken into account as the Commission finalizes any revisions to Accreditation Standards.

The COA periodic review of standards is practically identical to our more familiar ACCJC process for institutional re-accreditation:

The COA members, team chairs and evaluation teams, and others examine the current standards to determine alignment with USDE and CHEA expectations as well as adequacy in evaluating institutional and educational quality, student learning and achievement, and announce a timeline and process for review

Most recently, the COA allocated more than 18 months to soliciting suggestions from funeral service practitioners, students, educational institutions, professional organizations and associations, and the public, as well as in conducting surveys and in-person interviews, to determine needed revisions

The COA hosted multiple town hall sessions between 2022 and 2024, including at the annual meeting in 2023, to solicit additional input on the draft standards before publishing and requesting feedback (to which Canada College responded), and evaluated each comment received (more than 250) in relation to USDE, CHEA, and related standards for continued recognition of the COA's ability to serve as an accrediting body for funeral service education programs

After final COA deliberations were conducted under the surveillance of an assigned USDE staff monitor (in attendance at the April COA meetings in Boston) the final version of the revised standards was announced and will become effective in January 2025

Having been a member of the COA from 2010 to 2016, an officer of the ABFSE since 2016, and a longtime delegate representing Cypress College to the ABFSE since 1995, I can attest to the diligence with which the COA maintains its autonomy and ability to meet the expectations of USDE and CHEA for the continued recognition as the only accreditor of funeral service education programs. There are multiple opportunities to participate in the periodic review of standards, but much like ACCJC processes, not all institutions get a vote nor are all likely pleased with changes made to accreditation standards when they occur.

I personally am in complete support of requiring a minimum of two full-time faculty, one of which is the program director, for accredited programs in order to ensure that students receive a high-quality educational experience and are well-prepared for professional practice. The survey results and open forums during the review of standards process did not indicate significant opposition to this change. For many programs, there is much greater concern for the use of national board examination results in program outcome assessment (STANDARD 10: PROGRAM PLANNING AND EVALUATION / ASSESSMENT).

For the past 6 years, I have served on the California Community Colleges Board of Governors and understand the budget constraints, Faculty Obligation Number compliance concerns, parameters of the 50% law, and AB 1725 (1988) minimum qualifications. I also appreciate not wanting to create faculty positions (on-going expense) under grant/one-time funding. I would like to propose an alternative operational strategy for consideration while building out the program and pursuing accreditation:

Develop an unaccredited Associate degree program (Funeral Service Arts) that can be promoted as meeting the California educational requirement for licensure as a funeral director, and continue to offer the program online;

Consider rotating one-year temporary full-time contracts for qualified Funeral Service faculty, which includes one person with program director responsibilities (see revised standard 1.9.2);

Use current tenured full-time faculty member with FSA in psychology, sociology, counseling, etc. disciplines, and assign this person to teach the Social Science areas of the ABFSE-prescribed curriculum (see standard 6.1.4) (NOTE: curriculum revision may be necessary so that the discipline/FSA for the course includes more than Mortuary Science)

Sociology (SS-1) – possible SMCCCD FSAs (as determined by courses in related TOP codes)

- i. 1255.00 – Mortuary Science (MQ)
- ii. 1201.00 – Health Occupations, General (MQ = Health)
- iii. 1299.00 – Other Health Occupations (MQ = Health)
- iv. 1308.00 – Family Studies (MQ)
- v. 1309.00 – Gerontology (MQ)
- vi. 1399.00 – Other Family and Consumer Sciences (MQ = Family and Consumer Studies)
- vii. 2001.00 – Psychology, General (MQ)
- viii. 2003.00 – Behavioral Science (MQ = Psychology)
- ix. 2099.00 – Other Psychology (MQ = Counseling)
- x. 2104.00 – Human Services (MQ = Psychology, Counseling)
- xi. 2199.00 – Other Public and Protective Services (MQ = Psychology, Counseling)
- xii. 2201.00 – Social Sciences, General (MQ = Social Science, Sociology)
- xiii. 2202.00 – Anthropology (MQ)
- xiv. 2299.00 – Other Social Sciences (MQ = Counseling, Social Science, Sociology)

History of Funeral Service and Embalming (SS-2)

- i. 1255.00 – Mortuary Science
- ii. 2202.00 – Anthropology
- iii. 2205.00 – History (MQ)
- iv. 2299.00 – Other Social Sciences

Funeral Service Psychology and Counseling (SS-3)

- i. 1255.00 – Mortuary Science
- ii. 1201.00 – Health Occupations, General
- iii. 1299.00 – Other Health Occupations
- iv. 1308.00 – Family Studies
- v. 1309.00 – Gerontology
- vi. 1399.00 – Other Family and Consumer Sciences
- vii. 2001.00 – Psychology, General
- viii. 2003.00 – Behavioral Science
- ix. 2099.00 – Other Psychology
- x. 2104.00 – Human Services
- xi. 2199.00 – Other Public and Protective Services
- xii. 2201.00 – Social Sciences, General
- xiii. 2202.00 – Anthropology
- xiv. 2299.00 – Other Social Sciences

I realize that this email is very lengthy and contains a multitude of topics addressing more than just the Funeral Service Education program. If I can offer any assistance, clarification, or additional information, please let me know, Dr. Thompson. I really want to see this Strong Workforce undertaking initiated by Julian Branch and Jonathan Wax in 2019 excel in developing the workforce of tomorrow.

Jolena Grande, Cypress College