

Academic Senate President's Update – February 22, 2009

The Update is intended to inform local senates of significant issues. Comments may be sent to the Academic Senate at info@asccc.org.

Please copy and distribute this Update to all faculty! Share it with full- and part-time faculty, as well as with your administration and board.

The Budget

The signing of a state budget is the big news of the month. It signals the continuing dysfunctionality of our state budgeting process and, ironically, the earliest that the state has ever had an approved budget. The recently signed budget covers the remainder of the 2008-2009 year and also the 2009-2010 year. I'm sure that you are getting reports from multiple sources, so I'm only going to highlight a few points. More news will continue to emerge as the repercussions of the new state budget (as well as the federal stimulus package) are figured out.

In a nutshell, the budget for the community colleges remains flat through June 2010. There is no COLA for 2009-2010, and the COLA for 2008-2009, meager as it was, has been eliminated. While the community colleges fared better than many other governmental entities, this loss of COLA represents a cut of over \$300 million dollars. This fact was impressed on legislators, which partly accounts for the lack of additional cuts to the system. Categoricals (and essentially everything else) have been maintained at current levels with no mid-year cut - and for the moment, the proposal for categorical flexibility has been shelved.

However, don't think you can relax. While there is a budget in place for 2009-2010, there will undoubtedly be changes made in the May Revise after tax revenue numbers come in from income tax filings. In addition, a lot of the current budget is underpinned by changes now to be put before the voters in June. If these changes are voted down, the budget collapses again. Colleges are also not out of the woods with regards to cash flow problems. The deferrals incorporated into the budget will delay payments to the colleges for many months. Furthermore, while the adoption of a budget allows the state to once again sell bonds to fund construction projects throughout the state, buyers for those bonds are still in short supply, so it will be a while before colleges receive promised construction funds.

You recently received an email from me about the Sacramento Rally in March, and I encourage you once more to provide what support you can to this effort. Funding remains a serious problem for our system (see my Accreditation update below for another aspect of this problem), and all segments of public education need to voice their concerns to legislators and the Governor. The March in March: Rescue Education is March 16, 2009, in Sacramento. While the webpage is still under development, the best place to get more information is at iwillmarch.com.

College Affordability

While the recently signed state budget and federal stimulus package are still under dissection for their effects on community colleges, there are several positive achievements regarding college affordability for our students. First, there is no fee increase slated through 2010. Second,

although threatened, the Governor did not veto funding for the competitive CalGrant. Third, the maximum for the PELL Grant will increase an additional \$500 beginning this fall.

With these increases in financial aid, it is imperative that we share information about financial aid opportunities with our students.

Some of you may know of the California Public Information Research Group (CALPIRG). The student arm of CALPIRG was central to recent federal testimony about the rising costs of textbooks, and college affordability remains one of its top priorities. This year, CALPIRG is focusing on getting the word out about financial aid, and CALPIRG would like to enlist your help to make this possible.

The centerpiece of this effort is to simply get more students to apply for financial aid. More financial aid can buy back some of the hours that most students have to work to support themselves and their families. We all know that too many work hours can hinder student progress and ultimately the ability to achieve an educational goal.

This semester, as part of its Getting to Graduation Campaign (www.calpirgstudents.org), CALPIRG is collaborating with financial aid offices at colleges around the state to help increase student awareness of state and federal aid programs. It will be conducting a survey to further document student participation in financial aid programs and will be doing direct outreach to encourage application for financial aid. CALPIRG would like to make a short presentation at the start of class to as many classes as possible to further this goal. One of its campus organizers may contact you to ask permission for a student to make a five-minute class announcement to your students about this issue - and I hope that you will consider granting this request. For more information about the Getting to Graduation Campaign, you can contact Saffron Zomer, Program Director of CALPIRG Campus Chapters, at 617.309.8823 or saffron@calpirgstudents.org.

Full-time Faculty Job Listings

In spite of the financial difficulties facing our institutions, many colleges are still hiring in light of retirements and growth in student enrollments. I would like to remind you, and encourage you to share with your Human Resources Director and those involved in posting jobs on your campus, that all full-time faculty positions are required under Title 5 to be advertised on the CCC+ Job Registry (www.ccregistry.org). Aside from the regulatory requirement to post full-time jobs, the Registry can be a key element of your recruitment for full-time faculty, bringing your job listing to the attention of a wider pool of potential applicants.

Minimum Qualifications and Oversight of Language Labs

In review of Title 5 regulation regarding hours to-be-arranged, a thorny issue has emerged. Current regulation requires that faculty who oversee students working in a lab under hours to-be-arranged meet the minimum qualifications for the students' course. An informal poll of colleges reveals that all of them are violating current regulation with respect to language labs. The typical situation is this - teachers of languages share the responsibility for oversight of the language lab. However, students are not required to attend the lab at a specific time. As a result, an instructor

of French may be overseeing students who are engaged in lab programs in Japanese, Spanish, and Arabic.

The System Advisory Committee on Curriculum (SACC) is engaged in addressing this issue. One possible solution is to make a change to Title 5 to permit oversight of language labs by any faculty who has minimum qualifications to teach a foreign language or perhaps any language (including English). SACC is eager to get input from the field on such a possible change and to find out more about how language labs are organized at the colleges. Please share this issue with your language faculty and provide input directly to the Chair of SACC, Michelle Pilati, at mpilati@riohondo.edu.

Accreditation Update

It isn't quite like the Academy Awards, whether you think of the opening of envelopes or the recently leaked and perhaps bogus winners list for this year's awards, but there was a definite tension for an entire week as colleges received their letters from the Accrediting Commission and shared with the Academic Senate the results of their latest self-study, progress report, and visit. And unlike the Olympics, the final tallies are disturbing rather than marks of achievement. Seven colleges have newly been put on warning (one from probation, one from just having been reaffirmed), two colleges on probation (one from warning), and two colleges on show cause. There has not been a college on show cause since Compton, and the severity of this sanction cannot be understated. At this point, Solano and Diablo Valley need to "show cause" as to why the Commission should NOT remove their accreditation.

A colleague reported that her administrators returned from a Commission pre-accreditation visit meeting "trembling in their boots." Indeed, the Commission has acquired teeth in its actions thanks to the enforcement of the federal two-year requirement that colleges address any deficiencies in two-years or else lose their accreditation. Two years is not a long time, and in the last 18 months, 30 community colleges have been on or received sanctions and only eight have been taken off sanction. This means that as of today 20% of all California community colleges are on sanction, and this does not include Compton.

Frustration and even anger with this threat to college viability is growing. Even though many in the system acknowledge that the sanctions are justified and long overdue, colleges are often at a loss as to how best to address their recommendations. I would argue that our chronic underfunding is a major factor, and that this increase in sanctions reflects our growing inability to meet accreditation standards with existing resources. However, other things are also in play. For our part, poorly developed and implemented program review processes hinder any honest assessment of how programs and the institution are doing. Governance issues often hinder an honest reappraisal of program review processes. And difficult negotiations at many institutions have stalled efforts on all fronts. On the part of the Accrediting Commission, trainings of team members continue to be a significant weakness. As a result, recommendations emerge that are not consistent with stated Commission positions, confusing institutions. There is also a lack of faculty on visiting teams, partly due to the cumbersome necessity of being nominated by a college president. The lack of faculty on visiting teams removes a vital perspective to any institutional review. Finally, I would also argue that the Commission is falling short in its support of the Academic Senate in its efforts to serve as a resource to colleges.

In March, I will be discussing with my Executive Committee how best to communicate with the Commission this frustration and suggest ways to improve support for our colleges. I will work with other groups as well - our union colleagues, administrators, staff, and students - to craft a unified message to take forward.

Vocational Faculty Leadership Institute

It has come to our attention that several colleges and districts have imposed travel restrictions regardless of where the funds for travel are coming from. The Vocational Faculty Leadership Institute, an Academic Senate sponsored event to inform and inspire leadership among our occupational education faculty, is underwritten by a Chancellor's Office grant. As a result,

faculty are supported for their participation, including travel, lodging, meals, and registration. In this time of severely limited resources for faculty professional development, it would be a shame and illogical to impose travel restrictions on participation in this conference. I urge you to share information about the institute with your occupational education faculty and to talk with your college president/district chancellor about allowing faculty participation in this event. The Institute takes place at the Sheraton Universal City from March 12-14, 2009. More information is available at the Academic Senate website (www.asccc.org).

Everything Old is New Again

We've been struggling over the last five years to follow the desire of our System Chancellors and refer to our state agency as the System Office rather than the Chancellor's Office. Many of us have continued to fail in this regard, and we have been saved. Chancellor Jack Scott has communicated that he wishes to return to the previously used moniker, so once again our office in Sacramento will be referred to as the Chancellor's Office.

In Closing

I look forward to seeing you at upcoming Basic Skills Initiative workshops, at the Vocational Faculty Leadership Institute, at Area Meetings, and of course at our Spring Plenary Session at the SFO Westin on April 16-18, 2009. In spite of the challenges that we face, we carry on.

Mark Wade Lieu
President, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges