



DIALOGUE



Spring 2006 • An Open Forum for Faculty at Santa Rosa Junior College • January 26, 2006

WANT A STRONG & HEALTHY BUDGET? KEEP THOSE STUDENTS COMING!

by Janet McCulloch, AFA President and Regular Faculty in the English Department

At a Department Chair/Instructional Manager's meeting last semester, our new Vice President of Academic Affairs, Mary Kay Rudolph, presented some ideas about retention and persistence as a way to maintain or increase enrollments. For those of you unfamiliar with the terms, "retention" means that the students passed your class with a "C" or better; "persistence" means that they return to the college from one semester to the next. This was a meeting packed with information about evaluations and repeatability, so there was not much time for extended dialogue. Mary Kay had said that sometimes students go away because of a kind of "neglect." Although I would have said "benign neglect," her point is well-taken. Or maybe not so well-taken by some. She, like many of us, had set aside time to call "disappearing" students when she was an instructor at Sacramento City College. During the brief discussion, I was struck by the fact that some instructors think that this kind of follow-up is coddling our students or compromising our standards. To those who think so, I would have to ask, "How is it that you define

teaching at the community college?" For me, it means teaching them how to be students, and part of that process is explaining how the educational system works.

Most of our students do not know about college policies, drop dates, credit/no credit options, financial aid, or even how to talk to their instructors about what's keeping them from succeeding. But how would they know these things if we did not tell them? These students are often first generation college students—their family members haven't gone to college, nor perhaps have many of their peers. They are

blindly navigating some very treacherous waters when they embark upon this journey. It's not handholding to want to help them through this process, it's what we're paid to do. And speaking of getting paid, let me remind you again that every 1.0% decline in enrollment costs our district \$750,000 in revenue.

In light of recent enrollment trends, we should be looking very carefully at how we can retain the students that we have. It may be a matter of self-interest to keep these students, but it's also a professional responsibility. Some strategies for keeping students in your courses are:

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All faculty are invited to the **ENROLLMENT ENHANCEMENT FORUM**

Sponsored by Academic Affairs, AFA
& the Academic Senate

Friday, February 3, 2006
1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Emeritus Hall Room #1588

Two hours of Flex Credit
(approval pending)

Come and share your ideas and strategies
for identifying ways to serve students better,
increase enrollments and enhance retention.



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- Getting students' phone numbers and e-mail addresses during the first week of school, remembering that, legally, you may only talk directly to the student.
- Learning your students' names during the first two weeks of class.
- Getting a writing sample during the first week of class to determine if students are prepared to succeed in the course.
- Showing them the physical location of your office and the department office.
- Informing your students about the Instructor Home Page.
- Explaining the Credit/No Credit Option before the deadline to file.
- Scheduling mandatory conferences in your office at mid-term.
- Handing out financial aid packets to your classes.
- Inviting Transfer and Work Experience advocates to your classes.
- Publishing and talking about important college deadlines in your course calendars (e.g., the last day to drop with a "W" or last day to file for Credit/No Credit).
- Calling or e-mailing students when they have excessive absences.

I know that not all these suggestions are workable for all instructors, and I'm sure that you have many more suggestions that you could share with our colleagues. I suppose that's my point—we need to have an on-going dialogue about how to serve our students better and, therefore, retain them as part of our on-going commitment to the college. Thankfully, next Fall's Institutional Professional Development Day will be devoted solely to this topic.

An institutional researcher once told me that not attending to persistence and retention is like opening all the doors and windows of your house and turning the furnace up to high. You get my point — it's a terrible waste.

THE *AFA Dialogue* HAS BEEN CREATED TO AIR CONCERNS OF ALL FACULTY. THE *AFA Update* WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE FACTUAL VOICE OF THE AFA, WHILE THE *AFA Dialogue* WILL ENCOURAGE CONVERSATION AND PUBLISH OPINIONS ABOUT WORK PLACE ISSUES AND POLITICAL CONCERNS. WE INVITE ANY FACULTY MEMBER TO SUBMIT LETTERS, ARTICLES, OR OPINION PIECES. AFA RESERVES EDITORIAL PREROGATIVES.