



DIALOGUE



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EQUITABLE RESTORATION

by Phil Forester

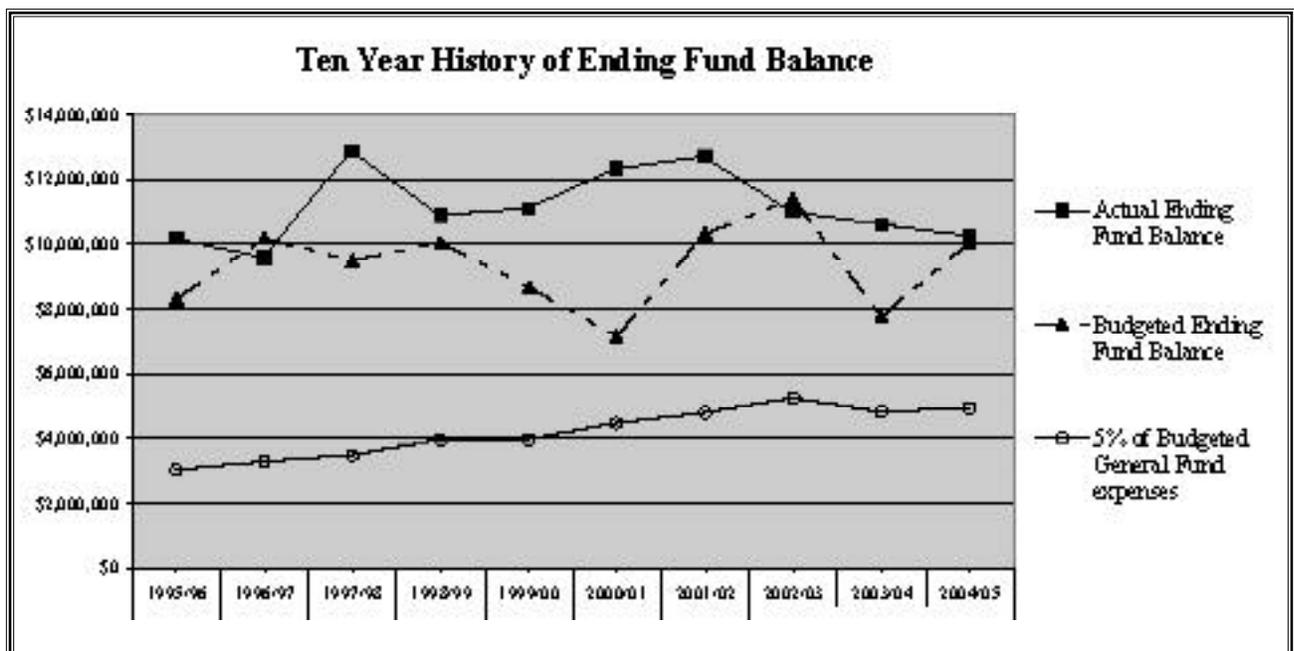
Regular Faculty Member in the English Department and AFA Conciliation/Grievance Officer

If you were to ask Dr. Agrella and the administrators, the Board of Trustees, or, for that matter, the general public in our region and beyond, what word best characterizes the level of education at SRJC, you might expect to hear the word, “excellence.” It’s on our website, on our publications, on the tongues of our managers. A follow-up question might be, “Do you believe we’re at least the tenth best community college in the state?” Now, you might expect to hear, “Much better than that!” And the faculty, chiefly responsible for that “better,” would modestly agree. We now ask the Board to acknowledge that excellence with equivalent compensation.

With declining enrollments here and fiscal uncertainties there — in Sacramento — our financial woes are far from over. Still, as Dr. Agrella has told us in recent memos, it’s not as bleak as it was in 2002-2003, the year, you’ll remember, that faculty consented to postpone sabbaticals and agreed to a one-year salary freeze. That was the year, too, that the District made its own contribution to solvency by using \$400,000 from the reserves. Although the reserves were again healthy at year’s end, the loss of income for faculty was not recovered and those missed sabbatical experiences were, well, missed.

Yes, the Board believes in maintaining substantial reserves,

which, despite the good and bad news from the state, stood at \$10,249,567 at the end of 2004-05. We all recognize the need for an umbrella for the proverbial rainy day, a cushion in case we bottom out, a nice chunk of mad money. The State itself mandates that each community college hold in reserve at least 5% of its annual budget. And SRJC? We have more than twice that, more than 10% of our budget in the reserves — but we’re still not at Rank 10, indeed, distressingly far from it. This is what we mean by equitable restoration. If the Board has seen fit to return to historic levels of reserves, it ought similarly to honor its contractual commitment to Rank 10. *(cont. on page 2)*





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But the long-term effect is even greater. That salary freeze meant that we fell below our historic Rank 10, and every year that we remain so, we lose income. A major goal for faculty must be the restoration of Rank 10, which serves as the salary marker for all faculty—adjunct, temporary, probationary, and regular.

Please remember this: AFA never gave up Rank 10. We agreed only to put it in abeyance for a year, to yield up the gains to which we would otherwise have been entitled. Rank 10 has been in place since the inception of the AFA-District contract in 1990, and replicates a similar placement measure used for many years before that. Faculty made a sacrifice one year, yes, but a sacrifice with time constraints, not one in perpetuity.

How much would it cost? A raise of 4.998% — about \$2,014,200 — would achieve that goal. In my opinion, an additional .5% could appropriately be added to that figure for a compensation schedule that fully takes the measure of the contributions of our faculty. Such an increase would enhance morale. Such an increase would show appreciation for the financial sacrifices we have made over the last few years. Such an increase would enhance our prospects for bringing in gifted and dedicated instructors to replace the many nearing retirement. I believe such an increase is fair, just, and equitable.

I propose that — in the spirit of partnership — the reserves should be viewed as a pool of shared resources. In the past, construction and maintenance

projects were funded in part from the reserves, but now bond funds are in place for those purposes. The reserves exist to meet other contingencies, and I submit that one such contingency is the return to Rank 10, thereby honoring the preeminent role of faculty at SRJC. It is faculty that daily come face to face with our students, train them, educate them, and, often enough, challenge, guide, and inspire them. The institution depends on the faculty to recruit and retain students and to retool the curriculum to match the changing demographics. We are the ones who know best how to achieve these desired results. We are not, however, responsible for the fiscal management of the District.

We're not all artists, but we can draw a bottom line.

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