



# DIALOGUE



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## MIXED MESSAGES

by Janet McCulloch

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For those of you who have not read President Agrella's e-mail of November 15 or Vice President (Student Services) Ricardo Navarrette's follow-up memo, it will be news to you that the District is facing a possible monetary crisis as a result of a recent internal audit of our enrollment procedures. Every year the District's auditors perform one or more of six possible tests to gauge our compliance with Ed Code and Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) regulations. This most recent audit revealed that we were not properly following "disenrollment procedures." The auditors looked at rosters which accounted for 97 students; out of those 97, they found that four students had been claimed for apportionment (which means to get paid for teaching them) but had not been attending the class from the beginning. Those students are considered "No Shows" and, therefore, claiming apportionment for them is illegal. The District chose an additional 20 rosters at random and found similar results. Navarrette has said that this had not been a problem in previous audits. Now the plan is to do a complete audit and then to negotiate with the CCCCCO as to any future effects on SRJC's budget. The District's auditors contacted the CCCCCO to clarify the difference between "No Shows" and "Inactive" students as the Ed Code identifies these two different categories, but does not define the "Inactive" status. The auditors were informed that

this was a statewide issue and they would be issuing a report to clarify the definitions.

When I heard about the results of enrollment audit and the potential cost to SRJC, I was at first skeptical about its validity, but, as I received more details of the audit, I began reflecting on the causes because I didn't really want to think about the more tangible, financial effects. But those effects will probably be very serious: we will have greater difficulty negotiating salary and benefits; we will not be able to hire new full-time faculty over and above the Full-time Obligation Number (FON); we will also continue to live with the drastically reduced budgets of the last three years. Keeping inaccurate track of student attendance, or not keeping track at all, is not just a problem with paperwork; it has the potential to create real economic hardship. Because of mixed messages from the administration, the faculty have not accurately reported No Show students before First Census. The importance of that date—the date we count the number of students and units for which we claim apportionment—has not been clearly communicated to the 1246 faculty who are tasked with filling out and returning the Temporary Rosters.

But what has been happening here? The WebLink and TLC registration systems clearly say that it is the student's responsibility to drop the course. The same is

true in the College Catalog. The cover sheet that accompanies the Temporary Roster says, "To drop students—indicate drop by placing date student stopped attending in drop column left of student's SSN. Sign and return top copy to records office. Keep second copy. Students cannot be added by using this roster." Nowhere is there any indication that ALL rosters should be returned by a date certain; furthermore, the Faculty & Staff Handbook says of "Attendance Accounting and Grading", "Faculty are responsible to submit accurate attendance and grading information for their classes," but says nothing about any responsibilities to drop No Show students before the First Census. In the Fall 2006 Schedule of Classes, the "College Calendar and Timeline" shows the First Census as September 11, but there is no explanatory note indicating the crucial significance of this date. In the same schedule on page 6, the message to the public is, "Filing an official drop is always the student's responsibility." Finally, the back of the Add/Drop card says, "It is the student's responsibility to drop classes, not the instructor's." Even though I have alluded to mixed messages, the preponderance of the messages to instructors is, "Students should drop themselves. There is no compelling reason to use the Temporary Roster."

The next question is, "Whose job is it to enforce the Education Code and the Chancellor's Office

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## MIXED MESSAGES *(cont. from page 1)*

Regulations?” Well, it’s all of our responsibilities once we know what they are and truly understand them, but the primary burden is placed upon the administration who then communicates those responsibilities to faculty and staff. The faculty is responsible for communicating clearly to our students; the administration is responsible for communicating clearly to faculty and staff the kind of information that has the weight of law. The importance of accurate attendance data at the First Census date is just that sort of information.

Today we are once again facing a financial crisis in a year when we should have expected large raises and restoration of some of the important support services we have missed so much over the last three years. **Certainly, we are all to blame for not dropping students before the First Census.** I believe that I may have been guilty of doing this as well. Some of us knew better, while others knew not at all that what they were doing could result in a financial disaster. It seems fair to expect the 304 Regular (full-time) faculty to know the rules. But is it realistic to expect the 942 Adjunct faculty to understand the importance of the Temporary Rosters when some of them are brand new to the institution? Communication with the Adjunct faculty is absolutely crucial every semester because they are temporary and variable in their assignments. Either way, there exists a culture of benign neglect for the rules, sloppy communication, and a very real lack of accountability. This culture

developed over a long period of time, and will take a long time to reverse. Faculty can be held accountable for what they do in the classroom, and taking roll and returning forms in a timely manner is certainly part of our job. But who is responsible for enforcing the laws and regulations? Not the faculty.

In my years on the AFA Executive Council and especially in the last three and a half years as President of AFA, I have been witness to many instances of lack of respect for policy, procedure, and the law. Administration made it abundantly clear that it was not important to turn grades in on time; instructors who did not have syllabi or who did not keep office hours were not sanctioned; overworked department chairs often felt unsupported in dealing with serious issues; curriculum (especially non-credit curriculum) was considered a kind of “administrivia” even though lack of compliance in that area has also resulted in lost revenue; departments who blatantly disadvantaged Adjunct faculty were allowed to do so with impunity. A lack of academic leadership and the lack of clear communication has had the effect of making it seem that rules are not important. Faculty want to do the correct and legal thing, but we need guidance.

It’s true that there is plenty of blame to go around, and in the flurry of e-mails last week I was proud to see colleagues creatively working to find solutions to the problem. I am also very cognizant of the huge burden placed on the Admissions & Records

staff and managers as they undertake this massive audit. I also understand the embarrassment this must be causing College administration, and what should be the extreme chagrin of the Board of Trustees who believe that they have been doing a great job of carrying out their fiduciary responsibilities. Historically, AFA has worked with the administration to correct bad practices. A good example is our work to make sure that grades are turned in within a deadline. Because the faculty, both Regular and Adjunct, are on the front line of implementing policies and procedures, we will work to solve this problem and future concerns before they become crises. We are already participating in a task force working with Admissions and Records to clarify the forms and the processes.

What can we ALL do now? Administration should clearly communicate laws and regulations. They should also design a clear and simple form for recording census enrollment data. Faculty should follow instructions given to them to complete the forms accurately, correctly, and on time. Administration should enforce deadlines and show zero tolerance for lack of compliance in this area. Faculty should support each other in doing our jobs as well as we can. There will soon be an entirely new process for accounting for attendance during the Census period, so please pay close attention as you receive communications about this issue. Your future actions will have a real monetary impact.

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