



UPDATE

March 4, 2008

• A Publication of the All Faculty Association at Santa Rosa Junior College •

Challenging Times

Warren Ruud, AFA President

Both the Governor's January Budget proposal and the February defeat of Proposition 92 have placed present levels of state funding for California Community Colleges in jeopardy. Community colleges such as SRJC, already enduring chronic underfunding, soon will be asked to maintain services to their students with even fewer resources.

With the daily discussion of oncoming draconian cuts to community college programs, increases in student fees, and the anticipated attack on faculty compensation and benefits statewide, it's not difficult to see we are in for challenging times. However, many of the current dire predictions may be premature. Only one fact is certain so far, and that fact is the uncertainty of future financial support for SRJC and all California community colleges.

During the previous statewide economic downturn in 2003, the college learned the hard way that across-the-board funding reductions at SRJC can be devastating to our students and to our instructional programs. Some programs are now just beginning to recover. The 2003 cuts hindered our ability to grow during the subsequent years of increased funding, making our present situation much more acute. Most faculty accepted severe reductions in instructional support with the promise that this support would be restored when times improved. For many, that restoration has never happened, and morale has suffered. Many faculty were asked to work well beyond their contractual obligations for the good of their programs with no plan of future relief. Some adjunct faculty lost rights to assignments that have not yet been recovered. The District's reaction to the last financial crisis inadvertently

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Negotiation Survey Results

Deborah Sweitzer, AFA Chief Negotiator

Thank you to 277 members who completed and returned the recent AFA Spring 2008 Member Negotiation Survey. Of the 277 total, 119 were full-timers and 158 were part-timers. AFA is in the process of studying the written responses, but is able to report on the tallied results.

Regular Faculty Question Responses:

The majority of regular faculty respondents, 60 or more, cited one area as their first or second choice as a potential area to demonstrate cost-sharing:

1. (#14) Reduce GASB funding, since it is not legally required.

When the third choice is added, a majority of respondents also identified:

2. (#9) Eliminate District-paid life insurance.
3. (#7) Permanently reduce the number of sabbaticals.

Among the top five areas trailing in support with less than the majority agreeing were:

4. (#8) Provide fully-paid dental benefits for faculty member, but require faculty member to pay for dependent dental insurance (as is currently done with vision insurance).
5. (#10) Provide fully-paid benefits for employee, but require faculty member to partially pay for dependent medical insurance.

Adjunct Faculty Question Responses:

The majority of adjunct faculty respondents, 79 or more, cited one area as their first or second choice as a potential area to demonstrate cost-sharing:

1. (#21) Eliminate from eligibility those faculty who have access to any form of

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Survey Results *(continued from page 1)*

medical insurance, or payment in lieu of medical insurance, through spouse, partner or another employer (except another community college).

When the third choice is added, a majority of respondents also identified:

2. (#22) Eliminate 50% payment for non-SRJC group plans and require faculty to choose from among SRJC group plans, and require adjunct faculty to choose from among the same plan choices as regular faculty.
3. (#23) Reduce GASB funding, since it is not legally required.

Among the top five areas, trailing in support with less than the majority agreeing were:

4. (#19) Extend eligibility period to qualify for benefits from one year to five semesters (the amount of time it takes to earn re-assignment priority).
5. (#17) Establish a maximum amount of money per participating adjunct faculty member (to cover employee and dependents) for medical benefits, the faculty member pays the difference, if any.

All Faculty Question Responses:

Among the 277 respondents, the majority of respondents, 139 or more, **STRONGLY** agreed with the following statements:

1. (#24) \$160,000 in funds from Adjunct Faculty District Activity Funds (AFDAF) should continue to be redirected to help maintain the adjunct medical benefits program.

When **AGREE** is added, a majority of respondents also identified:

2. (#30) Keep General Fund Reserves at a level equal to 7% (the State requires 5%, for 2007-08 SRJC budgeted 8.2%) to provide more funds for salaries, benefits and program support.
3. (#27) GASB funding should be discontinued in tough financial years so that money is available for salaries, benefits and program support.

Among the top five areas trailing in support with less than the majority agreeing were:

4. (#25) All faculty should contribute something towards the adjunct faculty medical plan.
5. (#29) GASB funding should continue at a lower rate per year.

As stated in the survey, any changes to the existing benefit provision would have to be negotiated. At this time we do not know IF additional benefit cost-saving and/or cost-sharing measures will be needed. AFA will keep you informed.

District-wide Budget Forum

Wednesday, March 12
3:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Pedroncelli Center

Thursday, March 20
3:15 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Newman Auditorium

The College community is invited to attend.

AFA Constitutional Revisions Approved

AFA members overwhelmingly approved proposed revisions to the AFA Constitution that will provide a mechanism, through the AFA Bylaws, to allow for an increase in the number of seats on the Executive Council. Out of 972 ballots distributed to adjunct and regular faculty members of AFA, 336 were returned; 300 voted in favor and 16 were opposed. The approved revisions will go into effect immediately.

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may have, in some way, imperiled the college's rightful claim of academic excellence.

As we begin to deal with this new financial crisis, AFA has opened a dialog with the District. Our specific purpose for this dialog is to protect the rights and well-earned gains of faculty that have been negotiated over prior years. AFA also has the more general interest of protecting our instructional programs and our students' right to a quality education. The District so far shares this interest, which is encouraging.

While it's far too early to make decisions that may drastically affect the quality of programs and services, there are actions we can take now to improve our situation further down the road.

First, we need to work now with the District to pursue all potential savings that do not affect negotiated employment conditions and compensation, and do not affect instructional and support programs. Cost-saving measures implemented by departments and programs, both substantive and symbolic, can have a huge effect on the college's overall financial health and morale as we wait for more information from Sacramento.

Second, we need to recognize now that we are all in this together. A reduction to any one program affects all of us. We, as faculty, should advocate for each other's programs as the District deals with the college's financial problems. Also, each of us can make a difference by sharing our resources with other programs so that every dollar has its maximum impact on teaching and supporting our students. The District and the President, in particular, have been very open to receiving input from the faculty about financial efficiency, and we hope that input will be put to good use.

Third, we all—students, faculty, staff, and board—need to take an active role now in advocating that community colleges be supported by Sacramento. The case needs to be made to the Governor and our state legislators that cutting community college funding is exactly the wrong

thing to do in tough financial times. The best way to reverse the present financial difficulties in California is to build a high-skilled, high-wage workforce that pays taxes. No one builds that workforce as well, or as cheaply, as we do. Even though Proposition 92 fell short at the polls last month, the campaign did make our funding issue much more visible statewide, and now is the time to press our elected officials to do the right thing. Visit the AFA Web page (<http://www.santarosa.edu/afa>) to find out how you can contact your legislators.

Last year, even with the dark clouds of the present financial difficulties looming on the horizon, AFA negotiated an agreement that resulted in a number of achievements for faculty. Here, in part, is what we achieved with the District in 2007:

- An overall two-year faculty salary adjustment of 8.27%, with an even larger overall adjustment for adjuncts.
- A restructuring of the salary schedule that resulted in double-digit increases for those at the bottom of the salary schedule, and up to an additional one thousand dollars per month in STRS benefits for those retiring in the near future.
- Initial advanced salary placement for adjunct faculty and improvement of existing initial salary placement for newly-hired, tenure-track faculty.
- The continuation of fully-paid medical premiums by the District for regular faculty, the continuation of the adjunct medical benefits program, an overall reduction in prescription co-pay cost-sharing, and the creation of a more stable environment for future medical benefit costs through a joint powers agreement.

AFA and the District had their moments of stridency during negotiations last year; yet, at the end of the day, we agreed on the importance of

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AFA Council Election Results

AFA is pleased to announce the results of the recent Executive Council representative elections for 2008-10. Ballots were due back at 5:00 p.m. on February 26 and were counted the following morning.

Six regular faculty members ran for the five open regular faculty seats on the Council. Paula Burks, René Lo Pilato, Dan Munton and Andrea Proehl were re-elected, and Joyce Johnson was newly elected, to serve as regular Council representatives for a two-year term, beginning Fall 2008. AFA would like to thank Mike Meese for throwing his hat into the ring in the closely contested election.

Out of the 273 regular faculty ballots that were delivered to campus mailboxes of current AFA dues-paying regular faculty members, 144 ballots were returned by the deadline (a 52% return rate).

AFA would also like to thank Alix Alixopulos, Social Sciences, Lara Branen-Ahumada, P.E. Dance & Athletics and Theatre Arts, and Michael Kaufmann, ESL — the three adjunct faculty members who ran unopposed for the three open adjunct faculty seats on the Council. All three were re-elected to serve as adjunct Council representatives for a two-year term, beginning Fall 2008. Out of the 700 adjunct faculty ballots that were mailed to current AFA dues-paying adjunct faculty members, 192 ballots were returned in time to be counted (a 27% return rate).

AFA welcomes competition and differing points of view because effective negotiations requires effective and representative group decision-making — the more diverse the perspectives, the better the outcome. We encourage all interested faculty members of AFA to run for a seat on the Council during the next election for Council representatives in early Spring 2009.

The election of AFA officers and the appointment of other positions for 2008-09 will occur at the March meeting of the Executive Council.

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investing in our faculty. In particular, both parties recognized that this continuing investment will be essential to attracting dedicated quality teachers to fill open positions as SRJC enters a period of an unprecedented number of faculty retirements.

My first year as a teacher at SRJC was 1978, the year of Proposition 13. Back then, we heard the same pessimistic economic forecasts as we are hearing now. Eventually, following a few rough years after that initiative passed, we returned to a more acceptable level of funding. That same cycle has been repeated in the other three financial emergencies since then. My personal opinion is that we are in for yet another challenging period, but eventually we will again return to better times. How challenging that period is or how long we take to recover depends not only on Sacramento, but also on the measured and responsible actions we all take, starting right now.



Finally, I want to recognize two of our colleagues for their contributions to our association.

Janet McCulloch, my predecessor as AFA President, served for more than four years in that position. Janet's leadership and hard work served not only the faculty, but the entire college community.

Also, after fourteen years as AFA Chief Negotiator, Deborah Sweitzer is stepping down from that position and from the negotiating team at the end of the year. Her ingenuity, knowledge, and industriousness have been the principal reasons for many of the hard-fought AFA victories over the last two decades.

Thank you, Deborah and Janet.

Of Interest to Adjuncts

Log onto the new
Adjunct Faculty Web page at:
<http://www.santarosa.edu/afa/adjuncts.shtml>