

Spring 2009 • An Open Forum for Faculty at Santa Rosa Junior College • May 11, 2009

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 PERSONAL OPINIONS ABOUT WORK PLACE ISSUES AND POLITICAL CONCERNS. WE INVITE ANY FACULTY MEMBER TO SUBMIT LETTERS, ARTICLES, OR OPINION PIECES. AFA RESERVES EDITORIAL PREROGATIVES.

SO, WHERE'S THE TENTATIVE AGREEMENT?

Janet McCulloch

For the eleven years off and on that I have served AFA either as a Councilor or an Officer, there have only been two years when AFA and the District have not reached Tentative Agreement and ratified the Contract prior to the end of the Spring semester. Those two times were in Spring 2003 and Spring 2006, and not coincidentally the lack of agreement revolved around salary and benefits during a State Budget crisis. Sadly, we are once again in the same position, and even more disappointing is the fact that Interest-Based Bargaining or IBB (see box on page 3), in which AFA strongly believes, only works if both parties participate fully and refrain from taking intractable positions. It is now my impression that the District Team may *want* to engage in IBB, but the Board of Trustees may not understand the difference between IBB and positional bargaining.

(see "Where's the T.A.?" on page 3)

RANK 10 AND THE BUDGET CRISIS

Warren Ruud

Part of my assignment as a member of the AFA Negotiating Team is to conduct a study of faculty salaries at all seventy-two California community college districts. Each year, this study provides the benchmarks used in negotiating SRJC faculty salary adjustments to get to our "Rank 10" — a salary schedule that, loosely speaking, places us tenth in the State in terms of salary compensation.¹

When the SRJC Board of Trustees initiated the Rank 10 salary concept over twenty years ago, they did it to recognize the "Legacy of Excellence" represented by both regular and adjunct faculty. Each year, good times or bad, the District has made an effort to provide the funding for achieving this goal.

¹ The 2009 study is available at www.santarosa.edu/afa/statewide_study.shtml, and the process on how the study is used to create our salary schedule is described in AFA Contract Article 26 (www.santarosa.edu/afa/Contract/Articles/art26.pdf).

(see "Rank 10" on page 2)

READERS WRITE BACK

IN RESPONSE TO
"ANCHORS 'AWAY' . . . OR
GIVE THEM PAY" AND
"BUILDING ON A LEGACY
OF EXHAUSTION"

With the permission of the authors, we are printing some of the many emails received in response to the articles written by Cheryl Dunn and Renée Lo Pilato that were published in the April 9, 2009 edition of the "AFA Dialogue."

Thanks to Renée Lo Pilato and Cheryl Dunn for their articles in *Dialogue*. The college has long relied on the willingness of faculty to work themselves to exhaustion, and it's important to shed light on such expectations as we live with an ever-growing budget crisis. At some point, the college is going to need a new vision of how to proceed, one that goes beyond asking fewer and fewer faculty and staff to do more and more work.

Naneene Van Gelder, English Dept.

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Cheryl,

I saw your "Anchors Away" essay and wanted to tell you that I thought it was great. It even clarified a few things for me — and I'm an anchor! Thanks for being a clear and reasonable voice on the topic.

Name withheld by request

(see "Readers Write Back" on page 2)

RANK 10 *(cont. from page 1)*

Year-to-year funding for California community colleges has not been stable since Proposition 13 moved the major funding obligation from local property taxes to the State legislature. When State revenues decrease, Education — now the largest expense of the State — takes the biggest hit. When those dollars are allocated, community colleges compete with K-12, UC, and CSU, and each year, community colleges are the last to be served at that table.²

And that's not the end of the story; once the community college system is funded, then individual colleges compete for that pot of funds. Imagine a poker game in which all seventy-two districts sit down with the State as the dealer. Some districts get good hands, others bad. Some districts are more skilled with the rules and odds of the game, others pay for their ignorance. (What makes playing in this game particularly tricky is that the State often changes rules in the middle of a hand, or it pulls money out of the pot.) In the end, each district is still grossly underfunded no matter how well it plays the game.

Despite all this uncertainty, we have been relatively successful in achieving Rank 10 in the past years. The advantage of having a system tied to benchmarks relative to other districts is that it should account for the year-to-year vagaries of funding to the system. Ideally, Rank 10 should be no more difficult to achieve in lean years than it is in good years.

For 2009-10, achieving Rank 10 will cost the District \$1.1 million, an increase of 2.4% in total salary. Despite the current budgetary crisis, many districts have made salary adjustments over the last eight months. The boards of these districts have recognized the importance of their faculty to the long-term welfare of their colleges. Other districts have chosen in these challenging times to commit resources to other needs they perceive more pressing.

Typically, the faculty has ratified a Tentative Agreement before graduation.³ This year, AFA has no plans to present a Tentative Agreement at the faculty General Meeting this Wednesday. The Negotiating Team plans to meet with the District through the summer. Although these negotiations are confidential, we will keep the faculty apprised as much as possible about any developments as they unfold.

Warren Ruud is a regular faculty member in the Mathematics Department, and currently is serving as AFA President and member of the AFA Negotiating Team.

² In 2008, Proposition 92, which would have stabilized the funding process for community colleges, was rejected by State voters. The major opponents were the bargaining units of K-12, UC, and CSU

³ The last exception was in 2006, when the Tentative Agreement was not ratified until the following August. Faculty noted the occasion by wearing yellow "People, not Buildings" buttons to graduation.

READERS WRITE BACK

(cont. from page 1)

Such a seduction to "slide towards becoming managers" and then one wakes up and realizes in truth they are already "managing," just not getting paid for the work. Applause for your courageous words, Reneé, reminding faculty of exactly what we do not have and what we continue to do without financial compensation, and often without a simple "thank you." What an ingenious ideal to have the District pay faculty for the actual hours we work, to recognize all the "volunteer" hours that are contributed in the name of "commitment," and to have our contract reflect actual workload. Difficult times require difficult decisions, frenetic exhaustion or self-preservation?

Peace.

Brenda Flyswithhawks,
Behavioral Sciences Department



Cheryl and Reneé -

Thanks for writing a frank discussion about the work load issues at the college. I've received reassigned time for at least four coordinator positions, served as department chair for three years, and am now in Petaluma, performing as liaison for our Writing Center. You both captured real issues facing faculty and the administration. I appreciate your willingness to put this in writing.

Barbara McClure, English Dept.



Reneé,

Your article "Building on a Legacy of Exhaustion" was outstanding!!! It transcends all faculty, whether full time or adjunct. Thank you for speaking so clearly for all of us. I am an adjunct instructor with additional administrative duties (requiring more hours than paid, and less than instructor's salary.)

Name withheld by request

(cont. on page 4)

SOME KINDS OF PROGRESS

The AFA Negotiating Team has met with the District eighteen times since the end of the Sunshine Period on October 17, 2008. We have completed work on several non-monetary items including many items left over from the 2007-08 negotiations cycle. For more details about that work, see the *AFA Update* (May 7, 2009) or go to www.santarosa.edu/afa for the actual signed Memoranda of Understanding documents. Much of this work is tedious and time-consuming and definitely necessary because faculty and administration benefit from having clear and well-defined contract articles to guide us in the areas of salary, benefits, and working conditions. Most of us, however, work to be paid, and we prefer jobs with adequate benefits. Educators especially expect that in return for less salary than they could make in the private sector they will receive the job security, benefits, and pensions that their private sector counterparts may not.

AND THEN AGAIN . . .

But what the faculty really wants to know is whether or not AFA has come to some agreement with the District regarding salary and benefits. Since January we have devoted five discussions with the District about these two important monetary items. Certainly Article 26: Salary Schedule Development mandates an adjustment to Rank 10 at a cost of \$1.1 million. Medical benefit premium increases for regular faculty will be announced at the Fringe Benefits Committee meeting on May 22, 2009, just one day before Commencement, but the rumors are actually quite positive. State trends point to an increase of approximately 5 - 7%, which is approximately \$160,000. The District's self-insured dental program typically increases 5% annually, or approximately \$18,000. So what's the problem?

BUDGET UNCERTAINTY

Without going into all the arcane and frustrating mechanisms by which the California Community College System is funded, I can easily assert that SRJC is in difficult circumstances.

- Yes, the State Budget crisis is real;
- Yes, the District's Reserves are depleted;
- Yes, AFA is trying to work with the District to creatively craft ways to defray costs and increase revenue.
- No, we don't seem to be making much progress.

What we are not willing to do is to simply acquiesce to the District's desire to balance the budget on the backs of faculty who are already showing the signs of exhaustion after years of cutbacks to programs and services. This wear and tear on the collective faculty psyche is something that I don't think the Board genuinely sees or appreciates.

AFA WANTS YOUR FEEDBACK!

SUBMIT COMMENTS,
LETTERS, AND/OR
ARTICLES VIA EMAIL
TO AFA@SANTAROSA.EDU
OR VIA FAX TO
(707) 524-1762

WHAT IS IBB?

IBB is a negotiating strategy that aims to create a win-win environment. Both parties develop interest statements that lead to a greater understanding of the desires, concerns, and fears that are important to each side. This form of bargaining usually produces more satisfactory outcomes than does positional bargaining which is based on fixed, opposing viewpoints or positions. IBB in the best sense tends to result in more creative, integrative solutions that give both parties much of what they both want to achieve.

COME TO THE MAY 13TH GENERAL MEETING

Please join the AFA Executive Council on Wednesday, May 13, 2009, at 3:30 p.m. in Doyle Library, Room #4245, for our General Meeting so that you can add your Member Concerns to the long list we keep trying to bring to the negotiating table in the truest spirit of Interest-Based Bargaining.

I look forward to seeing you there in large numbers.

Janet McCulloch is a regular faculty member in the English Department. She served as AFA President for four-and-a-half years, and is currently serving as AFA Chief Negotiator.



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READERS WRITE BACK *(cont. from page 2)*

Dear René,

Great article in the AFA Dialogue newsletter! I teach 5 transfer level courses and currently have about 140 active students on my roster; a large part of my exhaustion is related to grading essays, essay exams and term papers. In the Child Development Department, in addition to teaching our specific course content, we are now prioritizing basic skills, especially writing. We have had many, many discussions about the amount of writing students should do, the level at which they should be proficient, marking grammar and punctuation errors on papers, and whether to allow a student to “redo or pre-do” papers. We believe that if students are really going to be considered functional at the college level, their writing skills must reflect that. We are all well aware of the statistic that 70% of our students come to us unprepared to perform at the college level, but what this really means is that we are spending much more time, energy and effort in teaching the skills that students lack. I have taught these classes for 30 years; the students we have now have many more needs than the students we used to teach. I believe we need to address this in our job descriptions and our load requirements. At some colleges more load is assigned for classes that carry a lot of writing and therefore require more grading hours; also required load can be spread through the summer or credit toward load is given by teaching summer classes. Are any of these ideas being considered in negotiations?

I am concerned that if we do not address this we will see it become increasingly difficult for instructors to uphold standards, to assign the extensive or frequent writing assignments necessary to develop competency, and to give needed written feedback to students, all because it has become so labor intensive to do so. As you wrote, “Working in a state of frenetic exhaustion does not allow . . . the time to collaborate, reflect and plan effectively;” nor does it allow us to be the effective teachers our students need us to be.

Again, thank you for writing this great article — so validating!

Jeanie Harmon,
Child Development Department

I’d like to express my thanks to René LoPilato for her thoughtful and timely article in the *AFA Dialogue*, “Faculty Work Outcomes: Building on a Legacy of Exhaustion.” I found her analysis to be principled and clear. We should, all of us, be mindful of the degree to which our (generally admirable) spirit of volunteerism interferes with our central, contractual obligations as educators. As faculty, we are in the best position to know where the reasonable balance lies and so we ought to regulate our acceptance of additional responsibilities carefully. When such pressures, whether external or self-imposed, threaten to exhaust our capacity to focus on our primary function as educators, we really aren’t doing anyone (our students, the District, fellow Faculty, nor ourselves) any favors. But such a change will require mutual support and empathy. So, thanks again René, for your (in my view, long overdue) call to work together on reshaping this “culture of acceptance.”

Sean Martin,
Philosophy Department