

AFA

DIALOGUE

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IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STUDENTS

by John Daly, Regular Faculty in the Counseling Department

On the wall of the Bertolini Building is the statement, "It's all about the students." In economic terms students are our customers and the entire college is here to serve them.

As faculty, we are the experts in terms of the development, maintenance, and implementation of the curriculum within our disciplines. As the experts, we need to decide on the courses we offer students and we must be sensitive to serving the needs of students and our programs. We are fortunate that we have faculty department chairs. However, we need to make sure that we, the faculty, make decisions regarding our courses and their offerings, rather than an area dean who may have little or no background in our fields of expertise.

The students seek faculty for their expertise. We are the ones taking more students in our classes with little or no support (readers, T.A.'s) and buying equipment and resources out of our own pockets to maintain the highest quality of instruction. If an administrator

needs an assistant or a temporary employee, it happens. However, faculty members are asked to do more with less.

**WE HAVE TO KEEP
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— TRANSFER,
CERTIFICATE, AA
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We have to keep in mind that we serve all students — transfer, certificate, AA degree, job skill improvement, Basic Skills, and ESL. We provide the access to the work force. It's not "all about transfer" when only approximately 18% of our students transfer to 4-year colleges. A case in point occurred on Friday, December 18, 2009, when management held an emergency meeting to reduce 8.5 FTE (about 75

classes) because an area dean failed to comply with requested schedule reductions. The entire instructional community paid for this oversight in further course reductions with the majority of the course reductions occurring in Basic Skills and ESL. A biased or prejudiced decision? Why is this area administrator so bullet proof? What about the 12 students in the Excel class who needed the course for job security or new employment or the ESL students who needed to master English to enroll in the general curriculum or the Basic Skills students who needed to bring their abilities up to college level to take classes? The sad thing is that this management decision was made with little or no faculty input and that, initially, management's decision was not to advise the enrolled students of these cancellations.

Another example of the failure to take students into account occurred when a department chair was asked by an area dean to create an additional class at the beginning of the

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IT'S THE STUDENTS *(cont. from page 1)*

Spring 2010 semester. The chair found a qualified instructor (very difficult to do), gathered students from the department wait lists, got these students to add, and created the class. Many students rearranged their class schedules to take the course. The chair received an email from the dean's administrative assistant with instructions to cancel the class because an error was made in the growth report. No consideration was given to the students or the newly hired faculty member.

I understand the importance of targeting the 20,436 FTES figure. What I do not understand is why the District does not have an accurate system of monitoring this count. If, as some have suggested, it takes three different databases to determine the facts, it must be a top priority to have one system that can accurately predict the number of classes needed to meet the target figure and avoid the disaster described above. I am very disappointed in the current system and the hardship it creates for students and faculty.

Other areas of concern are student access, assessment, and retention at SRJC. Recently, the Counseling Department lost two faculty members. One died and the other one took a management position in Petaluma. Neither position was backfilled. The case of the Petaluma interim administrator highlights the fact that if management wants something they get it even if it means an increased cost to the District. The Counseling Department is the recruiting agency for the District in the community and high schools and, with fewer counselors, the void creates less potential for student contact. Counselors also keep students apprised of the changing certificate, AA, and transfer major requirements. With the state budget cutbacks, the UC's have gone to a supplemental computerized application screen for Fall 2010. The system is not student friendly and an error or misunderstanding on the student's part cancels admission. The CSU's will apply the same supplemental

computer application for Fall 2011. San Diego State and Cal Poly (two of SRJC's more popular transfer institutions) already apply the supplemental application. Helping students with this new application takes more counselors' time with far less staff.

The mantra now is "re-engineering." As faculty we must take charge. We need to pressure the area deans through our department chairs. We need to become involved in the Senate, the academic guide to curriculum, programs, and standards. We need to become involved with AFA to protect our contractual rights in salary, benefits, class size, and instructional assignments. We need to be active on key committees — EPCC, Budget Advisory, College Council, IPC, PFF, to name a few — and make sure our voices are heard.

If we remain passive we deserve the District's decisions. The District needs to remember that it's students first, then faculty, and then the rest of the District.



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