



UPDATE

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AFA — Twenty Years of Independence

In early 1990, a rookie quarterback named Brett Favre played in his first professional football game, a skinny 29-year-old law student named Barack Obama had just been selected as editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, and Santa Rosa Junior College faculty ratified its first collective bargaining contract. This contract marked the beginning of the All Faculty Association, an independent union representing the faculty of SRJC.

Fast-forward twenty years to 2010: Brett Favre has started 293 consecutive games and won three MVP trophies; Barack Obama is the forty-fourth President of the United States; and AFA is still on the job, working harder than ever as an independent union to protect salaries, benefits, and working conditions of both adjunct and regular faculty at SRJC.

AFA's twentieth anniversary provides an opportunity to review why we have chosen to remain independent for over two decades. What follows is an FAQ on the significance of being an independent faculty association.

What does it mean to be an independent community college faculty union?

AFA's independent status means that it answers to no parent organization or outside interest. The leaders of AFA are SRJC faculty, both adjunct and regular, who are democratically elected by the membership. Being independent also means that our AFA dues stay right here at SRJC and serve our faculty's interests.

Unions in other districts affiliate with statewide organizations, which impose leadership on their faculties and divert their dues and fees outside their districts or the state. These districts cede much of their autonomy to these statewide organizations.

Being independent means that the union's resources stay local. AFA is operated by faculty of the college, not an executive director paid by

an outside organization. Its office is right on the Santa Rosa campus, not in some distant location. The conciliation/grievance officer, who handles the day-to-day contract-related concerns of the faculty, is a colleague who understands the local issues, not some distant entity reached via a computerized 1-800 phone tree.

Why did SRJC faculty decide to form an independent union?

The SRJC faculty has always had a history of self-determination and independence. Even before the State of California recognized the right of community college faculty to organize in the 1970s, SRJC faculty members were negotiating their salaries, benefits, and working conditions directly with the Board of Trustees. When the faculty decided to form a collective bargaining unit, independence was the overwhelming choice of the faculty at that time.

What about other faculty unions that are not independent?

These "non-independent" faculty unions each affiliate with either the California Teachers Association (CTA) or the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), the two statewide organizations, which are both headquartered in Sacramento. Their parent organizations, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), respectively, are based in Washington, DC. Many of these affiliated faculty unions simply find it easier to outsource most of their organizational tasks, negotiation duties, and member services to one of these two organizations. Napa Valley College (CTA) and Marin College (CFT) are local examples of districts with affiliated faculty unions.

Back to [Click to AFA](#)

(cont. on page 2)

The primary concern of CFT and CTA is representing K-12 teachers, but they also have an interest in representing community college units for their income potential from dues and fees. The interests of community college faculty and the interests of the K-12 teachers often differ, as we all saw in the Proposition 92 campaign in 2008. Even though the passage of Prop 92 would have provided a sustainable funding mechanism and protection for categorical programs at California community colleges, it was defeated at the polls. Most political observers give the credit for that defeat to CTA, which, fearing that Prop 92 could possibly reduce K-12 funding, poured \$6 million into the *No on 92* campaign. Ironically, a large portion of that \$6 million dollars came from dues of community college faculty.

To survive and grow, these Sacramento organizations acquire “market-share” — that is, they add more school districts to their list of affiliations. With each new district, they are able to siphon off more local dues and fair-share service fees to their Sacramento and Washington, DC offices. Dues for community college unions affiliated with these organizations are roughly three times AFA’s dues, and that difference costs their members more than \$800 per year (average per FTEF).

How do these Sacramento-based organizations add more districts?

Virtually all school districts already have collective bargaining unions, so the only option open to these organizations is to “decertify” existing unions and take over their management. These organizations employ professionals and retain lawyers specifically to target districts and promote these takeovers. Decertification attempts are not uncommon; in fact, AFA fought off an attempt by CFT just two years after its founding.

Presently, both of these Sacramento organizations are focused on the nineteen independent community college unions in the state. Santa Barbara City College and Grossmont College near San Diego have been the most recent targets. Santa Barbara faculty fought off the takeover, but Grossmont was absorbed by CFT into the bargaining unit of a neighboring district.

Recently, Pasadena City College settled a lawsuit brought by CTA over the faculty’s recent decision to return to independence.

How do salaries compare for independent unions and affiliated unions?

Generally, independent unions fare much better salary-wise for both adjunct and regular faculty. For example, at Napa Valley College (CTA), contract faculty salaries are more than 14% lower than at SRJC, and hourly salaries are less than half of SRJC’s at the top end of the schedule. At Marin (CFT), contract faculty salaries are almost 8% less than at SRJC, even though Marin, as a *Basic Aid District*, receives significantly more funding per FTES than SRJC does. When one factors into these comparisons the higher dues that CTA and CFT charge their members, the differences become even more pronounced.

How do independent unions advocate for their faculty without a big organization in Sacramento?

AFA teams up with the other independent unions in a confederation called the California Community College Independents (CCCI). (For more information about CCCI, read “Independent Unions Cooperate” by CCCI President Rich Hansen, at: <http://www.santarosa.edu/afa/clicktoAFA/100923-CCCI.pdf> .) CCCI provides a unified voice for these independents in Sacramento. It’s important to note that CCCI carries the same weight as the larger organizations when consulting with the California Community College Board of Governors and the Chancellor’s Office.

AFA also works closely with the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC), which advocates in Sacramento for faculty rights. FACCC is the only statewide organization that speaks exclusively for community college faculty in the political arena.

In these challenging times, it’s never been more important for AFA to remain independent. We need to maintain our own voice. AFA’s twentieth birthday may be just the time to reassert our commitment to being a locally run independent union committed to serving all faculty at SRJC.

by Warren Ruud, AFA President