

AFA Report to Board of Trustees, 3/9/21, Sean Martin, AFA President

President Battenfeld, Trustees, President Chong, Colleagues and other members of the community,

To begin, I'm happy to report we're making substantial progress negotiating necessary provisions to address myriad COVID-related working conditions. We've recently finalized a side-letter and terms for compensation for the current, Spring '21 semester, and have completed much of the preparations for Summer and Fall. For the latter, AFA is conducting a series of listening sessions for faculty and is meeting with specific groups in our diverse unit. In addition, we've recently completed negotiating terms for the Professional Development Coordinators and have begun work on several other topics. As in previous AFA reports, I wish to thank our partners on the District Negotiations Team for their collaboration and contribution to this work.

AFA remains engaged in the effort to improve diversity, equity and inclusion at our college. We are actively seeking and continue to benefit from the input we receive, especially from our BIPOC colleagues. We are eager to negotiate terms for implementation of professional development proposals being advanced by the Academic Senate, we look forward to negotiating any special assignments related to equity such as the creation of a Black Student Success Center, the new Ethnic Studies Department, as well as other new and ongoing programs.

Now, I'd like to turn to the question of restoring in-person instruction and services in the district:

Through a wide array of outreach efforts, including the aforementioned listening sessions, AFA is gathering information it needs to address the diverse interests of the faculty.

Some faculty have found value in what they've learned from moving their work to remote modalities, and AFA supports those faculty who wish to continue those practices, even after the pandemic recedes. Some of this will require attention to the contractual provisions that pertain to such work.

However, most of the faculty input we've received emphasizes a severe loss of instructional quality and overwhelming workload that online instruction entails. Some of our members find their current duties unrecognizable and unrelated to their disciplinary qualifications. This is especially true in areas such as athletics and the performing arts. But even those in fields that are more accommodating to remote instruction are expressing deep dissatisfaction with current conditions, especially in disciplines where dialogue is an essential feature of learning. Most faculty report their students having expressed similar concerns.

To this end, AFA urges the district to make every effort to restore in-person instruction to the extent possible while preserving public safety. We recognize that our facilities and our resources are not unlimited, but we wish to emphasize that this is a matter of urgency for the health of our faculty and other district employees as well as for our mission of providing quality instruction. We agree with our district colleagues that restoring in-person activities must proceed in stages, but we think the principle moving ahead should be to favor restoration of in-person activities while identifying reasonable exceptions as needed.

Of course, AFA is committed to protecting those (faculty and others) who believe it is unsafe for them to return to in-person instruction and services. We believe the effort can be accomplished in a manner that respects this legitimate concern.

AFA urges the district to direct state and federal funds targeted at COVID-related costs to alleviate workload, provide continued leave options, and/or compensate increased workload for faculty and other district employees. We should explore all creative options short of triggering an audit.

Finally, though AFA agrees with, and appreciates, the praise faculty have received for the heavy lift of continuing quality instructional and allied services during the COVID pandemic, we wish to emphasize that the working conditions faculty have been laboring under are unsustainable. I'm sure the faculty are not alone in this assessment, but it is hard to overstate the toll that the inordinate stress and workload of the previous year has taken on all of us. A reckoning with our limits is in order and we must establish priorities. We need to not only honor those who are unable to continue business as usual, but actively encourage people to focus only on what is essential while setting aside the rest. Each person needs to assess their own situation, but this must be a collective effort supported by district leaders in that much of our work is reciprocal and interwoven with others. That is, people need to recognize that the work they wish to continue has implications for the work of others. Simply put, we need cut ourselves and each other a healthy dose of slack.