

Association Notes



April / May 2009

Winding down, gearing up

The school year is quickly coming to a close, which gives us time to reflect upon what we have accomplished as an Association this year. At the same time, we are preparing to meet the challenges that face us in the future.

President's Message - Jennifer Fernandez

I can't believe that it has been a year since I took the helm as President of the RHC Faculty Association. I want to thank the executive committee members as well as the entire Association for all your support during the 2008-2009 academic year. Thank you for voting for me and having the confidence that I would serve you well. Under my leadership, the Association has made some positive strides in many areas. I truly believe that we have made progress on various issues, from online instruction to bringing parity with our health care coverage. We have also resolved a variety of concerns for our faculty this year. I am proud to have been part of the leadership that removed the two-tier health care system, increased a few benefits for faculty and at the same time, developed a workable policy regarding online instruction. During these tough economic times, I am equally proud that no layoffs were necessary and no class sections were cut.

I have also witnessed an increase in faculty involvement in Association-related activities. Your faculty has served you both on and off campus, at local and state-wide conferences. Rio Hondo continues to participate and express your concerns at all levels. The RHC Faculty Association

endeavors also focused on membership recruitment and development. We received an



award from CCA for this accomplishment. Additionally, our RHCFA team spirit has been revitalized by embracing a more positive and proactive role. We started off with a summer retreat in order to identify Association goals. We began the Fall semester with a few social events, hosting

membership forums, an evening at the theatre, purchasing and wearing faculty Association shirts, and awarding prizes at our monthly meetings. We have continued to be involved in campus governance as much as possible, and have made every effort to support our faculty with their concerns as well as their employment rights as identified in the contract.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve the Faculty Association as your president.

Local Happenings

Electronic Voting Deemed a Success



Late April saw the implementation of electronic voting for Association officers, something that we will be using on a trial basis for the next few years. Besides being eco-friendly, electronic voting cuts down on the significant workload to write and print ballots, stuff envelopes and put them in mailboxes, and count ballots. Using this method also allows us to drop the Elections Chair stipend, offsetting the costs of the voting. Feedback from members who used the system was nothing but positive.

There is no Team in I(EC)

Led by the Institutional Effectiveness Committee (the “IEC”), the District hosted the second annual Leadership Retreat in mid-April as part of the elaborate planning required for accreditation. Over 60 faculty, staff, and administrators spent about six hours reviewing college goals, analyzing what has been accomplished over the last year, and making recommendations for the future. Teams scrutinized each of the eight college-wide goals, developing key performance indicators to measure success.

The process also included the assessment of major expenditures for divisions and technology upgrades, as well as proposed hiring rankings for both classified staff and faculty. In essence, this was the culmination of about 150 separate plans submitted by all constituency groups on campus....that is, except for one. The attendees noted that new administrative positions were not ranked as other resource allocations were. We have since learned that the IEC will revise the process so that these positions will be treated the same as new faculty and staff positions and facility and technology requests. We all appreciate the need for a planning process, and are happy that this change will make the process as transparent as possible so that the entire community understands the final budget decisions.

AIG at Rio Hondo



Speaking of the administration being above certain requirements, we have recently learned that AIG is present on campus. No, this is not a reference to the insurance giant (although we could use some of their bailout money). “AIG” refers to “Administrative Income Gains”. Rio Hondo remains among the elite in average administrator salary in the state. For the last four academic years, Rio Hondo has ranked in the top 8 California colleges - we are currently 7th - for average administrator pay. Over the same period, average faculty salary at Rio Hondo has steadily declined from 14th in 2005-2006 to 30th for this current year.

2009-2010 RHCFA Officers

President

- Adam Wetsman

Vice-President

- Colin Young

Secretary

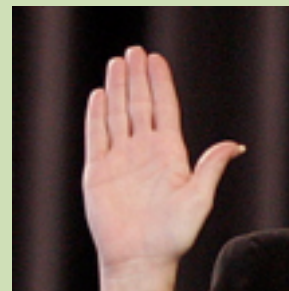
- Jay Ribaya

Treasurer

- Angela Rhodes

At-Large Members

- Martha Carreon
- Jodi Senk

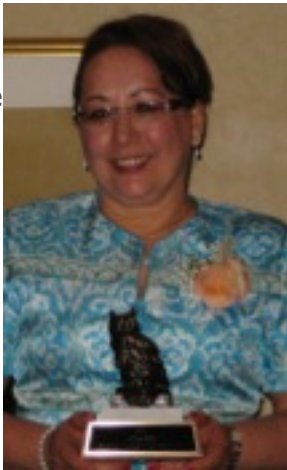


Other News

CCA Conference

About ten faculty members attended the Community College Association Spring Conference held in San Diego this year. As always, the many workshops provided valuable information on many topics confronting our union, such as accreditation, grievances, representing members, the possible merger with the other large college faculty union in California, and others. Of particular note, Lynette Nyaggah from Communications ran unopposed for the vice-president of CCA.

Perhaps the most interesting bit of information provided relates to accreditation as will be described on the next page.



W.H.O. is Martha Carreon

Martha Carreon from the Humanities department was a recipient of the 2009 Community College Association's W.H.O award (We Honor Ourselves).

Flex Day(s) Reminder

As part of contract, we are now required to have one and a half days of Flex in the fall. The full day will be on Thursday, August 20th. Each division will have a three-hour meeting on Friday, August 21st at times designated by each division. There will only be a single Flex day in the spring.

Evaluate-Shun

Apparently the District is having trouble training some of their administrators on how to properly evaluate non-tenured faculty. Last summer, the administration was authorized by the Board to hire a consultant for the process. Despite this resource, some faculty members are still not being evaluated as specified in the contract. We will be working with the administration to reduce any glitches in the system.



Board Elections

Three positions for the Board of Trustees are open for election this fall, André Quintero, Angela Acosta-Salazar, and Garry Couso-Vasquez. Our Political Action Committee (under the supervision of Martha Carreon) will be working throughout the summer to evaluate candidates and will have recommendations for us upon our return.

The Accreditation Tale

Once upon a time, Rio Hondo was placed on warning by the accrediting agency that visited our school last year. Since that time, we have been working hard to correct the cited deficiencies before our next site visit in October. What most are unaware of is that there are some strange circumstances surrounding the accreditation process in general. So gather around and listen to this wild tale.

“Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't.” - Mark Twain

First, we need to have an appropriate setting for our fable. There are six regional associations in the United States that accredit public and private schools, colleges, and universities. Ours is named the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and covers California, Hawaii, and various schools in the Pacific (such as Guam). The wing of WASC covering community colleges is the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). This is the group that wrote that put Rio Hondo on warning.

No narrative would be complete without a worthy villain, and we have one here. Her name is Dr. Barbara Beno. She has been the president of ACCJC since 2001. Under her leadership, ACCJC has been on a tear, slapping colleges with sanctions at an alarming rate. No actual sightings have occurred, but there is speculation that she keeps a broomstick in her closet. Since 2003, 37% of colleges reviewed have received some kind of reprimand (“Warning”, “Probation”, or “Show Cause”). This contrasts sharply with the other five accrediting agencies in the United States, whose rates have gone no higher than 6% during the same period. In other words, ACCJC has been sanctioning schools at a rate that is six times higher than anywhere else in the country.



If this is not enough cause for alarm, consider the plight of two California schools, Diablo Valley and Solano Colleges. Both have received the harshest reprimand of “Show Cause,” which is the step just short of losing accreditation. These are the only two in the *entire country* that have been given the designation, the only two. Coincidentally, these schools fall in the district of U.S. Congressman George Miller from California. He happens to chair the House Education and Labor Committee, which, in 2008, decided to omit

student learning outcomes in the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, something apparently dear to Dr. Beno. One can hardly believe that mere chance led to the two schools in Congressman Miller’s district being the only ones in the U.S. to receive a “Show Case” status. Is Dr. Beno wielding her power for evil purposes?

What could be the motivation behind ACCJC’s high rate of sanctioning? Was Dr. Beno shunned for a princess’s birthday party? No. The answer is arguably money. The agency is a 501(c)(3) organization, an IRS-sanctioned non-profit group. Even though no taxes have to be paid by such organizations, there are certain limitations, such as those on employee compensation. Unfortunately, we do not have much information about ACCJC’s finances since they have not filed the appropriate tax returns since 2000. Rio Hondo has paid a little over \$16,000 per year for the last two years just for annual fees. Site visits cost extra, like the one from October where we were billed close to \$11,000. The more difficulties schools have, the more fees ACCJC can collect.

There is little transparency in the decision-making processes that lead to recommendations for colleges. Investigations by CCA have revealed discrepancies between the preliminary reports filed by visiting accreditation teams (who, by the way, receive no compensation) and the final recommendations given by ACCJC. There is also little consistency among the requirements ACCJC imposes for getting accreditation affirmed. For example, some California colleges have emphatically refused to engage in any work involving SLOs and have been fine, while others have done a lot of work in the area and have been required to do more.

The strange state of affairs has led state-wide groups, including CCA, to mount investigations into the workings of ACCJC. As more information becomes available, we will pass it along to you. For now, we can only wish for a happily ever after.