Dear President Nguyen:

The Foothill College Academic Senate presents this letter in response to the growing number of faculty who have expressed a lack of trust and diminishing confidence in Foothill College’s executive administrators and their current leadership approach.

At Academic Senate meetings over the past two years, our constituents have brought forward multiple reports of incidents where decisions of major scope, affecting multiple stakeholders including faculty and students, were made in a seemingly autocratic manner without including closely affected stakeholders at all or early enough in the decision-making process. We have heard time and time again from a growing number of faculty constituents that their valuable expertise and insight has not been solicited, and their concerns have been too easily dismissed. The increasing amount of faculty that do not feel heard or valued is disconcerting.

Faculty perception of autocratic decision-making by college executive leadership is producing a culture of mistrust, and has deteriorated faculty morale. Though we understand there will always be nuances to college employee turnover, our constituents have shared that the current style of leadership has either greatly influenced, or in some cases, caused employees to resign. It is clear that the number of faculty and administrators who have either left Foothill College completely or have needed to take time away from the campus has significantly increased over the last few years. We also hear that an increasing number of our colleagues are disengaging from campus activities and efforts due to low campus morale.

The Academic Senate understands the challenges our executive leadership faces during these current times. We also understand that there are instances when some decisions, particularly decisions that involve personnel-related items, are not appropriate for broad stakeholder involvement due to legal or ethical reasons. Similarly, we acknowledge that there are differences in responsibilities between administrators and faculty. All that said, we urge the executive leadership to consider enlisting faculty at the outset to ensure a more advantageous and transparent decision-making process. We feel strongly that shifting to a more inclusive leadership style will greatly improve the functionality and well-being of our college.

While we appreciate some of the steps the college administration has taken recently to increase transparency and faculty involvement, we have not observed a consistent shift in approach nor have our constituents heard from you an acknowledgement of these serious concerns and a demonstrated commitment to address them. We fear that without immediate, significant and visible adjustments to how our college is governed, we would face potentially grave consequences that would adversely impact our students and community. We therefore urge you to receive this letter with utmost seriousness, as it includes the Academic Senate’s proposal of concrete steps that can be taken to help heal the faculty-administration relationship.

With the above context, we share recommendations we feel will help move our campus to reestablishing trust between faculty and executive leadership, re-engage faculty with campus wide efforts, and support an overall positive campus morale. We request a formal response from our executive leadership colleagues regarding each of the recommendations listed below:

1. Reaffirm a college-wide commitment to the spirit of shared governance and ensure an appropriate structure is in place that results in faculty engagement and trust.
2. Work with the Academic Senate to establish a set of standardized processes for campus-wide decision making that will ensure affected stakeholders are being engaged in an appropriate and timely manner, and that decisions are being communicated in the same way.

3. Include faculty leadership in manager’s meetings and president's cabinet.

1. Work with the college to create a new shared governance committee dedicated to enrollment management, charged with strategic planning for enrollment and scheduling, balancing face-to-face, hybrid and online offerings, and informing class cancelation discussions.
2. Task one or more of the governance councils with a time-sensitive request to prioritize the study and drafting of a proposal to revitalize campus spaces where faculty engage with each other, administrators, staff and students.
3. Formalize communication strategies which provide the campus community with regular updates regarding new and ongoing initiatives, and which work to consistently solicit broad input and participation.

In closing, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to a strong partnership with college executive leadership, and especially emphasize our ongoing enthusiasm for and support of your ambitious campus equity goals. We believe in the equity vision you bring, and are excited and ready to work together to close achievement gaps, and improve outcomes for our underrepresented students.

Sincerely,

Academic Senate Executive Committee