

May 1, 2020

Dear President Nguyen:

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foothill College Academic Senate engaged in a series of conversations regarding a lack of trust and diminishing confidence in our College's decision-making practices and current leadership approach. The Senate Executive Committee, in responding to constituent demands for a formal Senate response to these concerns, prepared draft communication and were seeking input from our constituents immediately prior to the Coronavirus outbreak. Given the immediacy and urgency of the pandemic, which resulted in the most significant operational shifts in our College's history at breakneck speed, the Senate Executive Committee voted to indefinitely delay the formal Senate response at the beginning of the Spring quarter.

There were Senators who expressed an optimism that we may not ever need to respond formally to the above-mentioned concerns, as perhaps the necessity to collaborate and engage with each other during this crisis could strengthen decision-making processes that rely heavily on stakeholder input, and could help rebuild faculty trust in the administration. Unfortunately, due to events at the April 24th College Advisory Council meeting, our constituents have vigorously revived their request that the Senate prepare and present to you a formal response to their concerns, which we present to you in the form of this letter.

To summarize how we've arrived to this point: over the past two years, our Academic Senate has been inundated with concerns from our constituents about decisions of major scope and impact at our college being made in a seemingly autocratic manner. Though these decisions affected multiple stakeholders, including faculty and students, they were made without including these closely affected stakeholders at all or early enough in the decision-making process. Some decisions that seem to logically fall in the wheelhouse of the shared governance councils seem to by-pass these committees, for example resource decisions never reaching the Revenue & Resources Council. Similarly, decisions that have major impact on faculty and staff positions, such as institutional re-organizations, are "packaged and presented" for quick stamps of approval at Senates or governance councils, rather than engaging the most affected and informed stakeholders as thought partners in the planning stages. 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.

From many faculty members' point of view, 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 there are challenges our campus executive leadership face during these current times, even prior to the current pandemic. 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. We urge the executive leadership to consider enlisting faculty at the outset to ensure a more informed 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. Our constituents have not heard from you an acknowledgement of these serious concerns and a demonstrated commitment to address them, despite repeated attempts to raise your awareness to them. The events of last Friday's College Advisory Council meeting, centering around your announcement to hold positions deemed critical to uphold existing organizational structure, further reinforces our concerns. These decisions were made and presented without transparency, and without any apparent faculty inclusion or even awareness prior to your announcement. The events have yet again stirred a strong sentiment of distrust.

We fear that without immediate, significant and visible adjustments to how our college is governed, we face potentially grave consequences that will 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 below 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 would like to acknowledge that this is not a comprehensive list of strategies, and we are open to engaging in conversations to refine these and/or identify additional ones that will best serve our college. We request a formal written response from you regarding each of the recommendations listed below by May 22nd, in preparation for faculty discussion at the June 1st Academic Senate meeting.

1. Reaffirm a college-wide commitment to the spirit of shared governance. This includes a commitment to ensuring planning and decision-making conversations are happening in councils and committees where faculty already serve. Those councils and committees should be fully informed with modeling, data, and all necessary details so we can all be effective thought partners. If current campus councils and committees are inappropriate for that role, communicate to faculty where decisions are being made and actively enlist faculty to serve and participate in those spaces.

2. Include faculty leadership in manager's meetings and president's cabinet, and/or where decisions of consequence are being discussed and informed to ensure affected stakeholders are being engaged in an appropriate and timely manner, and that decisions are being communicated in the same way.
3. Task the Revenue & Resources Council with the central role in budget discussions, including initial conversations, modeling, planning, and developing strategies for any potential need for organizational restructuring or hiring freezes and/or holds, in anticipation of the impending budget crisis.
4. Work with the college to create a new shared governance body 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.
5. Continue to engage with campus stakeholders via regular updates such as the Parliament and direct communication to the Senate that acts to keep the campus informed and to 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 equity gaps, and improve outcomes for our underrepresented students.

Sincerely,

Academic Senate Executive Committee (Division Representatives and Academic Senate Officers)