
From: Bernadine Chuck Fong <fongbernadine@fhda.edu>
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To: foothill
Subject: Energy from Friday and some thoughts about our colleagues, our boundaries, and our future

Last Friday we had an outstanding turnout to celebrate the nearly 200 colleagues who either never left working on campus during the pandemic or returned to work on campus this year. Each of our “honorees” received a pin and certificate of appreciation from the Academic and Classified Senates, the ASFC, and the President’s office, on behalf of the entire college. We are so pleased that these colleagues were celebrated with a record turnout of faculty, staff and students, eating lunch in the freezing cold, nonetheless. We will also be posting the names of everyone who was honored on the screen in the administration building. Whenever you see these colleagues, I hope you will thank them as well. Our custodial, building and grounds crews and our police, whose work is largely invisible, were particularly grateful for this acknowledgement, and we cannot thank everyone, including our faculty and staff, enough. The amount of energy in the patio was palpable and I am really excited for our future. And special thanks go to everyone involved in planning and producing the event!

And thanks to Student Services, and with vaccination protocols in place, we will be offering full admissions and registration services in person, as well as online, in January. While we have had the overwhelming number of registrants use our online services during the pandemic and those services will continue, we have still experienced huge drops in enrollment and my suspicion is that we lost many students who do not have online accessibility and thus, did not/could not “show up” for our online classes. (I have taken note that our online surveys showed that students preferred online, but then, those surveys could not have captured our students who were not online and/or did not have access to the online survey....). Our goal will be to return to being a vibrant in person campus as well as maintaining a vibrant online campus, as well. We want to offer our students, our lost students, and our potential students, as many options as possible to access our wonderful educational programs and services. So how does this in-person and online balance happen, and how does this affect our work life balance?

We should think about boundaries. While the offering of online classes, as well as our reliance on Zoom for meetings, is of tremendous convenience and saves us time in “going” from class-to-class or meeting-to-meeting with just the click of a Zoom link and we avoid the traffic in a commute, and the need to find parking, and we avoid our “what shall I wear today” wardrobe challenges, we also have the challenge of our work life spilling into our personal life and quality time with family. In fact, Zoom has intruded into our home lives and our balance between work and personal life and makes our “workday” bleed into what was out personal time because there is no physical separation of place. In the short time that I have returned to Foothill, I found that I was getting emails and texts almost 24/7 because people were working at odd hours and/or trading some of their workday hours for other activities and then “working” at night or weekends. While I appreciate the dedication of everyone, I am also concerned about psychological health and want to remind everyone there is value in separating personal life from professional life. Having a real break from our respective duties, and spending quality time with your friends and loved ones, or doing mindless tasks as cleaning out your garage, is rejuvenating and refreshing and gives us the break we all need so that we can return to our workday, refreshed and with new energy.

Similarly, for our students and the boundaries for them. And this distinction needs to be even more marked for them. Students, whether on campus or online, need places to study. Remember, for our credit course, every unit of credit represents one hour in class and two hours outside of class. How are these two hours spent and where, if students are online and don't have the facilities to study, concentrate, and do the work apart from competing priorities at home? Clearly, our successful online students have addressed this challenge, but our concern should be for the students who are no longer with us and how do we attract them to return?

We get daily winter quarter enrollment data, and as of last Friday, we are offering 4% fewer course sections, but our enrollment is *over 30%* lower than the same time last year. So, clearly, our classes are dramatically under enrolled. While I often avoid comparing ourselves to our neighboring colleges, it does appear that our enrollment drop is dramatically greater than our neighbors.

What does all of this mean for Foothill, and this is where I ask for your help. Foothill's reputation was founded on distinctiveness and innovation, starting with our remarkable campus which won major architectural awards in 1961 when the campus first opened, and has since. What was notable is the architectural integrity of the campus with a unique and coherent design, Pacific rim, and a campus that was built "all at once," not piecemeal over time. This architectural distinctiveness and innovation contributed to and attracted a faculty and staff who were equally distinctive and innovative, making Foothill one of the premier colleges in the country, resulting in a number of "firsts," like the first community college honors program, the first college with divisional curriculum committees instead of a single college curriculum committee, the first college to offer totally online courses and degrees through an open source learning management system, and one of the first colleges to join Campus Compact, the initial service learning movement in the 1990's for colleges and universities. We also led the state's over 100 community colleges in student success in transfer, basic skills, and in persistence. We were also the first in our area to offer study abroad programs, Middle College, and Writing Across the Curriculum and Diversity Across the Curriculum programs. Given this history, culture, and legacy, how can we all think creatively, out of the box, and entrepreneurially, and brainstorm with one another, and come up with ideas on how we envision what can make Foothill unique for the rest of this decade? Some of you have already heard me say, if we continue doing what we have been doing, we will be the same result, so it's time think differently and innovatively, maintaining laser focus on our mission. For example, instead of being the passive recipient of Zoom services, what are virtual and technological enhancements to all our modalities that sets us apart, and therefore, more attractive to our students? And for those whose teaching is virtual, what is it we can do that sets apart our online classes from other institutions? Does the use of virtual reality or holograms or the next new software have added value and attraction for our students?

And this is not to say innovation is just in technology, but it is to say, how can we make technology work for us? How can we interact with our students in ways that the "feel" of small class sizes happens even with large class enrollments? What are new ways that take the concept of learning communities to another level of interdisciplinary studies? *What is the disruptive innovation that we can generate because we are creative and because it is a challenge we want to meet?*

I hope you are as excited about reading this email, as I am writing it. Let what I have proposed germinate with you over the next few days, weeks, and over our winter break. We will launch a "live" suggestion box to capture your thoughts. There is no idea too small or too outlandish. Begin with What if.....?

Best regards,

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