

union action

VOICE OF AFT 2121



Timeline of an epic struggle

Supporters stand up for City College, stand up to accrediting commission

4-5



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Community College
Federation of Teachers

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Keeping CCSF in our community

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Defending quality education and educators

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Accreditation and beyond: Saving our City College



By Alisa Messer

As a writing teacher, I've spent a fair amount of time in the classroom talking about questions: Sure, there are "no stupid questions"—but what makes a good one? Some questions are better framed to help us understand the depth of a subject, the critical nature of a situation, and what we must ask or do next.

The questions about City College these days demonstrate a deepening understanding of the college's value, crisis, and possible futures. They have evolved from a confused "What is going on at CCSF?" to more emphatic queries like "Are they really going to close our college?" The progression tracks the public's growing clarity about what is at stake.

A decisive answer here: No, they are not going to close our college.

But there's an essential follow-up question: What kind of college are we going to have? Our community—those of us at the college itself, and the public that relies on it—will need to grapple with that, now and in the months to come.

While we have been actively investigating ACCJC's improper and illegal imposition of sanctions and working to reverse them, we as a faculty have at the same time been addressing the ACCJC's directives. From the very beginning, faculty joined work groups and, along with others at the college (and a bevy of high-paid outside consultants), devoted enormous amounts of time and energy to working on the accreditation recommendations.

Keep in mind: no ACCJC finding said that the quality of education at City College was anything other than excellent.

Faculty also contributed to solving the financial issues at City College. Many of these problems came from outside the institution, with the recession and severe underfunding

from the state. Some were generated by poor fiscal management. They were not caused by faculty, who nonetheless sacrificed, and continue to sacrifice, to pay for them.

With the public's help, we filled the financial hole that CCSF was facing: Propositions A and 30 should have stabilized the college budget for years to come. But the destructive impact of the ACCJC's actions have turned that hole into a widening cavern—more than \$20 million next year—as enrollment and future revenue spiral down.

Enrollment drops mean lost revenue and the likelihood of a vicious downsizing cycle that could leave San Francisco with a community college that serves a third the population it once did. The numbers also represent thousands of real students—perhaps a whole generation—delaying, dropping out, missing out on the opportunities a community college education affords. Our neighboring community college districts (let alone Bay Area traffic and transport) cannot absorb these students. (The for-profit colleges and student debt industry may swoop in—but should they?)

As such, saving our City College of San Francisco is about much more than ensuring our accreditation, as important as that is. Saving our college means we must struggle with the questions: What kind of college are we going to have? What kind of college do San Franciscans deserve?

Although living with the threat of disaccreditation has been challenging, faculty have risen to the occasion many times over, taking part in the accreditation work, writing SLOs, promoting enrollment, and—most importantly—educating our students. Despite the admonitions that we should do all this quietly and silence very real concerns about what is happening to our beloved college, our livelihoods, and our ability to deliver quality education to our students, we have also made some noise in the process. And it's making a difference.

A growing community of concern regarding ACCJC's actions at City College and beyond has recognized that CCSF's evaluation process was deeply flawed.

The tide of public opinion is turning, and key decision makers and public leaders are now convinced: something is very wrong in ACCJC land. Our extensive research demonstrates the unfair, illegal, and often outrageous conduct of an accrediting agency gone off the rails and doing irreparable harm to California's com-

munity colleges. The U.S. Department of Education has corroborated our concerns, citing conflicts of interest, a dramatic lack of faculty participation in the review process, and unclear standards that are not supported by the educational community, among other concerns. And there are three lawsuits underway to stop the accrediting commission.

California's community colleges have an essential—and visionary—mission, serving community needs throughout the state, providing accessible quality public education "for all who can benefit." Our communities are diverse: San Francisco is not Bakersfield, or San Mateo, or Van Nuys. We have different populations, and different community needs—and our course offerings, programs, and support services must reflect those differences.

If we create—or are forced to create—a cookie cutter approach, and every community college around the state becomes solely a "junior college," that will continue to help a lot of people. But it will also leave a lot of people out in the cold, and those it excludes will be among those who need education the most. They will be our communities' most vulnerable students, who have the most at stake, whose fortunes affect the communities where they will thrive—or struggle for lack of education.

In San Francisco, our community college provides irreplaceable and affordable pathways for many, including low-income and immigrant communities; displaced workers; veterans and the disabled; students in need of second—and third—chances, and students transferring to four-year institutions.

We want to keep this college intact as a public institution for the public good, preventing privatization and profiteering; we should not be selling off pieces or programs to the highest bidders or pushing students into deeper debt at the for-profits. We need a college that supports faculty and all campus workers to do their best work—and values and sustains them for their efforts.

We believe City College of San Francisco must remain broad and inclusive in our services and programs, providing quality education and meeting the educational needs of San Francisco and Bay Area residents, accessible to those who need it most. What kind of college is San Francisco going to have? What kind of college are we willing to fight for?

(amesser@aft2121.org)

On the cover:

On Halloween, hundreds gathered at SF City Hall in support of City College as part of Campus Equity Week. Vampires, zombies, Winnie the Pooh, and a giant starving student puppet marched from CCSF's Civic Center campus to deliver 5,000 postcards to the mayor.

Photo: Gwynnd Maestre

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San Francisco would be **SPOOKY** without our community college

By Denise Selleck

On Halloween Day 2013, an assembly of around 400 faculty, students, alumni, and CCSF supporters rallied at City Hall to urge Mayor Ed Lee to help keep CCSF open. Dressed as witches, zombies, vampires, and Day-of-the-Deadheads, they advocated for City College's role in serving our diverse community rather than being reduced to a ghost of its former self. This event was part of a Week of Action in

conjunction with Campus Equity Week and the ReFund California Coalition. Community groups including co-sponsor Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) and the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA), labor leaders, and members of CCSF's deposed Board of Trustees were there—as were sloganeering tortilla makers!

Speaker after speaker ripped into the ACCJC's attempts to kill off CCSF. AFT 2121 President and vampire-for-the-day Alisa Messer told the crowd:

"We believe San Francisco deserves a comprehensive community college with room for all. San Franciscans depend on City College. Many students, particularly our most marginalized populations who benefit greatly from higher education, have no other viable options." She asked the mayor "to call on the ACCJC to restore accreditation now." Messer then led a delegation inside City Hall to meet with the mayor's education adviser, Hydra Mendoza, and present her with 5,000 postcards asking the mayor to protect our City College.

Other speakers included Labor and Community Studies student Ariel

Hiller, who called on the mayor and other city officials to support CCSF students; army veteran and student Jim White, who spoke about the importance of CCSF to the veterans' community; and Antonette Bryant, President of BART's Amalgamated Transit Union 1555, who told the crowd how important CCSF is to those "who need a stepping stone into the next level of education."

Bryant, a former CCSF student, was there with her father, Clarence Bryant, also an alumnus. In fact, many in the crowd spoke of family members who have attended or currently go to CCSF. Student Tiffany Louie, who inspired the postcard campaign, said, "My parents went to City College. I'm a current student and my brother is currently enrolled in his first semester. So City College has been a really important institution in my family, but CCSF is a really, really vital institution for San Francisco."

The rally got started at Civic Center Campus, located at 750 Eddy Street. Campus Student Council President Khanh Le, who moved here recently from Vietnam and attends ESL classes along with her parents and siblings, addressed the crowd: "Before I started to take classes at City College, I couldn't speak English as well as I can right now. Thanks to CCSF, my English is getting better every day. City College helped me feel confident in my English abilities and helped prepare me to be ready for credit classes next semester." Le, who is taking a high-intermediate ESL class, went on to say, "We [can] see that City College has brought a lot of benefits to students as well as immigrants from all over the world, so CCSF should not be closed for any reasons."

The crowd then marched three blocks down Polk Street to City Hall, led by the lively music of the Brass Liberation Orchestra. Marchers carried banners and signs and long strands of the postcards addressed to the mayor. Towering above it all was a skeletal CCSF effigy head proclaiming "Reclaim the Promise of Public Education."

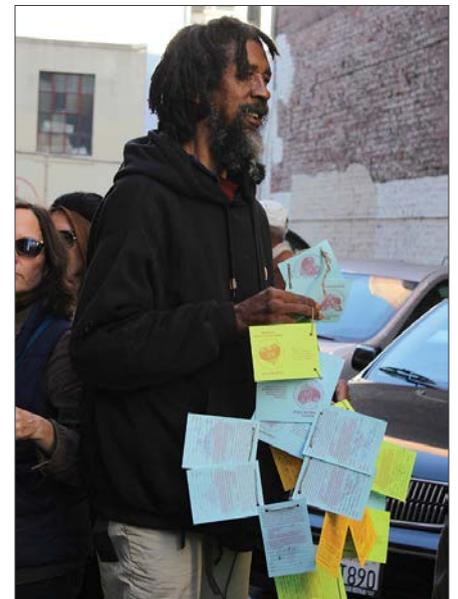
It was particularly fitting that the march started at Civic Center Campus since the students who



Above: Proud faces of public education: Instructors Janey Skinner and Kathe Burick.

attend there are among the most vulnerable and would be among the most impacted by a shutdown. Along with one LGBT credit class, the campus offers non-credit Business and ESL classes; the Adult Learning and Tutorial Center provides basic education and GED preparation classes. Civic Center students are, for the most part, economically disadvantaged and many have overcome huge obstacles just to attend classes. Some students in the lowest ESL level, Literacy, cannot yet write their name or address in English. Yet the "Closure Report" required by the Accreditation Commission suggests that these students could carry on with noncredit classes at community colleges as far away as Santa Rosa, Saratoga, or Livermore.

As Civic Center student speaker Levent Baysal stated in remarks before the march, "This school gives us all these opportunities. Our teachers give 110% to help us learn. They are kind and smart. City College's teachers get so little yet they give so much. I have been to many other countries where this kindness and help is not there for immigrants. City College is [a] very good investment in everybody's future."



Above: Civic Center Instructor Elinor Chypyha rallies with students.

Right: The Great Tortilla Conspiracy serve up school and Halloween spirit with message-laden tortillas: "We are all City College," "Stop the ACCJC monster from ravaging our future: Protect City College," "Health classes for the masses," and "Mayor Lee, speak up! Support quality public education for all."

Far right: Some 5,000 postcards are delivered to Mayor Ed Lee's office.



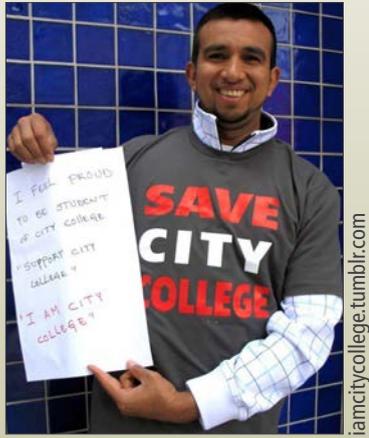
All photos on this page by Chris Hanzo

THE FIGHT TO SAVE OUR CCSF

an epic battle and the heroes joining to win it!*

JULY 2012

Hundreds gather at LGBT and Community Center to discuss, defend CCSF.



iamcitycollege.tumblr.com



2011-2012

As new cycle of CCSF accreditation review begins, CCSF and the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) clash over SB 1456, community college reform bill.

AUGUST 2012

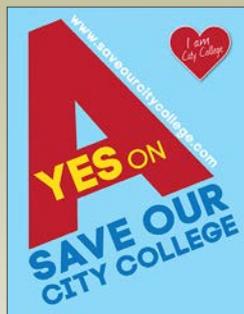
CCSF workgroups responding to ACCJC findings begin meeting.

AUGUST 2012

CCSF trustees approve narrowed CCSF mission statement. ESL and GED programs retained.

SEPTEMBER 2012

Kickoff campaign for Proposition A, an annual parcel tax of \$79, to provide exclusive funds for CCSF.



SEPTEMBER 2012

State's Financial Crisis Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) reports on College finances. Much depends on outcome of November elections, also on tracking, management.

FALL 2012

Confusion over CCSF's fate causes steep enrollment decline and ultimately loss of millions in state funding.

SEPTEMBER 2012

State approves hiring of "Special Trustee."

OCTOBER 2012

CCSF submits "Special Report" outlining its plans to meet ACCJC's recommendations.

NOVEMBER 2012

San Francisco voters pass Proposition A by 73%, bringing more than \$15m annually to college. Statewide Prop 30 staves off additional state cuts. CCSF's financial future stabilizes.

JANUARY 2013

District unilaterally cuts faculty salaries 9%, as teachers work without contract—just one illustration of the new state of labor relations at the college.

SPRING 2013

More student enrollment lost.

MARCH 2013

CCSF submits costly self-evaluation and "closure plan" as required by ACCJC.

MARCH 2013

Demonstration at City Hall brings more than 1,000 protestors out to support CCSF.



MARCH 2013

California Federation of Teachers (CFT) Convention passes two resolutions in support of CCSF and criticizing ACCJC.

APRIL 2013

Visit from ACCJC evaluation team.

APRIL 2013

AFT 2121 and CFT file extensive complaint with ACCJC and U.S. Department of Education (USDoE) alleging incompetence and conflicts of interest at ACCJC.

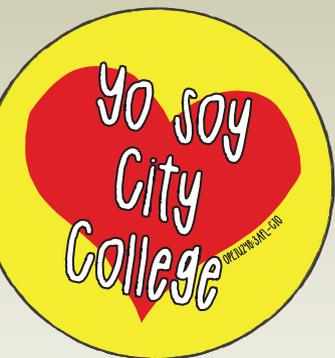


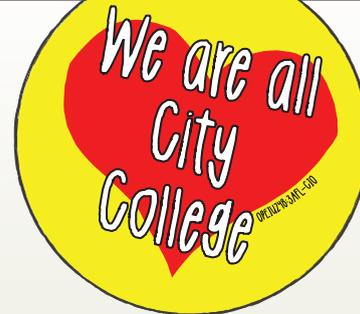
Fred Glass

MAY 2013

SF supervisors unanimously urge CCSF to preserve the quality and diversity of the school's course offerings, ask the city to consider new support. "The scales should tip toward people in need."

*Disclaimer: This doesn't cover it all. Be sure to add your own events.





AUGUST 2013

USDoE issues letter to ACCJC upholding Union complaint: ACCJC is out of compliance with standards required of accreditation agencies.

JUNE 2013

ACCJC meets to measure CCSF's response. Students, faculty, media, and public blocked from hearing.

JULY 2013

CFT and AFT 2121 file new complaint to stop ACCJC from violating federal law and to prevent coercive attempt to stifle debate.

JULY 2013

ACCJC announces CCSF will be disaccredited effective July 2014.

JULY 2013

Democratically, legally elected Board of Trustees stripped of power by State bureaucrats. Special Trustee with Extraordinary Powers takes over.

JULY 2013

Hundreds pack the SF State Building for CCSF forum sponsored by Assemblymember Tom Ammiano, Supervisor John Avalos, San Francisco Labor Council, and AFT 2121 to testify to college's importance and community good.

JULY 2013

Thousands march through San Francisco's streets, call on USDoE to take action.

AUGUST 2013

SF City Attorney Dennis Herrera files dual legal challenges charging ACCJC with political bias, saying: "There are very good reasons why judges should not be advocates, and why advocates should not be judges."

AUGUST 2013

California's Joint Legislative Audit Committee (JLAC) tasks Bureau of State Audits to scrutinize ACCJC. Senator Jim Nielsen reports on his meeting with ACCJC President Barbara Beno: "In all my career, in my thousands of meetings with agency individuals—representatives, secretaries, etc.—I have never dealt with a more arrogant, condescending, and dismissive individual."

SEPTEMBER 2013

Supervisor Eric Mar, SF's Budget and Legislative Analyst release study outlining the staggering economic impact CCSF closure will have on the people of San Francisco.

SEPTEMBER 2013

AFT 2121 and CFT file lawsuit against ACCJC charging that they engaged in unfair, unlawful business practices in sanctioning City College, and arguing that these reckless actions have already caused harm to students, faculty, other employees, the community.

NOVEMBER 2013

"Is the Accrediting Process for California's Community Colleges Fair and Accountable?" hosted at CCSF by U.S Congresswomen Jackie Speier and Anna Eshoo, State Senator Jim Beall. Speier concludes: "The ACCJC is a travesty. You underscored here today why it is an institution that has run amok."



Jane Hundertmark

DECEMBER 2013

The USDoE reviews accrediting agencies on a regular cycle. ACCJC up for "re-recognition" as an accrediting agency.

OCTOBER 2013

Halloween rally: "SF would be spooky without our City College." Delegations of students, faculty, and community deliver 5,000 postcards to Mayor Ed Lee: Protect our City College!



Rodger Scott

FALL 2013

Enrollment declines of nearly 25% over 1.5 years predicted to cost college as much as \$26m annually.

SEPTEMBER 2013

CFT and AFT 2121 request that USDoE "delist" ACCJC as the agency overseeing educational standards and quality for community colleges in California.



Jane Hundertmark

WHAT WILL 2014 BRING?

JOIN US!
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Chris Hanzo

AGCJC ACTIONS
CCSF ADMINISTRATION ACTIONS
COMMUNITY/POLITICAL/AFT 2121

A fair faculty contract: Foundations for quality jobs and education

Decades of gains make our contract a model—and a target

1978-81

- **Collective bargaining election at CCSF and First Contract:** AFT 2121 wins right to represent CCSF faculty and negotiates first contract with the District. Survey shows CCSF salaries ranked in the bottom 50% of the Bay Area community colleges. Fact-finding report endorses upgrading and pro-rated benefits for part-timers.
- **Unified salary structure** for credit and noncredit “adult education” faculty implemented.
- AFT proposes “pro-rata” pay for part-time faculty, who receive even lower pay than full-time faculty for comparable work. Agreement recognizes that full-time “permanent” employees in Health Service System (HSS) receive health coverage in accord with SF City Charter provision, including vesting in lifetime coverage. Upgrading provision provides “first consideration” to current part-time faculty for full-time jobs and for assignments up to 60% FTE.

1980's

- **Health care:** full-time employees receive coverage under the City's Health Service System (HSS), including lifetime coverage for retirees, in accord with the City Charter. **Health and dental coverage established for part-time faculty** who work at least 50% of a full-time faculty workload. Upgrading provision provides “first consideration” to current part-time faculty for full-time jobs.
- AFT 2121 launches **full-time jobs campaign** to address the increased hiring of part-time instructors and the overall exploitation of part-time, temporary employees in the community college system, winning ten new full-time positions in addition to faculty replacement positions.

1990's

- To attract and retain quality faculty, District commits to raising full-time salaries **above the median of Bay Area community colleges**. The first **“pro-rata” pay scales are established for part-time faculty**, with pay tied to the full-time salary schedule. Part-time faculty now earn a “pro-rated” (albeit lower) amount of what the full-timer earns per assignment based on comparable experience and educational preparation. Through negotiations, this pro-rata percentage begins to climb, bringing part-timers closer to “equal pay for equal work.”
- Part-time faculty **rehire rights** established, providing a measure of job security for part-time faculty, and a stable, experienced faculty work force for CCSF students.
- **Salary formula** established guaranteeing faculty a “fair share” of new revenues at CCSF for improvements in compensation and working conditions, including a share of the 0.25% sales tax approved by S.F. voters.
- Our statewide union, the California Federation of Teachers, leads a statewide campaign for California's community college part-time faculty, who now number 30,000, a large majority of community college faculty. **“Equal pay for equal work” is written into State law** with passage of Assembly Bill 420, leading to new State “equity” funding. Paid office hours for part-time faculty inaugurated at CCSF, increasing student access to their instructors.

2000's

- **Full-time salaries climb to 2nd in Bay Area** community colleges, and 5th to 7th statewide. **Part-time rates for credit instruction rank 1st or 2nd in the State**. \$57 million in the State budget is allocated for part-time faculty New salary matrix with higher salary levels for faculty with additional education/training beyond the minimum qualifications.
- District agrees to provide six weeks of **paid pregnancy disability leave**.
- 2007 is the last year that faculty see a salary increase at CCSF. A full Step 16 is added to the full-time salary schedule while pro-rata pay increases to 86% of full-time salaries.
- “Consolidations” of part-time hours to **new full-time jobs reverse the downward trend of over-reliance on part-time temporary faculty**, eventually growing the full-time faculty core to an historic high of 823 faculty in 2011.

2009-present: a recent history of faculty cuts and sacrifices

California suffers its most severe recession since the Great Depression; CCSF loses \$53 million in State funding in three years.

- Faculty agree to salary and other cuts in assignments in each year from 2009-12 to close budget deficits, totaling over \$13 million in savings to the College. Labor and community mobilize to bring new revenue to CCSF and all of public education in California.
- In 2013, citing “accreditation requirements” and bowing to State pressure, CCSF imposes an ongoing 5% salary cut on all faculty.
- After a year of contentious negotiations, the District agrees to only partially restore this cut by 1.5% by 2015, despite millions in new revenues from Prop A and 30.
- With other districts passing on a share of new Prop 30 revenue in pay increases to faculty, CCSF full-time faculty salaries plummet to among the lowest in Bay Area community colleges
- Cuts to programs and a virtual moratorium on hiring replacements for retiring faculty, the number of full-time faculty declines to from 823 to 748. Part-timers lose assignments and some their jobs under the wholesale downsizing of the College.
- After a year of contentious negotiations, the District agrees to only partially restore this cut by 1.5%, despite millions in new revenues from Prop A and 30.
- With other districts passing on share of revenue in pay increases to faculty, CCSF salaries plummet to among the lowest in Bay Area community colleges.
- With cuts to programs and a virtual moratorium on hiring replacements for retiring, the number of full-time faculty declines to from 823 to 680 faculty. Many part-timers lose assignments and some their jobs under the wholesale downsizing of the College.

Short-term truce reached in AFT/District negotiations

Many faculty gains preserved but salaries fall

Faculty negotiations became a battleground over the past year, under the destabilizing forces of the State takeover of CCSF, installment of a Special Trustee, the removal of the democratically-elected Board, and the disaccreditation of CCSF by the ACCJC. Management sought to roll back many of the gains in working and learning conditions achieved over the years at CCSF.

With the support of an energized and involved membership, many of whom witnessed negotiations and mediation first-hand, AFT 2121 averted takebacks that threatened the 20-class-size minimum rule, pro-rata pay and reemployment/recall rights, sabbatical leaves and pay, and shifting more of the cost of health coverage to employees.

In the meantime, the State takeover and ACCJC's disaccreditation announcement has led to large cuts in program and the downsizing of the College, limiting access for students and cutting faculty.

Despite millions in new revenues from Prop A and Prop 30, the new regime at CCSF refused to restore the 5% unilaterally imposed cut on faculty salaries, citing “accreditation requirements” and the possibility of a further withdrawal of State funding owing to projected enrollment declines next year. The last time faculty salaries increased at CCSF was 2007-08. Under the new agreement, faculty will see only 1.5% of the cut restored over the next 18 months. By the time the new contract expires, with our accreditation restored, negotiations will have revved up with new goals clearly in our sights: a true restoration of faculty pay that is commensurate with the value of faculty work at CCSF.

Member organizing has given us a taste of the power we can generate. Let's hit the ground running in 2014-15 in our demand for economic justice and quality education at our college!

Faculty workload intensifies

Rising to the challenges of enrollment, SLO's

By Li Miao Lovett, *editor*

Every semester, Mike Solow goes through a familiar ritual as a chemistry instructor at City College. More students pile into his classrooms than he can take in, filling an auditorium that seats 140 to overflow. He's used to managing the crowds of anxious students who are trying to get a seat in the class so they can fulfill transfer or vocational requirements.

Along with the usual demands of teaching and serving students, City College faculty have been managing an onslaught of extra work in response to the challenges of the last several years. Before the accreditation crisis, it was the budget crisis unfolding over multiple years that cut services and course offerings even as seats continued to fill during the Great Recession. More recently the

whose courses had to be updated and submitted by a November 13th deadline. Student learning outcomes (SLOs) need to be clearly written and to reflect the course content. "This additional stress against the background of accreditation demands compounds the effect on all involved," said Vargas.

The curriculum committee has stepped up its response to this challenge. Committee members engage with faculty prior to course submission to provide guidance and feedback based on current standards. They accomplish much of the work in between committee meetings. Vargas credits committee chair Melinda Weil with developing a streamlined and thorough process to approach the gargantuan task of curricular approval of hundreds of courses.

While students may not consciously notice CCSF staffing changes



Chemistry Instructor Mike Solow reflects on massive changes at CCSF.

“This additional stress against the background of accreditation demands compounds the effect on all involved.”

—Counselor Nancy Vargas on course approvals



Counselor Nancy Vargas has worked with curriculum to approve hundreds of updated courses.

accreditation mandates are responsible for an especially large increase in the burden placed on college faculty and changes behind the scenes have added demands to the work required of faculty.

Nancy Vargas, an academic counselor serving on the curriculum committee, is well aware of the “undue stress” facing many faculty

in the classroom, the shakeup in administrative leadership also creates unintended obstacles. Solow, who has been teaching here since 1997, pointed out that City College is on its fifth chancellor in just half a decade. “There’s an absence of continuity as a consequence of a revolving door arrangement.”

He cited an October department chair council meeting where an administrator expressed dismay that she could not carry a key project to fruition, tying program review involving faculty input with the college’s fiscal decisions. Integrating program review into the budgeting process was one of the changes targeted in the accreditation review, and many faculty are now playing a role in contributing to their departments’ review.

Another major area where changes driven by ACCJC’s sanction have impacted faculty is in student learning outcomes (SLOs). Tim Killikelly, political science instructor, has taken on the role of coordinating SLOs for his discipline to meet accreditation standards. The workload issue is simple: “If you do one thing, you have less time to do something else.” Like many of their colleagues,

these instructors see value in the process, yet Solow notes that “SLOs can be viewed as a stick” in light of the sanctions imposed on the college.

Killikelly took on a sixth class during the fall semester. When asked to do overload, he felt responsible for doing his part to maintain the department’s offerings. Killikelly has enrollment challenges in the back of his mind, as well as the hurdles that students face in adding classes. Nowadays, he gives an “add” sticker to every student who wants to register during the add/drop period, something he used to do only for his advanced classes.

Faculty are collaborating and going beyond the call of duty to address accreditation challenges. For example, many teachers are working hard to boost enrollment. This may mean spending extra hours—evenings and weekends—distributing print schedules, running enrollment drives around the city, and making calls to students to remind them of the college’s offerings.

Finally, it’s not just the physical work that presents a challenge, but the “mental load” of dealing with crisis and uncertainty. “Everyone feels burdened by not only the work itself, but the context,” said Killikelly. “If you don’t do this work, you’ll get closed. The sword comes down.”

The intense pressures caused by ACCJC’s decisions have taken a toll, yet Solow has also noticed that this has “brought out the best” in faculty. Solow is cautiously hopeful. “The institution that was borne of the Great Depression will be a survivor of the Great Recession. I’m quite optimistic that we’ll make it to our 80th anniversary.” (editor@aft2121.org)

The incredible shrinking humanities

Two Bay Area colleges struggle with pressures to downsize.

By Li Miao Lovett, editor

Across the state, the devastating cuts to public education over the past five years have turned away half a million community college students. They have also accelerated the shrinking of humanities and other liberal arts programs, which, in the Bay Area, is a terrible irony given its diversity of populations and languages. The heavy hand of accreditation, along with statewide changes, have also influenced the downsizing of programs. This creates tension

“Arabic, Italian, French, German, American Sign Language, and Japanese were put on the chopping block. Only Chinese and Spanish are still offered.”

between the very survival of community colleges, and their breadth of offerings and accessibility to all students.

While California’s community colleges have struggled to stay afloat during rough economic times, many have lamented the loss of their inclusive, open-enrollment mission of serving “all who can benefit.” At College of San Mateo (CSM), English instructor and AFT 1493 president Teeka James spoke of the “horrendous cuts” the district underwent in 2009, when 23% of the total budget was cut. While every discipline had to trim back programs, foreign languages saw severe reductions to previously broad offerings: Arabic, Italian, French, German, American Sign Language, and Japanese were put on the chopping block. Only Chinese and Spanish are still offered.

“We were all mourning,” said James. “How, in this age of globalization, were we not offering more languages?” For ESL students, the cuts took place at the lowest levels, since adult education in San Mateo school districts could take up the slack. Classes like Italian and German were relegated to community education. While humanities took a big hit, faculty who also taught in other disciplines tried to infuse cultural perspectives into remaining courses.

CSM faculty were involved in this difficult process of paring back

their college’s offerings. Indeed, the San Mateo Community College District eliminated lifelong learning from their mission, focusing on transfer and vocational programs.

James noted that the shadow of accreditation loomed as the college was deciding how to make these cuts. In 2007, CSM was sanctioned with a warning from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC); in 2009 as the budget axe came down, the college needed to file a midterm report with the commission. She notes that

Skyline faculty took on more of an activist stance against the cuts. “But they had not gotten an accreditation warning,” said James, “and they didn’t feel as vulnerable as we did.”

Some might read these developments as a sign of impending changes at all community colleges; even if the iron hand of the ACCJC is weakened, pressures exerted by the 2012 Student Success Act and ongoing lean budgets – despite the passage of Prop 30 – seem to take direct aim at the vision of access for all under California’s Master Plan.

These changes have had devastating effects on faculty. At City College of San Francisco, the humanities and social sciences, while remaining an integral part of general education courses for the associate degree and transfer, have also suffered enrollment declines, in no small part due to accreditation sanctions from ACCJC. For one part-time instructor who asked not to be named, the reduction in teaching load means that she will lose health insurance coverage for the first time in decades of teaching at CCSF. “The hidden expenses are very huge. It’s very tough for part-timers,” she said.

Problems stemming from low enrollment compound from one semester to the next, affecting both full- and part-timers. In this case, full-timers who had their load reduced in previous semesters due to cancelled classes are now “paying

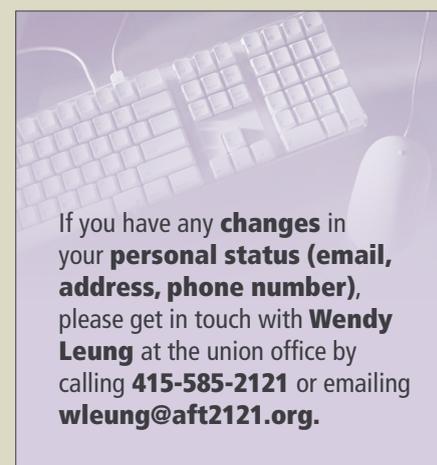
back” the college by adding on assignments; this means that part-time instructors have fewer assignments. The instructor noted that the introductory classes in her department usually started off the semester with 35 or more students; this fall, after the ACCJC announced its disaccreditation decision, the classes barely had the minimum 20.

Leslie Simon, women’s studies instructor and coordinator of Project Survive, echoes the hit that humanities and social science courses have taken. Up through spring 2013, women’s studies had “five healthy sections” of U.S. women’s history. “Enrollment was drastically destroyed because of negative publicity due to accreditation,” says Simon. Now U.S. women’s history is reduced to just one section each of HIST 12A and 12B.

In San Mateo, James sees the changes as the “end of an era” for the broad spectrum of courses that community colleges have offered. Even with Proposition 30 funds, it’s unlikely that the former range of courses, especially in foreign languages, will be restored.

City College advocates have been vocal about the collateral damage that shrinking budgets are inflicting on the school’s diversity of programs. The humanities and social sciences aren’t just breadth requirements to be fulfilled; they are a crucial part of the college experience in which, Simon points out, “Students learn the critical thinking skills that allow them to be engaged participants in a democratic society.” (*editor@aft2121.org*)

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