DAS President's Report to the PCCD Board of Trustees for September 27, 2011
Karolyn van Putten

Thank you Mr. President. Good evening trustees, district administrative center staff, college presidents, colleagues and members of the public.

Earlier this week the state chancellor's office distributed two documents detailing the progressively devastating impact on California's community colleges of the last two years of budget cutting, or workload reductions. You received one of them attached to Vice Chancellor Gerhard's budget update report.

In the longer document, the California Community Colleges 2012-13 System Budget Proposal, dated September 12, 2011, the state chancellor's office makes a compelling case for correcting the long slide toward disaster that community colleges are now actively, inadvertently, pursuing.

You've already heard this evening from students who are not able to get access to counseling at one of our colleges. Counseling faculty have been stretched thin for a long time and retirements that have not been replaced in the past 2-3 years have further exacerbated this problem. For many years we've known and argued that students who meet with counselors who help them strategize pathways to completion of programs, degrees and certificates are significantly more likely to navigate this terrain successfully and with fewer unnecessary detours. That we appear to be depriving students of this support undermines their success and our mission. This is one of several outcomes related to an informal hiring freeze in conjunction with 3 successive years of budget reductions.

At the same time the state chancellor's office has based its proposal on the premise that California Community Colleges play a critical role in the state's economic recovery.

Faculty Senate President Sonja Franeta spoke earlier about some of the instructional support needs that have been compromised or are being threatened by impending budget reductions.

As a district, with some noteworthy exceptions, we have cut sections to the point where those courses required for program completion and transfer have become almost impossible for students to enroll in. We cannot continue to balance the budget in this way. Combining these limitations with decades of a somewhat laissez faire approach to enrollment management and a lack of integrated program planning we can now see exactly why it takes students 4 or more years to finish a 2 year program of study.

It's time for us to seriously apply ourselves, at every level, starting with the board, to having the difficult conversations and making the hard decisions that we have been avoiding. Early last summer we began meeting with the vice chancellor of educational services to explore ways of facilitating and providing support for discussions about program viability and integrity. We will continue working on that later this week with the vice chancellor.

But that's just one aspect of this larger puzzle. We cannot do that alone. We need all hands on deck and all hands willing to have this conversation, and to do those things which may or may not be, politically, in your best interests.

That concludes my report for tonight. Thank you for receiving it.