

Peralta Community College District
Board of Trustees' Listening Session – Merritt College
December 2, 2008

Present: Chancellor Harris, Trustees Gulassa, Gonzalez Yuen, Withrow, Guillen, President Adams, President Inclan, Linda Berry, Wise Allen, Tae Soon Park, Thomas Branca, Sadiq Ikhara, Tom Smith, Hank Fabian, Leslie Fleming, Mr. Wills, Ms. Pompon, David Morales, Ms. Price, Jon Drinnon, Gisele Giorgi, Horace Graham, Rona Young, Debra Jacks, Baba Harrison, Audrey Trotter, Lorna Pascual, Marcus Aubry, Marquita Price, and Josué Hoyos.

People were asked to list three systemic things that would make people's lives work better at Peralta, and also to mention things that are working here. Updates were requested on purchasing, health and safety issues and protocols, and student life issues on campus. Communications are very important, and one of our weaknesses is to all be on the same wavelength and have mutual expectations. One top priority is that people have a sense of input and personal satisfaction from their work.

Speaker Fabian commented on the purchasing process. He shared that orders still get lost, and multiple copies need to be submitted. He feels that people are trying hard, but that things still fall through the cracks. It was suggested that the departments meet with their business college office to see how orders can be better streamlined. It was noted that the schedules on the website are always wrong. This is because the data needs to get to the printers early in the process, even before adjunct schedules are confirmed. One suggestion was to scrap the catalog altogether, and to use a hybrid addendum printed to the catalog that could be posted online so that students know where to go for their classes. A new courses list would be helpful. The GAF meeting also addressed this issue. Dr. Allen is looking into updating the classroom schedule, so that it's more interactive.

Speaker Wills is a student. He received part of his PELL grant, but it's distributed to him in portions. He is requesting that all of it be distributed to him. He shared how he financial aid delays have complicated the lives of students. He asks for someone to step up and to be accountable for the delays. Student's file should be able to tell the reason for any hold-ups. Last year some of the disbursements went directly to banks, which was helpful for the students. The names of students are asked to be collected to try to help students on an individual basis. Minh Lam is also working diligently on the problem.

Speaker Fleming is very dismayed that many students still haven't received their Financial Aid, and some have had to drop out of school. Students have received insufficient responses to their questions. Generous faculty have given students' loans. People keep blaming the system for the problem, but we're not serving our students. Many of our students need financial aid in order to stay in school. She feels these delays will effect enrollment next term. She wonders if faculty will later pay a penalty for lower enrollment. Students will go to other colleges where they can easily receive Financial Aid. She's concerned that Passport has no back-up system. Students she entered into the

enrollment system did not work, and she had to physically go to Admissions & Records (A&R) for their enrollment. She wants to know who made the decision on the new system. She feels that someone needs to be accountable for what she feels was a short-sighted decision. Dr. Allen reported that 64% of the checks have been distributed. He shared the details per college. The plan is to have these checks issued before the end of the term. Applications received after August 25th still need to be processed. We are building a parallel system for the Spring, going back to the SAFE system. Our problems are due to the Regent system not working. It was asked how soon are students notified if they are ineligible? The student is sent an e-mail and called, as well as promptly notified when they come to the A&R counter.

Student Pompon commended the Financial Aid staff and how hard they are trying to help the students. She's a full-time student, and she also works here. She reported how instructor' assignments consist of constant day-by-day workload. She wants to know if the homework assignments can be broken down, or given weekly, and she feels that the instructors' expectations are too high for full-time students to be able to stay in school and fulfill their goals.

Speaker Morales spoke about visionary leadership. He feels it's hard to tell who is "steering the ship" and the "ship's" destination. He feels that we are too data driven, but that we need to predict when the next storm will hit. What does the community need? He asks for hiring accountability. He feels that people are being hired at the District to compensate for the poor performance of others. He feels that people are working full days, but he doesn't see that accomplishment part of the goal. He wants to see better management. He feels that we are losing site that we are a service organization, and that the District is a service center, there to serve and not to be served. Perhaps managers shouldn't take paychecks until students receive their Financial Aid paychecks.

Speaker Price reports that there is some new challenge for her everyday because the students aren't getting their money. It's sad that students are leaving the school. She's telling students not to come here. School is her life. She can't pay her parking tickets. She wants to know what will happen next semester. She gets headaches in class and can't concentrate. She asks for a resolution of the check delays.

Speaker is a campus librarian. She shares the same frustration as the students currently feel on campus. The students keep hearing that the checks are coming, but they don't arrive. Students have told her that they are leaving Merritt. She feels that bottom-up management works better in organizations. She shares that faculty are frustrated because there is nothing that they can do to help the students. She feels that checks should have been hand cut for the students. She asks that we be proactive and not reactionary. She also reported that there were fumes in the library prior to Thanksgiving. She complained that students and faculty were not warned of this. The smell in the fumes tells people to get out and that it's dangerous. She was sick due to this occurrence. She also reported that she put in an order for new computers and materials from Measure A, and that now no one knows what happened to the order.

Vice Chancellor Ikhara responded to the prior speakers' comments. We have construction protocols for contractors, and the college health and safety committees discuss these issues. Project managers use our manual for anyone coming here to work, and prior to commencing work there is a meeting on how to execute the construction to make it safe, and to discuss any possible type of hazard. There is no construction going on in the library, so they were not supposed to have any fumes in library. However, there was work done in the parking lot, with notice of the construction, and that work is now finished. The vendor was asked if there was any type of hazard, and they appropriately used the Cal State standard. However, the direction of the wind did blow non-toxic fumes toward the library. If there are people that hypersensitive to smell and chemicals, perhaps they should have an alternative work space. Sadiq will work with each college President to ensure that Material Safety Data Sheets are posted in near-by buildings that may be affected. Regarding procurement, all processed items are sent to the purchasing department, and everything that is correctly submitted is processed. "Just-in-time" project is used at Merritt, where if a product is ordered by 3 pm on any day, it's delivered by 8 am the next day. Employees should talk to the college business manager to see the status of purchase orders, or go directly to Sadiq to ensure that items don't fall through the cracks.

Speaker Drinnon feels that administrators and faculty really care about our students. He feels that the "lessons learned" are that we gave up too much control to a machine and a computer program.

Speaker Prevost shared that faculty, staff, and Dr. Adams have gone out of their way to lend students money and to try to help. She listed many great instructors she's had, many who went out of their way to provide books and help to students. She feels that the buck stops with the Chancellor and the Trustees. She wants to see some consequences for managers who do not meet their goals. She doesn't think there's anyone at Merritt who hasn't helped. She asks the Board to hire more full-time faculty, and that she finds it hard to work with part-time or temporary instructors, if they later leave Peralta. She feels students need more support in the help center. She suggests that an outside agency look at our system for improved efficiency. She doesn't want students to have to go through this in the Spring semester. Work study is important for the students, especially if they don't get receive their Financial Aid checks. She suggests that we put good students to work.

Speaker Giorgi shared the story of a student who quit his job and is living out of his car so that he can attend her class. She feels there are so many great employees on this campus, with wonderful students. She feels that most of the employees are overworked, are trying their best, and are well-intentioned. She asks that we come together as a system. She reported that the first group of microscopy students is doing well, and that the job market is looking good for them. She feels that every little thing that needs to happen at Peralta is complex. For example, she sites that twenty people have to handle one requisition to get a Measure A purchase processed. She feels that different offices often give different answers, and there's a certain level of confusion, with people not wanting to stick out their necks to respond to a problem, if they really don't really know

how to help. She hopes that the website will be more transparent in the future. She feels that if people can find clarifying information on the website that there will be more trust in the system, and that most people just want information. She wants to develop a director position, a technician, and greater staffing for her program, and she's looking for creative funding solutions.

Speaker is an anthropology teacher, and has worked here for 18 years. He shares that things do go wrong, and that back-up systems are always important. He feels if we can't issue checks via the computer, then we should hire as many people as possible to write the checks by hand. He suggests that we be creative with our solutions.

Speaker Robinson is a disabled student who hasn't received her financial aid checks yet, and reports that they are 2-4 weeks late. She feels she can't leave school, but also feels pressured because she can't afford to stay in school.

Speaker Roy reported that he received his third Financial Aid check, and that each check came on time and when he needed it, and he thanks the Financial Aid department for all of their hard work.

Speaker Graham assisted with some Financial Aid disbursements. He discovered that our students do not have personal checking accounts, and have to pay a large fee to cash their check. He wants to know if we can assist students who don't have checking accounts, and he cited the City of San Francisco which did this with the homeless. He feels that we have lots of very good programs, but that the local community is unaware of many of them. He suggests that we advertise our work programs at the community career centers. Some credit unions are trying to increase banking and financial literacy for our students, while other institutions are willing to give free classes and provide banking services to the community.

Speaker Trotter is the Title 3 Grant Director, and she asks that we bring in alternative resources as we face budget cuts. She feels that many of our policies impede and obstruct personnel hiring for grant objectives.

Speaker Fatima feels that the Financial Aid process isn't fully explained to students, and suggests a list from A to Z to help students. She went all over the Bay Area to get one document at a time, and then was told that she needed another document. She feels that it would be a better plan if the information was in writing. She was a student ambassador, and feels she should have also been trained on how to assist Financial Aid students. She feels that a back-up system should have been in place. She reports that morale is very low on campus.

Student speaker addressed how students' Financial Aid issues are very hard on the students and their school performance. He also takes classes at BCC, besides at Merritt. He asks people to recall what it's like to be a student and how hard it is. He feels that he can't do many of the things he requested, because he needs to get basic tools from his Financial Aid package. He feels that many students have already left school. He asks

people to open their hearts to what's happening, and to see how it's hurting our future leaders. He reported that Financial Aid lost his paper three times. If shared that if that occurred at his bank where he works that he would be fired if he lost someone's confidential paperwork. He feels that the necessary help isn't here for our students, and that we need more staffing. He asks that privacy issues need to be better protected.

Trustee Gulassa commented how the Financial Aid crisis has put tremendous pressure on everyone. He asked that all of the ideas presented be considered, that a back-up system be put into place, and that there be no more excuses in the future. The Trustees ask for a full accounting of what happened. They want to move forward so that this never happens again in the future. The audience was thanked for their comments and concern.

Respectfully submitted,

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