

Subject: From the President's Desk

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To: "Campus Wide Business" <campusbusiness@sjdccd.cc.ca.us>

Good morning everyone!

It has taken me a while to crank it up, but I hope to put out regular installments of

From the President's Desk from now until the end of the academic year. It is a challenge to do so on a weekly basis, but I will give it my best shot.

Constitution Day

Whether you realize it or not, September 17 has been designated as Constitution Day by the U.S. Congress. Constitution Day is not a holiday in the same sense that we celebrate Labor Day or Memorial Day or other holidays where we take a day off from work. However, it is intended to be a day of celebration of the U.S. Constitution. September 17 was chosen as the commemorative day because on that day in 1787 the delegates to the Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution and presented the final document to the nation.

Constitution day is the brainchild of Senator Robert Byrd from West Virginia, who has been dubbed as the “unofficial constitutional scholar” of Congress. Senator Byrd authored an amendment to a bill that was passed by both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives in 2004. The U.S. Department of Education has interpreted that bill as requiring every educational institution that receives federal funding to “provide an educational program pertaining to the United States Constitution on September 17 of each year.”

Delta's response to this mandated day of celebration is still in progress, but both the Student Services and Instructional areas are working on several activities. The guidelines suggest that colleges create web sites, hold public forums, create copies of the Constitution and then hold signings in public areas, along with a number of other ideas meant to raise awareness. This idea really came about because of the pitiful state of understanding of the Constitution by students as measured on national surveys (e.g., some of the results of these surveys showed that vastly more students recognized the city corresponding to the 90210 area code than recognized that the Constitution originated in the city of Philadelphia or that 60% of students knew that Bill Gates was the founder of Microsoft and only 1.8% knew that James Madison is considered the father of the U.S. Constitution). Obviously, there is a need to raise awareness on this issue and I want to encourage faculty and staff to consider how you might contribute to Constitution Day.

Hispanic Heritage Month

September is also Hispanic Heritage Month. This month of recognition has not taken off the way that February has in celebration and honor of African American history and cultural contributions. Nonetheless, it is

wonderful that many communities and organizations honor our Hispanic Heritage at this time of year. One of the major Hispanic days of celebration, the 16th of September, which is Mexican Independence Day, falls during this month and is often the focal point for many activities. I know that we always have some special events here at Delta and I look forward to another enjoyable celebration.

Health Benefits

As I have previously stated, the health benefits situation is an issue of concern to all of us here at Delta College. I am not going to say a lot about this issue as it is a collective bargaining issue. At the same time, it is difficult not to comment on it because it has such significant implications for us all. However, I will try to stick to the facts as I see them.

As you probably know, the Delta College Board of Trustees approved at its last meeting the new health benefits proposal for the Police Officers Association (POA) and for Management and Confidential employees. This means that these employees will now select their health benefits from a cafeteria style plan in which they can choose their level of coverage. It also means that these employees will now be on a "pay as you go" program rather than on our existing plan, which involves current year payments for prior year services. Another implication is that no POA or Management and Confidential employees hired after October 1, 2005 will be eligible for lifetime health benefits.

The intent behind these changes is to correct the structural imbalances that have contributed to our arrival at the brink of a medical benefits crisis. There are some structural imbalances that are beyond our control. For example, we can't control the rising costs that are passed on to us by our medical providers. We have experienced double digit inflation in our health care costs for the last five years and these rising costs show little sign of slowing down. Similarly, we can't control how many employees have opted for retirement nor can we unilaterally make substantial changes to retiree benefits packages after employees have retired. The only factors that we can exert some control over are the ones we are trying to address with the proposal that was just implemented for the POA and for Management and Confidential employees.

I know that everyone is aware that the medical benefits issue and the corresponding issue of a substantial accrued liability for the medical benefits of retirees are not issues that are unique to Delta College. Many community colleges across the state have already crossed this bridge and many more are continuing to grapple with it just as we are. The same holds true for K-12 districts, other public agencies, and even for private companies, most of whom have been paying for their health benefits for many years. There are no simple solutions to this growing dilemma. It will take a lot more dialogue, a lot more creative thinking, a lot more willingness to make some hard choices, and a lot less wishful thinking that somehow this whole mess will just disappear of its own volition if we are truly to solve this contentious and corrosive crisis. I hope for all of our sakes that we can solve this problem.

Hurricane Katrina

It is almost ghoulish, in the sense of watching a bad horror movie, to see the coverage that is occurring in all of the national and local media about Hurricane Katrina. I know at least two Delta employees, my assistant

Valerie Stewart-Green and Pat Putman, who have close family members who were in the path of this devastating storm. Luckily, it appears that none of their relatives lost their life, but in both cases it appears as if their relations lost most of their physical possessions. There are probably a number of other Delta employees or students who have relatives that were touched by Katrina as well. I know that there are many relief efforts underway. I am not soliciting donations because I know how generous the Delta community is and I am sure that many of you have already given or are in the process of doing so. If you have given, I applaud you for doing so!

Kudos

- I am sad to report that we have had two longstanding managers announce their retirements this summer. Mary Ann Cox has already retired, but she is still working on a short-term consulting contract to assist in the transition period. In the three years that I have known and worked with Mary Ann, I have been impressed by her ability to accomplish tasks, even under difficult timelines, and to take charge of a project and do what needs to be done with minimal direction. She has been a leader in curriculum development, in program development, and in many other areas. I appreciate greatly all that Mary Ann has done for the college in her long tenure. It is also true that no matter where I go in the local community, there is someone from outside the college who knows Mary Ann and who has something positive to say about her and, as a result, about the college. Mary Ann has truly been a community ambassador for Delta College and many of our good relations with community organizations and with prominent citizens is due to her efforts over the years.

Also retiring with a similarly lengthy service record is Michael Kerns, Director of Outreach and Enrollment. Michael's retirement is effective as of September 30th. In my experience, Michael is a person who is always willing to help out and who has always been willing to take on new assignments. I appreciate his quietly efficient professionalism and his constantly calm demeanor. Michael has been a "jack of all trades" in the Student Services area and I wish him the best in his retirement career as a real estate agent. If you need to buy or sell a house, I'm sure Michael is ready to assist!

Best wishes and best of luck to both Mary Ann and Michael.

- Congratulations to the Financial Aid program for their fine work with the San Joaquin County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce! The San Joaquin County Hispanic Chamber was recognized at the recent statewide conference in August as the Program of the Year. The particular program that was recognized was the Bilingual Financial Aid Workshop that our Financial Aid Department at Delta College has been co-sponsoring for the last two years with the Hispanic Chamber.

- Gillian Murphy and the Delta College Small Business Development Center also deserve kudos for partnering with the Hispanic Chamber to develop business start-up workshops that they intend to offer with additional consulting and translating services. These workshops will begin this month. This type of service is sorely needed to encourage and assist Hispanic entrepreneurs.

- Chris Malone, former Delta College star baseball player, has been thriving after being signed by the Los Angeles Dodgers and being put into the pitching rotation at their Columbus affiliate. Chris led the system this season with a 7-2 record and an ERA of 2.86. Chris just happens to be engaged to the daughter of Delta Police Chief Marc Bromme and his spouse, new Delta Nursing Instructor, Caralee Bromme. Let's hope Chris has a long and successful career with the Dodgers (except when he plays against the Giants).

Have a wonderful holiday weekend!