

**Subject: From the President's Desk**

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

*Good morning everyone!* I am sending this message out a day early as I will be off campus tomorrow meeting with the Director of the Equity for All project. Delta has been a participant in this project and we need to decide if we are going to continue in the next iteration of it. In any event, that has pushed my timetable up a day early.

## **Health Benefits**

Several months ago I attended part of a presentation on the health care industry and the health benefits issue that was sponsored by the CSEA. I can't remember the name of the person who presented the information, but she had a handout that contained some disconcerting information about the health benefits issue on a global scale. One of the pieces of information that stuck with me was the fact that the cost of healthcare in the U.S. was double that of the next most costly country.

This fact underlines what we have all observed year after year. Namely, that the healthcare crisis in this country has to do with runaway costs that continue to outpace the rate of inflation. The federal government seems unwilling or unable to do anything substantive about this situation. In fact, it appears that the government is trying to shift what little it does over to the private sector. The private sector in turn is shifting more and more of the costs to their employees.

The reason that I bring this up is simple. No one here at Delta College created our current health benefits situation. It is a much bigger issue that will take much grander solutions than what we have at our disposal. What I mean is that we have no way to stop or exert control over the double digit inflation that has characterized our health care costs for that past six years. There are other factors that are similarly beyond our control. Our situation is a microcosm of what has been happening all across our nation. We are by no means the first organization to find ourselves in this type of quicksand. In fact, if anything, we are latecomers to the health care benefits crisis.

It is extremely difficult for me to comment specifically on our local health benefits issue because anything that I say will be examined microscopically and criticized. It is also difficult because I don't want to cross the line into public bargaining. Even though people are trying to characterize this issue as an ethical or moral imperative, the health benefits issue is a collective bargaining issue. As a collective bargaining issue we must follow the dictates of the collective bargaining process. One of these requirements is that it occurs in a closed door setting. I wish that I could openly discuss all aspects of this situation, but I am legally constrained by the collective bargaining regulations.

Having given that disclaimer, there are some things that I can comment upon. First, I deeply sympathize with

the situation of many of the classified staff who are now facing a debilitating reduction in their monthly salary. It is disheartening and disappointing that it has come to this juncture, but it is not as if this was not known well in advance. It gives me no pleasure or sense of validation to recognize that what the administration has predicted all along has come to pass.

The question for all of us should be about what we can do locally to respond to the larger issues of the health care crisis. That is, what items are within our scope on which we can exert some level of control? We can't control health care cost inflation, but we can do other things to make an impact on our \$50 million dollar liability for retirees. If we don't enact some measures to cope with this liability, projections show that it can quickly rise to \$95 million or beyond, which would be a disaster for us all. I realize that such considerations are abstract and lack urgency for someone trying to cope with a big bite that is about to come out of their paycheck. However, the only viable solution to this dilemma is to balance short-term relief for individuals with long-term reductions in our retiree liability.

The current benefits payments and calculations were negotiated and ratified by CTA and CSEA memberships. Serious efforts were made to disseminate information about alternative options that would minimize the out-of-pocket cost to all employees. The POA and the Management and Confidential employees started paying last October for the benefits they individually selected. Both CTA and CSEA chose to keep the pay in arrears approach and declined the opportunity to modify their current contract.

I am encouraged by the recent collaborative progress that resulted in a memorandum of understanding between CSEA and the District. I am cautiously optimistic that planned meetings and discussions with each union will result in a substantive solution to the health benefits issues.

We need a comprehensive approach and not a "band aid" approach. Even though we are enjoying a healthy and robust college budget this year, throwing money at a broken system is not the solution. Throwing money or doing a bailout only delays the impact, it doesn't fix the problem. We need to resolve the larger issues of health care cost increases and meeting previously made commitments to retirees. We also need to realize that our compensation at Delta includes both salaries and benefits and that they are inextricably linked together. As much as we would all like it to be so, free medical coverage is not a right, it is a privilege. And, it is a privilege that Delta can no longer afford.

The administration has been ready and we are still ready to sit down with the unions and negotiate a solution to this dilemma. I look forward to finding a fair and comprehensive solution that we can all endorse.

## **uPortal Project**

Yesterday was the kick-off of the uPortal implementation project with a two-day workshop. This project is being directed by **Ralph Olstad**, Director of Information Services, and by **B.R. Brown**, our Director of Public Information and Marketing. I was pleased to see the participation of representatives from all constituent groups, including students in the workshop. We have hired a company called Unicon, out of Chandler,

Arizona, to assist us in the design and implementation process.

We haven't decided on a name for the portal yet, but it will probably be called MyDelta or MySJDC or something similar that is a short identifier of the college. I think most people know what a portal is, but for those who don't, a portal is a type of web site that allows students or staff access to specific information. For instance, when we implement our portal it will have a whole range of online support services for students. A student should be able to register through the portal, find out about the status of their account, and have the ability to complete a range of other tasks that, at present, they have to do in person. The portal links together different data bases so that student records are linked with financial information and other pertinent information related to individual students. There will also be a portal for faculty and staff, but the student portal is the first priority.

The target date for completion of the portal is summer 2007.

### **Kudos**

Last week, **Hazel Hill**, Dean of Workforce and Economic Development, organized a highly successful articulation meeting that was held in Upper Danner. The purpose of this meeting was to facilitate discussions between high school teachers and faculty here at Delta. So much has happened in the last several years at the high school level in terms of the state and federal mandates that have affected curriculum that it is critical that we maintain a dialogue to understand these changes. The long-term goal should be to keep our courses aligned with the high schools so that students have career paths. The high school work of our students needs to be relevant to whatever path they choose here at Delta. On the flip side, the courses and programs that we offer here at Delta also need to be consistent with what is happening at the high school level. This type of dialogue is the essence of articulation and I applaud Hazel for being proactive in sponsoring the articulation workshop.

Delta has had the HEP program on campus for the past five years. This program, funded by the Department of Education, assists students from migrant families to complete their GED and, in many cases, to make the transition to higher education. This year was our renewal year and there were many more grant applicants than grants available. Unfortunately, our grant was not renewed. As a result, we must shut down the HEP program although we hope to apply again in the future. I want to publicly thank the director of this program, **Joel Reyna** (as well as his staff), for all of his efforts in helping the migrant students and for running an outstanding program.

There was a wonderful article in the Stockton Record about former Delta Volleyball Coach **Mary Ann Paz** and her daughter, **Michaela Reyes**, who is our current volleyball coach. The article chronicles the background of these two coaching dynamos and it is a positive and touching story. Delta is indeed lucky to have both Mary Ann and Michaela on our team! Also on the athletics front, another article in the Record reported that our star basketball player, **Michael Nunnally** from Manteca, has orally committed to accept a scholarship to Pacific next year. Congratulations to Michael and to Coach **Brian Katz** for his continued success in placing our athletes into senior institutions.