

All the Facts You've Never Heard Before.. And What We Can Do About It

WHY OUR DISTRICT IS SO FAR FROM THE GOAL OF 75% FULL-TIME FACULTY

by Bob Smith, CSM

When AB 1725 was passed back in 1987 it contained, for all community college districts in the state, the goal of having 75% of all credit instructional hours taught by full-time faculty. This was cause for celebration by both full and part-time faculty in the San Mateo County Community College District.

Administrative Mushroom Farming?

Since that time both groups have become increasingly disillusioned because we seem to be moving away from the 75% goal rather than toward it. At the same time our administrators (at least the ones I talked

to at CSM) assured me that we were in compliance with the state's requirements. To me, this assurance was both puzzling and suspicious. We could all see more retirements than hires taking place year after year; how could we be moving closer to the 75% goal? Persistent questioning of our administrators always got the response, "Well, the law is very complicated and, besides, it's done on a district-wide basis", or words to that effect. I couldn't help but think of the time, about twenty-five years ago, when Dave Mertes was president of CSM and I was president of the Academic Senate. One day, in a jocular mood, Dave explained the "mushroom theory of administration" to me: "Cover the faculty with a
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AREN'T 75% OF FACULTY SUPPOSED TO BE FULL-TIMERS?

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thin layer of horse manure every few months and keep them in the dark as much as possible." I got to wondering if our current administration was thinking of doing a little mushroom farming of its own.

Last Spring John Kirk and I had a conversation about all this and decided to start asking questions directly at the District level using the pipeline that John has established with Assistant Chancellor Gus Petropoulos. Thus began a sequence of written questions and answers that did not seem to get us anywhere. As a result, we recently decided to ask Gus to sit down with us and, face to face, answer all our questions until we were satisfied. He readily agreed and said that he would ask Assistant Chancellor Bob Verzello (who had handled a great deal of the recently completed contract negotiations) to sit in with us. We met on Friday afternoon, November 8, and again on Thursday afternoon, November 21, at the District office. These sessions proved to be both enlightening and disturbing. It was enlightening because I learned a lot that I hadn't known before, and disturbing because it also showed me how little I understood about what was really meant when the administration claimed compliance with state requirements in striving for that magical goal of 75%.

It All Started with AB 1725

To begin at the beginning, when a law like AB 1725 is passed it does not contain all the rules necessary for the implementation of its provisions. The required machinery is incorporated in the California Code of Regulations, or Title V, as we usually hear of it. The state chancellor's office in Sacramento is then charged with assuring Title V compliance by all districts. (Sections 51025 and 53300 through 53314 are the ones that pertain to the 75% goal contained in AB 1725 and are readily available on campus if you want to wade through them.)

In order to get the process started the state chancellor's office called for a baseline count of full-time faculty, using the Title V rules, to be measured in the Fall

1988 semester. This, of course, depended on the definition of just who should be counted and who should not be counted and this was not as simple as you might think.

Who's Counted as Full-Timers?

For example, any certificated faculty with a 6 unit counseling load and, therefore, only a 9 unit teaching load (as most of our faculty counselors have) count as full-time teachers for the purpose of this determination. Also included are "academic supervisors" like apprenticeship and nursing coordinators even though they do not actually teach any classes. I hope it is obvious that I am not questioning the important role that all the people I have just mentioned play in the life of our three colleges. The point is, simply, that while they teach either a reduced load or no classes at all, they show up as full-time positions according to the Title V rules.

To further complicate the count, as faculty, we have a number of options available to us that I'm sure most of us regard as positive attributes of our jobs. For example, we have professional development time available, we can take an unpaid leave of absence of up to a year, we can get reassigned time for special projects, through unit banking we can take an entire semester off, we can be granted post-retirement contracts as the vast majority of retirees request, and we can opt for phase-in retirement plans. I think we would be unhappy to lose any of these opportunities.

But, what all these desirable options have in common is that, although they each allow us to spend time away from teaching or to do less teaching, we are still counted as full-time teachers under Title V. As the old saying goes, "You can't have your cake and eat it too." Part-timers are hired to teach all those sections that we do not teach because we are otherwise occupied—but the counting method does not reflect that.

We can argue that this Title V counting method is unfair, biased, crazy, or anything else we choose to call it in our frustration, but we have to recognize that it is the rule by which the game is played. The good news

is that no administrators are counted as faculty.

Full-Timers Taught 68% of Classes in 1988

When the baseline figure was computed in 1989-90, based on the Fall 1988 figures, our district had 377 full-timers as counted by the state's rules. This put us in the bracket having between 67% and 75% of all credit instructional hours taught by full-time faculty. The count showed, in fact, that we were at about the 68% level. Remember that this does not mean that 68% of the teaching faculty were full-time and the remaining 32% were part-time. This was not a simple body count. What is meant was that 68% of our total credit instructional hours in the district for that academic year were being taught by full-time faculty.

For the next two years (1990-91 and 1991-92) the state made money available to help districts move towards the 75% goal. We received about \$1,000,000 per year for those two years for this purpose and, due to our position in the 67%-75% bracket, we were obligated to spend at least one-third of it for new full-time faculty. This worked out, at the time, as an obligation to hire twenty new teachers in the district. We actually exceeded the minimum requirement and hired twenty-four new full-timers so we ended up with 401 compared to the baseline figure of 377 and the required figure of 397.

The full-time faculty count is included in something called the Staff Data Report, which every district submits annually to Sacramento. The State Chancellor's Office looks at that report and at our student and class load and, by comparing the two, arrives at the number of FTE (full-time equivalent faculty positions) that they say we need to be in compliance with Title V regulations.

The fine print in those regulations says that in those years when the state has enough money to distribute to the districts in the form of growth money, those districts

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HOW OUR FULL-TIME % HAS CONTINUED TO DECLINE, BUT IT'S ALL LEGAL!

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that have experienced a decline in FTES and a corresponding decline in their full-time faculty must use a proportional share of the growth money to grow back to their target obligation. The other variable involved is COLA (cost-of-living adjustment). Now, stand by for the curve ball; when the state does not distribute COLA, no such hiring needs to take place because the State suspends the rules for growth. In fact, if our FTES (full-time equivalent students) count goes down the state also sees this and reduces the required number of full-time faculty needed to stay in compliance. For all the years since the halcyon era, when we received about a million dollars a year in Program Improvement Funds and hired those twenty-four new full-time teachers in the district, we have been hit by the double whammy of no COLA (so don't worry about compliance) and decreasing FTES (so our target number diminishes besides).

Full-Timers Now Teach Only 63% of Classes

Our district's full-timer obligation for Fall 1996 is 367, down 30 from the 397 obligation back in 1992. The figure of 367 is contained in a letter from the State Chancellor's office dated October 17, 1996. What this actually translates to, according to Gus Petropoulos, is that our district now has only about 63% of all credit instruction hours taught by full-time faculty. In other words, we are down from our starting point of 68% in 1992—and yet we are still "in compliance" with the number of full-time faculty we are required to have!

When, in the past, I have been assured by the CSM administration that the district was meeting its obligation, this annually diminishing number, of which I was wholly ignorant, has been what they were talking about; and, on these grounds, as far as I can see, they have been correct. (That is, assuming the accuracy of the annual Staff Data Reports.) The misunderstanding in my mind was that I was playing a simple game of checkers (75/25) while the administration was playing a very arcane game of chess (Title V). My expectations and theirs were based on entirely different premises. I

suspect I am not alone on the faculty in missing this incongruity. (I think we may well argue at this point that the district and college administrations should have done a better job of educating the faculty to the real rules of the game though the specter of mushroom farms in San Mateo has, at least, been put to rest in my mind.)

A subsequent letter from the State Chancellor's Office, dated October 24, 1996, was received which begins, "The California Code of Regulations, Title V, Section 51025 requires community college districts to increase the number of full-time faculty over the prior year in proportion to the amount of growth funds received for credit FTES in the prior year." This letter contains a projection of full-time faculty obligation for Fall 1997 and acts as an early warning for those districts whose obligation may go up. As the letter states, "This projection is based on districts increasing their credit FTES to the maximum of their credit growth fund allocated. The obligation figure will be adjusted at year end" based on actual funded credit FTES."

State Money Will Be Available

Our district's projected obligation figure is shown as 382, up fifteen from Fall 1996. This adjustment is based on a maximum of approximately five percent growth in our FTES. Less growth, fewer new teachers required. This year, for the first time since 1992, state money will be available and our district will be expected to respond accordingly.

"We All Feel That We Need More Full-Time Teachers"

I have purposely left out some of the minutiae that John, Bob, Gus and I discussed to keep a long article from becoming longer. What I have included is basically the information that I wish I had known before. As our session was ending, Gus said, "We all feel that we need more full-time teachers." At that point, I suppose, we could have started a whole new philosophical discussion of the district's financial priorities, why the process of justifying the need for new full-time faculty is

so difficult (especially when the need seems to be so self-evident), why the district seems satisfied with minimum technical compliance rather than with the spirit of AB 1725, and so on.

These questions, and more like them, need to be pursued in a vigorous and timely fashion. This should be done, I think, by both the Academic Senate and the AFT and not simply by a couple of faculty members on a quixotic mission to satisfy their own curiosities. Cliff Denney, AFT 1493 President, has already announced that our union's highest priority for the coming year is to increase the number of full-time faculty as much as possible and this is certainly a step in the right direction.

Make Full-Time & Part-Time Hours Public Information

At the moment, I think the best thing we can all do to remove the mystery from our pursuit of the 75% goal is to begin, on each campus, to publish lists of the assignments (by name) of every full-time faculty member showing (semester by semester) all teaching assignments, released time, phase-in and post-retirement status, leaves due to unit banking accumulation, etc. Include in the list all those coordinators who are included in the Title V count of full-time faculty positions. Publish, on a department or division basis, the semester-by-semester record of the percent of credit instructional hours taught both by full-timers and part-timers in such a way that faculty and administrators alike can track our progress. (I am assuming that our administration is as interested in clearing the air on this issue as the faculty is and the time and help that Gus and Bob gave John and me certainly seems to bear this out.)

Fund drives usually use a large-scale vertical thermometer type graphic display to show how close the drive is to achieving its stated financial goal. Perhaps we could have a similar graphic (about 6 feet tall) posted at the door to each Division office to show how close that Division is to achieving the AB 1725 goal of 75%. I'll volunteer to design the "thermometer". How about it?