



2016-07

Faculty as Central to Student Success

Third in a Series

By Adam Wetsman

Everyone is interested in seeking ways to enhance student success and the faculty at Rio Hondo College participated in a day-long workshop to develop ideas relating to the issue. This was developed by our local Academic Senate after it learned that the administration was moving forward with plans for student success without significantly engaging faculty in discussions.

Unfortunately, the promise by the administration to include meaningful participation by faculty never materialized, and simply meant that the campus constituency groups were supposed to rubber stamp a proposal to upgrade an administrative position to meet the needs of the Student Success Initiative (SSI). Little additional input was sought; in fact, it was generally shunned.

Nonetheless, the Senate-led workshop produced a slew of suggestions to help students succeed, ones that will be described in later entries of this blog. As the Academic Senate president, the challenge was to get help with implementation, and the administration was the gateway for doing so. They were skeptical, however, of faculty input, perhaps believing it was a threat to the plan that had been developed, the one with an enhanced administration position as the centerpiece. Undaunted, I pushed forward to communicate our findings with as many governance groups as possible.

The first stop was at the Board of Trustees where, a month or so earlier, the administrator whose position was eventually upgraded, spent an hour describing the challenges of the SSI and how Rio Hondo College would respond. I had asked the administration if I could give a short presentation on the Senate-led workshop and was told that I could not since the agenda was full (which really was not). Undeterred, I expressed that I would do it during the comments section of the Board meeting where leaders of the constituency groups (Senate, Faculty Association, CSEA, etc.) could inform the Board on relevant events and activities of their respective organizations.

The Board president was prepared for me, however, and before I even started she admonished the trustees against asking questions or making comments since the item was not on the agenda. Nonetheless, the presentation went well with several trustees squirming in their seats, legally precluded from participating in the conversation even though they wanted to.

This was followed a week or so later at our Associated Students' executive committee where I outlined the challenges facing students and the ways that faculty can provide assistance. Upon completion, there was a strange mood in the room. Evidently, many students interpreted the recommendations as suggesting that *students themselves* were responsible for low levels of success. This required me to do some repair, explaining it was our responsibility as professors, and Rio Hondo's responsibility overall, to position each student for success. Once I emphasized that we need to do better for students to do better, their concerns abated.

Later, I presented to faculty at Flex Day, to the Academic Senate, and to our umbrella planning committee. Each was exceptionally well received with even more suggestions elicited on how we can best help our students. All of this achieved two important objectives. First, faculty and other members of the campus community gained an increased awareness of the roles that we play in student success. Second, our work demonstrated that faculty can indeed make significant contributions to help students achieve their educational goals.

The next two blogs will describe the recommendations from our Senate-led success workshop...