

# Q&A with Sarah Thompson

## New FACCC President



Stepping into the role in December, Sarah brings experience, strong policy expertise, and a clear commitment to faculty advocacy. A longtime FACCC Board member, she led key efforts on the Student Centered Funding Formula and continues to influence FACCC's legislative and budget priorities.

Grounded in her work as a faculty leader, past academic senate president, and union communications officer, Sarah leads with collaboration, clarity, and purpose. We're excited to have her at the helm as FACCC moves into its next chapter.

### Can you tell us a little about your path into community college teaching and what originally drew you to this work?

My path was a little unconventional. I was a Sociology graduate student and a full-time administrator at Rutgers University. I had completed my coursework and was working on my dissertation proposal when I hit an impasse and, somewhat impulsively, sent my CV to every open full-time faculty position listed in The Chronicle of Higher Education that month.

At Rutgers, I taught gateway retention courses for EOF (similar to California's EOPS) during both their summer bridge program and the academic year. That experience led to my role as Learning Specialist for Livingston College's Learning Center, where I coordinated tutoring, workshops, and academic support for both special programs and the broader student population. I also served as liaison to the Athletic Department, developing retention programs for the men's football and basketball teams.

I truly enjoyed my work at Rutgers. What I didn't realize at the time was that it was perfect preparation for teaching the diverse student population of California's community colleges.

### You've been deeply involved with FACCC for many years. What first drew you to the organization, and what has kept you committed over time?

I became involved with FACCC in 2018–19, when both my district and FACCC were raising concerns about the new funding model, the Student-Centered Funding Formula. We attended the same oversight committee meetings and provided public comment.

As a result, my union appointed me as its representative to the FACCC Board of Governors. I've stayed committed because I believe our strength as an organization lies in the quality of our research, advocacy, and feedback on the issues that matter most to faculty. We also invest deeply in relationships with our system partners, ensuring thoughtful, productive collaboration.

### Outside of formal roles and titles, what personal values guide the way you lead and advocate?

I can attribute my code of personal values to several of my life experiences:

- Growing up overseas as a religious, racial, and national minority,
- My academic training as a sociologist, and
- My deeply embedded faith beliefs.

I spend a lot of time evaluating my choices, my reactions, and my strategies through the lens of fairness. I try to listen before speaking, and to learn before acting. But once a decision is made, I commit fully to carrying it out. I understand that my role gives my voice weight, and I am accountable to our members who trust me to use it wisely. I also believe in clarity and transparency with our system partners as the foundation for trust.

I believe in radical hospitality and inclusion. This challenges me to be observant in social settings, looking out for those who may be new or feeling marginalized. In line with these beliefs, I try to engage in active "strength spotting" – recognizing both contributions and potential in others. I value perseverance and a strong work ethic, but I balance those with hope, humor, and joy.



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**What are your top priorities for FACCC in the coming year?**

1. Work with system partners to end the practice of withholding legislatively budgeted COLAs as a punitive measure against “underperforming” districts.
2. Develop long-term solutions to reform the 50% Law.
3. Promote greater honesty and transparency in district financial reporting.
4. Continue evaluating and refining the Student-Centered Funding Formula.
5. Address the most harmful outcomes of AB 1705.
6. Advance our sponsored legislation on part-time faculty healthcare and protections for faculty facing immigration actions such as detention or deportation.

**What do you see as the biggest challenges currently facing community college faculty, and how is FACCC positioned to address them?**

**Federal Attacks on Higher Education**

While FACCC primarily focuses on state policy, growing membership strengthens our ability to collaborate nationally. Right now, we are urging the Chancellor’s Office and our state legislature to respond as quickly and humanely as possible to federal attacks on our institutions and the people who populate them. FACCC is sponsoring legislation to protect faculty facing detention or deportation, and recently hosted a forum on navigating immigration policy.

**Part-time Faculty Exploitation**

FACCC-sponsored AB 1171, authored by Assemblymember Patel, would legislate that all qualifying part-time faculty across the state would have access to health care equivalent to that of full-time faculty. Our position paper on the Unified Faculty model positions us to collaborate with system partners towards a more equitable system.

**AB 1705 (Irwin) and Curricular Authority**

The fallout of AB 1705 reflects a broader erosion of faculty control over curriculum. FACCC is engaged in data collection, coalition building, and advocacy to address its unintended consequences and to safeguard the Academic Senate’s role in curricular decisions.



**The Student-Centered Funding Formula (SCFF)**

FACCC opposed the SCFF before it was enacted, as the potential to mitigate the harms of the enrollment-based funding model was outweighed by the SCFF’s potential to harm high-cost-of-living regions. In what is considered a “good” budget year, many districts are struggling with rising costs, dwindling reserves, and threats to solvency. FACCC has been actively engaged in data collection, coalition building, and legislative efforts, including last year’s reserves audit, to address these impacts. Our goal is to work with system partners to develop a funding model grounded in stable base funding, with built-in incentives for success and no punitive withholding of funds.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

As AI expands in higher education, faculty must be meaningfully consulted about its benefits and risks. While FACCC successfully supported legislation requiring faculty roles to remain human, automation of faculty duties remains a concern. We need to be ever-vigilant in our senates and collective bargaining agreements, engaging in local consultation before implementing these technologies.

**What is something FACCC members might not know about you that helps shape the way you show up as a leader?**

I am a great believer in the idea that play is essential for our mental health. Games, make-believe, and outdoor activities give us the break we need from our work and home routines while releasing healthy endorphins. Laughter is medicine, and connection is a powerful antidote to political heaviness.

I organize a meetup group called “Adult Recess,” where adults come together to play dodgeball, Family Feud, Pictionary, and more. One of our most popular events is the annual “Office Olympics,” inspired by an episode of The Office. The picture to the right is a Flonkerton relay where competitors strap reams of paper to their feet and “skate” across the floor.

**What do you hope faculty across California feel or experience under your leadership?**

Essential. Empowered. Encouraged to act.

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