

Can union prevent VVC 'restructuring'?

September 19, 2013

MARSHALL KAGAN

On Oct. 15 the Accreditation Committee will visit Victor Valley College. After five years of warnings, it's likely the committee will revoke the accreditation, as it did with San Francisco Community College for similar financial budget reasons. As reported in the Sept. 15 Press Dispatch, all the top executives switched from their previous, "Everything is OK," to now saying it's all the fault of the Board of Trustees. But no significant proposals, as you would expect from college leaders, came from any except Peter Allan.

Mr. Allan's proposal is for a "restructuring." He now acknowledges that the full-time faculty union contract results in a \$175,000 average cost for each full time faculty member. A good part of that comes from "management activities," for which the faculty receives extra pay, at high pay scales. His proposal, apparently, is to hire cheaper, "management" personnel, and thus reduce full-time faculty pay. Add people to reduce the payroll. He had an opportunity, to start on this wonderful plan last June, when he re-negotiated the union contract. He did nothing, and the contract can't be renegotiated for at least a year. He provides no numbers, and will face union resistance.

There are more than 100 community colleges in California. Only a few face accreditation problems. And only a few have problems similar to VVC's full-time faculty union contract. When you read the contract quickly, the salaries, up to \$100,000, plus about \$25,000 in benefits, appear on the high side, but not too outrageous.

The devil is in the details. The \$125,000 cost is based on 23 hours per week, and 32 weeks per year. Some faculty members actually have full-time jobs outside, in addition to their faculty job.

The union contract also provides summer and winter session work, and administrative duties, that boost the average compensation to the \$175,000.

The obvious solution is to expand the work week (30 hours a week?) and the number of weeks worked (44 weeks?). This would easily reduce the average compensation by \$50,000, which when multiplied by 147 full-time faculty members results in more than \$7 million in savings. The \$4 to \$6 million deficits could be eliminated, the 7,900 student requests for classes that were denied virtually eliminated, and funds would be available for construction and expansion. The taxpayers, the students, and the community gain. (Mr. Allan's solution would only provide a small part of this benefit, but would probably encounter union resistance as strong as expected for the above plan.)

The executives who now try to put the blame on the trustees are right; it is the board's responsibility (but they also share the responsibility).

Unfortunately, the board has two or three union stooges (who in exchange for campaign contributions or because they simply don't know any better) support the union position. One member who was supposed to be opposed to the union position and the new member haven't been heard from lately. Ms. Lorrie Denson, board president, was forced to admit that she violated the Brown Act (that governs public meetings) by refusing to allow speakers to discuss the union contract. Shame on this board.

The future probably holds the Accreditation Commission withdrawing the college's accreditation. The California Community College Board would then appoint a Special Trustee, and the existing board would become a zombie board (They walk and talk, but as far as the college is concerned, they are dead).

It will be our task to provide the Special Trustee with this information, and assure him of the community support that will be needed.

Marshall Kagan lives in Victorville.