

Don't depend on teachers union to help meet ACCJC demands

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For the past eight years, Victor Valley College has been struggling with accreditation issues, most of which concern: 1) holding faculty accountable for adequate instruction by requiring a report of student learning success, and 2) curing budget deficits.

Of course, if one were to talk to the faculty union on campus, they would insist no budget deficit exists because there is still money in the bank. The union apparently does not understand that spending more than you receive, annually, creates a negative cash flow, annually. The savings account dries up and the college is exposed to risk. That is a structural budget deficit.

One opportunity to cure the budget deficit exists in negotiation of contracts to help bring salaries and benefits under control. It has been suggested that the college's Board of Trustees pass a resolution to bring salaries and benefits to the level of 80 percent of the general funds of the college. It now stands at 87 percent. The trustees previously told the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges that they would accomplish the 80 percent goal. Negotiation of salaries and benefits presents the best opportunity to achieve the 80 percent goal and address the structural budget deficit. The effort to do both has largely fallen on deaf union ears. Based on the following, it's easy to understand why.

Members of the VVC faculty are subject to a step/column program of base pay which provides them with automatic salary increases in excess of \$2,000 per year every year — for 22 years. Full-time faculty members are required to work only 21.5 hours per week. Receiving a full-time salary for part-time work with 22 automatic raises of more than \$2,000 each year (no need to prove your work is worth it) would never fly in the private sector.

Living off the taxpayers

It appears that this is all about living off of taxpayers. This type of salary structure fosters a sense of entitlement that no previous board at VVC has been able to combat. Frankly, if the last meeting is any indication, at least two members of the current board support this boondoggle, are controlled by the union, and coached by the union before they vote on any matter on the agenda.

These raises are exclusive of annual Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) and exclusive of add-on assignments, which can increase faculty hours per week but which can also double a member's pay. All faculty members receive 100 percent, fully paid benefits and life insurance policies. I am sure many of you are scratching your heads and saying, "I am in the wrong profession."

The worker bees at the college, the members of the California School Employees Association, and the management staff, are not quite so extravagant. They have automatic increases of about 1 percent annually for seven years and thereafter they get automatic longevity raises of approximately half a percent annually.

Working on the deficit

But "me too" clauses in their union contract provide them with many of the same rich benefits. One would note, however, these groups appear willing to work on the budget deficit.

The part-time faculty asks only to be paid a fair hourly wage for hours worked. No benefits, no automatic raises, no longevity pay exists for them.

At the January board meeting, VVC "sunshined" (published) the full-time faculty union contract provisions scheduled for negotiation in 2014. What are they? Higher salaries, more benefits and more positions: All translate into more taxpayer dollars. The union claims the COLA and anticipated increased enrollment funds (not actual enrollment) as sources of money to fund their increases. Was there mention of working on curing the budget deficit? No. Was there mention of compromise? No. Was there mention of accreditation concerns? No, just a desire to secure higher salaries to the detriment of the college.

A golden opportunity for the union and the college to work on fixing the structural budget deficit is being missed. True colors have been shown. The faculty union only sees green.

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