

OUR OPINION

Whom to believe?

August 14, 2013

Steve Williams

Dr. Thomas E. Miller chairs the Fine/ Applied Arts Department at Victor Valley College, and is the dean — in time of service — of the VVC faculty. He's been there 38 years.

He's also angry with us (see his letter today) for Tuesday's editorial, which he says contain figures for VVC salaries as "completely erroneous," and "a sad attack on a group of folks who are working diligently to both effectively educate our students and to get the college off probation." He asks that we set the record straight, adding, "I don't know where you got your figures, but it would be helpful to everyone if you would reveal that source in your corrections. That source should not be allowed to continue to spread false, even libelous information."

Glad to oblige, Dr. Miller.

Our information came from a website maintained by the office of John Chiang, California's Controller, called "Government Compensation in California" (the link is <http://publicpay.ca.gov/Reports/HigherEducations/HigherEducation.aspx?entityid=3653&fiscyear=2011>).

We were directed to the link by Peter Allan, currently serving as acting superintendent/ president at the school.

Curiously, we also received an email Tuesday from Mr. Allan, similarly chastizing us for the editorial. "I am at a loss about why you would print such an editorial," he said. When we reminded him where we got the information, he responded that "The faculty contract provides for plenty of opportunities for faculty to earn extra pay for doing extra assignments," and said that had we used the phrase "total base pay," instead of "base pay," our figures would have been more accurate.

Dr. Miller, in a follow-up email, basically said the same thing, that "these (Chiang's) higher total compensation figures include summer school pay, overload pay (usually at the hourly part time rate) and administrative duties such as department chair, curriculum committee chair, etc. These do not represent the salary schedule, which is what you referenced in your editorial."

Mr. Allan's explanation is similar: "Your numbers would have been more accurate if they had referred to 'total pay' however, I am not sure that the general public would understand faculty assignments, and the opportunity that exists for faculty to earn extra pay without a detailed explanation."

What the public "understands," it seems to us, is the bottom line, and the bottom line says VVC's fulltime faculty is absorbing a lot of taxpayer money. Is it too much? We think so, which is why we believe the fifth trustee (when one is either elected or appointed) should be on the side of the taxpayers.

We might note here that we've never met Dr. Miller, which we consider our loss. Any educator who says unions have no place in education (see his letter) is to be honored and respected.