

April 12, 2021

Dear President Nguyen,

We are writing nearly one year after our last open letter to you. We are writing again to urge you to address the serious complaints from faculty about a deteriorating campus climate and pervasive distrust in our governance structure and the decision-making practices at Foothill. Our faculty continue to report a perception that their input is not solicited, valued or considered by the administration, even when required by law and regulations. We hear complaints from all constituencies expressing frustration, confusion and distrust when it comes to governance and decision-making.

The Foothill Academic Senate needs you to know that frustration is growing. Many are losing confidence in your administration's ability to lead our college out of this growing "governance crisis." The Academic Senate remains ready and willing to partner with you, our colleagues in Classified Senate, and our student leaders to rebuild trust and relationships and improve the role of constituent senates within our governance structure so that all voices are heard and valued.

We ask that you demonstrate a commitment to address our concerns through action. Many of the issues that still stand unaddressed were brought to your attention nearly one year ago in our [May 1, 2020 letter to you](#). To this date, our constituents have not reported demonstrable improvements in the issues raised in that letter. We need to trust that you are equally committed to finding solutions that will avoid further deterioration of faculty morale in a year that has been among the most difficult any of us have ever experienced in our professional lives. We need to see action now.

From our faculty body of over 550 full-time and part-time faculty, we bring forth to you the following concerns as shared from our division and area senators representing these faculty, as well as our Academic Senate representatives appointed to the five governance councils:

**General concerns with campus climate, governance and decision-making practices:**

- A lack of clarity about how decisions are being made, who is making them, when they have to be made, and what information they're relying on to make those decisions resulting in confusion, distrust and sometimes conflict
- A perception that stakeholder voices seem to be consistently forgotten, ignored or excluded
- Fear of retribution when openly challenging or disagreeing with executive leadership
- A lack of understanding of the role of the Academic Senate and its relationship to governance, resulting in the Academic Senate being "bypassed" on decisions being made on academic and professional matters
- A lack of accountability
- Concern with an administration that seems to devalue and minimize the role of faculty in decision-making
- Concern with a campus climate that seems adversarial between faculty and administration

**Concerns specific to the Governance Councils:**

- A lack of clarity of the scope and purview of the councils
- Confusion over the roles and responsibilities of council members
- A lack of needed information and resources to make informed recommendations

- Lack of sufficient time to discuss and deliberate
- A perception that “decision-points” being brought to the councils for consideration are in fact decisions that have already been made by the college administration, and they are brought forward for either rubber stamping, if approval seems guaranteed, or simply changed to an “fyi” if council members do not get on board
- A perception that council input, even when formulated via memo, is being ignored
- Discomfort with the process by which all councils are tasked with “asks” solely and unilaterally by the College President, and recommendations go only to the College President, even when topics are academic and professional matters requiring collegial consultation with the Academic Senate, and/or directly impact constituencies in such a way that would warrant broader stakeholder input

**The combination of all of the above results in a perception of a unilateral decision-making process by college executive leadership and a limited and only performative role of shared governance. These concerns have also eroded faculty’s confidence in the quality of decisions being made. This perception is also contributing to a culture of distrust, and has further deteriorated faculty morale and led to pervasive faculty disengagement in governance.**

As mentioned above, we had already brought a great number of these issues to you in our May 1, 2020 letter. Since that letter, we have not observed a consistent shift in approach to address these serious concerns, nor have we seen a demonstrated commitment from you to address them. In fact, our constituents express further deterioration in campus climate, faculty morale and overall ineffectiveness of governance at our college. This disempowerment is threatening our ability to fully serve our students and community.

The following actions, or inactions create a perception that the Academic Senate and faculty have been disempowered and deprioritized in this administration:

1. In your [May 22, 2020 response to the Academic Senate letter](#), you stated that “Members of our Cabinet and I look forward to meeting with you weekly to identify operational proposals that may involve faculty,” yet, such meetings have not materialized, or at least the faculty have not been invited to them.
2. Also in your May 22, 2020 letter and in a subsequent meeting with senate leaders and Chancellor Miner, you spoke of engaging a facilitator in the 2020-21 academic year to help mediate the conversations with faculty and address the concerns of our letter. To date, you have not engaged a facilitator or mediator, despite requests from senate officers to do so.
3. While we do appreciate your willingness to co-sponsor the “Collegiality in Action” visit, what is often considered a “level one” mediation between academic senates and college administration, which took place on February 5, 2021, it is obvious that the “level one” visit failed to address our concerns, and in fact led to what many faculty perceive as a worsening of the relationship. This was likely due in part to your public statement at the January 11, 2021 Academic Senate meeting whereby you expressed reluctance to request the visit initially, and you cautioned faculty to “keep their power and privilege in check” in efforts to “democratize shared governance.” Nothing was communicated by you to the attendees in advance of the meeting about the purpose or goals of the visit, and your jarring silence during the visit itself when the chat erupted with serious allegations of racist structures and systems was also striking to many faculty.

4. On multiple occasions starting immediately following the Collegiality in Action visit, the Academic Senate officers have requested that you co-sponsor with us a “level two” ASCCC/CCLC visit verbally and in writing, which has been ignored to date.
5. Also in your May 22, 2020 response to the Academic Senate letter, you stated “I have asked that all matters that go to governance must also include a report on the feedback from ‘closely affected stakeholders.’ The inclusion of affected stakeholders will become standard practice.” As far as we know, there have been to date no official reports of feedback from closely affected stakeholders at any governance council meetings.
6. We also wrote to you on January 6, 2021 in response to the October 2020 students’ open letter to governance. In this letter, we asked for your support and advocacy for our commitments to address the students’ demands and our desire to collaborate with others on campus to do so. We also acknowledged that the student letter had highlighted many of the concerns with institutional structures and campus climate we shared above and expressed our fear that these challenges would impact our ability to be effective in addressing the student demands. We requested that you convene a group representing all of the recipients of the letter by the end of Winter quarter 2021 to debrief the concerns and collaborate in our responses. To date our letter has been ignored.
7. You have never included the Academic Senate as a recipient of your “governance memos,” even when the topic of action, or ask, is an academic or professional matter named within the 10+1, requiring collegial consultation with the Academic Senate as stipulated in FHDA Board Policy 2223. Furthermore, you have never engaged verbally or in writing the current Academic Senate President or officers with any request for consultation associated with these memos, including one dated April 7, 2021, which was proposing an entire redesign of our governance structure (squarely within the 10+1), and even threatening the role of the Academic Senate on our campus, by suggesting academic senates may be creating barriers to equity work.

Finally, while we did read in your May 22, 2020 response to us a sincere apology for actions or inactions that may result in faculty not feeling valued, the reality is that we did not read in your letter, nor have we seen in any action since then, an acknowledgment of your administration’s practices that may be causing or contributing to these issues, nor any verbal commitment nor demonstrated effort to address them. This is in fact a major contributing factor to the furthering lack of confidence in your leadership of the college.

We therefore ask the following of you:

1. Initiate regular meetings between the Academic Senate (represented by the senate officers, also known as the Executive Council) and President’s Cabinet starting immediately.
2. Engage an outside facilitator within the next few weeks to help mediate conversations between you and the Academic Senate (represented by the senate officers and/or a senate-designated leadership committee of the senate), with a goal of repairing trust and building relationships.
3. Institutionalize stakeholder reports in proposals coming to governance councils by the end of May 2021.
4. Ensure you have engaged directly in collegial consultation with the Academic Senate, and not simply through the governance councils, before taking action on any recommendations coming before you on academic and professional matters, starting immediately.

5. Bring to the Academic Senate (via the Academic Senate officers and not solely through Academic Senate representatives to governance councils) any new initiative/program impacting academic and professional matters before tasking other administrative offices and/or governance councils with discussion, to collaborate on how best to engage all constituencies and stakeholder voices in developing recommendations, starting immediately.
6. Co-sponsor and fund (if applicable) a “level two” Collegiality in Action visit before the end of this academic year, with the explicit purposes of: a. Helping us analyze our existing governance structure and b. propose recommendations that will ensure effective participation of all constituents and honor collegial consultation with the Academic Senate on academic and professional matters.
7. Provide resources for, and collaborate with the Academic Senate, Classified Senate and ASFC, in the convening of a “Shared Governance Task Force,” to be charged with conducting a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of the current governance structure, utilizing the data collected to date from various forums (C&C, Academic Senate, Classified Senate, ASFC, etc.), and to be convened prior to the end of May 2021. We ask that you create a new body to complete this work, and do not charge such an important task to C&C and/or one of the governance councils, which meet only once a month for two hours. This Task Force would be charged with:
  - Preparing recommendations for needed improvements/fixes.
  - Facilitating opportunities for college-wide input into these recommendations.
  - Ensuring approval of all recommendations by all constituency groups: ASFC, Classified Senate, Academic Senate, Admin Council, and the Office of the President.
  - Implementing the changes and updating the Governance Handbook.
8. Take action on the January 6, 2021 Academic Senate letter to you, and provide us your response by the end of April 2021.
9. Take initiative and leadership in repairing relationships with faculty and rebuilding a climate of trust and collaboration starting right away and ongoing into the future.

The Academic Senate again would like to reaffirm our commitment to a strong partnership with you and the rest of the administrative leadership of our college. The Senate especially emphasizes our ongoing enthusiasm for our college’s Strategic Vision for Equity and our desire to be your partner in its implementation. We sincerely hope that this desire for a strong partnership is reciprocated, and we can soon put these concerns to rest in order to focus all of our energies on the great work ahead of us.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee of the Academic Senate

Cc: Chancellor Judy Miner, FHDA Board of Trustees