“A Renaissance for Solano Community College: Pursuing the Ideal College”

Members of the Faculty, Classified staff members, students and administrators; members of the Governing Board, members of the media:

I. Preface to the Speech:

As I reflect on the past three years that I have served as your President, so many of our achievements (and our shortcomings) spring to mind. However, despite the overwhelming challenges that we, as educators (to include faculty, administrators, staff, Governing Board members, and students) have faced and may continue to face, I believe that our College continues to move toward the ideal college that I embrace. And contrary to what some of our critics may say, I sense that a renaissance at SCC is in the making (as the poet Bob Dylan said in an earlier time: “Yes, the times they are a changing…and we all do need to lend a hand.”

As I thought back on the difficult challenges we experienced this past year—especially the ones that make you feel like giving up—one conversation that comes to mind was with Judy Spencer—when I vowed that I would not be discouraged. At that time, I recalled again my commitment to Solano Community College: when you first hired me, I told you that I would be committed to this college and have kept my commitment. Then over the summer, I was approached by a head hunter who asked me to lead another institution—an institution that the head hunter insisted was the ideal college to lead. I then told the headhunter that I was committed to serve Solano Community College and realized—at that moment—that I would do well to construct a model of an ideal college, a college that SCC might aspire to. Immediately, I was certain that the ideal college has one indisputable feature: leadership stability based on loyalty to their institutions. Several community colleges and universities fall in that category: Miami Dade, Valencia, Johnson County, San Mateo District, University of Maryland Baltimore County, Cuyahoga Community College, Montgomery College, Anne Arundel, etc.

So, colleagues, in an effort to challenge us all, I decided to present to you my ideas on what constitutes an ideal college. What does an ideal college look like? Why wouldn’t we all want to transform Solano Community College into a more ideal college?

Today, then, please allow me to formally articulate my model, a vision statement if you will—a model that I invite all of you to critically reflect upon. My speech today will address three characteristics of what I envision as an “ideal college.” As I sketch out my vision, I will address
specific areas in which Solano Community College may already approach my ideal and I will comment on specific areas in which SCC is not measuring up to this ideal.

II. Three characteristics of the Ideal College that I envision are presented here in a broad sketch:
   A. One: A College ever focused on education itself.
      My concept of education here consists of three basic ideas:
      1. Education is all about reform (RE-Form): reforming or reshaping individuals such that each might realize the best that is in her or him. Innovation is inherent in reform.
      2. Education is grounded in subject matter knowledge, and all knowledge has reform in mind.
      3. Education derives from “educare,” the Latin root for education that defines learning as something that is not put into students, but is, instead, drawn from students. This process is not so much “student centered” as it is knowledge centered.
   B. The second ideal characteristic is a college wherein all educators understand and embrace this concept of education. These educators are:
      1. Grounded in their disciplines or their specialties and are ever-perfecting their craft.
      2. Conscious of the value of education in a democracy wherein the educator has the responsibility to develop good citizens.
      3. Conscious of the arduous task of educating students who may not be sufficiently aware of the aforementioned ends of education (reform, knowledge, and civic responsibility). And, given Gandhi’s truth that the chain is not stronger than its weakest link, we must acknowledge that some of our students require our redoubled attention to these ends.
      4. The consummate professional is motivated by a deep sense of responsibility for the perfection of his or her respective work as it contributes to the well-being of the whole. All educators mutually support one another with dignity and respect.
      5. Individuals who act on principle and not selfish interest: all are focused on the common good.
      6. Educators who have high expectations for all students; demand that each student performs his or her work to the highest standards of literacy and scholarship.
C. My third ideal characteristic is that educators have a mature understanding of the just allocation of resources necessary for the realization of an ideal education. This entails:

1. The establishment of criteria that will ensure the just distribution of all resources
2. A visible public awareness of all budgetary transactions
3. The wisdom necessary to unite ideal and practice

III. At SCC, we are approaching the ideal I have outlined; in other respects, we are falling short.

On this point, let me now address a variety of College matters, namely labor negotiations, budget, Accreditation, education and facilities master plan, community relations, professional responsibility and civility.

As I elaborate each of these topics, let us keep in mind the ideals of my “vision statement: as we work to transform students’ lives.

- **Labor negotiations:**

  One trademark of an ideal college is a peaceful and collegial environment between employees and employer. Our Governing Board and the unions are very pleased we were able to overcome major difficulties and settled contracts with all three bargaining units last year. I must add that the prospect of that was very much uncertain until all sides set aside old grievances and squabbles and acted in the best interest of the College and its employees. I find this to be a great achievement that confirms to my vision idea that all are focused on the common good. Let’s thank our faculty, CSEA, and Local 39 leaders as well as the members of the Board of Trustees for this accomplishment.

  However, I am well aware we need to continue to work on clear lines of communication between all parties. We need to hold one another accountable and communicate issues openly.

- **Budget:**

  Everyone knows the dire budget picture of our State. There is no need for me to dwell on it, except to say:

  As we started the budget discussions last year, it was important for us to admit to all that we had nothing to hide in our budgets and we invited the unions to look carefully at what we are claiming. We wanted to specifically deal with those who persist in believing that the District is hiding money, I offered to open the books to all of you and intend to continue that practice. One
of the ideals for a college is that of “visible public awareness” of all funding activities. As a matter of fact, two faculty members, Charlene Snow and Diana Plant (of KSU) looked at the books and pointed out to us that we were using too high a number for step and column. We agreed with them and adjusted the budget accordingly. We also invited CSEA and they chose John Siebert and George Olgin to keep an eye on what we are reporting. VP Liglioso and I welcome their continued participation. I invite you to use them for verification of any suspicion you may have.

We have worked hard to reallocate resources and have cut only when absolutely necessary. I think all of us have oxen that have been gored in this process.

Today, no institution in this state appears to thrive financially without having diverse funding sources and as I recently stated to our Governing Board, institutions can no longer depend merely on state allocations.

Thus, Solano Community College is moving to establish more self-sustained resources, such as Contract Education, Grants, SCC foundation, and our earnings from out of state tuition as we recruit international students.

One of the best examples of our efforts to establish more self-sustained resources will be realized in savings to our energy bill. Thanks to diligent work done by our VP for Finance and Administrations, Yulian Liglioso, the College is about to receive a favorable loan to undertake a solar project for the Centers in Vacaville, Vallejo and the Fairfield Campus. This loan of 12.5M will allow us to decrease substantially our $1M expenditures on utilities. Furthermore, those savings can be redirected to instruction and services to our students. It is important to note that the Solano County government be acknowledged. This funding would not have been granted without the support of County staff and the Board of Supervisors.

Nevertheless, we have cut 2.2M to our overall budget in case the pending Governor’s tax initiative in November does not pass. However, if the initiative does pass, we will be able to fill several of the positions we have put on hold. In the meantime, as Professor Marc Pandone rightly put it, we need to educate the voters of the State on what it means to truly support education.

Finally, as you may already know, our Governing Board approved our $348 million bond measure for consideration on the November ballot. Called the Student/Veterans Affordable Education, Job Training/Classroom repair measure (Measure Q), the bond passage could expand facilities, seismically upgrade classes, increase access for the disabled, provide training and job placements for Veterans to name just a few of the possibilities. Unfortunately, our bond measure will compete also with state propositions to increase education funding and public safety needs. With these considerations in mind, I will soon get additional information to all of you as to how we can help to educate our voters on the importance of passing this bond. Some of the
anticipated projects are: a new science building at Fairfield, a Biotechnology Center, an agricultural center at Vacaville, a new library in Fairfield and a higher education center at Vallejo to expand the presence of Sonoma State and Cal Maritime at the Vallejo Center. The bond will serve also to strengthen the workforce of Solano County and Winters.

I invite all of you to review the Facilities Master Plan that includes the details of the projects for each of our sites. This bond will serve us for a long time and has the potential to further solidify the County’s tax base by supporting local business and improving overall educational opportunities for the citizens of Solano County and Winters.

- **Accreditation:**

  We are on warning status as you already know and are working to gather evidence that we are complying with all nine recommendations for our upcoming Accreditation visit and report. Since we received our warning, much work has been done to comply and this summer, much progress has been made as the Academic Senate put together a team to work to satisfy our SLO Accreditation mandates.

  The deadline was August 3 to complete and submit all reports to Dean Shirley Lewis and Dr. Annette Dambrosio for further analysis, refinement, and revisions. If you have not yet done so, it is imperative that all of you submit your reports on time.

  As you know, we cannot afford to continue to be put on “warning” or to suffer any other sanctions by the Accreditors. We must engage in constant and self-criticism in order to continue to meet the standards of accreditation. Meeting the expectations of ACCJC is a necessity for the ideal community college and many of its recommendations should be viewed as values that are already part of our ideal identity, such as sound planning, measurable student outcomes, and clear communications.

- **Education and Facilities Master Plans:**

  We are merging the Education and Facilities Master Plans. The key variable in a successful merger will turn on funding, that is, the tax initiative, public funding, grants, bond measures, etc.

  In the meantime, we have delayed the approval of both plans until the faculty and ten-month staff return to give you an opportunity to review them.

  Our Education and Facilities Master Plans must drive our planning for all disciplines.

  - MIG has helped us to refine our planning efforts and tie our plans directly to the budget. As we continue to shape our planning, we are working to move some of our disciplines to become more self-supporting, particularly as we continue to face the decrease in state funding.
• For example, we have initiated plans with MIG and the Kinesiology Department this past Spring to make the discipline more self-supporting and we will continue to revise and refine our plans this Fall.

• At the same time, MIG has helped us to pilot similar planning with Visual Arts. Though they had already contemplated expanding their curriculum, the discussions with MIG have led to more strategic proposals and the development of potential programs to enrich Fine Arts as well as to serve the workforce demand of the County and Winters.

These types of focused plans should be expanded to the rest of the College. As Biotechnology is looking at a new Biotech Center at Vacaville, for example, we ought to work with the Ed Master Plan group to help us to realize this plan. The same is true for the Performing Arts and the Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Student Services. We need to continue to work strategically with our resources as we plan for the future of Solano Community College.

• **Career and Technical Education and Liberal Arts education:**

  We are certainly proud of our partnership with Sonoma State University for the Bachelor’s degree program at Vallejo, and we look forward to offering more degrees at Vallejo and initiating such activities in Vacaville and Fairfield with Sonoma State and other willing institutions—preferably state institutions.

  As the 4 year public colleges and universities are cutting back on admissions, it behooves us to accommodate those students who are being turned away. I look forward to working with the Academic Senate to investigate how we may be able to put in place the best partnerships possible to provide additional access to the Bachelor’s degree.

  Finally, there are many education innovations that we need to consider, e.g., apprenticeships with the trades, liaisons with international students, the establishment of a middle college, the establishment of a teacher training program at SCC, and so forth.

• **Professional Responsibility and Civility.**

  Last Spring, 1,700 grades were not turned in on time. [Now, some were minor slips, but there were faculty who did not turn in a single grade.] 1,700 grades not turned it! This is unacceptable and simply not fair to the student, staff, and funding considerations—-all are jeopardized when grades are not turned in on time and our students suffer: potential loss of scholarship funds, eligibility of financial aid, transfer and R2T4 (Return to Title 4), a penalty wherein we must return funding to the federal government. Let us solve this once and for all.

  Some of us have chosen to ignore the formal final exam schedule and forfeit final exams altogether. These practices are unacceptable and our students deserve better. Final examinations are a requirement for all classes and we should not be supportive of our colleagues who let students out of this obligation.

  **On Civility:** We have had far too many instances involving bullying, threats, and humiliation. While these human degradations have tended to be from the same perpetrators, we must take the stand that Solano Community College will not tolerate such unprofessional behavior. That being said, the
College will take action against those who engage in these kinds of human indecencies. In particular, too many inflammatory electronic missives have created an atmosphere unbecoming to a community of professional educators; unworthy of the ideal college. Furthermore, we must be mindful of our professional image. There are habits we must model for our students in order to expect the best from them and our image ought to be reflected also in our language, our dress. We should expect decency, civility and decorum to prevail. Here, I urge all of us—from students on down-- to reflect on the College as a community which ought to formulate linguistic and aesthetic standards that match the true character of academic life: the ideal community for us to learn, teach and grow.

IV. Conclusion

Let me reiterate my three educational ideal characteristics that I expressed earlier:

A.) A constant focus on the ideal of education itself

B.) A community of educators who strive to realize this ideal of education

C.) Educators who have a mature understanding of the just allocation of resources necessary for the realization of an ideal education and who make the most of these resources.

We have much to be proud of at Solano Community College. If we can critically formulate ideas and practices to support my “ideal college model,” an educational renaissance may indeed be within our grasp. I welcome all of you to contribute to my vision as we begin this academic year.

Thank you!