

# September 25, 2009

## ACCREDITATION

Two weeks ago, I received a letter from the Accrediting Commission providing us with a time frame (10/4/10 to 10/21/10) within which to select the dates of our upcoming visit. Because we are members of a multi-college district it was important for all three colleges and Continuing Education to agree on the best dates. I am pleased to inform you that we have selected October 11, 2010 as our first choice (remember the visits are a week-long) and October 4, as our second option. Please block these two weeks tentatively on your calendars. Mesa will have visitors and our house is ready for company.

## **INTERSEGMENTAL WRANGLINGS – The Education Pathway, Admission, Enrollment, Transfer, Persistence and Graduation.**

In 1983, then President Reagan established the National Commission on Excellence in Education which then published a seminal document, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform*. Terrell Bell, who was Secretary of Education at that time used this document to help shape many reforms that are with us to this day. At the time that this report came out I was a young Specialist in Educational Standards and Evaluations within the State Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges. I remember being filled with dread and alarm when I read the ominous warning in opening language of the report:

“the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur--others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.”

Then as I do now, I thanked my lucky stars that I was working within the one segment most perfectly poised at the education crossroads of our nation, the community colleges. I remember beginning to form the basis of an educational philosophy as I recognized the fact that community colleges in California had the chance to offer the best and broadest access to education for all Californians and therefore the best chance to answer the challenge of a “Nation at Risk.”

Twenty-six years later, I find myself filled with the same dread and wondering why it is that we still “don't get it.” The words of Terrell Bell and David Gardner, who chaired the National Commission in 1983 and was then President of the University of California System, ring more true than ever as the mission of community colleges to offer lower division course work,

transfer, career and technical education and basic skills are seriously threatened. Let's not lose sight however, that in this debacle all students are at risk.

It is important that we remember that all students who come to our classrooms in community colleges start their educational journey in Kindergarten (pre-K if they were lucky enough) and on through elementary, middle school, and high school. Some of them may have dropped out of high school and later found their way back through adult noncredit education. We can't think, therefore, of the K-12 student or the Community College Student or the CSU or UC student—it is all one student—the same student who depends on us to be able to achieve his or her educational goal.

The question is: what now if the transfer pathway is in peril; what now if those that could have gone on directly to four-year colleges cannot afford to do so; or what now if community colleges cease to be “open access” institutions, not because we wish it, but because we haven't the resources to offer the array and number of courses our students need? It is “all one student” and we are all inexorably linked to each other intersegmentally; K-12, community colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

When our students rallied two weeks ago, this is what was truly at stake —“A Nation at Risk!”

## **BUDGET STRATEGIES**

One of the things our District has done very well is to plan and to envision multiple scenarios in the budget planning process. It is like building a home – the final structure can only be as solid as the workmanship that goes into the framing of its walls. This framing is based on:

- Good, accurate, and constant information
- Understanding the information shared in direct relationship to the impact it has on the District, College, Schools, Departments and ultimately the classroom (our most critical unit of measure).
- Ongoing and arduous work to provide the best education and student support services with what we have.

I want to emphasize the last point above. We have talked before about the important impact of perspective on the ultimate development of options. In particular, we have agreed that it is infinitely better to discuss what is possible to do rather than what is no longer possible given budget constraints.

Late Friday afternoon we concluded a two-hour meeting on the topic of Tutorial Services at Mesa College, Past, Present and Future. As always, the discussion was spirited and Mesa's values around student access and success were at the center of the conversation. I was proud of the fact that while we looked at the concrete obstacles facing us including facilities, staffing shortages, equipment, and budget concerns, we never lost sight of the fact that tutorial services are central to the educational program delivery of our college. The discussion will continue for a while, but at least we now have a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. I

came away feeling optimistic that we can find a way to proceed that will enable us to serve students in the short, mid, and long term.

The budget realities are half the battle the program realities and their ongoing success is the place where the genius of our faculty, administrators, and support staff is ultimately tested.

Thank you for your perseverance, unending commitment, and creativity.

Next Test---Categorical Programs, stay tuned.

## **EARLY RETIREMENT OPTION**

At the last meeting of our Board of Trustees, President Rich Grosch made an announcement characterized as “historical: by Chancellor Carroll, namely, a Selective Early Retirement Program (SERP). This option is designed to offset categorical program reductions and was only made possible because of mutual agreements negotiated with the AFT. There was much thought given to the viability of pursuing this path and it has yielded the prospect for a number of individuals to make a very personal choice after having the opportunity to have all of their questions answered through individualized counseling. Please be assured that a great deal of additional information is forthcoming and every effort will be made to answer all questions so that the best choice can be made by each individual involved.

## **MIGRATION TO THE MODULAR VILLAGE**

I don't know why, but the entire move to the Modular Village brings up images of Frodo Baggins and the Shire in the Lord of the Rings. I don't try to understand where these ideas come from; perhaps it was the word “Village” that raised all sorts of amazing panoramas in my mind.

The truth—I walked to the Modular Village in preparation for the migration of our first group of “Mesans” (new word), the student services faculty and staff. One at a time, entire groupings will make their way in and out of the “Modular Village” and back to great new shiny buildings, made all the more special because we helped to imagine, design, and finally construct facilities that are worthy of the talent of our students, faculty, and staff.

It will not be easy, but it is doable and the prize at the end of this adventure makes it all worthwhile.

## **BUSY WEEKEND**

Many times during my career as a college president, I have promised to myself that I would like to commit to pen the great variety of places I can be on any given day. This weekend is a great example. On Saturday, I will be at the 50 yard-line taking part in the Grand Reopening of the Douglas Merrill Stadium (I've already been warned by Ron Perez - no high-heeled shoes, tennis shoes are preferable.) On Sunday morning, I will take those same tennis shoes to the AIDS March at Balboa Park.

The real point I wish to make for the Mesa College family however is to remind you to join us this weekend at any of these two events. The information is as follows:

**Douglas Merrill Stadium Grand Reopening**—Saturday September 26, 2009

San Diego Mesa College Stadium was originally dedicated forty-five years ago and named after Merrill Douglas, Mesa's first Athletic Director.

- 4:30 p.m. - Football Alumni Gathering
- 5:30 p.m. - Ribbon cutting and remarks
- 6:00 p.m. - Mesa College Olympians vs. Mt. San Jacinto Eagles

**AIDS March**

- Registration begins from 6:00-8:00 a.m.
- Actual Walk begins at 8:05 a.m.
- Post-walk Festivities scheduled for 11:00 a.m.

***Note:***

President Updates - are posted on the Mesa Website at: <http://sdmesa.edu/president/updates.cfm>

College Governance – All Presidents' Cabinet Minutes are posted at:  
<http://sdmesa.edu/president/cabinet.cfm>