

Good afternoon, Board of Trustees!

I don't know if you all know, but I have not chosen to run for president of MPCTA. This has been a more than full time job. I literally have worked two jobs for two years. I don't ask for sympathy because there are many of us doing the same thing. I just state it as a point of fact and for your information. Despite the tremendous work, I have enjoyed doing this service and working with you, and I hope I've done some good.

So, in that spirit of tough love and doing some good, I'd like to spend this report reflecting back and noting two places especially we still need to improve - in hopes that we better processes even in this part of the college, the part that has to do with compensation and working conditions of faculty (and by inference others, too). Remember the mantra of ACCJC: continual improvement. I also tell my students that we all, including me, can use improvement. We should not fear or be bothered by criticism. We have to grow a thick skin, as they say.

And it is through criticism that transformation occurs. It's the necessary catalyst.

In the end, all of us want to make this the best college we can be for our students. That's what all this great mechanism of democracy here and in participatory governance is all about – creating an environment of learning that helps students succeed and grow in their own lives.

So here we go. I'm taking advantage of being at the mike this one last time. 😊

- 1) One area of continual improvement needed has to do with communication. I'm sure the intention of all is to have good communication, but too often in my two years, communication falls far short of the professional level at which it should be. This is no little matter, as it affects greatly both operations and morale.

This communication shortfall involves three aspects. One has to do with communication between administrative personnel and faculty, whether in union matters or other matters, and in an operational sense. As MPCTA president, I continue to receive complaints from frustrated faculty about the "email black hole," where faculty ask questions but receive no reply or

an extremely delayed reply. This occurred even to our Grievance Chair, and while I understand that administrators have tough jobs, still I believe in a level of communication etiquette that this school is not reaching even now, let alone a level of prompt actions to email requests - despite repeated complaints on this in my two years. I think upper level administrative personnel are trying to get better at this, and some are certainly better than others, but this is certainly an area of very needed improvement. I don't believe there has been improvement at the highest level of leadership, and, frankly, that must change to create a better school.

A second area of communication that needs improvement is in communications to the mass of faculty. When CBT comes to College Council the other day to summarize their reports, and only one question is allowed, that's a weakness in communication. When a faculty comes to a Board meeting and is told by MPC leadership that it's not time for questions, despite the agenda stating that "Public comments on Special Meeting agenda items will be heard at the time the matter is under Board consideration" and despite the tight schedule faculty are under at this time of year – that's a weakness in communication, especially when there was only one faculty requesting to do so. Etiquette would require, at a minimum, pausing to listen.

Likewise, the art of transformation, which is what is occurring at MPC, requires slow and well-communicated processes, and it requires buy-in, which in turn requires real discussion. Lots is happening at MPC, yet most faculty don't really understand what is happening. At Academic Senate, we had a great conversation about that with Senators overwhelmingly voting in favor of more discussion and clarification, rather than endorse a draft document of a handbook on governance which was recommended by CBT.

And one has to consider faculty workload when communicating. The busiest time of the year for faculty is right now – the last two weeks of the semester. It is no wonder that very few could attend last Friday's special

board meeting, let alone read and analyze all the CBT documents provided for us.

Certainly among leadership, there appears to be an almost panicky need to move on the CBT recommendations. Underlying this push for action with not enough communication and discussion could be the fear of ACCJC. However, I have been to ASCCC breakouts and talked to Academic Senates in other college - where I've been warned that rushing into too-quick changes that appear to be done to appease ACCJC can backfire. What counts is patient, open, transparent, conversation-filled transformation.

And, you know honestly - You never know from what corner of the ocean floor some pearl of wisdom will appear. There must be plenty of opportunity to dive for that pearl. That opportunity comes in multiple and open discussions that follow clear and transparent explanations.

A third area of weakness in communication has to do with the way the systems of communication are structured between Board and Association. I appreciate that we in the Association are given time to report to the Board at a public meeting like this. But I have yet to really understand how else to communicate to the Board. CTA tells me one thing, while the MPC District tells me another. For example, today, I'm assuming the Board and their bargaining team and the college president discussed the concept that's at the bargaining table. How can the Association explain its reasoning, explain the reasonableness of this concept, give an in-depth argument as to why this concept is such a good one, before a decision is made on that and, for that matter, other topics of contention – especially considering the existential moment MPC is right now at?

I don't blame anyone on this weak aspect of communication between Board and Association. It may have to do with conflicting or misunderstood applications of law. I think it would be a great idea to have some kind of joint Association and District Special Board session at the start of next

school year in which there is public discussion on the ways boards and faculty and Associations are and are not allowed to communicate.

And I think another helpful session would be on the role of unions and academic senates in the running of a college.

Again, remember, I'm trying to help. Please don't be offended by any of my advice or criticisms. All of us, including myself, can grow and learn. I very much appreciate criticism, no matter what the tone, because I always assume the criticism, even if spoken in rude manner - and believe me, as a practicing Muslim, I've experienced being rudely spoken to walking down the street or sitting in my car at a red light - even that, I always assume, is coming from a place of helping. I hope we all feel this way about criticism, too.

Perhaps I'm repeating myself on the grave weakness we have right now at MPC in communication, but grave it is, and it is ongoing for the vast majority of us, and so I'm going to say it this one last time.

Communicate well we must. One of the ultimate best practices in my profession of teaching the adult learner is that one must not just order the student to do a task, one needs to explain and convince them of the need and importance of the task. Communication both at the micro-level of emails to the macro-level of college-wide conversation needs improvement. Without such, no good will come of any sort of change.

- 2) Besides weakness in communication, another area of great need has to do with workload issues. Faculty work more and longer hours than they ever have because mandates from the State have brought in more work with new reporting requirements for all but especially in CTE areas and in basic skills areas, because technology rather than decreasing work has increased it, and because improvements in pedagogical methods of teaching require more time investment.

As I'm sure you know, there is an increased level of conference attendance and grant writing to run programs and teach courses, and email and expected data availability has brought about a greater expectation of work, but also, something you may be less familiar with, are the improved best practices in ways of teaching, such as the overall increase in writing requirements, for instance, for courses to articulate to UC and CSU. For example, the scantron is becoming, in many disciplines, though not all of course, a thing of the past. I could go on, but let's just say, workload has increased, and we've not had thoughtful conversations to come up with mechanisms that ease that burden for faculty. It's time for that conversation.

When I sit at the table and I hear comments from leadership, I have sensed that there is not an understanding of just what faculty do. Compensation certainly is an important issue for faculty. Of course, as other schools get raises mostly better than the one that the current concept being considered by the District asks for, we will continue to be below the median. So, the need for compensation is still here.

But having a good life/work balance is equally as important. Faculty certainly want to improve on that, too.

I don't understand how we can do all the work that is needed and yet cut down on reassigned time. If the district wants to shift the work to more administrators, then how do we pay for this expensive shift? Even after sitting at the table and going to many, many meetings, I'm still not clear about any real game plan, despite the CBT documents, that will make working at MPC as faculty a manageable life/work balance proposition. Tired and overworked faculty are simply not good for students. At the bargaining table and in the concept first presented by the District, the District has much desire to make our organization more efficient. No one can argue with that, but in the figuring of these efficiencies, faculty work/life balance must be understood and considered.

My hope is that next year we continue with what's begun with Interest Based Bargaining on this and other issues, and my hope is that the district really understand the faculty street corner. We all want to fix things and get thing done, to move and to act – but if we don't pause, communicate, understand, really understand, all points of view, nothing good will occur, and people will continue to consider ways to leave MPC, as has happened this year.

A good start to improving working conditions will be the accepting of the concept as is. I guess we faculty will find out if that's the case tomorrow at the bargaining session.

Thank you, and I hope all goes well with all of you. As for me, I will be, among other things, enjoying the reading and planning for the Intro to Poetry class that I get to teach for the first time - assuming I get enough students.

Paola Gilbert
MPCTA President