Dear Friends of Valencia:

Many of you are following the serious economic challenges of our country and state and are reading in the newspapers about serious consequences for the public schools, universities, health care system, etc. Some of you may be wondering what impact this is all having on Valencia. In the past several weeks, I have been visiting with staff and faculty on each campus in forums to discuss our situation, and I’d like to share the same information with you. Valencia’s extended family.

First, in times of economic stress, the people of our community do just as you might expect—they improve their skills and enhance their educations so they will be more competitive and productive. Thus, community college enrollments typically expand in hard times. This has certainly been true at Valencia. Our enrollment growth pattern of a 5 percent per year ballooned to 7 percent last summer and nearly 10 percent this fall. Such rapid growth stresses our capacity in normal times, but it is compounded by the budget cuts we are taking from the state and are likely to continue to see for the next 18 months or more.

Whereas the universities immediately froze freshman enrollment as the budget crisis unfolded in Summer 2007, we made a decision to principle to serve as many as we could without any artificial enrollment caps and to try to weather the economic storm with our students. Meanwhile, the state has cut our operating appropriation three times since Summer 2007, and we expect additional cuts during the current year and in next year’s budget. The combination of unfunded enrollment growth and real budget cuts has translated into a 50 percent reduction in state support per full-time student in less than two years. Some (about two-thirds) of this has been made up by the state increasing tuition and fees, shifting the costs to the students, but there are limits to this strategy, as well. When I came to Valencia in 2000, roughly 70 percent of the college’s operating budget came from state appropriations, as of this year only 45 percent comes from the state. We are no longer a state Institution, but a “state-assisted” institution.

So how has Valencia fared? So far we are managing this challenges with our hopes, our mails work, and our focus on students and their learning intact. Early in the crisis, we identified principles we would use to manage the reductions, protecting students and their learning experiences first, as well as our best work underway to improve their learning and our staff. Further, we adopted a rule of complete transparency with regard to our finances and have tried to communicate often and deeply with all the staff and faculty, who have shown a remarkably responsible stewardship for every penny we still do have available to spend.

More budget cuts are coming. No one can say how large, although we anticipate at least another 8 percent this year. But Valencia will weather even these heavy seas if we stick to our principles. The most important negative consequence will be a temporary (we hope) reduction in access. We simply cannot afford to add more course sections, in spite of growing enrollment demand. Therefore, many students will be admitted to the college next year but will be unable to make a schedule, effectively denying them enrollment. I estimate the number to be near 1,000 whose educations will be, at best, deferred.

But we believe we can preserve the mission and forward momentum of the college by avoiding damaging rumor, announcements of “potential layoffs” and other demands designed to send a political message. The college is facing real challenges, but we refuse to politicize them at the cost of our morale and our work. With any luck, as the state’s economy eventually recovers, so will our financial condition, with our institutional strength carefully nurtured through the crisis.

Meanwhile, some of you are also following state developments in the creation of new “state colleges” and additional baccalaureate granting colleges out of existing community colleges, wondering what this will mean for Valencia. More on this next issue.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
President,
Valencia Community College