LAST MONTH IN THIS SPACE I wrote about the shenanigans that are being played by the District with regard to their offer on wages during our ongoing contract negotiations. I asked President Coon to get clarifications from his numbers man, Greg Nelson, and it took a few weeks, but I did get an answer. I want to stress that this clarification was not a formal offer. When I speak to President Coon, it is strictly for clarification on both sides. Formal offers happen at the table. This was not one. However one of the disturbing aspects of this “clarification” came around the calculations that the District did with regard to mandated statutory taxes, which had been included in the cost of the wage offer to the District. These mandated statutory taxes were included in a calculation that was passed off as part of an average salary increase of 8.68% for all full time and part time faculty when, in fact, those costs would never have shown up in our gross pay. When I recently met with our president for clarification, he did concede that those taxes were indeed misleading, an “error” on their part, but I’m sorry to say, the numbers, which he passed on from Greg Nelson, changed, yet again. In fact they were lower than we had previously been told and so the District had been inflating the numbers once again.

At this point, I feel like we are playing a shell game with the District, and they are the only ones who know what’s really under the shell. I guess shell games can be amusing if you are watching a magician, but watching this shell game of an explanation regarding wage offers is not amusing to me. Last month I asked you to let me know what you think about all of this and I got an earful. You wrote, you called and you talked to me on campus.

Well, I guess I should share some of these comments with the rest of you. I’m going to paraphrase and not attribute these comments to any of you personally because, unfortunately, some of you have told me that things are starting to feel like the bad old days when faculty and staff were often afraid to speak out because of fear of retaliation. That said, I hope that, if there are any brave souls out there, you will write to the editor of this newsletter and to some of the local papers about the situation we find ourselves in here. One of the minimum quals for my job here is an ongoing sense of outrage, so when I write or speak out it is not a big deal. But if you, our members at large, speak out, I think ears will perk up. Knowing that >>>
(Ponderings –continued)
the faculty at large and staff are really upset about the way things are going...well, maybe someone will take stock.

In the meantime here are some of the things I’ve heard since the last newsletter:

- I’m not interested in an off schedule, one time payment. What the District is offering on schedule is an insult to the faculty.

- The District should THINK about what they are really suggesting when they value our work at 1%+1%.

- You have to be kidding. The District included taxes that they would have to pay but we would never see in their calculation of our salary increase. Do they think we are stupid and wouldn’t notice? Insulting! Did they do that when management raises were announced? I don’t think so. If they didn’t do it for themselves, but did it for us, I am really angry!

- How stupid are they, giving themselves huge raises before union contracts were settled? Then throwing crumbs at us...but these are the brains that are running the place...

- Why does the argument that the college has to offer higher wages to attract quality administrators not apply in the same way as it does to attracting quality faculty members?

- President Coon is bringing in autocratic managers. Just because you pay them well doesn’t mean that the managers will be good. Maybe we are having trouble attracting good managers because there is a tremendous lack of talent out there.

And then there are the people who are angry with me. Why? Some of our colleagues are tired of me saying how much I like President Coon! They feel that his good will stock is really plummeting. They say that the cheerful convocations and interest in our personal life events have worn thin and that talk is cheap. They don’t trust the numbers he is presenting to us.

(My note: these numbers are given to him by Greg Nelson.)

But if President Coon really appreciates us and what we do for our students he will advocate for a good raise that will make our salaries competitive with the other districts in the Bay Area.

Speaking of President Coon and management salaries, maybe you would be interested in the raise that the Board of Trustees saw fit to give our leader. I know he has a lot of responsibility, but Governor Brown gets paid under $174,000 per year for running the state of California. Here are some figures that our Budget Monitor, Deborah Graham, put together from the Board Packet:

- President Coon’s salary 12/2010-6/30/14: $215,000
- President Coon’s salary 7/1/2014-6/30/18: $255,000 (an 18.8% increase).
- A Consumer Price Index, on schedule, raise each year of the contract (Last year that was 1.6%)
- A performance award, 2%-5%, each year going into a 403b
- Eighteen month termination pay as severance
- $250,000 life insurance
- $750/month ($9000/year) car allowance plus travel expenses.

Let’s compare this with their latest offer for us:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coon: 4.7% salary increase per year</th>
<th>Us: 0.83%/yr</th>
<th>Coon: CPI on schedule each year</th>
<th>Us: Zero</th>
<th>Coon: Performance award 2%-5%</th>
<th>Us: Zero</th>
<th>Coon: 18 Month severance (150%)</th>
<th>Us: 65% SERP</th>
<th>Coon: $250,000 life insurance</th>
<th>Us: $50,000</th>
<th>Coon: $9000+ car allowance</th>
<th>Us: Zero</th>
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I don’t know about you, but as Rob Reiner’s mother said in her famous line in When Harry Met Sally, “I’ll have what (s)he’s having!”

Finally, a couple of our colleagues, although upset at the way things have gone so far, say they are hoping that we can move on. Well I do too. So stay in touch, stay informed and stay involved. Your negotiating team is working hard checking the numbers for honesty and accuracy. They are doing their very best to bring you a wage package that reflects the value that we bring our students and that President Coon is always praising us for. □
MONEY MONEY MONEY

FOR CENTURIES, PHILOSOPHERS HAVE DEBATED the essential difference between man (humans) and animals.

Religious philosophers claim that it is the presence of man’s ‘soul’ that accounts for the difference. Psychologists suggest that it is man’s capacity for self-reflection that distinguishes us. Many anthropologists maintain it is our ability to communicate learned experience through spoken language.

I, however, tend to agree with Gertrude Stein, who said, “The thing that differentiates man from animals... is MONEY.”

MONEY... that man-made scheme that leads to hoarding and capitalism and class war.

MONEY... a system which leads to slavery and exploitation and gender inequality. And produces sickness and early death to the many who are deprived of it.

Given all the adverse consequences resulting from money, it’s not surprising that those societies with the most unequal distribution of wealth are the ones that have the most discord and class conflict.

And so it shouldn’t be a surprise that we have discord and conflict here at the College of Marin, because we also have a system of money distribution that is inequitable and which leads to campus animosity and discord.

Why?, some of our faculty are asking, should managers, who work no harder, spend no more time, have no more education or experience than the rest of us, earn wages that are so much higher?

Why are our administrators valued and compensated so much more highly by our Trustees than faculty, without whose contributions College of Marin would not exist?

It’s a question similar to that asked by the Parisian ‘Communards’ in 1871 and by the Russian peasants in 1917, and which has led to strikes and revolutions and bloodshed around the world.

Maybe there would have been less carnage and fewer of these conflicts if there had been a more equitable system of financial distribution.

That’s what the world-wide Union Labor Movement is working to achieve.

And that’s what our UPM Bargaining Team thinks we can achieve at the bargaining table – a reduction of conflict and discord at our college, by making our faculty compensation more equitable. □
PRESIDENT COON RECENTLY CONTACTED the UPM Bargaining Team to confirm dates for upcoming negotiation sessions. Also, in response to UPM’s message that neither the UPM Team nor the faculty at large has much, if any, faith in the accuracy of the numbers that the District has put out regarding its recent offers on Wages, President Coon asked us to clarify our concerns. He wrote:

“In order to make our next round of negotiations as productive as possible, we would appreciate having any outstanding questions that may still exist about our most recent offer ahead of time.”

So, here is a partial list of questions that we have about the District’s most recent wage proposal:

- How can the District use the word “increase” when a major part of that “increase” is a one-time, off-schedule bump or bonus?
- How can the District use the word “increase” when a large portion of that “increase” includes statutory taxes the District will have to pay to the state on our “increase?”
- How many other categories of the District wage package “increase” offer include similar, unidentified statutory taxes that will never be part of our salaries, on-schedule, off-schedule or otherwise?
- How can the District claim that its offer to us represents an “increase” in Wages when, in fact, the “increase” it is referring to actually represents an increase (one-time payment, statutory taxes, etc.) in cost to the District?
- How can the District’s off-schedule offer of 2% ($447,480) made on 8/21/14 equal the same dollar amount ($447,480) as its 12/5/14 offer that, with subsequent District clarification, should have been 4%?
- And how can that same dollar amount at 4% off-schedule be consistent with the previous 2% offer when the District is now acknowledging that approximately $83,000 of that latest offer will not come to us but is simply part of the statutory taxes the District must pay to the state?

- How can the District continue to expect to meet the 50% Law with a one-time bonus to its faculty?
- How can the District threaten layoffs when recent management salary schedule changes start 27 of 30 managers at or above salaries that exceed the top faculty salaries at our highest Step?
- How can the District tell us repeatedly in Bargaining sessions that it is putting a dollar figure on the table and that we can take it any way we want, yet when we tell them how we want to take it and accept President Coon’s 8.68% increase, they balk and say, That’s not what we meant?
- How can the District claim that part of our wage “increase” includes a $15,000 increase in PAC funding? (Money that we will not be part of wages).
- How can the District say in all honesty and sincerity that it is trying to attract and retain new faculty when its latest on-schedule offer works out to be an approximate 0.83% per year increase over three years?
- How can the District say in all honesty and sincerity that it is trying to attract and retain new faculty when a recent Santa Rosa JC study reported that College of Marin Faculty salaries rank tenth (lowest) out of the Bay 10+1 community colleges?
- How can the District ask the UPM bargaining team if it has any outstanding questions about its latest offer (its wage package) when we explicitly told District reps that we are NOT interested in their wage “package”?

With all these questions looming,

- How can the District question UPM President Laurie Ordin’s word, her “transparency and accuracy,” when the District has been, at best, misleading in its offers and language?

These are a few (OK, more than a few) questions that the UPM membership has been asking and that we intend to ask the District in our up-coming sessions. We’ll keep you posted and will relay the answers that the District provides. □
IN LAST MONTH’S UPM NEWSLETTER, Laurie Ordin asked for faculty input about recent negotiations. I figured she meant it when she asked eight times in bold and all-caps, so I sent her an email with my perspective. Laurie responded thoughtfully and thoroughly, encouraging me to write this letter.

My main concern with current negotiations is wages. Laurie’s and John Sutherland’s recent articles specifically outline the timeline and numbers associated with recent wage negotiations, which I greatly appreciated since I had difficulty following their presentations during the UPM general meeting. Having the information in a handout at the meeting would have helped visual learners and English geeks like me follow the mathemagical journey.

Here’s the problem with wages: with what’s currently on the negotiating table, the salary schedule at College of Marin will not keep up with other districts. Take SRJC, for example, where my wife teaches. Last year, their union negotiated a 5.3% average increase across their salary schedule. If I taught full-time at SRJC, I would make 22% more than I do at COM for the same job, an increase of $13,183 per year. (Benefits are comparable between the two districts, and I save our district thousands of dollars by staying on my wife’s health insurance. But I’m only compensated a mere $1,500 a year for doing this.)

And it’s not just SRJC where wages are better. Since SRJC has a formal commitment to keep up with salaries elsewhere, their faculty union tracks wages at the 72 California Community College districts and ranks them by the highest salary column without a Ph.D. (our Column 4). According to the 2015 draft (to be finalized this month), of the 72 districts, College of Marin currently ranks in the 60s for the first fifteen steps, roughly $20k-$40k away from the #1 district Mira Costa at each step. (But Mira Costa is a basic-aid district in an affluent area, so it’s understandable. But wait—we are also a basic-aid district in an affluent area, so why such a discrepancy?) COM eventually jumps to the mid-30s toward the high end of our schedule, but then ranks into the high 40s for our most veteran faculty because our schedule stops at step 21 while others go on, some with 30 steps or more.

At best we’re middle of the pack; at worst we’re lagging near last place. In comparison, Barstow is ranked 10, even 20 places better than Marin at each salary step. Ouch. Given the cost of living in Marin and its commutable surroundings, this seems absurd. There’s a problem when College of Marin employees would consider a move to Barstow.

I realize that comparing the contracts of specific districts can be like comparing apples and oranges and that my perspective focuses on full-time wages. SRJC does not pay their part-timers at 95% for example, nor do they offer part timers the same kinds of health benefits as COM. As a former freeway flier, I support parity and health benefits for all faculty, so I accept a contract that distributes wealth from full-time to part-time faculty. But when the discrepancy between our district and others is so vast, then even part-time faculty—whose wages are based on a percentage of the full-time faculty salary schedule—are losing out. Would you rather make 95% of $80 or 80% of $100? The former option pays more evenly; the latter option pays more bills.

Recently, upper-level managers have received significant pay raises. A few months ago, I overheard one administrator saying that this was to update the managerial pay scale to be competitive with other districts since their pay at COM had stagnated. Fair enough: good administrators seem hard to find and harder to keep.

Yet instructor pay has stagnated too, and I would argue it’s even more important that we attract and maintain the best instructors. I am extremely disappointed in what the District has put on the table, especially for a three-year contract. The proposal makes me question the District’s commitment to faculty, and it leaves me wondering why I haven’t been applying for a position elsewhere. I don’t like that line of thinking.

I acknowledge the District’s budget woes and fears of financial catastrophes, but I fear a more insidious outcome if faculty wages fall: that our college will lose good teachers to other districts—or it will fail to attract the best teachers in the first place—and those who remain will feel they are overworked and underpaid for their labor. We work hard, we teach well, and we deserve better than that.

But this is just my point of view. I encourage other faculty, especially recent hires like me, to speak up and contribute their perspective to the conversation. The UPM leadership is and has been supportive and responsive to my concerns, and I would hope the district representatives are listening too. And while new hires like me may lack history here at COM, our recent experiences in other districts often give us a broader perspective. Plus we make up a growing proportion of our union, and we’re the District’s most significant long-term investment.

Of course, most of us recent hires are contingent faculty or don’t have tenure, and despite President Coon’s stated commitment to an environment free of fear and intimidation, we may feel vulnerable. I understand this, but I also trust that the administration recognizes the ethical and legal implications of targeting faculty who speak out on behalf of their interests and the interest of our college as a whole. And I’m also confident that we will have the full support and protection from UPM to participate in a constructive discussion about our contract.
SALT MONEY

WHERE DOES THE WORD ‘SALARY’ come from?
It comes from the Latin word ‘sal’ meaning salt. The word salary literally means ‘salt money.’

In Ancient Rome, the Roman legions were given a ration of salt because salt was so necessary to support life and for the preservation of food. Later the soldiers were given an allotment of money so that they could purchase salt. This monetary allotment was called a “salarium,” from which we get the word SALARY.

Today, as in ancient Rome, a “salarium” is still necessary for the support and preservation of life. That’s why UPM is fighting for an equitable salary for our faculty, so that we are able to support and preserve our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

If our administration values the work of our faculty ‘legions’ (as they repeatedly claim they do,) they would agree to negotiate a fair and equitable allotment of “salt money” for our faculty.

SO HOW MUCH IS EQUITABLE?

CONSIDER THE STARTING SALARIES in Silicon Valley, and how our faculty compares.

Microsoft Starting Salary
Around $90,000 per year on average. Typically comes with $50,000 worth of stock over four years.

Google Starting Salary
The starting standard at the Mountain View office is about $100,000/year with stock grants between $45K and $71K over a four year vesting period. Google.com gives bonuses of $45,000 per year or more in addition to base pay.

Apple Starting Salary
Engineers at Apple start at around $90,000 per year with cost of living allowances, an average yearly cash bonus of $6,000, and around $9,000 in stock placed in the employee’s e-trade account.

Amazon Starting Salary
Amazon programmers start at about $87,000/year and can receive between $40,000 and $50,000 worth of stock options over 4 years, with a non-uniform vesting period. The longer you stay employed at Amazon.com the more stock options you get.

Facebook Starting Salary
Facebook starts engineers at between $85,000-$90,000/year. The stock options are between $8,000 and $10,000 over four years and potentially worth more than $200,000 if secondary market prices hold.

SO… AREN’T COM FACULTY WHO EDUCATE, MOTIVATE AND ACCULTURATE STUDENTS JUST AS VALUABLE AS THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO CREATE GOOGLE GLASSES, APPLE WATCHES AND FACEBOOK APPS? YET WHERE ARE OUR STARTING SALARIES?

*Most Silicon Valley companies are secretive about employee pay and do not publish salary ranges. The pay scales noted above were taken from interviews, online forums, job boards and salary aggregators at: http://www.netpaths.net/blog/starting-salaries-of-top-technology-companies-apple-google-microsoft-facebook/

MONEY IS NOT THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.
LACK OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.
George Bernard Shaw
GOING UPSTREAM?

IN A PARABLE ATTRIBUTED TO SAUL ALINSKY, a group of people were standing by a river bank when they saw an infant struggling in the water. One person immediately jumped in to rescue the child. But then another baby came floating down the river, and then another, and another. And people continued to jump in to rescue the drowning babies. But then they noticed that one person had started to walk away from the group of rescuers. And they shouted accusingly, "Where are you going? We need everyone available to help save these drowning babies!" To which the person replied: "I'm going upstream to stop whoever is throwing the babies in the river."

It appeared to some of us that the keynote speaker at our recent Convocation, Diego Navarro, when lamenting student failure, was like one of the well-meaning rescuers jumping in the river to save the drowning babies... rather than going ‘upstream’ to stop the babies from being thrown in.

In encouraging self-discipline, deferred gratification and “grit” as a way for students to improve their academic performance, Mr. Navarro seems to have ignored the data showing that the greatest predictor of low academic achievement is poverty.

Certainly it’s admirable of Mr. Navarro to jump in to try to help the academic performance of drowning students, but if one is really concerned with eliminating the cause of the drowning, wouldn’t it be better if Mr. Navarro had suggested “going upstream” to fight the root cause of poor student performance – poverty.

issues including staffing cuts and workplace protections. Apparently the threat of a strike brought management back to the table, where a tentative agreement was reached.

The agreement includes a 14% pay raise over three years, the hiring of hundreds of additional registered nurses, additional workplace protections and increased employer contributions to 410(k) retirement plans.

Kaiser will also create a new committee of nurses and nurse practitioners to work with management to discuss workforce concerns.

Perhaps the success of the Kaiser nurses might be an object lesson for other employees whose demands are being ignored by management. The nurses let management know that they were serious and were ready to strike, and that threat seems to have paid off.

For as George Shultz, former US Secretary of Labor, once noted:

“NEGOTIATIONS ARE A EUPHEMISM FOR CAPITULATION UNLESS THE THREAT OF A WORK STOPPAGE IS CAST UPON THE BARGAINING TABLE.”

TWO UPCOMING UPM ELECTIONS

NOMINATION FORMS TO RUN for our UPM Executive Council are being sent out on March 9th; to be returned by March 30th. Ballots will be mailed on April 10th, and must be returned by May 1st.

OUR CERTIFIED RETIREMENT ACCOUNT (CRA) is also holding an election; for Board of Directors. Nomination forms will be sent out on February 23rd and are due back by March 6th. Ballots will be sent out on March 20th and must be back by April 3rd.

PLEASE CONSIDER RUNNING FOR THESE IMPORTANT UNION POSITIONS.

Kaiser Nurses Reach Agreement! A strike by registered nurses at Kaiser Hospitals was averted earlier this month after a tentative contract agreement was signed.

The California Nurses Association/National Nurses United said it withdrew plans to walk out after it resolved months of stalled contract negotiations over...
FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Below is a sampling of photos and quotes from notable past and present African-Americans who have contributed to the advancement of social and economic justice in our country and around the world.

Men do not love those who remind them of their sins.

The liberals in the House strongly resemble liberals I have known through the last two decades in the civil rights conflict. When it comes time to show on which side they will be counted, they excuse themselves.

They came down on us because we had a grass-roots, real people’s revolution, complete with programs, complete with unity, complete with working coalitions, where we crossed racial lines.

We do as much, We eat as much, We want as much.

Better that my blood makes one with the blood of all the struggling workers in the world --- Till every land is free...

Shaking hands with the Queen of England was a long way from being forced to sit in the colored section of the bus going unto Wilmington, North Carolina.

We do not merely protest; we make renewed demand for freedom in that vast kingdom of the human spirit where freedom has ever had the right to dwell.

Justice is never given; it is exacted. And the struggle is continuous, for freedom is never a final fact.