

1st draft: JMC School Faculty Letter to the campus community.

UNSUNG HEROES NEED ATTENTION – A TIME TO STAND UP, SPEAK OUT & MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Colleagues and friends on campus:

What follows offers no quick or easy solution. As intelligent and thoughtful academics, however, we know in our “quick fix” minded world, we in higher education are called on to stop, see the big picture, study and think critically when we ask the important questions like “Are we who we say we are? All too often today the common retort by many to enormous problems and tough situations is “what can you do?” But our rich history at this institution, and our guaranteed rights as a free people, enable us to speak up and take act more nobly and boldly especially when we perceive a wrong is taking place and is being glossed over or ignored. As the representatives of the First Amendment on campus, we the faculty in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication are calling on the campus community to step back, grasp a sensitive but deep concern we all face, then respectfully speak out by sharing the stories and suggestions as one collective voice to foster a new way of incorporating our campus values in the discussion of personnel transfers and layoffs.

The economic downturn has brought us all to an important crossroad at San Jose State University where some of our declared priorities and values as a campus community are being directly challenged from within by our own limited and codified administrative strategies, single-minded union contract solutions and predictable desires to find the next quick and legal fix to get past this difficult decision. We know and are practical enough to understand, given the dire financial situation in this state and the problematic results of the faculty furlough approach, that staff would be the focus of attention in an effort to resolve an \$18 million dollar SJSU deficit. News reports and the president’s comments about the impact on 76 friends and colleagues lives and careers have done much more than stir of feelings of sadness and loss. For some of us, the layoffs and re-assignments seem to be damaging our ability to keep our word as an institution.

Two of our treasured priorities at SJSU, diversity inclusion and unique performance recognition are being trampled. Our campus climate driven mission statement on diversity is one of the powerful and inspiring in the nation. While others have delayed in recognizing the potential of underrepresented cultural communities in America, we have embraced it as an educational asset. For many years our forethought to build fair, honest and meaningful diversity outreach into our hiring practices, equally along with our commitment and make it an intractable to attract the best qualified people for all academic position continues to reap huge benefits and earn SJSU prideful recognition. But on the simplistic levels, by insisting on showcasing our diversity in all personnel categories, we sent a subtle but powerful signal to our students and professional communities. Our diverse hires are our unsung heroes who quietly, but most definitely, showcase hope. They confirm for all people who have never seen their gender or culture in influential positions and important responsibilities that maybe, just maybe, through our education they too can have a place at the table and be successful. While so many institutions and businesses talk about diversity hiring and inclusion, we have “walked the walk,” and shown the world how to make it work.

A broader interpretation of diversity inclusion should also include unique talents and abilities which enable unexpected and outstanding job performance. No matter their gender or ethnicity, these individuals bring to our employ a specialize career training, language skills, technology expertise and other factors which no one degree program could anticipate or provide. Like traditional diversity hires, however, their value to a institutions of business and higher education has developed slowly over time and have carried little weight in labor negotiations.

Many of these diverse people have been late comers to our institution now more than 150 years old. Practically speaking, many without the benefit longevity employment, don’t stand a chance of surviving a system defaults to one key factor, seniority, when determining how to downsize a staff. At these moments in time, all the open-minded thinking, careful planning, and insistence on diversity hiring has no teeth or influence on decision-making. “It can’t be done because of the union contract,” we’re told. Did we insist on meeting Equal Opportunity Employer standards in all hires the past twenty years just to look good? Do we care about diversity and unique performance only when our academic programs are up for re-accreditation? Are we prepared to say nothing when what we value, want and

expect can't find a way into campus employment bargaining strategies because nobody has bothered on all sides to put a priority on thinking about and incorporating it when layoffs are inevitable?

As one of the largest academic units in the largest academic college on campus, CASA, we believe attention must be given to this issue. As the representatives of the First Amendment we feel it is our constitutional duty to inform all academic units on the SJSU campus that your voices on this issue needs to be heard, and now. Since California's economic crisis is not likely to end in the near future, and lawmakers have not shown an ability or willingness to effectively explore and address the problem, we believe now is the time for people on campus to join a campus dialog on the issue we have raised.

We encourage all faculty, staff, students and administrators to weigh-in, and not tune out. This semester hundreds or our SJSU responsibly marched in solidarity with thousands on campuses nationwide because they have awakened to reality that collective and thoughtful loud a voice of protest can make a difference. More and more they are abandoning contemporary beliefs about activism and turned to peaceful, respectful and powerful collective efforts which garner public attention and put pressure on decision-makers. As their teachers, it was our generation which first showcased to the world how meaningful change can result for joint action. As the campus caretakers of the principles of diversity inclusion and the inspiration which encourage quality performance in professional endeavors, we owe ourselves, our students and our individual reputations more than quiet acquiescence on this matter.

Put your views on paper on in an e-mail and send them to us, the administration and union leaders for both faculty and staff. Make them aware of our collective disappointment and urge them to do what we teach, namely, "think outside the box." Find a fair, reasonable and legal way to elevate diversity and unique job performance to the level of seniority when negotiating potential personnel cuts. Stop the nonsense of saying it's never been done, it will take too long to get all sides to agree, or it's too much work to research and discuss. Do your jobs. Walk the walk. Stand up for all the principles of our SJSU mission. Your tough decisions directly affect our future and how the world see us.

Share your department or personal experiences with the campus community. The collective information should then be presented to the CSU Chancellor and the union leaders for both faculty and staff with the goal being to change the mindset that seniority is the only real priority we value. There are many "assets" we need to protect and find ways to keep at San Jose State University if our institution's reputation is not to be compromised.

Join us. People will listen if we try. Thank you.

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