Assemblymember Nancy Skinner

Elihu Harris State Building

1515 Clay Street, Suite 2201

Oakland, CA  94612

February 3, 2014

Dear Assemblymember Skinner:

I am one of your constituents. I am also a community college professor of music, writing to ask that you do everything in your power to restore state funding this year for the Part-Time faculty categoricals (office hours; medical benefits; and the Part-Time equity fund).  Recent cuts to these programs have hurt our students and faculty.  We need your help and I know you are a strong supporter of Community Colleges and the vital work they do in educating our people, young and old.

It is really the tale of two worlds for students at my college, Los Medanos.  Here, if a student happens to get a class with a Full-Time Professor, h/she can see that Professor any one of 5 different office hours per week,  However, at my college, the majority of courses are taught by Part-Timers, and in that case, even if a Part-Timer teaches 150% of a Full-Timer’s load, the maximum # of office hours is 1.5. If our goal is to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed, we need to make sure that each student has equal access to Professors, whether or not they get a Full or Part-Time Professor.

As well, because the pay for Part-Timers is so poor and they are lacking in basic benefits, many of our Part-Timers become the fabled freeway flyers, teaching at as many as 4-5 different districts a week, just to make ends meet.  Understandably, such an overstretched individual may well not have the energy and time that a Full-Timer Professor will, teaching in one college will have.

Ideally, our district will honor the 75-25 Full to Part-Time ratio that is the law but is currently ignored, as it has no legal enforcement teeth.  (I hope that you can help us to make the 75-25 ratio more than a paper tiger that districts routinely ignore.)  In the meantime, the least we can do for our students is restore funding for Part-Time categoricals.   Just as the reason people go hungry is not the “culture of poverty” but the lack of food, the reason our students don’t achieve success, the new state mantra, is not the “lack of effort” on the part of our faculty, but the lack of student access to Part-Time faculty or fair compensation for these faculty.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my thoughts on this,

Michael Zilber, DMA

Director of Jazz and Popular Music

Los Medanos College