

Accusations fly, debate heats up over stipends at Delta College

By Joelle Milholm

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What was supposed to be a presentation of a committee's informational report turned into a confrontational showdown laced with accusations of giving false information that left audience members awkwardly stirring in their seats at the San Joaquin Delta College Board of Trustees meeting on Tuesday night.

Teresa Brown, the chair of a committee formed in October to investigate whether or not decisions by Delta President/Superintendent Raul Rodriguez to give stipends to managers without board approval violated California Education Code rules or Delta board policy, separated herself from the committee and gave her own report. Brown said she felt the board was owed the report and was unwilling to wait any longer for fellow committee members Ted Simas and Mary Ann Cox, who she accused of attempting to give false information to the board as well as failing to reply to her e-mails or offer comments on her first draft of the report.

"I was looking for the facts and they seemed interested in looking for only the facts that encouraged the suppositions they had already reached," Brown said in her oral presentation.

Brown's words were met with defensive outbursts from both Cox and Simas, who both defended their actions and said Brown was giving her own false information. Cox and Simas both said they wanted to meet one more time before finalizing their report.

The committee was formed to determine if Rodriguez had authority to shell out eight stipends totaling \$94,000. Rodriguez has insisted throughout the process that he is only following the process that has always been in place at Delta, and that he has not violated any rules.

In her research, Brown found that past presidents at Delta had preceded Rodriguez in the practice of giving out stipends and found no wrongdoing on his part. Cox and Simas both expressed their concern that the board should have been notified and asked for approval before the stipends were given.

"Our issue is not to fire Raul," Cox said. "Our issue is to clearly define here that we are responsible for the money we spend."

After Brown's report, Rodriguez tried to resolve the matter by insisting that the board should focus its efforts on making a new policy on how and when stipends should be given out.

"That would be very helpful because right now there really aren't any guidelines," Rodriguez said.

Several trustees and faculty members, including instructor Elizabeth Maloney, who is also the Delta California Teachers Association second vice president in charge of grievances, pleaded with the board to try to work together better in the future.

"You guys have got to pull it together," Maloney said. "We are hitting hard times and it is going to get tough before it gets better. I am asking that you model for us what we should be like."

Cox said she will now present her committee report at the next meeting, scheduled for Feb. 2.

Contact reporter Joelle Milholm at joellem@lodinews.com.

In other action

— Pacific Gas and Electric Company presented Delta College with a check for \$21,759.84, for the school's energy-saving efforts after completing a recent server consolidation.

— The board approved a \$337,500 bond-funded locker room renovation project that will help Delta become compliant with Title IX requirements.