

RESPONSE FROM SIERRA NEVADA COLLEGE TO NEWS REPORTS ABOUT ITS TERMINATION OF FACULTY

(SENT TO DAILY NOUS BY JIM SCIPPS, SNC MARKETING DIRECTOR, JULY 16TH, 2017)

Sierra Nevada College's decision this week to cut faculty and staff positions came after much debate about the financial health of the college, discussion about how to best pursue the college's academic mission, and an examination of long-term sustainability. Those positions eliminated have been held by teachers of the highest caliber and integrity, and the college remains grateful for their professionalism and wishes them well in future endeavors.

Unfortunately, this move has prompted speculation that the college's decision not to rehire specific faculty members was motivated by politics, to "silence" criticism of the college administration. This charge is 100 percent untrue and has no basis in fact. Without any attempt to confirm the veracity of this claim, an online petition articulating this false narrative has been circulated, and the charge has been the subject of unverified media reports.

Like many small, liberal arts colleges with limited endowments, SNC Tahoe is a tuition-driven institution. With fewer students graduating from high school annually and a strong national emphasis on workforce preparedness, liberal arts colleges have faced a very challenging environment for enrollment and recruiting. SNC Tahoe is no exception: We have seen undergraduate enrollments decline every year for the last three years. And these enrollment declines have impacted some majors more severely than others.

Liberal arts colleges like SNC Tahoe must adapt to this new environment. The college and its board of trustees believe that adjusting the college's expenses to match new revenue expectations, while targeting reductions at programs serving a declining number of students, will give us a baseline from which to build a sustainable financial future.

Members of the SNC Tahoe community know that before recent steps were taken, the college exercised many other options, including significant cuts to the operating budget last year. Many times in the last two years faculty and staff forums were held to share, transparently, the college's budget and provide insight into budget challenges. Previous budget adjustments have reduced administrative staff, overhead, operations, facilities, and co-curricular programming. In addition to the recent faculty reductions, six administrative positions will also remain unfilled. Letting faculty go was not the first, or only, option exercised as the college tries to adjust to new budget realities.

Through all of this, the preservation of the college's high academic standards has been a paramount goal for the board of trustees and college leadership. Without question, our academic strength is the college's most important asset. And so, the decision this week to reduce teaching positions was a solemn but necessary one. The board targeted cuts that would have minimal negative long-term impact on students, while maintaining the college's academic character.

Finally, regarding the charge that the college leadership is trying to silence its critics, nothing could be further from the truth. Last year President Alan Walker created two faculty positions (held by the chair and vice chair of the college's faculty council) on the president's cabinet. Provost Shannon Beets also worked with the chair of the board's academic affairs subcommittee to secure faculty representation on the committee and give faculty members access to board members. These are inherently positions where the expectation is advocacy for the college's faculty as employees and academia as an enterprise. In the interest of inclusivity, the college leadership invites and encourages robust debate about its most important asset, and will continue to do so in the future.

As we adapt to the fast-evolving higher education market, we ask our community to participate by sharing ideas, debating our future, and yes, criticizing decisions. But we ask that in the spirit of fairness, for those whose interest is to build a positive future for SNC Tahoe to arm themselves with facts and not unfounded speculation.