Independent Review of SMC Response to Protest Released; SMC Accepts All Facts, Findings, and Conclusions in Report; Will Implement All Recommendations Immediately

- Veteran Campus Officers Acted Professionally
- Some Protesters Engaged in Unacceptable Conduct
  - Inappropriate Use of Force by One Officer
- Additional SMC Training and Protocols Needed
- Call for Education on Protest Rights and Responsibilities

An independent review panel has released its report on a protest incident at a Santa Monica College Board of Trustees meeting on April 3, 2012. The purpose of the Review Panel has been to consider the incident and to review policies, practices, and protocols relevant to the College’s response to demonstrations and similar events.

The protest centered on a previously adopted Board of Trustees’ decision that approved a Summer 2012 pilot program that would make available about 50 self-funded courses to supplement about 750 regular state-funded courses. A group of about 80 protesters were involved, including Santa Monica College students and students from seven other area colleges.

The report uses extensive video, interviews, surveys, and published reports to document the events before, during, and after a surge of protesters at the door of the Board Room led to physical contact with campus police personnel stationed at the door. During the incident, one officer used pepper spray to disperse the crowd. The incident received extensive national coverage.

The report provides a series of findings and conclusions regarding pre-planning, crowd control, communications, sufficiency of personnel, behavior of protesters, the needs of the campus community to be educated on protest rights and responsibilities, and the priority use of student discipline processes to address violation of campus protest rules.

The section also includes a detailed analysis and review of force by campus police, noting that individual members of campus police acquitted themselves with commendable restraint and professionalism. Nevertheless, the report concludes that some force threatened or used by one individual officer was inappropriate.

The report concludes with thirteen recommendations regarding planning and facilitating campus speech events, training in operational and incident protocols, event procedures, a call for educating the campus community on protest rights and responsibilities, the use of student affairs staff as the primary representatives of the College with groups of student protesters, policies on pepper spray-type agents, specific crowd control policies, revised guidelines on use of batons, the engagement of the Academic Senate in conflict mediation, and the use of the student discipline process and the Office of Student Judicial Affairs.
The Review Panel consisted of Professor Eve Adler (SMC Academic Senate President-Elect), Dr. Patricia Ramos (Dean, Workforce Development), Dr. Nancy Greenstein (Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees), and Joshua Scuteri (Student Trustee at the time of the incident), and was chaired by Robert M. Myers (Campus Counsel).

The Review Panel Report is available online at www2.smc.edu/review_panel_report. A statement from SMC Superintendent/President Dr. Chui L. Tsang regarding the report is available online at the same web address and is also provided below.

Biographies of the Review Panel members are available online at http://www.smc.edu/ACG/reviewpanel/Pages/default.aspx.

STATEMENT OF SANTA MONICA COLLEGE
SUPERINTENDENT/PRESIDENT DR. CHUI L. TSANG

“Santa Monica College is an outstanding learning institution, open, diverse, and supportive of the free exchange of ideas. I am heartened by the thorough examination and detailed recommendations provided by the Review Panel regarding the April 3, 2012, protest events. I thank them for their work and guidance.

I have accepted all facts, findings, and conclusions in the Review Panel report.

In response, I am directing the affected departments to implement all recommendations as provided for in the report, by means of study, planning, and action, and to report their progress to me in 60 days.

I concur with the Review Panel’s observation that this incident is incompatible with our shared values. By adopting these recommendations, Santa Monica College will strengthen its commitment to values of mutual respect and collegial communication.”

INQUIRIES

Inquiries may be addressed to:

Donald Girard, SMC Senior Director, Institutional Communications – 310.434-4287
Dr. Nancy Greenstein, SMC Chair, Board of Trustees – 310.396.1752
Dr. Chui L. Tsang, SMC Superintendent/President – 310.434.4200

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