

March 16th, 2020

RE: Letter to Chancellor Judy Miner and FHDA Board of Trustees Regarding Response to COVID-19 Crisis

Dear Chancellor Judy Miner and FHDA Board of Trustees,

Given the increasingly serious COVID-19 crisis spreading across Santa Clara County, we are writing to you as student representatives of De Anza College because we believe that despite the best intentions of the college, outreach to students and faculty has fallen short. The administration has not effectively informed students of their rights and on how to address their academic hardships. This is concerning, as De Anza College offers instruction to many commuting students, international students, and other vulnerable populations such as the caregivers, the elderly, and the immunocompromised. A slow response and ineffective communication from the administration could have caused a severe outbreak among De Anza's community, which would have adversely affected public safety and health.

As student representatives, we believe the administration adopts the following practices to increase outreach to students:

- Adopt and publicize a specific protocol of the district administration's plan to tackle the COVID-19 issue with whichever information is available, as this would greatly increase transparency between the administration, faculty, and students. An example could be information in regards to meetings where student input is relevant posted publicly. Administration should work to ensure student presence in discussions affecting student welfare (i.e confirming the students' stance on attendance preference).
  - Student involvement and consultations in matters that pertain to students' welfare should be included in the standard procedures for crisis situations. The point in time for such consultations should be specified and established as protocol.
- Publicize an explicit list of resources available for international students provided both on and off-campus, including but not limited to healthcare, legal and immigration advice, and on-campus jobs. International students make up almost 10% of the student population of De Anza College and may be disproportionately impacted at times like these such as this. The list should also include what international students should do in the event that a class is canceled mid-quarter and students find themselves in need of extra units to retain F-1 visa status.
  - When a student senator went to ISP on Friday, March 13th, she was told that there were no counselors in office even though the office should have been open. Until very recently, no email had been sent out by ISP to inform students of how to reach their counselors. ISP should prioritize getting timely and accurate information to international students, as it is the one channel of communication provided to the students who are residing in a foreign country with minimal contact or support from the campus.

- Maintain consistent and concise communication about student resources by utilizing multiple social media platforms. Emails should focus on new updates to prevent new information from getting buried under old information. Alternate communication methods shall not replace but instead complement methods of communication the administration has employed, such as regular updates through the De Anza website's homepage, emails, and text messages.
  - An example of an effective means of communication is how Foothill College's administration reached out to and collaborated with ASFC's marketing committee to disperse information. De Anza's social media accounts have already been sharing updates on COVID-19 made by Santa Clara County, WHO, CDC, and the California Governor. If student groups like the DASB Senate and La Voz could be more involved in De Anza administration's crisis management, information could be delivered to students in a timely and effective fashion.
  - Critical information should be presented at the forefront of all communication. The March 13th email sent out to all students did not hold any new information except for the buried second-to-last paragraph informing students of the prolonged Spring break.
  - There should be specified personnel to contact for crisis communication. Students are directed to reach out to faculty, Deans, Office of College Life, counselors, the administration, the President, and the Chancellor. The lack of an established system of recommended crisis contacts can cause uncertainty about who the students can go to for reliable answers.
- Update faculty regularly about the college's decisions, as this information enables professors to update students about coursework and exams.
  - Uncertainty about the college's decisions may cause instructors to suddenly cancel Winter classes at the end of the quarter and deny students a chance to complete the class. (ex: HIST53X)
  - Uncertainty about the college's decision for the Spring quarter classes, especially for those requiring labs, studios, and other campus facilities, may result in even more class cancellations. The administration must directly communicate with students and faculty about expected plans of action for the Spring quarter as soon as possible. Slow responses could result in unwarranted uncertainty and class cancellations, which endangers the F-1 visa status for international students.

Furthermore, it is evident that these failures in communication are symptomatic of overall systemic issues present in the college. The delayed updates from the college about COVID-19 and the lack of district-level cohesiveness point to the fact that the district has no emergency contingency plans established. The college was essentially waiting for a COVID-19 case to be confirmed on campus before taking further action. This is moving *reactively* and is the exact approach we *do not* support. Especially during times of crisis, we urge De Anza College to take a *proactive approach* by taking the necessary actions to lower the risk while also reassuring students through informative guidance procedures.

Therefore, as student representatives, we suggest the administration adopts the following practices to solve the systemic problems:

- Take proactive measures.
  - On March 10th, surrounding community colleges including Evergreen Valley, San Jose City, and Mission canceled in-person classes despite having no confirmed COVID-19 cases on campus. The colleges then proceeded to move classes online on Wednesday, March 11th. Foothill reacted proactively by moving classes online on March 11th, but instead of acting likewise, De Anza's was reactive by deciding in the Chancellor's Advisory Council (CAC) that it would follow<sup>1</sup> recommendations given by the Santa Clara County Public Health Department. On Friday, March 13th, after Santa Clara County's announcement to close down all public schools and the President's address to declare a national emergency, the CAC decided that further action would not be taken until the Governor's address later on that day. This highlights inconsistencies in the decision making process within the FHDA district, which delays necessary preventative actions.
- Inform students of their rights, especially the right to ask for accommodation, in these extraordinary circumstances.
  - In the CAC, Tim Shively and De Anza President Christina Espinosa-Pieb; members of said council, informed DASB senators that students have the right to ask for accommodation, and that it should be done through the appropriate channels. This is not clearly communicated to all professors and students. Despite individual students voicing their concern to professors about attending classes in person, they were denied accommodations for their assignments/tests. When this was brought to the attention of the department head and the deans, they also dismissed student concerns. Students should be made aware of their rights to seek accommodations. This information should also be disseminated to the faculty.
- Listen to student voices.
  - Members of the Academic Senate did not deem a student petition to cancel classes as an extension of a serious student concern because of grammatical errors. All student voices are valid and deserve to be heard. The DASB Senate discourages academic elitism that limits the participation of underprivileged student groups in important administrative discussions.
  - DASB Senators voiced out student concerns in the Academic Senate meeting on March 9th as well as the IPBT meeting on March 10th, and were also dismissed by its members. As elect representatives of the student body, it is concerning that our concerns were not taken seriously in professional settings, and raises the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://deanza.edu/healthservices/coronavirus-03.0?.20.html>.

question of whether the administration is willing to involve student voices in the decision-making process.

The following examples demonstrate the lack of swift comprehensive action and planning to prioritize the health of the community:

- College policies on moving classes online were not clear. Faculty should have operated based on clearly articulated instructions. A lack of a unified platform to operate resulted in multilateral understandings between professors and their students. The issue of face-to-face classes should have been determined earlier on a departmental level, and specific departments that intended to continue to meet on campus (physics, biology, etc.) should have been listed out. Students should have been told that they are not required to come to campus and may make arrangements with their professor to accommodate their situation
- From observation, the most prevalent method of communication during this crisis appears to be word-of-mouth. This type of communication can result in the inaccurate dissemination of essential information and thus should not be relied upon. The insistence for students to go through “appropriate channels” when there are no specified crisis contacts previously established is also an inefficient communication method. This type of communication allows for the responsibility of answering student concerns to be shunted off to an unspecified source and thus should be discouraged

Our recommendations and requests for the Spring Quarter :

- Inform all students in a timely manner about the online or on campus instruction.
- In the event that classes are canceled or instruction is moved online during Spring Quarter, the administration must enforce direct communication to students in a timely manner
- The college should update students on how to complete their courses and reassure them that their degrees will be awarded
- Students who are transferring should be reassured that their transfer requirements will be fulfilled.
- Students graduating should be informed of any changes to the graduation ceremony.
- All guidance for the above mentioned information should be sent by email, posted on the college website and links with all relevant info should also be sent via a text message to students.

We as the De Anza Associated Student Body Senate aim to work with the administration in every way possible to promote the welfare of our students during these difficult times. We hope that this letter serves as a resource for concise communication and student involvement in the future.

With Concern,

De Anza Associated Student Body Senate