

Classified Senates and Classified Unions: Classified All

A Position Paper

By

California Community Colleges Classified Senate (4CS)

The advent of collective bargaining and classified unions within the community college system was an historically important event resulting in classified employee's right to representation and protection in critical issues affecting their safety, security, salaries and benefits. Currently not all California community colleges have classified unions although classified staff at these colleges retains the right to elect to have one.

AB 1725 (Shared Governance, more accurately referred to as participatory governance) heightened awareness that classified employees were not affective participants in governance in the community college system. This is not to say that all superintendents chose a management style that excluded classified staff in their consultative and governing process. A number of formal and effective structures were developed for classified staff to participate in governance, meeting the needs of AB 1725. Some found that the existing classified unions could meet the needs and responsibilities of participatory governance requirements. In most institutions, however, classified staff have elected to develop classified senates to assume participatory governance responsibilities.

Classified senates (sometimes called councils) were developed to represent classified staff in participatory governance issues only -- those areas not pertaining to collective bargaining. In 1995 Vice Chancellor and General Council for California Community Colleges Tom Nussbaum wrote in his position paper, Evolving Community College Shared Governance to Better Serve the Public Interest, “. . . a body besides unions should represent classified in shared governance.” Shared governance was designed to address non-negotiable items and establish an environment of participatory, consultative governance. The senates are the vehicles for classified staff to contribute to the direction and health of the community college system for our students and community. In contrast, union missions are collective bargaining issues, primarily working conditions and salary, a responsibility that has taken on giant and critically important proportions.

In the same paper, however, current Chancellor Nussbaum also addressed typical district mechanisms for shared governance, two of which were the classified collective bargaining unit and senates.

“The union for classified employees also sometimes becomes empowered to participate on a broader range of issues as the district responds to regulations of the Board of Governors requiring the establishment of policies to ensure that “staff” can effectively participate in district and college governance. . . . While some districts have classified senates (see below) which participate in district and college policymaking and governance, others simply rely on their classified unions to name appointees to district/college committees, review policies, and otherwise participate in shared governance.

3. Classified Senate: Classified employees in at least 57 colleges [1995] have formed classified senates to enable this staff to participate in district and college governance. The notion has been that collective bargaining framework is not the appropriate arena into which to bring shared governance and the broad spectrum of policies involved in running a college.”

The suggestion that a separate classified body should take on the role of input in participatory governance for classified staff was met favorably on a large number of community college campuses, as attested to by the number of classified senates developed (currently 71 out of 107). Some structures also exist that include both senates and unions in the participatory governance process.

When evaluating the relationship between senates and unions, it is important to acknowledge the history of the academic senates and unions. Academic senates developed prior to community college faculty unions. Faculty unions were formed to provide the valuable and necessary service of contract negotiations, apart from college governance functions. Classified senates were created after the presence of unions in most cases to function within the college governance process. The California Community Colleges Classified Senate (4CS) believes the need remains for a separate representative body for negotiable issues and a representative body for governance issues. Although one combined body has served both areas of classified issues, it is the position of 4CS that two distinct and complimentary bodies serve those issues better in most cases.

Though some unions felt the development of senates to be a threat to their representation of classified staff, the individual classified senates and the 4CS have no goal or desire to usurp the collective bargaining duties and responsibilities of unions. By their very nature, unions are often placed in an adversarial position by their obligations and responsibilities. Unions represent classified interests, whereas governance bodies look at the interest of the institution, not of individual constituent groups. Classified staff have asked themselves whether a union can be as effective in both capacities of participatory governance and collective bargaining, especially during a period of contract negotiation or conflict resolution. The 4CS goal is to work together to

increase classified participation in the governance of community colleges and districts in more avenues than have been previously available.

The Redwoods Decision is an example of an unsuccessful effort to develop a classified body other than a union. This was a case of an administration, not the classified staff, developing and establishing the mission for the classified senate. It must be made clear that other community college classified senates were not formed in this manner nor have they intruded on the responsibilities and duties of the union. Senates must be developed locally by classified staff for participatory governance at that institution. The 4CS support and respect the responsibilities and duties of all unions in the system. The 4CS encourages senates/councils to work cooperatively to achieve clear communication between the two bodies to better serve classified staff, students and the institution.

The 4CS mission is to assure classified staff an important role in participatory governance and the mission of the community colleges by supporting the development of classified senates or classified governance bodies and act as a cohesive element of those bodies by providing information and representation on state-wide organizations related to community colleges, as well as leadership training. The 4CS provide information to all classified participatory governance bodies in the California community college system, whether senates, councils, unions, or other classified governance bodies. The 4CS respects the right of each district's classified staff to choose the classified body or bodies that best serves their needs and will continue to include them in all benefits achieved for classified staff by the 4CS. It is the hope of 4CS that unions will continue to work with classified senates/councils as partners in the common goal of an informed, professional classified staff to better serve the students, the institution, and the community.

Over the years since AB 1725, it is clear that classified staff have a professional interest in the overall health of the California community college system and in its effectiveness in serving the educational needs of students. In the future, 4CS would propose that a statewide coalition of all classified organizations would be of service and benefit to the system.

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