

Senate Forum

Volume XX, Number 2, Spring 2005

A publication of the Academic Senate, California State University, Fullerton

Incivility: A Problem at CSUF?

Inside, find four responses to this call for papers:

- Students grabbing their essays as they are handed back
- Faculty taking parking spaces that others are waiting in line to get
- People cutting ahead of each other in line at Carl's
- Phones ringing in class during lectures and exams
- Faculty dressed in class as if they were going to Laguna Beach
- Students throwing beach balls during the commencement address
- Faculty not returning books when they are recalled by other library patrons

How do you define civility? Are incidents such as these pervasive enough on campus to threaten the quality of the learning environment here at CSUF? Are such incidents on the rise? If so, what factors contribute to the decline of civility? What can be done to increase the level of civility on our campus? What role do students, staff, faculty, and administrators play in creating and maintaining a place where learning is preeminent? Are existing university policies sufficient, or are new policies needed?

Main Entry: **ci·vil·i·ty**
Pronunciation: s&- 'vi-l&-tE
Function: *noun*
Inflected Form(s): *plural -ties*
1 *archaic* : training in the humanities
2 a : **COURTESY, POLITENESS** **b** : a polite act or expression

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Civility: The Value of Valuing Differences

By Robert A. Emry and Owen Holmes

A general coarsening of American society is evident. Here are just a few examples from recent events:

- Comments made by a presidential candidate's wife to a reporter's question;
- A sitting vice president's remark to a U. S. Senator on the floor of the Senate;
- A willingness to label those who disagree with a given viewpoint as ignorant, stupid, rude, or simply as liars;
- Terms like "fascist," "wimp," "extremist," "Femi-Nazi," "girlie men," or "squirrely man;"
- A flood of television programming and talk radio shows centered on our most base instincts and extreme positions on every issue (i.e. "reality TV" or "tell-all" talk shows).

These all point to a loss of personal dignity in public life and lack of concern for our shared humanity. What's going on? A number of changes in American life over the last four decades may help explain this coarsening.

The 1960s ushered in a series of events that changed how we related to each other and the rest of the world. Prior to this time, interpersonal relationships between and among family members, friends, and community members were based on common experiences and shared attitudes, values, and beliefs (Cushman & Craig, 1976). However, during the latter part of the 1960s, the U.S. became much more tolerant of cultural, group, and individual diversity in response to, or as a result of, rising levels of interest groups. This increased tolerance was

driven by the abortion debate, women's liberation, civil rights, increased immigration, the Vietnam War, and the rejection of "the establishment" (or at least anyone over the age of 30).

Second, as this diversity spread, Americans became increasingly aware of the growing complexity of our society and our world. This awareness forced a realization of just how dependent we were on each other, as well as on other countries.

A third event was the increased access to communication that further emphasized our differences and our interdependence.

Cushman and Craig (p. 39) assert,

Communication aimed at motivating collective action in regard to our common problems depends on our establishing agreements regarding meanings, purposes, and values. Tolerance of diversity poses a substantial barrier to achieving the precise understandings and agreements on purposes and values necessary to direct and motivate collective action in regard to

Senate Forum

The Senate Forum is a publication of the Academic Senate at California State University, Fullerton. It is designed to stimulate discussion, debate, and understanding of a variety of important issues that the Senate addresses. Individuals are encouraged to respond to the materials contained in the Forum or to submit their own contributions.

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serious and complex problems. Such barriers may lead to confusion, misunderstanding, and insufficient commitment to motivate collective action.

The confusion and misunderstandings resulted in deadlocks and an inability to make cohesive policy decisions, giving rise to single-issue interest groups and an explosion of communication channels.

These actions have created additional barriers between us and others. Sometimes the barriers are created for privacy, other times they are created out of divisions that cut along political, social, economic, racial, and religious lines. We have become a splintered society. This splintering of the American experience has been labeled by David Frohnmayer (1988, p. 1), President of the University of Oregon, as the “new tribalism”:

New tribalism is the growth of a politics based on narrow concerns, rooted in exploitation of division of class, cash, gender, region, religion, ethnicity, morality and ideology – a give-no-quarter and take-no-prisoners activism that demands satisfaction and accepts no compromise.

Under this dynamic, more communication probably only generates more miscommunication and misunderstandings. Perhaps the solution demands a particular type or quality of communication.

Possible Options

■ Opening Up Spaces

An important start toward regaining civility would involve efforts to “open up spaces for differences and manage those spaces with a concern for interpersonal justice and ... shared humanity (Sypher, 2004, p. 258). To open up spaces for differences, communication would

discourage antisocial behaviors that “undermine democracy, mute voices, hurt feelings, damage self-esteem, reduce worker involvement and productivity...” (Ibid). Such an approach would recognize that all communication is personal; that is, we make sense out of the world based on our own limited perspective. Because our perspective is limited, our ability to understand an issue fully means that we value and embrace our differences.

For example, positions on the abortion issue have so hardened that any statement places an advocate in one camp (right to life) or another camp (pro-choice). Political parties have created litmus tests to determine whether a candidate is fit for office based on the polar extremes of this *single* issue.

Currently, positions on abortion appear to be softening. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Republican Governor of California, supports abortion rights. In December

2004, Howard Dean stated that he supported Democrats who advocated the pro-life position. He appeared on NBC’s “Meet the Press” as part of his effort to campaign for chair of the Democratic National Committee. Moderator Tim Russert asked if the Democratic Party should change its position on abortion. Dean replied no, but that the Democratic Party should change its position on persons who support the pro-life position. He argued that Democrats have much in common with persons who support the right to life. He asserted that, in many cases, both groups (pro-life and pro-choice) are committed to providing prenatal care, health benefits for families, good schools as well as preschool for all children, etc. Clearly, Dean’s focus was not overpowered by a sense of difference; rather, he reframed the issue to find common ground.

“... the vitality of any public square ultimately depends on how much we care about the quality of our lives together.”
– Cornel West

■ Political Correctness

When language is used in a way that may not be considered politically correct, it is not our thoughts that are criticized but rather it is our language (Whillock, 1999). For example, an individual in local government in New York City and an elementary school teacher in the Midwest both used the word *niggardly* to describe inadequate budgets. The New York City government official was removed from his job, although later reinstated, and the school teacher was forced to write a letter of apology to her students to retain her job.

In both cases, each individual used the word properly, but the word “sounded” like another word that is a racially charged. Our point is that a single word was used to judge an individual rather than the intent of the individual and/or what he/she was attempting to communicate. As a result, many things cannot be discussed and, because of a lack of dialogue, misunderstandings and social stereotypes remain.

■ Cooperative Argument

Each of our examples highlights a lack of willingness to engage with others as fellow human beings. Those whom we see as different from us are viewed as enemy combatants through a “win/lose” lens. In the words of



"Hasn't anyone ever told you to say
excuse me before you shoot that arrow!"

*Walter Hettich has been teaching in the
Department of Economics since 1984.*



Robert Emry (left) is faculty emeritus, Department of Human Communication Studies, and co-director of the CSUF Center for Community Dialogue. Owen Holmes (right) is associate vice president, public affairs and government relations and co-director of the Center for Community Dialogue.

Makau and Marty, we are pitted against each other “and people are successful only if they are ‘right,’ ‘win’ the argument, or manage to ‘get their own way.’ This stance affects our abilities to sustain reciprocal relationships and to make responsive decisions” (2001, p. 84).

A central theme of our course “Communication, Community-Building and Civic Engagement” (Human Communication Studies 435) is cooperative argument. The goal of argument is not winning, but rather understanding and viewing “those who disagree with us as resources rather than rivals” (Ibid, p. 88).

■ Dialogue

Another central theme of our course is the importance of dialogue in our lives. According to Isaacs (1999, p. 1):

Dialogue is a conversation with a centre, not sides. It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of polarization and into a greater common sense, and is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups and people. Dialogue is a living experience of inquiry. It is a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together.

Conclusion

Increasingly, we are defining ourselves based on differences (red-blue states, 50-50 nation, etc.). Such definitions make it easy for us to network with like-minded persons, exposing ourselves only to niche media and publications and demonizing those with whom we disagree. However, this dynamic causes us to behave in ways that devalue each other and miss opportunities to profit as individuals and as a nation from our differences.

As we have demonstrated throughout this essay, one way to increase civility is to focus on valuing differences by proactively seeking common ground and honoring others. Civility requires our willingness to see our differences not as something to tolerate, but rather as something to value and use as a resource. Civility demands that we honor our differences and our interdependency and together we negotiate a shared understanding. In the words of Cornel West, “the vitality of any public square ultimately depends on how much we care about the quality of our lives together” (1993, p. 11).

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Civility on Campus

By Sandra Rhoten

In Washington’s “School Exercises: Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation,” our first president coined a series of rules including this small subset:

1st Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present.

6th Sleep not when others Speak, Sit not when others stand, Speak not when you Should hold your Peace, walk not on when others Stop.

12th Shake Not the head, Feet, or Legs rowl not the Eyes Lift not one eyebrow higher than the other wry not the mouth, and bedew no mans face with your Spittle, by appro[aching too near] him [when] you Speak.

89th Speak not Evil of the absent for it is unjust.

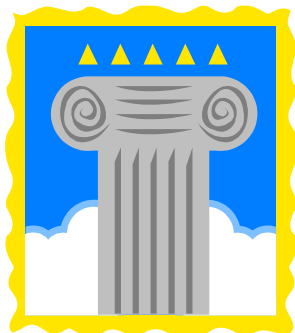
110th Labour to keep alive in your Breast that Little Spark of Ce[les]tial fire Called Conscience.

Although the spelling may have changed since Washington’s time, his list still has relevance for us today. A perceived rise in student incivility is of concern or even alarm to many professors across the country, although examples of uncivil, rude, and even obnoxious behavior among faculty, staff, and administrators can also be found. The importance of civility in the academic community is reflected by the timeless laments about its passing.



What is civility and why is it important?

“Civility” comes from the Latin word *civitas*, meaning city and community and implies a larger social concern. When we are civil, we are members in good standing in



the community, good neighbors, and good citizens. Although civility cannot always be defined with precision, it is equated with courtesy—a style and manner that elevates human interaction and discourse. Results of a Penn State project, “We Are—Civility Defined by Students” showed that students believed that “being treated courteously, being listened to with respect, speaking up to oppose situations that are hurtful to others, and having considerate interactions with their faculty were important components of a civil campus climate.”

Civility is grounded in recognition of the standing and dignity of other human beings. Establishing a civil climate is a shared responsibility of community members, yet some individuals, by virtue of their influence and authority within the community, serve to establish and model behavioral norms and expectations. Although faculty members may express concern for the behavior of their current students, they are often the most influential in setting a standard of civility on campus, not only through modeling (a willingness to listen to alternative views, respecting diversity, encouraging ideas), but by intentionally shaping the academic experience for their students.

Over the past few years, complaints concerning student behaviors have been on the rise, including rudeness, lateness, loudness, distractedness, and the myriad of small sins that irritate faculty. However, it is helpful to remember that there has never been a golden age of perfect students. For example, in 1763 at King’s College of New York (now Columbia

University) there was an admonition that “none of the Students shall molest (by making unreasonable Noises, having Company at unseasonable hours or otherwise) either the President, Tutors or their Fellow Students.”

What student behaviors are causing concern on campuses today?

In a survey on academic incivility at Indiana University, a majority of 1,449 instructors defined classroom incivility as any of the following behaviors:

- sarcastic remarks or gestures
- sleeping in class
- not paying attention in class
- conversation distracting other students or the professor
- using a computer during class for purposes not related to the class
- cell phone or pager disruptions during class
- taunting or belittling other students
- harassing comments concerning race, ethnicity, or gender
- hostile verbal attacks or challenges directed at the professor
- vulgarity directed at the professor
- inappropriate emails to the professor
- harassing comments or behavior directed at the professor outside the classroom.

However, it is important to differentiate disruptive classroom behavior (that which directly interferes with the ability of the instructor to teach or the ability of other students to benefit from the classroom experience) from behavior that is rude or uncivil, such as not paying attention in class.



Disruptive student behavior in the academic community is detrimental to both faculty and students. It interferes with the learning process for other students, inhibits the ability of instructors to teach most effectively, diverts university energy and resources away from the educational mission, and may indicate a significant level of personal problems or distress on the part of the disrupter. Disruptive behavior can become a disciplinary matter and adjudicated through the Dean of Students Office, Judicial Affairs under Title 5: California Code of Regulations.

Although rude or uncivil behavior may become disruptive when it is repetitive or persistent, it usually is best addressed by example and influence. Moral suasion, an important tool which is often overlooked, is very effective at addressing incivility. It may be expressed by a simple inquiry or observation, or by informing others of the impression they may be making on members of the community.

What can individual faculty members do to foster an environment of civility and also minimize disruption in the classroom?

■ State expectations

At the beginning of each course, it is helpful for the faculty member to clarify not only academic expectations, but also expectations regarding civil behavior that will lead to success. When instructors are establishing and promoting guidelines for behavior in the course, it is important that instructors avoid standards that they are unwilling to enforce. Likewise, standards for classroom behavior should be fairly and consistently applied; otherwise, confusion and resentment may result.

“...strategies are based on a belief that there are current social norms that work against students’ understanding of good manners and social responsibility.”

It is best for behavioral standards to be published in the course syllabus and discussed the first day of class. Information should specify the behaviors that are prohibited, how the instructor will manage behavioral issues, and the consequences that may result.

Explaining why the behavioral standards are important for the course and how they benefit students can help students understand and abide by established expectations.

■ Draft ground rules for dialogue

It is helpful to facilitate a discussion with the class about ground rules for communication (oral, written, and electronic) in order to insure respectful dialogue essential to open-minded analysis and learning. Agreeing on standards for classroom conduct can assist students in abiding by those standards.

Other positive benefits include fostering an expectation among student peers concerning appropriate behavior and having a concrete and agreed-upon reference point should inappropriate behavior occur later.

■ Model respect for students and open-mindedness for alternative points of view

One of the most important strategies for faculty members is to model civility in all their interactions as well as to treat students consistently and fairly. People who feel that they are not being treated fairly often rebel through inappropriate behavior.

These strategies are based on a belief that there are current social norms that work against students’ understanding of good manners and social responsibility. Such norms include instant messaging, strident discourse in the political arena, and no-holds-barred behavior



Sandra Rhoten has been the Associate Dean of Students, Judicial Affairs since 1999. Prior to arriving on campus she was at the University of Southern California, University of Texas at Austin and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She

attended Nebraska Wesleyan University and the University of Texas at Austin.

by popular icons as well as talk show participants. Not surprisingly, these patterns of behavior contribute to a growing gap between students and faculty members.

Additionally, the recommendations are based on the expectation that students can and will be reasonable if they have adequate information, clearly understood parameters, and are treated with respect. The expectation is that students can change their behavior and will adapt to the norms that instructors set out for them. It is therefore imperative that faculty establish firm but fair expectations of their students at the beginning of their college experience so that the university can anticipate that students will understand appropriate etiquette by the time they attend their own graduation ceremony.

Why is civility important in the academy?

A fundamental aim of civility on campus is the creation of community. Like anything worthwhile, caring and respectful behavior takes time and effort. Civility is the expression of genuine respect for others and for the tasks we share. Civility is threatened when there are perceived inequities, unequal access to resources, where conflict is high, or when dogma or ideological policies are present. According to Anna Royce at the Campus Forum on Academic Incivility, “If we can invite ourselves and our colleagues, our students, staff and administration to participate

fully in this community of learning, learning to acknowledge and value all the different ways of contributing to it, then civility and common good will surely follow.”

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Student Perspective on Civility at CSUF

By Philip Vasquez and Mona Mohammadi

Civility on campus is a concern not only to faculty and staff, but to students as well. Given the number of interactions that occur on this campus daily, it is inevitable that un-civil circumstances will arise, no matter what we do to prevent such incidents. We also must realize that everyone has his or her own subjective definition of civility. This is why it is important to communicate clearly to faculty, staff, and students what the University considers civil behavior.

As students, we believe that interactions between faculty and students are among the most valuable interactions that occur on campus. These relationships are what make our learning environment preeminent and outstanding at Cal State Fullerton. Faculty members have the power to set standards for civility at the beginning of the semester in each of their classes. It is the responsibility of faculty members to be consistent in setting standards of their expectations for classroom civility. With that said, not all faculty members will have the same set of civility standards in their classrooms. Therefore, it is the responsibility of individual students to adhere to multiple sets of standards in any given semester.

“Faculty members have the power to set standards for civility at the beginning of the semester in each of their classes.”

One major issue worth mentioning is cell phone interruptions during class sessions. This is a great example of the type of standard that a faculty member must address at the beginning of the semester. Many instructors do not address cell phone usage in their classroom discussions or syllabi. Other instructors set very strict policies but unfortunately fail to enforce such policies. It is vital that we also recognize that cell phones have become a large part of our society and the daily lives of students, faculty, and staff. We cannot realistically expect that cell phone interruptions will never occur again. It would be unwise to pursue university policy on this matter because it should be at the discretion of individual faculty members rather than being governed by a university policy statement.

Civility at commencement is a concern to all members of the CSUF community. It is a memorable experience for graduating students and their families. It seems that most of the civility problems occur during the university-wide commencement ceremony in the morning. The university-wide commencement seems to

yield more chaos than enjoyment to graduating students and visiting patrons. If we create a graduation of stadium proportions, we must realize that we will yield a crowd of stadium proportions—which is not always a civil environment. We cannot expect a crowd to remain captivated throughout the ceremony when we clearly do not have the resources to fund a more captivating program that might include high profile and educationally related speakers. This is apparent when we invite a legislator to speak at our commencement when he has clearly demonstrated an unfriendly voting record towards higher education policies that directly affect CSU students.

It is important for students to realize the great importance of a graduation ceremony, but it is up to the University to instill this sense of importance within the student body. We think that the commencement committee has taken great action this year to revamp our commencement program and make students more aware of their responsibilities at this important event. It is up to our administrators to ensure the continuity of this vision.



As students, we do not feel that civility is a large enough problem to require uniform policies in our learning atmosphere. Students value the diverse classroom environments they encounter at Cal State Fullerton. If an instructor dresses as if he or she were going to Laguna Beach and is on a first-name basis with students, that is the faculty member’s prerogative. If other

instructors would rather wear bow ties and be addressed by their academic title, then they are responsible for enforcing those standards. We need to cherish our diverse civil interactions and focus more time and resources on providing quality education to the students at Cal State Fullerton.



Philip Vasquez is a senior majoring in Human Services with a minor in Political Science. In addition to his role as ASI President, Philip also serves as the Chairman of the University Affairs Committee for the California State Student Association.

Mona Mohammadi is a junior majoring in Political Science with a minor in International Politics. She is a President's Scholar and hopes one day to attend Columbia University to obtain her Law Degree and Ph.D. in International Politics.



Now, think about two things. First, when someone cuts you off on the freeway, are you still annoyed and resentful when you reach your destination? Are you still gritting your teeth and wishing a plague on the house of the miscreant? When someone slows down and waves you into the lane you have signaled to enter, do you remember and feel grateful for it as long a time? Second, do you really experience more rudeness on campus than you do elsewhere, or are we facing a cultural shift that extends well beyond campus?

“Faculty members are not cops, but we do, and should, set the tone in the classroom, and we have a clear role in formulating broader campus policies.”

The purpose of the first question is to remind us that how we respond to someone else's action is an important part of how we perceive the action. Most of us are probably peeved by the rude driver far longer than we are pleased by the courteous one. The rude action takes on far more importance than the kind one does. This we can change quite readily by deciding to re-focus our attention and to respond differently. So think about the 34 students whose cell phones are *not* ringing in class as well as the one whose phone does ring. Perhaps we could thank the 34 right then and there, hoping that the scofflaw would get the point more clearly, and perhaps reform more readily, than if we castigate him or her. This could, of course, be reinforced by a few paragraphs in the (already over-long) syllabus setting forth the etiquette for classroom interaction. I include such a thing in my online course, because at arm's length students lose even more of a sense of how their behavior impinges on the learning of others. And let us consider that students, and our colleagues, do not intend to be rude: this is

Uncommon Courtesy

By Jane Hall

What role do university faculty members have in addressing—and perhaps changing—social behavior on campus that can be described as discourteous, thoughtless, or downright rude? Faculty members are not cops, but we do, and should, set the tone in the classroom, and we have a clear role in formulating broader campus policies.

largely a matter of not paying attention and therefore not being considerate.

The second question is meant to remind us that universities are not the only places being transformed by crowding, electronic invasion, and a general sense of being unconnected and harried. We can try to set a different tone, to engage in what traffic engineers call “calming,” but we cannot overcome influences that affect us and our students during the majority of our time spent in the larger world.

People do not set out to be intrusive or rude. Almost everyone is occasionally thoughtless, therefore careless, and sometimes discourteous. And we do not intend to be intolerant when our “space” is transgressed. What is likely to succeed is not more rules, but engaging in more discourse and encouraging more awareness of how all of us affect those around us. All of us who teach have experienced more than a few students who did well when we expected more of them than they did of themselves. Could we find a way to communicate higher campus expectations for more civil interactions? Could we perhaps endeavor to inculcate a campus culture of courtesy that extends from silencing cell phones in the classroom (also in hallways outside offices, and in the library) to disposing of trash appropriately? This could be a great project for a marketing or communication class, or several classes working together. (Surely it would be worth providing modest support for a faculty member willing to coordinate this project.)

Rather than imposing another set of policies that assume the worst, instead let’s assume the best, and then work to encourage everyone in the university to live up to those positive assumptions. Will this eradicate blood-pressure raising moments? No. But it might reduce them, both by changing behavior and our responses to it.

Jane Hall is Professor of Economics. In 1998-2000 she served as Chair of the Academic Senate. She was named CSUF’s Outstanding Professor for 2000-2001, and she received the CSU Wang award in 2001. She is a member of the National Academies of Science Committee on Air Quality Management and has received more than \$1.4 million in research funding.



What’s Happening at the Statewide Academic Senate

By Barry Pasternack

The ASCSU (Academic Senate of the California State University) has held three plenary meetings so far this academic year. Our first meeting was conducted on September 9th and 10th. As most items coming before the Senate require work by subcommittees, action items at the first meeting are limited and much of our time is spent hearing reports. We did, however, pass a resolution on student fees that reaffirmed our desire to have a rational long-term fee policy, but acknowledged that for the next three years fees would be set according to the “Compact” agreed to with the Governor. The resolution called for the CSU to set up a broadly representative committee to look at student fees and students’ share of their higher education. We also passed a resolution that thanked the members of the CSU Presidents’ Task Force on Educational Leadership Programs and reiterated that curriculum in this area should be developed by faculty.

In the November plenary we had a number of first-reading items (the Senate normally considers resolutions at one plenary session, sends these resolutions out to campuses for comments, and finalizes approval at the following plenary meeting). In some cases, due to the urgency of the matter, a waiver is requested and the Senate votes on the item without sending it to the campuses. One item for which a waiver was requested was a resolution congratulating students and others for the tremendous voter turnout in the November election.

Without a doubt, the major resolution the Senate acted on was to support the efforts of the CSU to obtain a legislative change in the Master Plan for Higher Education so that CSU campuses would be permitted to offer professional doctorates.

In the January plenary meeting, we considered a number of second-reading resolutions dealing with such “mom-and-apple-pie” issues as academic freedom for students, academic freedom in general, support for representation of lecturers on campus academic senates, support of non-mandatory service learning, support of greater flexibility in transfer requirements for majors such as engineering and science where students must start specific courses in the major as freshmen or sophomores if they hope to finish in a timely fashion, and a commendation for the alumni trustee who is stepping down.

Without a doubt, the major resolution the Senate acted on was to support the efforts of the CSU to obtain a legislative change in the Master Plan

for Higher Education so that CSU campuses would be permitted to offer professional doctorates. This will be a tough legislative fight with resistance expected by both the University of California and the private institutes of higher education in California.

Also at the January plenary, the Senate engaged in first readings of resolutions calling for campuses to have the right to delay the implementation of the student module of CMS and opposition to certain provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act. These issues will be taken up again at our March plenary meeting.

Of special note to the Fullerton campus, I am pleased to report that our own Senate Chair, Jack Bedell, has been selected as one of four finalists for the position of Faculty Trustee (to serve on the Board of Trustees of the CSU). The Senate will vote in March as to whose names will be forwarded to the Governor for selection (state law mandates that the Senate forward at least two names to the Governor for this position).

Detailed minutes of Senate meetings may be found at: <http://www.calstate.edu/AcadSen/Records/Minutes/>



Barry Pasternack is a long-time member of the CSUF Academic Senate and a campus representative to the Statewide Academic Senate. In 2002, Barry was honored as recipient of Cal State Fullerton's Faculty Leadership in Collegial Governance Award. He is currently chair of the Department of Information

Systems and Decision Sciences.