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COD adjunct faculty call for vote of no confidence against board of trustees. Here's why

Faculty also share concerns about how the board will replace outgoing president Martha Garcia and fill a vacant board seat.



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Adjunct instructors at the College of the Desert have called a vote of no confidence against the school's four trustees: Bea Gonzalez, Joel Kinnamon, Ruben Perez and Bonnie Stefan.

COD Adjunct Association President Catherine Levitt says the symbolic vote is a result of concerns over how the board has handled personnel matters related to two counselors.

As of Wednesday evening, Levitt said over 200 adjuncts have voted in favor of the vote of no confidence and fewer than five had voted against it. COD has over 350 adjunct faculty members. The vote of no confidence, a symbolic action to try to persuade the board to heed union concerns, began earlier this week and theoretically could continue until the board is scheduled to meet on April 21.

At this time, full-time faculty have not called their own vote of no confidence against the board, but the leader of a faculty group said they share adjuncts' worries.

"We stand in solidarity with CODAA and have strong concerns regarding the board's lack of action on the approval of the hiring of the full-time counseling positions," COD Faculty Association President Oceana Collins said on Wednesday.

In December, the board was scheduled to promote two part-time counselors into full-time roles at COD, essentially moving them from roles represented by the adjuncts' union to roles represented by the full-time faculty union. But Kinnamon, the college's former

president/superintendent, requested an investigation into the hiring process used to recommend them.

He and the rest of the board agreed to conditionally approve the two counselor positions pending legal counsel and chair approval that the process was properly followed by Jan. 5.

More than three months past that date, the counselors' jobs have not been approved and faculty have not been given a rationale as to why.

On April 7, COD Vice President of Human Resources Diana Galindo told Collins in response to a formal request for information on the matter: "The District objects to this request and will not provide the information because the information is subject to the attorney client and deliberative process privileges and involves a confidential personnel matter."

Collins says the board should not have interfered with "positions that were vetted and recommended through the normal hiring procedure."

"We see this as the Board overstepping their purview and interfering in the day-to-day operations of the college," she added.

She believes this level of "operational interference" is a violation of Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior College standards because standard personnel decisions should be delegated by the board to the college president.

Secondly, the adjunct association is asking its members to call on the board to hold a special election to replace former Trustee Fred Jandt, who resigned at the end of March due to his health.

During its next meeting on April 21, the board will consider whether it will accept applications from which to make a provisional appointment or order an election.

"In order to avoid the appearance of political maneuvering and impropriety at College of the Desert, CODAA is recommending to the Board of Trustees that the Board should ask the County of Riverside for a special election in November 2023 so that the citizens can choose a Trustee to represent their area," Levitt wrote in a memo to adjunct faculty.

Thirdly, the adjunct association has asked its members to call on the board to appoint an external candidate as COD's interim leader when superintendent/president Martha Garcia leaves the school to take the helm of Mt. San Antonio College this summer.

Levitt said over 200 adjuncts have supported these ideas in addition to the vote of no confidence as of Wednesday evening.

Collins said these issues are of concern, as well, but have not been taken to a vote among full-time union members.

Garcia's brief time at COD since summer 2021 has been marred by board turnover and controversy, including her predecessor's successful bid to become a trustee in a historically expensive and divisive election last fall.

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Kinnamon, an outspoken critic of Garcia, called for the investigation into her hiring practices for the two counselors in his first meeting as a trustee in December.

COD's last interim president and current vice president Jeff Baker has a pending legal claim against the school, Garcia, Trustees Perez and Gonzalez and former Trustee Aurora Wilson, alleging that they defamed him.

COD has not released information about how and when the college will begin the process to find its next superintendent/president.

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