

Elimination of LTCC position fuels distrust among staff

By Kathryn Reed

Unrest is brewing at Lake Tahoe Community College among staff, the board and the president.

One classified employee on Jan. 21 told *Lake Tahoe News* privately, "Morale has always been in the toilet, now it's in the sewer."



College board member Kerry David isn't surprised staff would be disgruntled based on continued cutbacks by California, increased workloads and years without raises.

"Morale in higher education is tanking across California when you look at the proposal the newly elected governor has put on the table," David said.

The best-case scenario as proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown for LTCC is \$650,000 in cuts. The worst case is more than \$1.7 million cuts for the next school year. What compounds the problem is the outcome may not be known until June, weeks before the 2011-12 budget must be approved and takes effect July 1.

(The board is meeting with state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, on Monday in Sacramento to discuss the budget.)

Although budget constraints and the uncertainty that looms plays a role in creating an atmosphere of gloom, interim President Steve Maradian is not helping the situation, according to some LTCC employees.

Upon his recommendation, the board at its last meeting

unanimously did away with the position of the Title III project manager. This in turn means Craig Brinkman is without a job. He was putting the Datatel software system in place.

“First of all, it is a personnel matter. To me it was not a performance issue. It was a position not needed by the college to get the work done,” Maradian told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Maradian brought in three firms to assess how Datatel is working. Two were independent. According to Maradian, all said the college needed better technical support to make the grant funded software upgrade come to fruition. That is why he recommended doing away with the job held by Brinkman.

At the Academic Senate meeting Friday afternoon on the campus of the South Lake Tahoe two-year institution, Senate VP Steve Adams was adamant in his belief the dismissal of Brinkman was not handled correctly.

“When things happen this way, it affects all of us,” Adams said at the meeting.

He and fellow instructor Jon Kingsbury are upset College Council did not know about it beforehand. Shared governance is what they kept reiterating. Shared governance gives a voice to faculty and staff before the board takes action.

LTCC board policy 5.12 Subsection B states, “Except in unforeseeable emergency situation, the Board of trustees shall not take action on matters significantly affecting staff until it has provided staff an opportunity to participate in the formulation and development of those matters through appropriate structure and procedures.”

Although the Academic Senate did not vote on the matter related to this situation, Kingsbury and Adams briefed the more than two dozen people in attendance that their opinion is the board did not follow proper procedure. The Academic Senate is expected to address the board at the Jan. 25 meeting.

Maradian left the Academic Senate meeting before all of this was said. Reached by *LTN* by phone afterward, the president adamantly stood by this being a personnel matter, which would mean it would never go to College Council or Academic Senate.

As to whether the Jan. 11 agenda item was worded correctly, Maradian said, it was written per what attorneys advised. The item reads, "Public Employee Discipline/Dismissal/Release: Project Manager, Title III, and Interim Manager, Information Technologies."

Some interpreted this as the firing of the person, not the elimination of the position, which is what the board voted on.

David said, "This is not something that happened overnight."

People speaking at the Academic Senate meeting said it was a surprise when the agenda was posted.

Maradian said with all the meetings involved with people assessing the program he couldn't see how anyone would be surprised by what transpired last week.

The college board meetings and College Council meetings are available on podcast on the college's website.

The day after the board meeting, *LTN* received an email from an anonymous source that in part says, "(Maradian) has now LIED to the Board about following publicly available policies for the termination of a staff member – Craig Brinkman. It's a mess and there is rampant talk of a vote of no confidence against the president and the Board. The staff is afraid to speak up for fear of being the next to see their name on a public agenda for dismissal."

On top of the strife between Maradian and LTCC, he had problems just before leaving Los Angeles City College.

The Los Angeles City College paper in November 2010 talk about a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by a male student against

Maradian while he was president of the college. It was settled out of court.