Date: May 13, 2015

To: Green River Board of Trustees

From: Faculty at Green River Community College

Re: Supporting Letter to Vote of No Confidence in President Ely

Dear Green River Board of Trustees:

We faculty at Green River College remain very alarmed about the ongoing crisis that has escalated in the past two years since our 2013 Vote of No Confidence in President Eileen Ely. We are deeply troubled by proposed RIFs against the programs headed by our union and instructional leadership; the inability to reach a negotiated agreement; the continued dismantling of shared governance; low morale; and the deteriorating workplace atmosphere at the college. Our concerns are outlined below.

1. Since the 2013 Vote of No Confidence, we have experienced a relentless, ongoing collapse of shared governance at the college exemplified by capricious decision making and growing disregard for significant faculty input on decisions:
2. Arbitrary administrative decisions affecting instruction with no rationale or erroneous rationale provided:
3. Carpentry Technology program targeted for elimination due to high costs, according to President Ely. The Vice President of Instruction, Derek Brandes, announced these program eliminations at the April 20 Instructional Council meeting. Dr. Brandes failed to provide supporting financial data, but he assured the council members that he would deliver it on April 21. At the May 4 Instructional Council meeting, the administration informed members that they had been gathering the financial data for the past 10 work days. Making a decision to eliminate a program and then attempting to find financial data to justify the decision after the fact calls into question the process the administration has followed in making this decision. Rather than trying to solve a problem that they found through data analysis, they decided there was a problem and then looked for the data to support their pre-determined inclinations. This is not how efficient institutions with integrity should operate. The Instructional Council members did not receive additional financial data until May 8. Consequently, President Ely extended the deadline after finally giving some, although still incomplete, justification, which was in effect an admission that the data should have been given initially.
4. Carpentry Technology completed a Program Review two years ago and this process resulted in a stronger program.
5. Auto Body Technology targeted for program elimination due to low enrollment, according to President Ely. Classes in the program enjoy robust enrollment. The administration did not pursue the option of Program Review in order to strengthen the program.
6. All three of these programs slated for elimination generate FTEs and revenue for the college. Eliminating them is fiscally irresponsible in the state’s current economic and budgetary climate.
7. Carpentry Technology will receive $10,000 per year for the next seven years via the Seattle Foundation for carpentry only student scholarships; over those same seven years the Seattle Foundation will grant the Carpentry Technology Program $20,000 - $27,000 per year to support anything the program needs; the Seattle Foundation has also pledged $20,000 for the tiny house project. This is a minimum of $230,000 in direct program support over the next seven years. Moreover, the Carpentry Technology Program currently has $12,000 in a Green River Foundation account that can be used to support the program.
8. In the May 8 notice sent to the Instructional Council, President Ely states that only a high school diploma is required for employment in the field of carpentry, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics . This is only partially true and President Ely conveniently ignores the information that does not support her case. The complete quote from Washington State Employment Security Department website reads, “According to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the typical level of education that most workers need to enter this occupation is: High School diploma or equivalent.  *Additional training, experience, licenses or credentials may be required*.” (Emphasis added.) The training director for the Local Union 30 of Central Puget Sound Carpenters states that students completing Green River’s Carpentry Technology training enjoy a higher success rate of acceptance into an apprenticeship than those applicants without the pre-apprentice training. The training provided at Green River provides applicants for apprenticeship with knowledge and skill necessary to pass the entrance exam and interview.
9. According to the May 8 notice sent to the Instructional Council, the Washington State Employment Security Department website states that carpentry is a career “not in demand.” Once again, this is only partially true. While demand for carpenters might be down across the state, King County is listed as a county with demand for carpenters. Carpentry jobs in King County are projected to have an “average annual growth rate (2012-2022) = 3.3%,” according to the Washington State Employment Security Department. Moreover, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment of carpenters is projected to grow 24 percent from 2012 to 2022, *much faster than the average for all occupations*.” (Emphasis added.)
10. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of automotive body and glass repairers is projected to grow 13 percent from 2012 to 2022, about as fast as the average for all occupations. It states that opportunities should be very good for jobseekers with industry certification and *formal training in automotive body repair and refinishing and in collision repair*. (Emphasis added.) According to the Washington State Employment Security

Department website, Automotive Body and Related Repairers is listed as an occupation “in demand.” The Auto Body Program meets the needs of the community and the job outlook is strong.

1. The unexplained, abrupt halt of the Program Review process for the Geographic Information Systems program deviates from past practice and contractual obligations.
2. Carpentry Technology, Auto Body and Parent-Child Education are led by union officers and union contract negotiators. Targeting their programs for elimination amounts to retaliation. This is an unfair labor practice and the union has filed an unfair labor practice with the PERC Board as a result.
3. Administrative decisions negatively affecting the community and students:
4. Community colleges have a three-pronged mission: meet the needs of students pursuing a trade and professional technical degree; provide AA Degrees for transfer students; and serve students with basic education needs. The most recent strategic plan embraces this mission. Eliminating trades programs undermines the central mission of the college to serve all students in our community.
5. The announced cuts to trades are unconscionable. Green River’s trades programs provide training for very real and immediate jobs in our local community. The data proves this. These are real training programs that provide real jobs – for carpenters, builders, mechanics and auto-body technicians – to our community.
6. In the May 8 notice sent to the Instructional Council, President Ely provides financial data to show that the programs targeted for elimination are running at a financial deficit. The document states that the three programs run at a total deficit of $197,000. Other programs at the college generate significant revenue for the college. Traditionally, the profitable programs have offset the costs of the more expensive programs and enabled the college to maintain its commitment to programs like Auto Body, Carpentry Technology and Geographic Information Systems because they serve the needs of our community and provide career training opportunities for our community members not seeking a four-year degree. These programs are vital to the mission of the college.
7. Administrative decisions affecting instruction and curriculum are made without consideration and collaboration with faculty:
8. Beginning Fall 2015, a “Transitions” policy mandating students to complete a 2-credit course or no-credit workshop. This administrative policy was created without approval from the Instructional Council. Past practice calls for degree changes to undergo an all-faculty vote.
9. Parent-Child Education was targeted for elimination along with Auto Body, Carpentry Technology and Geographic Information Systems on April 20. The coordinator for the program agreed to greatly reduce the scope of the program in order to save it from complete elimination. Targeting a program for elimination before working with the faculty to find a solution serves as another example of pitiful decision-making by the administration.

D. Extreme difficulty communicating with leadership of the current administration concerning our grievances and/or perceived problems:

1. Failure to successfully negotiate a contract. The refusal of the administration to negotiate earnestly in a face to face setting has led to a negative, protracted process.
2. Failure to lead the college when facing an impending enrollment crisis has led to the inevitable lack of enrollments. Thus, we are facing a rebasing of our FTE allocation which means even fewer state funds to come to Green River College. In contrast, during the last FTE downturn the college mobilized all areas of campus with a successful, concerted effort to build enrollments and avoid a loss of funds. This current administration failed to lead at a critical moment.
3. The previous administration held regular, open forum sessions in which the president discussed the state of the college, reviewed the budget, and answered questions from faculty and staff – this promoted transparency and communication.

The number of such sessions with faculty and staff has decreased significantly in the past 5 years. Neither President Ely nor Vice President Brandes has held an open forum with faculty this academic year.

1. The last time faculty heard directly from President Ely in public was on her opening day speech in September 2014.
2. On April 17, 2015, Vice President Brandes, in his very first e-mail communication to faculty this academic year, issued a directive to faculty to attend In-Service Day workshops on April 20. He threatened faculty with disciplinary letters if they did not attend. Such a mandate was unprecedented and contradicted past practice.
3. The Board of Trustees passed the Civility and Respect Policy in May 2014. As the Board of Trustees considered the proposal, the board’s efforts to solicit faculty input on a policy were minimal and perfunctory. Faculty who attempted to communicate their concerns to the administration and Board of Trustees were ignored. The policy passed.
4. Unethical and irresponsible fiscal management:
5. The faculty has lost confidence in the ability of President Ely to ethically and responsibly administer the financial health and viability of our public institution:
6. Spending $34 million of taxpayer funds on a new trades building and eliminating two of the programs that occupy 1/3 of the space in the new building is fiscally irresponsible and a misuse of taxpayer dollars.
7. The Vice President of Student Affairs has received $25,432 in travel authorizations and reimbursements from 2012 – October 2014, authorized by President Ely, including mileage reimbursement for travelling to branch campuses for meetings that have been denied to faculty who teach classes there. This is in clear violation of Washington State travel regulations.
8. Administrative salary increases while faculty and staff have endured no pay raises in seven years. Between 2010 and 2013, President Ely has approved raises, stipends, and job reclassifications totaling at least $227,000 and providing average raises of 25%, and as high as 87%, for a select group of administrators and exempt employees.
9. $75,000 spent on a lawyer to negotiate a contract with the faculty has drastically slowed contract negotiations and has to date failed to produce a contract. This has led to mediation through the PERC Board. In contrast, prior contract negotiations without an administration-hired lawyer were conducted more efficiently, with more timely arrival at consensus and resolution.
10. The college spent $225,000 to participate in Achieving the Dream for a three-year period and $10,000 for each subsequent year of participation. Faculty were only minimally included in the decision to participate and, as a result, the program has not impacted the classrooms and proven to be a poor use of taxpayer money.

III. The termination of many long-term employees has created a climate of distrust and general malaise across campus:

1. Terminating the contracts of long-term employees has created a significant shortage of administrators and upper-level staff with institutional history and knowledge of our campus and community. Having campus safety escort long-term employees off campus as if these employees were untrustworthy is disrespectful and unnecessary, and these actions have themselves significantly eroded trust. In the past five years, a minimum of 168 full-time employees have left the college. Some were fired, some retired and others found comparable and better opportunities at a peer college or elsewhere.

The new administrative hires have no standing connection with faculty or our campus culture. The perception among faculty is that under the new administration the voice of faculty in campus governance is no longer valued.

The faculty understands that with any new administration there will be turnover and change, and that a certain degree of reasonable change is the prerogative of the president. The administration contends that faculty is equating this change with unreasoned fear. We respectfully but adamantly disagree. Our unease is justified and documented herein.

In conclusion, we are gravely troubled about the future of our college, an institution to which most of us have devoted our life’s work. The negative trends under the presidency of Dr. Ely have intensified over the past two years. We no longer believe that this trend will reverse under Dr. Ely’s leadership and we are asking the Board of Trustees to take the necessary action so that we can begin to heal. Our hope is that, with time, and under new leadership, Green River College will once again be an open and collaborative institution of higher education.