

Crafton Hills College STEM Resolution Commentary
by Susana de la Peña, Ph.D. (10/13/17)

Thank you for the opportunity to render a frank and respectful response to Academic Senate's resolution about the STEM program.

When I see administration apparently ignore faculty's pleas to have a seat at the table, so to speak, at the Dual Enrollment meetings, despite the union's strong suggestion that said meetings be held during the college hour when faculty may attend, then I am not surprised, nor am I happy, either, when I hear of perhaps a similar dismissal of the faculty's...the experts'...the scientists' suggestions or arguments for the STEM program. I am not pleased to hear of students' confusion and sense of demoralization because of the lack of information and services they are no longer receiving from the STEM program. I have not only heard, but then asked, students in my classes discussing a "chaos" associated with the "closing" (their words) of STEM on campus. I have heard them say, "It's closed," "We don't know where to go," and "Nobody's in charge and I don't know where to go, anymore, for help," as well as the often repeated, "This really sucks." Apparently, the STEM program has been shut down. As a strong supporter of a program justifiably designed, in part, to encourage the recruitment of more women and minorities into the sciences, I am concerned with this seeming undermining of our STEM program on the Crafton Hills College (CHC) campus. Why has this happened? And why are we making it harder, instead of easier, for said STEM students to get the information they need, or to have a permanent, qualified faculty at the helm to guide them, which they also need?

In just one article I recently read, "STEM Majors Prove Especially Profitable for Minority Students," a study is cited (June issue of *Research in Higher Education*), indicating that "majoring in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) proves to be the most profitable for

minority students, whether they actually pursue the STEM field professionally or not.” In addition, the co-author of this study, Dr. Wolniak, claims: “Among the high achieving minority students we studied, Latinos not only reported the highest annual earnings overall, but also reported the highest annual earnings among STEM majors.” At an Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities summit, Antonio Flores, CEO, adds that this “shift from minority to majority means that race, ethnicity, and culture will play a more important role in science, technology, engineering and math fields.” With such glowing accolades of such a powerful program, STEM, especially for women and minorities who have historically been relegated to the margins of these fields of study, if even that, why are we at CHC not doing more to ensure that we in fact do have a well designed, organized, and respected program run by experts—faculty—in their scientific, technology, engineering, and math fields? Are they the ones making the important decisions about the existence (or demise) of CHC STEM, and not the non-experts in the field—and if not, why not? When I have a plumbing problem at home, I trust the plumber...the expert... and not the manager behind the desk who merely fields my call.

I hope that the shutting down of the STEM program is not a page out of some administration playbook: namely, banish the employee so as to essentially banish the program, regardless of its success.

I suggest that this resolution about STEM, proposed by Academic Senate, *indeed* ensure that a qualified STEM expert facilitate the program and continue with the excellent work for which it is well known by numerous faculty, staff, and students.