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SJSU ERFA News, Winter 2014

San Jose State University, Emeritus and Retired Faculty Association

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A grant of money to educate retiring faculty

By Amy Strage & Joan Merdinger

Two years ago, SJSU received a grant from the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (Sloan) for the specific purpose of helping faculty make the transition from full-time work to full time retirement. Since then, SJSU ERFA has partnered with the SJSU Center for Faculty Development to implement this award and we’d like to let you know what we have been doing with it.

One of our first initiatives was the “Video Transitions Project.” We’ve completed video interviews with 16 retired faculty members in which they describe their own personal transitions into retirement with important lessons learned and suggestions for faculty who anticipate retiring. Our purpose for creating the videos was to provide information to currently employed faculty members who may be considering retirement, but are reluctant to “tip their hand” by asking questions about it, and their desire to keep such questions in confidence. These interviews are with your SJSU colleagues and we invite you to view them on the following webpage: http://www.sjsu.edu/cfd/rtp/career-planning/interviews-retired-sjsufaculty/

Secondly, this ACE/Sloan grant has allowed us to create a series of “Financial Literacy” video modules. We were delighted to be joined in this effort by two colleagues from our College of Business, Drs. Marco Pagani and Stoyu Ivanov. These modules allow faculty at all stages of their careers to understand the importance of financial planning in order to fund a successful retirement. We hope you will go to the following webpage to view the modules: http://www.sjsu.edu/cfd/rtp/financial-literacy/index.html

A third outcome of the award was a chapter we wrote about SJSU’s policies and programs, entitled, “Planning a Graceful Exit to Retirement and Beyond: The San José State University Way.” The monograph is included in the Continued on page 2
Continued from Page 1 recently published book, Faculty Retirement: Best Practices for Navigating the Transition, edited by Claire Van Ummersen, Jean McLaughlin, and Lauren Durenale (Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2014). Our chapter outlines the “best practices” that help faculty make the transition to retirement. It emphasizes the importance of a win-win solution for both the faculty member and for SJSU—for the individual, a successful, respectful retirement process, and for the University, an opportunity to replenish its ranks with new tenure-track faculty.

We’ve reported on these initiatives at national conferences, the most recent of which was the AROHE (Association of Retiree Organizations in Higher Education) Conference in August 2014. Our presentations on the video interviews and financial literacy projects were very positively received with follow-up questions from conference participants asking to link with our “Video Transitions Project” interviews, and our “Financial Literacy” video modules.

Finally, we have used some of the funds from the award to create a library and collegial space at the Center for Faculty Development on campus. It includes a cozy reading area, a collaborative workspace, and a dedicated desktop computer and printer. We invite you to stop by IRC 223 any time, to browse, to visit, and to enjoy a cup of coffee or tea “on the house.”

Keeping in Touch Through Email

By Carol Christensen (SJSU-ERFA Webmaster)

Several years ago the SJSU ERFA Board sought a way to quickly communicate with members and decided to establish an email distribution list through Yahoo Groups. The Board approved the list primarily for (1) announcements and reminders of upcoming SJSU ERFA events, and (2) news about SJSU ERFA members, other SJSU retired faculty and staff, and related organizations such as CalPERS, CSU-ERFA, or SJSU.

For those purposes, any member on the list can post an announcement of general interest. About 3-5 messages are posted each month, most with being announcements or reminders of SJSU ERFA related events. To join the list, just send an email to SJSU_ERFA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. If you have questions, please email Carol Christensen at chriwolf@pacbell.net.

ACE grant provides for retiring faculty

By Peter Buzanski (Academic Senate)

The SJSU Academic Senate researched policies regarding emeritus status for faculty and discovered wide variations among the Senate policy and the 23 campuses. As a result, our Senate developed a new policy, toward which SJSU-ERFA provided significant input. Among the statewide differences, there are those campuses which grant emeritus status to faculty retirees, except where cause impedes its granting. Then there are doctoral-granting universities and others that offer the status only to outstanding retirees such as Nobel prize winners, authors of significant publications, etc. We came up with our own new policy in the final session in December.

Its most significant terms provide that “Emeritus standing shall normally be conferred on each tenured faculty member” with a procedure that requires that a “Departmental personnel committee . . . must find that the faculty member has made significant contributions to the University.” The second important change from previous policies provides that Lecturers, who currently make decisions to one-half of the total teaching staff, shall be eligible for Emeritus status provided they meet two conditions: 1) have been employed for a minimum of ten years; 2) have been approved by a departmental personnel committee which finds that they have made significant contributions to the University. Only for members of CalPERS, CSU-ERFA, or SJSU.

Finally, regarding our campus Association for emeriti and retired faculty, the new policy provides not just emeritus faculty but retired faculty as well and states that “All emeriti and retired faculty are eligible for membership.” At this time the association shall determine its own name and constitution, and is presently named the Emeritus and Retired Faculty Association (ERFA). However, before this policy was presented to the Senate, the President raised some concerns which led him to negotiate with the Senate committee so that it has its own policy. Since the President has not indicated a position, the fate of this policy proposal is unknown at the time of this report.

On another matter, an unfortunate event took place early this year at a Board meeting of the Tower Foundation, the chief fund-raising group for SJSU. One Board member allegedly made derogatory comments about Latino and Latina students. When a group of students later learned about this incident, and that no one spoke up at the meeting to denounce the remarks, the local press gave it much unfavorable attention. As a result, the Vice President for Advancement, a competent, progressive leader who was present at that meeting, decided to resign.

Who is granted emeritus status and how is it determined?
Remembrance of Things Past
Sharing memories with our members...

Miss Bankard and Mrs. Sanders... .

By Arlene Naylor Okerlund
Ph.D. (English) H&AV (AP)
I have always venerated teachers. They have assured that my 76-year odyssey through life has been fascinating and challenging, both personally and professionally.

During my own career at San José State, colleagues facilitated that journey. Marion Richards, one of several treasured mentors in the English Department, welcomed me to campus in 1969 with her typical shrewd wisdom: “San José State is a good university for a career. It is large enough so that you can find friends and colleagues you genuinely like and with whom you want to spend time. It is large enough that you can avoid those whom you don’t.

At SJSU, I encountered fascinating friends and areas of knowledge that I never knew existed. During my tenure at SJSU, I encountered fascinating friends and areas of knowledge that I never knew existed when growing up in my hometown of 1,800 people. That’s why I never understood those colleagues—fortunately few—who seemed unhappy to be teaching at SJSU. Usually, they thought they deserved better: a more prestigious university, more brilliant students, more luxurious classrooms, fewer papers to grade. “If you are so unhappy,” I often thought but never said out loud, “why don’t you leave? Life is too short to suffer a job you don’t like.”

They should have met Miss Bankard and Mrs. Sanders, two of my teachers at Taneytown High School, a tiny school nestled in rural Carroll County, Maryland. Both were single women. Miss Helen Bankard, tagged an “old maid” by us naïve, irreverent teenagers, and Mrs. Virginia Sanders, a woman whose unexplained “Mrs.” fostered its own kind of mischievous adolescent suspicion.

Miss Bankard was the best teacher I have ever encountered. She had a brilliant mind and today could have qualified as CEO of IBM, HP, Microsoft—any company in the Fortune 500. But in the 1950s, near the end of her teaching career and life, such opportunities were not available to women. Indeed, Miss Bankard’s poverty of opportunity assured our class of her unique status. Bankard housewives, farmers, or secretaries the best mathematics education we could possibly have received (eight of us went on to college).

With Miss Bankard, we studied Algebra through Trigonometry over the course of four years. But she had the fortitude to defy the Carroll County Board of Education, who had decreed that Freshman Algebra I should be followed by Sophomore Geometry, then Junior year Algebra II, with one semester each of Solid Geometry and Trig in our Senior year. “That doesn’t make sense,” Miss Bankard declared. “If you insert Geometry between Algebra I and II, students forget everything they learned about Algebra when freshwoman, and if a teacher spends the first half of the Junior year re-teaching Algebra I.” Miss Bankard taught her preferred sequence, unchallenged by the Board of Education. Her teaching techniques were similarly unchallenged. When we arrived in class with homework completed, eight students were randomly appointed each day and sent to the blackboard, where we each chalked one of the assigned problems with our solution. One by one, we explained the class how we solved an equation or proved a theorem. When we made mistakes, Miss Bankard corrected them, and the entire class learned from the student-teacher demonstration.

One day in Geometry, there was a particularly difficult theorem. I struggled with it for hours during that night’s homework. No success. But I did concoct an answer because I lived in fear of the next day’s blackboard presentation.

Next morning during homeroom, everyone taking Geometry was frantic because no one had derived the theorem satisfactorily. But since my answer seemed more plausible than anyone else could imagine, everyone copied my homework.

How relieved I was that Miss Bankard did not call on me during her teacher demonstration. Another classmate who had copied my completely wrong answer wrote it on the board, but did not have a clue about algebra. No problem. Miss Bankard called on another student. That student wrote the exact same incorrect solution on the board. Miss Bankard called on a third, then one by one, she went around the class, all students admitting they had the same answer. Tension and fear increased exponentially. Finally, Miss Bankard stopped, faced the class, and uttered the dreadful words: “OK. WHO did the homework?”

There was absolute silence. In 1955 at Taneytown High School, completing a homework assignment was not a concept. It was called “CHEATING.”

All students looked down at their desks. More silence. Miss Bankard stood in stony stillness. Finally, I slowly raised my hand. I expected—I knew not what, since the crime was so severe. To my surprise, Miss Bankard simply looked hard at me, turned to the blackboard, and demonstrated how to solve the theorem.

That day I learned not to fear Miss Bankard. And my respect for her has grown every day of my life—augmented by gratitude that she insisted that students in a rural high school learn as much mathematics as their more privileged counterparts in fancier schools. Through undergraduate classes at the University of Maryland and Ph.D. studies at the University of California, San Diego, I never had a better teacher.

Mrs. Sanders, a wholly different kind of teacher, had a brilliant mind and today could have qualified as CEO of IBM, HP, Microsoft—any company in the Fortune 500. But in the 1950s, near the end of her teaching career and life, such opportunities were not available to women. Indeed, Mrs. Sanders’ poverty of opportunity assured our class of her unique status. Bankard housewives, farmers, or secretaries the best mathematics education we could possibly have received (eight of us went on to college).

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writes, "As I approach 90, ‘I don’t live in Costa Rica, daughter children are scattered: son Charlie continued to enjoy quiet days at The Terraces in Los Gatos with Road Scholars. He also outlined his daily routine would only tell their psychiatrists.”

He also outlined his daily routine as an octogenarian: “7:30 a.m. My old man gets up, then we spend a half-hour taking pills.”

Phyllis McNally (Nursing, ’77) recently took part in the ACE/Sloan Project Retirement Podcast (available at the SJSU Academic Affairs website). Currently living in Nipomo, CA, she is a member of the Friends of the Nimpo Library and is a member of the Monarch Butterfly Habitat at Monarch Dunes. This summer she visited the Scandinavian capital cities with Road Scholars.

Patricia Burns (widow of Bert Burns, Int’l Business, ’60) continues to enjoy quiet days at The Terraces in Los Gatos with her nine grandchildren and her great grandchildren. She is an avid reader, a gardener, and a walker. She lives with her husband Walter, her two sons, a granddaughter and a great granddaughter, most of whom live in Hawaii.

Gordon Greb (Journalism/ Mass Communications, ’60), who now lives in Chico, CA, was interviewed by his local newspaper before a book signing for his personal memoir, You May Be a “Time Machine” on the Internet (Universe, ’09). Gordon’s sense of humor came through strongly. Some samples: “Memoir writing is such a widespread affliction these days that it could be classified as a disease. . . . I, too am a victim. Day after day I have a persistent need to come clean, spill the whole works and tell the world what normal people would only tell their psychiatrists.”

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Before submitting it to the teacher for grading, I chose to prove that Shakespeare did not write those plays. Indeed, those so-called “Shakespearean plays”—all of them!—were written by Christopher Marlowe.

My research was impeccable. I had read an article in Reader’s Digest. By the end of my report, every student in our English class was convinced. Miss Sanders smiled, thanked me, and told the class that my research raised “some very interesting points.”

After graduating from high school, I visited Mrs. Sanders every summer when I went home to see my parents. We laughed about my Macbeth report, and she was thrilled when I told her that my life-long devotion to the Bard began in her English class. Until her death, Mrs. Sanders followed my career through graduate school and on to San José State. She would be doubly pleased to learn that I am still teaching Shakespeare today.

Miss Bankard and Mrs. Sanders represent the best of the teaching profession. They cared not a whit that their students were mostly the children of farmers and factory workers—or that they taught in an obscure school in the foothills of western Maryland. They arrived at school every day determined to challenge students to the limits of their abilities. I cannot think of a greater privilege—or richer life—than to follow in the footsteps of Miss Bankard and Mrs. Sanders.