(This article is an excerpt from the preface of the new edition of Michael D. Yates’ book, Why Unions Matter)

The first edition of Why Unions Matter was published in 1998. In it I argued that unions mattered because they were the one institution that had dramatically improved the lives of the majority of the people and had the potential to radically transform both the economic and political landscape, making both more democratic and egalitarian. I showed with clear and decisive data that union members enjoyed significant advantages over nonunion workers: higher wages, more and better benefits, better access to many kinds of leaves of absence, a democratic voice in their workplaces, and a better understanding of their political and legal rights. What is more, unions benefitted nonunion workers through their political agitations and through what is called the “spillover” effect—nonunion employers will treat their employees better if only to avoid unionization.

This assessment of the impact of unions has not changed in the second edition. What was said ten years ago is true today. I have updated the numbers, but they still show that unions matter. Other things being equal (that is taking two groups of workers alike with respect to experience, education, region of country, industry, occupation, and marital status), union workers in 2007 earned $1.50 an hour more than nonunion workers, a wage premium of 14.1 percent. This wage premium was highest for black and Hispanic workers, meaning that unionization reduces racial wage inequality. The union premium was even greater for benefits: 28.2 percent for health insurance, 53.9 percent for pensions, 26.6 percent for vacations, and 14.3 percent for holidays. These union advantages have diminished over the past decade because union density (the share of employed wage workers in unions) has fallen. This decline has also compromised both the union impact on inequality and nonunion wages and benefits. There have been many reasons for the decline in union membership and density—and these are discussed at length in the new edition of Why Unions Matter. However, we can say here that falling density means a tremendous loss for the working class: lost wages and benefits for all workers, still less response by the government to the needs of workers, and a smaller counterweight to the forces that have given rise to greater inequality.

Maybe unions matter even more today than they did in 1998. Working men and women are more vulnerable to a host of problems than they were then:

—Because of the electronic revolution, the radical reorganization of the labor process, and the political deregulation of important product and financial markets, employers are more likely to divide and conquer their workforces, and a smaller counterweight to the forces that have given rise to greater inequality.

—Deregulated globalization, fueled in part by anti-labor trade agreements, has displaced working people in poor countries like Mexico from their land and jobs. Large numbers have come to the United States, intensifying competition in some labor markets, allowing employers to divide and conquer their workforces, and giving an excuse for xenophobes to foment anti-immigrant hysteria, which helps to keep domestic workers’ from seeing clearly that it is their employers (and the employers’ allies in government) that are also more inclined to threaten to do so. Try to buy U.S.-made shoes, toys, jewelry, and a host of other consumer goods. If your automobile is made in the United States, chances are good that it was manufactured in union-free southern states.

—Employers are more likely to contract out to lower-wage states and nations both labor-intensive operations such as call centers and higher-wage labor like computer programming and medical service work. When we make inquiries about our computers, our credit card bills, our health insurance, the person on the other side of the phone will very likely be in a foreign country.

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[continued on page 4]
It was my pleasure to moderate a panel of community college students at the recent FACC A&R Conference. The students included Justin Young, who’s a retired Marine Corps Veteran from American River College; Courtney Cooper, who was a foster youth and past-president of the Student Senate for California Community Colleges; Alex Walker-Griffin is a student member of the Board of Governors, and Renia Alcova who is a Muslim immigrant. Each of the students had a fascinating story where they have overcome incredible challenges to become successful community college students. Justin Young did an outstanding job of representing the students of Los Rios.

The first question I asked was “What was more important to you in your community college education? Personal growth or to get a job.” Without hesitation each of them said that personal growth was more important, not only to achieve their educational goals, but also to become successful in their lives. I want to contrast this with the seemingly incessant focus to get students through in two years and increase the number of degrees and certificates in the community college system. Toward that end, the system institutes Guided Pathways and AB 785 to force students through, but absent from that equation is whether those students are better educated. Somehow statistics have become more important than the students we teach.

All of us have seen so many students mature, grow, and develop over the course of their community college career. A number of them need more than those two years to find their way, become more responsible adults, more diligent in their studies, and become very productive citizens. A few of my students have left college and, to my delight, have come back several years later. In this current environment, giving students the needed time to grow, develop, and mature is no longer appreciated. Setting a major and career course path at 18-years-old is that then attempts to restrict a broader educational experience, is not good for students. Beyond just providing classes, the college provides a structured and safe environment with social interactions, clubs, and activities that are a positive benefit for student growth. It is how many young people assimilate the norms and values of the community.

Community college students become more productive members of the community because they earn more income, pay more taxes, are more likely to vote, are less likely to commit a crime, and less likely to get arrested than those that don’t attend college.

During my 29 years as a Sacramento City College faculty member, I have had the honor of serving in a variety of faculty leadership roles during the 2016 semester, just as I thought I was out to pasture, I was approached and asked to serve as a representative for the Academic Senate on the LRCFT Union Negotiation Team. Having attended some of the LRCFT Executive Board Meetings as well as SUHJC (Senate Union-Higher Education) meetings during my senate leadership tenure, I was familiar with many of my district union colleagues and so I was looking forward to learning about yet another aspect of how our district processes work.

First and foremost, let me say that although the negotiations and strategic planning began in the fall of 2017, the work that preceded those conversations had been going on for some time before those meetings began. As many of you may realize, our union colleagues attempt to have these conversations with all faculty in the semesters prior to beginning the actual process with the district. By conducting forums on each campus or collecting surveys or having general knowledge of a variety of faculty issues that seem to be common concerns across campuses or attending state-wide legislative conferences to gain awareness of faculty concerns throughout the state as a result of legislation, our union representatives gain insight as to concerns and interest of faculty—i.e., if faculty are participating in these attempts at communication and understanding.

It is from this information gathered that conversations about what the union interests during negotiations unfold. In the meantime, we are not the only party interested in what the contract language will reflect as a result of legislation, our union representatives gain insight as to concerns and interest of faculty—i.e., if faculty are participating in these attempts at communication and understanding.

We are at a tipping point where community colleges age headed down a very destructive path for students and our profession as educators. If we wait much longer it will be too late and we will permanently harm a higher education system that helps more students find their way each year than any other higher education system in history. That is what I am afraid of. Do we step back and let it happen or do we rally to change the direction?

Anyone who knows me, will tell you that I am not afraid of speaking out at the State Chancellor’s Office or the state legislature. It is too late in my career for me to care what they think of me, and I am close enough to retirement, so what can they do? I make sure the faculty voice is heard at committees and in direct meetings with legislators. Unfortunately, it will take more from faculty to change the direction community colleges are headed. We need to let them know the unfortunate consequences as we try to implement AB 785 and Guided Pathways. In addition, we must do everything we can to stop the proposed Online College and the new funding formula.

I want to thank so many of you who have volunteered your time to come and lobby at the Capitol. We need your continued support and activism if we are to have a community college that truly cares about students and our profession as faculty. Believe me when I say that forces are purposely eroding the role and integrity of the Academic Senate and faculty unions.

We can’t let that happen.
are their true enemies. As we shall see, the influx of immigrants offers the labor movement new and enthusiastic troops for rebirth and revitalization.

—Over the last ten years, our government has been increasingly under the thumb of corporate interests. The failures of organized labor to provide a counterweight to this has allowed a corporate-political alliance to sweep away most of the safety nets that protect us from the vagaries of the market and the inevitable occurrences of failing health, old age, and workplace injuries. Our health insurance system is in tatters, with nearly fifty million people without coverage and tens of millions more with inadequate and expensive coverage. These numbers grow each year. Few workers have the once common defined benefit pensions, in which they are guaranteed predictable monthly incomes when they retire. Instead, the declining fraction of workers who have pensions must accept defined contribution plans, in which they put up the money, sometimes with an employer match, and then must decide in what type of stock or bond fund to invest. How much money is available depends on the amount they were able to put into their funds, the size of the employer match, and the performance of the funds. The social security system, which is well-managed, financially sound, and capable of providing decent pensions for all, has been attacked by labor’s enemies in a propaganda campaign aimed at privatization. Workplace safety has become a dead letter in the enforcement of our labor laws. These programs aimed at the poor, including those who lose their jobs, have been shredded, less generous in terms of both coverage and benefits. Workers were encouraged to consider their homes as security blankets, assets they could sell or borrow against to deal with emergencies or to pay for replacement incomes. But now the notice is a house is an asset that always rises in value is another big joke, one made at the expense of the working class. All in all, we can say with certainty that workers have lost ground economically, while those who hire them and invest in their companies, those who loan them money and invest in their companies, those who loan them money or offer more generous terms in the bad old days, have been rewarded by the system.

—Compounding worker insecurity has been the collapse of two financial bubbles, first the stock market crash that began in 2000 and the real estate debacle that commenced in 2007. The recovery from the first was one of the weakest on record, and working-class living standards never returned to where they were at the end of the last boom. Some were able to maintain their incomes or make up for money shortfalls by borrowing, with credit cards and by taking out home equity loans. Both allowed consumer spending to grow faster than it would have otherwise. Now, however, the burning of the housing bubble has left workers with a moun-

ments pier in place measures to deny the rights of many federal workers to unionize and threatened to invoke antidiscrimination laws to stop strikes. A climate of fear is a climate of fear and accusations.

—Over the past year, we have witnessed a constant barrage of attacks directed at women, the poor and working class, the LGBTQIA communities, immigrants, and people of color. Although these attacks on all fronts brought national attention to the prevalence of hate and bigotry – as faculty we were well aware that these trends were becoming increasingly prevalent on our campuses, in our classrooms, and in our meet-

ings. In response, LRCFT committed significant time, effort, resources, and energy towards strengthening the work that we do to actively support historically under-represented communities with significant attention to undocumented communities.

Immediately following the election, our efforts focused on promoting baseline information to our faculty on immigrant experiences and the legislation impacting these communities. Additionally, we hosted “Know Your Rights” workshops that were conducted in partnership with the California Rural Legal Aid Foundation (CRLAF) and the Northern California American Civil Liberties Union. These workshops were open to students, staff, faculty, and administrators of the Los Rios Community College District as well as the community at large.

During the fall 2017 semester, we hosted a number of social justice workshops, including Self Defense for Inclusive Communities, LGBTQIA Safe Space Training, and an UndocuAlly Training. Our overarching goal was to provide opportunities for union members to not only improve professionally, but to also create an environment on campus that actively works towards social justice and positive social change.

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teams to begin the actual conversations where each party discusses their interest. If anyone has attended the IBA trainings, you will be aware of how our district conducts these meetings, as it is a culture that has been long established. Once everyone’s cards are on the table, subsequent agendas for meetings are created, sometimes leveraging additional options, while at the same time meeting district’s interest and how to best establish faculty interests. These may require further conversations and/or researching other contracts for best practices. Essentially, the work feels as if it is never done.

Within these smaller team meetings, there are also larger “all hands” meetings where small teams communicate from each constituency’s perspective, what conversations are taking place and if there is movement toward agreement. It gives others who may not serve on the small teams opportunities for input to those conversations. As the semester continues, meetings begin to accumulate because, of course, there is a deadline so that the contract language can be ratified and presented to the Board of Trustees. These meetings are very long, often occurring all day on several Friday’s.

Once both parties have reached common ground, as MOU (memo of understanding) is crafted and will represent language in the contract. There are times, however, when agreement does not happen as quickly, and those issues may continue into the next semester, in this case, fall 2017, so that agreement can be reached.

The unfortunate side to the negotiations that I observed is actually viewed as courteous. Adding in tens that involved money/budgets. I believe that both parties should share to the whole committee (not just the few who are involved in money conversations) what the bottom line is. Often teams are lobbying strongly for what we think is important in this process, so one begins to understand the importance of current in this case. Sitting in meetings, we find that perhaps part of the bucket is being spent on another cause, or that there is not enough money, to find that perhaps part of the bucket is being spent on another cause, or that there is not enough money, which, quite frankly, can waste a lot of time in this process. Often teams are lobbying strongly for what we think is important in this process, so one begins to understand the importance of current in this case. Sitting in meetings, we find that perhaps part of the bucket is being spent on another cause, or that there is not enough money, which, quite frankly, can waste a lot of time in this process.

The professional oversight of the LRCCF’s funds is the reason why we have received such high praise from our independent auditors for decades. One auditor told me after his evaluation that LRCCF’s management of funds is the best he has seen in the Sacramento region. Donna was very stringent in her method of accounting, and with our previous treasurer’s reason why there is a healthy reserve and complete ownership of the LRCCF Union Hall.

Donna has an interesting family history. She was part Native American and came from an early pion- eering family in the Montana territory. Sitting with her and hearing the family stories was always fascinating and fun.

Donna was very much, her friendship, loyalty to LRCCF, and the unseen help she has been for so many cases, there is a hole in my heart and an un- filled empty space at LRCCF.

**Negotiation Experience** [from page 3]

- **NONSENSE, in MEMORIAM**

By Dean Murakami

It is with great sadness that I announce the passing of Donna Nacey. Donna was a part-time instructor of accountancy at Sacramento City College and a long-time member of the LRCCF Executive Board, representing part-time faculty. She was also the LRCCF Treasurer for over ten years and followed a stellar line of treasurers, including past-president Dennis Smith. Donna and Dennis both taught accounting at Sacramento City College and were accountants by profession.

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**Negotiation Experience** [from page 3]

- **Report to Members** [from page 3]

- **Negotiation regular cycle and were carried over into last fall. The negotiations team needed extra time to reach those agreements.**

- **Athletic Team Head and Assistant Coaches:** The head coach stipend was increased by the equivalent of five additional work days beyond the regular academic year and two-and-a-half days for assistant coaches. The intent of this agreement was to cover the increased workload for activities such as regular season playoff/competition that may extend beyond the regular semester.

- **Department Chairs:** Level II department chairs will be given one grace day in the annual stipend or re- assigned time of $10 FTE each semester plus a $500 stipend. Level II department chairs that have de- partments of at least 20 FTE will receive $30 FTE reassigned time. Level III department chairs that have departments of at least 45 FTE will receive $40 FTE reassigned time.

- **Oversize Classes:** The only change here from what is in the new contract is the start date for implement- ing the changes. The effective date in the contract has been changed from the “Summer/Fall 2018 se- mester” to the beginning of this semester.

- **Salary schedule Advancement:** As anyone who has ever tried to apply for salary schedule advance- ment credit knows, the process seems arbitrary and unreasonable. The District and Union agreed that no approval was necessary for upper division/ graduate, Continuing Education Units, or Profes- sional Development courses taken from accredited colleges/universities, etc. An exam taken and received which don’t indicate semester or quarter units will be translated into semester units by di- viding the hours involved by 50. The District will maintain a list on the HR Website which addresses knowledge college/university PDU and CEU courses and whether those courses are recoverable. For exam- ple, units or, if not, how those hours will be treat- ed (dividing hours involved by 30 to get semester units). Finally, upper division/graduate CEU or PD courses that don’t indicate semester or quarter units AND any other CEU/PD programs will be given 10 hours for every 1 CEU or PD.

A real source of satisfaction came from the par- ticipation of rank-and-file Union members in these negotiations, both the regular and carry over nego- tiations. We want to extend a special shout out to Connie Zuercher, David McCusker, and Eric Black.

**PROTECTING YOUR RIGHTS**

As anyone who has ever had to deal with a student complaint can attest, receiving in- struction on the specifics of the complaint from the LRCCF is virtually impossible. The District holds to the position that pro- viding the specifics of a student complaint will violate the student’s PERPA rights and will give the faculty member an opportuni- ty to prepare responses to questions posed in any investigatory meeting. In other words, the District believes that if you’re the target of a student and/or employee complaint, giving you any specific information will allow you to fabricate a response. They believe that your unprepared response in a hearing will be more “honest” than if you were given the opportunity to think about the allegation, recall the specific context of that allegation, and respond accordingly.

As a result of the District’s continued refusal to pro- vide copies of complaints and other documentation relating to the complaint, two years ago the Union filed an unfair practice charge against the Dis- trict with the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). The Union was able to present a prima facie case of a violation of the Educational Em- ployment Relations Act (EERA), more commonly known as the “Rodda Act,” which resulted in PERB filing a formal complaint against the District.

To represent it, the District hired the notorious anti-union-busting law firm of Logue Fleury. This firm is not enough space to detail the long history of anti- union activities carried out by this firm over the past few decades in upholding the interests of employers nationwide. What is particularly galling is that the $400 per hour rate charged by this firm is being paid by you and me. That’s right, the District gets to claim this as a mandatory expense and be reim- bursed by the State. Those are your tax dollars at work—unfortunately, in the service of the employer.

Despite significant recent PERB decisions, at least one of which was virtually on point with the com- plaint filed by PERB in the LRCCF v. LRCCF mat- ter, upholding the obligation of public school em- ployers to provide the very information the LRCCF requested, the District has refused to compromise its position. Briefs in the case have been submitted, with a decision expected before the semester ends. You can be certain that we’ll spread the news of the upcoming PERB decision.
George Esquibel recognized the need to be active in the social & cultural movements of his time. He served as a soldier in Viet Nam. George returned home to complete his Masters in Art History at CSUS. He combined art and politics by helping found the Royal Chicano Airforce art collective that produced murals, posters & banners that excoriated injustice. He marched with Caesar Chavez, and picketed lettuce and grape growers who exploited farm workers. As instructor of Art & Ceramics (as well as Chair of the Art Dept.) at SCC, George served as teacher, advisor & mentor to thousands of college students. He was a member of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission. George was a committed trade unionist as an officer for the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. As a very fine artist himself, Esquibel’s own creations in clay are treasured all around northern California. He witnessed and was part of an exciting art scene quickly emerging here in the valley.

Retiring in 2007 from teaching after 34 years, George then established the LRCFT Union Hall Gallery and curated a decade of exciting art shows. Uniquely, this is the only union hall in California that is also an art gallery! These monthly events currently serve as a bond between the arts, teachers and the Sacramento community. George Equibel always maintained that art was about thinking and intellect. A high calling of higher education. Art mobilizes the mind and thus is work to be honored. It is why art belongs in this house of labor.