

PCC statement addressing past reports of sexual harassment

Aug. 7, 2014

The start of a new academic year provides an opportune moment to reflect on where we as a college community have been and where we are heading. The probation sanction and intense work on the self-study served as reminders of the importance of understanding the past for creating a better future. While some of Pima College's past reveals tremendous accomplishment, other parts of its past are painful. To build on the accomplishments, we have to acknowledge the harms of the past and learn from them.

A critical chapter of the college's past occurred when 8 women employed at the College had the courage to come forward and report sexual harassment and retaliation by the former Chancellor. These women were willing to face him directly with an independent investigator. Rather than do so, he resigned more than a year before the end date of his contract.

Reporting sexual misconduct demonstrated real courage. There is great risk to the victim making the report. There is no guarantee what the reaction will be; whether there will be retaliation; or how the person will be perceived by others. The harm from abuse by a person in power and from the stigma that often comes with reporting it is real, even though the person reporting has done nothing wrong. As a new leader for the College, I am sorry that College employees, this group of 8 women who came forward and others, were subjected to abuse and suffered from its consequences.

From this part of the College's history and from our own personal experiences, we know that there are people who use authority or power and cause harm to others. This can happen in any area of the college – between a supervisor and staff, between co-workers, between a faculty or staff and a student, among faculty and administration and between students. We have taken steps to improve awareness of this problem through new training about sexual harassment. We will also develop a policy and training to address bullying and abrasive behavior. We all have the obligation to treat each other civilly, professionally, fairly and even kindly. We have taken steps to support those who have concerns and report them with a new Office of Dispute Resolution and improved complaint procedures. As your Chancellor, I hope we can learn from our past to have open and candid conversations about difficult topics like this one so we can build a college that provides educational excellence in the type of environment our students and colleagues deserve.