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College news: Student complaints are sticking point

By Flora Martin Gibson Columbia Gorge News
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Negotiations continue for Columbia Gorge Community College faculty and staff.

Trisha Walker / file photo

THE GORGE — The union and Columbia Gorge Community College's (CGCC's) administration got stuck on student complaint procedures at their July 17 meeting.

Administration struck the entire complaint procedure from the contract, saying it might need an update before the contract ends. Instead, they pulled language from Rogue Community College that says student complaints must be promptly investigated, called to attention of the relevant

employee, must follow the process in CGCC's student handbook, and must provide representation to the employee.

"Employees are feeling very strongly, and we're hearing it a lot, that student complaints are being weaponized right now," union vice-president tina ontiveros said. "And that the process in the handbook is not being followed, and that needs to be grievable.

"But the problem with this language is that management can change the process that's in the handbook without feedback from the bargaining unit."

"I don't know how we'll get beyond that," said Vice President of Instructional Services Jarett Gilbert. The student handbook is already being updated, he said.

ontiveros said student complaints have recently increased. Students are supposed to first try talking to the employee or, if uncomfortable, with the department chair. Instead, complaints are going straight over professor's heads to management, "with quite a bit of frequency in the recent past. ... Certain people can escalate these complaints and other people cannot. And there's not equity around that. And it's a big concern for a lot of the folks," she said.

"It is not uncommon that the handbook is going to be needing to be updated outside of a three-year cycle of the contract," said Karly Aparicio, Vice President of Student Services, said. "For example, the legislature just recently passed some things that will need to be addressed in our handbook this year."

Another argument: whether the contract should require administration to inform the union of changes in who supervises who. ontiveros said a "really solid problem" at CGCC is that employees don't know or understand the processes of discipline and investigations, and what the results are.

The union got “quite an overwhelming” amount of feedback from union members that they don’t understand administration’s reluctance to include language in the management rights clause that commits CGCC’s administration to following state and federal statutes. “Employees are really uncomfortable with the reluctance to just say, ‘We’re going to follow laws in the management rights clause,’” ontiveros said.

Administration agreed to language that said the college won’t pester or prevent union membership.

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