

LPoV Candidate Questionnaire Nov 2022

General Questions

Candidate Name *

John Rizzo

Candidate Website

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Why are you running for *this* office?

I am running to continue my work in keeping City College functioning for students, including re-accreditation which comes up this year. I want to build on the successes we have had in stabilizing the college's finances and satisfying all issues of the accrediting commission, the state auditors, and the College's independent auditors. By ending structural deficits, we have positioned the college well for growth, and positioned it well for the event of an economic recession. We now have funding for raises for teachers, updating of student computers and building maintenance, and for the wrap-around services that students depend on.

Additionally, I have been leading the effort to move forward on the construction programs funded by the \$845 million 2020 Prop A bond measure. We now have three new buildings waiting for state approval that could start construction soon. I have also succeeded in bringing back the Performing Arts Center/Diego Rivera Theater, which was cancelled nearly 10 years during the state take over. We have prevented a possible state takeover by fixing the College's financial issues, and therefore have saved hundreds of union construction jobs.

Finally, I would like to continue my work in building student housing. I succeeded in negotiations with the Balboa housing developer to include over 100 units of affordable housing for faculty and staff. I have now been working on building student housing.

If elected, do you commit to completing your entire term?

Yes

What are your values, and how did you get them?

I value education: I come from a working class family. I was the first person in my family to go to college; my mother did not finish high school because she had to work, and my father was a truck driver.

I was lucky to have the parents I did. From my upbringing, I value honesty, integrity, kindness, humility, and selflessness. I have tried to act with these values during my tenure at the community college board.

What communities do you represent, and how do they hold you accountable?

Although I represent all San Francisco residents on the board, I have tried to represent groups that have been underrepresented. For instance, I have worked to increase access to education by working to eliminate placement exams and remedial classes, even before the state outlawed them with AB 705. These tests unfairly impacted student diversity, equity, and inclusion by keeping students from earning college credit by requiring many years of remedial courses. This also negative impacted student success, as has been demonstrated in many studies.

Fortunately, AB 705 eliminated placement exams and remedial course at California community colleges. Because of my work and the Board's, City College was ahead of the curve. Once AB 705 was enacted, I and the Board of Trustees made sure the college fully implemented it.

This year, I participated in the approval and creation of a Cantonese language certificate program at City College, which is still in the design phase. We heard from the community that one was needed, and I and the Board acted.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

Aaron Peskin, Dean Preston, Sierra Club

What are the top three issues you will work on, and how will you implement solutions in a timely manner?

Growing Enrollment is the first. During the pandemic, California Community Colleges lost 20 percent of their students, and this has not recovered. That's why we made sure that this year's budget has adequate funding to attract students with a marketing and outreach campaign, as well as adequate funding to redesign the online enrollment system.

We must do this with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In my recent training on this area, I have learned we must remove the institutional barriers to DEI, both in student recruitment and in ensuring student success.

Re-accreditation is the 2nd issue, and the process starts this year. Serving on the board, I and my colleagues have now satisfied all outstanding accreditation issues, including having a 5% reserve fund 2 years in a row, funding building maintenance, professional training for employees, and funding new student computers. We have also raised faculty salaries. We must continue to fund these required areas in order to ensure a smooth re-accreditation process

My third issue building infrastructure for the future, including building housing and getting the \$845 million in student building projects completed quickly in a time of high construction inflation. As Facilities chair, I've been overseeing 3 classroom building project that at the state waiting for approval.

We have been successful in the getting over 100 units of affordable housing for teachers in the City's Balboa Reservoir housing project. We were able to do this through the negotiations with the Developer. I have also been investigating building student housing on District property using Certificates of Participation as a funding mechanism. If re-elected, I will make this a top priority.

What for-profit or non-profit boards do you serve on, including political organizations?

I'm on the Board of the Sierra Club San Francisco Bay Chapter, and also serve as the Political Chair.

What local and state commissions or policy bodies do you serve on?

City College Board of Trustees, Vice President

Please describe specific accomplishments in your activism. What did you get done, and what was your role?

In the Sierra Club, as Political Chair, I was the lead advocate for the creation the SF PUC CleanPowerSF, which offers 100% green energy to San Franciscans. I also helped create the GoSolarSF, which has enabled hundreds of low-income residents get solar installed on their homes. I successfully advocated for solar panels on the Sunset Reservoir, which passed the Board of Supervisors by one vote. I received a commendation from the Board of Supervisors for my work in defeating a proposal to build a fossil fuel plant in a low-income neighborhood in Southeast San Francisco.

As a trustee, I helped prevent City College's loss of accreditation by testifying and lobbying in Washington DC and Sacramento. I successfully lobbied for tens of millions of dollars for City College during the recession (thanks to bills by Mark Leno and Phil Ting.) When I was Board President, I led to effort to create and pass the College's first parcel tax, only the second community college parcel tax in the State of California. I successfully lobbied City Hall for funding for City College.

I also worked to get rid of placement tests and remedial classes at City College, which was negatively impacting students for whom English was a second language.

Please list specific ways you have shown up for immigrants at risk of deportation.

When Trump first came to power, I coauthored and passed a measure that designated City College as as sanctuary college, which went into effect before the statewide sanctuary policy. This policy forbid the administration and campus police from cooperating with and from sharing information with ICE or other federal entities.

Before that, I held a series of hearings regarding our undocumented immigrant students regarding their specific challenges, which are unique.

Please list specific ways you have fought against racism and white supremacy.

My work in helping diversity, equity, and inclusion includes some of the things I have mentioned above. The policies such as placement tests and remedial classes were examples of institutional implicit biases, which can be more difficult to root out than explicit racism. It has been helpful to me to attend training to learn better the ways in which to root out implicit institutional bias.

For instance, we set up an office of Office of Student Equity and Adult Education Program, which offers faculty, staff, and administrators the opportunity to participate in the certificate training program called Teaching Men of Color and Equity and Education. The program includes such topics as unconscious bias and racial micro-aggression. The Board receives regular reports from this office and Human Resources on the District's efforts to diversify hiring, and recommendations on how we can de-institutionalize implicit bias.

The Board has supported the college's Diversity Committee, a participatory governance committee made up of faculty, staff, students, and human resources administrators. The Committee promotes and cultivates College diversity initiatives.

And, in the job description for Chancellor, we included under Duties, "Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the District in all areas of the college." We also directed the chancellor "to develop a survey on diversity, equity, and inclusion to obtain baseline data on employee feelings on how they are treated at the college, and follow up with a plan." This plan is due later this year, and I intend to keep him to this direction.

Please give us some examples of situations you've encountered where gender and LGBTQ inequity was evident and what you did or would do to address it.

We have seen many human tragedies in the cold statistics of student data that I regularly ask for as a Trustee of City College. For instance, homelessness among LGBT students is higher than in any other group.

Our efforts in diversity, equity and inclusion (described above) include stamping out LGBT inequality in the institution and its procedures. We must keep in mind the many of the procedures of college were created many decades ago, when thoughts about the LGBT community were very different.

I have supported City College's Queer Resource Center, a vital group that provides wrap-around services to students. At the Board, we recently voted to give the Queer Resource Center resources for providing help regarding the current monkeypox pandemic.

In education, I have supported our LGBT Studies program (please sign up for a class!). It was the first of its kind in the nation. This program is important for the societal goal of fighting bias and hate with education and facts.

Amid a homelessness crisis, how can the City and County of San Francisco improve the effectiveness of our city's homelessness and supportive housing services?

I am a strong advocate for City College's HARTS program (Homeless At-Risk Transitional Students), which provides a slew of wrap-around services and referrals, including things like on-campus showers and help finding housing.

But a better solution is to build student housing. I have been active in this area. I have proposed that City College build student housing financed by certificates of participation (COPs), a method I have investigated that has been used by some other community colleges. Previously I participated in negotiations for student with the developer at Balboa Reservoir to provide student housing, but no agreement came of it. Building our own with COPs is a promising path forward. As I mentioned above, this is one of my top three priorities.

What is your favorite park, and why?

Golden Gate Park because I have done much work here as a Sierra Club advice. I helped create the first bike trail as a member of the Concourse authority, and lobbied many years for JFK closure to cars.

Why do you want the League of Pissed Off Voters' endorsement?

I have been honored to receive your endorsement, and would be honored to receive it once more. I believe I have a long record of doing good for the students of City College and the residents.

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

What experience do you have with City College or Community Colleges in general?

I am currently the longest serving trustee on the Community College Board, and am the current Vice President. I have served as president and am currently chair of the Facilities Committee. I also serve on the Standards Review Team for the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, and have substantial proficiency in community college accreditation standards.

I fought for City College during the accreditation crises, testifying in Washington and lobbying members of Congress and the California Legislature. I have also testified in Sacramento on behalf of City College.

Earlier this year, the Board took action to eliminate the College's structural deficit, stabilize the College's finances, and resolve all remaining accreditation issues.

When I was Board president, I lead the effort to craft and put on the ballot the College's first parcel tax, which was only the second community college parcel tax to pass in California.

As Facilities Chair, I have been active in securing housing for teachers and staff, and have been investigating the creation of student housing.

What do you see as City College's greatest strengths and challenges?

It's greatest strength is the people that work there, the faculty and staff that support the students. The greatest challenge is growing enrollment in a way that is sustainable for the future.

Do you support the City College Parcel Tax slated for the November 2022 ballot?

☒ Yes

☐ No

Given that many of the policy and funding decisions for SFUSD are made by other entities, what is your vision for fully funding City College, and what actions can the Board of Trustees take to that end?

The current state funding formula for California Community Colleges is broken. It is supposed to enhance student success for students who have lower success rates. But the it has negatively impacted the finances of urban community colleges. I have had discussions with trustees and chancellors from around the state, and there is grown consensus that we must change this.

Fortunately, we now have an opportunity to change this. A new state chancellor was just appointed this month. If re-elected, I will be working with the trustees at other colleges and with the state's lobbying entity, the League of California Community Colleges, to start lobbying the new state chancellor. Legislators often listen to the what the state chancellor advises, so the effort to change the funding formula starts there.

How do you plan to close the opportunity gap for students of color?

This is something we have been looking at. It starts with identifying and removing barriers to student success in the institution. There is much good research and work now being done in the national community college community, and we should take the best that to implement here. We must support the Office of Student Equity as the focal point.

For instance, we recently voted to eliminate student debt for 750 City College students, enabling them to enroll. The state requires colleges to collect debt before enrolling them, but often even small amounts of debt will cause students to drop out. We found 1-time funding in federal COVID relief funds, but I intend to identify permanent funding to make this program permanent.

Training for employees is also important so that more people can recognize problems in the system. We have increased the amount of funding for training in the current year's budget.

What specific qualities would you look for in a new chancellor?

Expertise in running a large community college, openness and transparency, and kindness. Good communication skills are essential, and a willingness to meet with different groups of people inside and outside of the College.

What metrics would you use to determine your success as Board Trustee?

Passing measures that make a difference to students, helping students meet and exceed their goals, closing the opportunity gap, replacing outdated buildings with state-of-the art teaching facilities in a timely manner. I believe I have had success in all these things during my time on the Board.

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