

VIEWPOINTS

Editorials • Opinions • Letters to the Editor



The mission of the Southwestern College Sun is to serve its campuses and their communities by providing information, insights and stimulating discussions of news, activities and topics relevant to our readers. The staff strives to produce a newspaper that is timely, accurate, fair, interesting, visual and accessible to readers. Though The Sun is a student publication, staff members ascribe to the ethical and moral guidelines of professional journalists.

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| National College Newspaper Hall of Fame
Inducted 2018 | San Diego County Multicultural Heritage Award |
| ACP Pacemaker 100 An Outstanding Student Publication of the Century
2022 | California Newspaper Publishers Association California College Newspaper of the Year
2013, 2016, 2020, 2021, 2023 |
| Student Press Law Center National College Press Freedom Award
2011, 2018 | Student Newspaper General Excellence
2002-23 |
| National Newspaper Association National College Newspaper of the Year
2004-2022 | Society of Professional Journalists National Mark of Excellence
2001-22 |
| Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker Awards
2003-06, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012-2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 | First Amendment Award
2002, 2005 |
| General Excellence
2001-23 | San Diego Press Club Excellence in Journalism
1999-2022 |
| Best of Show
2001-23 | Directors Award for Defense of Free Speech
2012 |
| Columbia University Scholastic Press Association Gold Medal for Journalism Excellence
2001-23 | Journalism Association of Community Colleges Pacesetter Award
2001-18, 2022-23 |
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2020, 22 | Newspaper General Excellence
2000-2023 |
| California College Media Association Outstanding College/University Newspaper | American Scholastic Press Association Community College Newspaper of the Year |

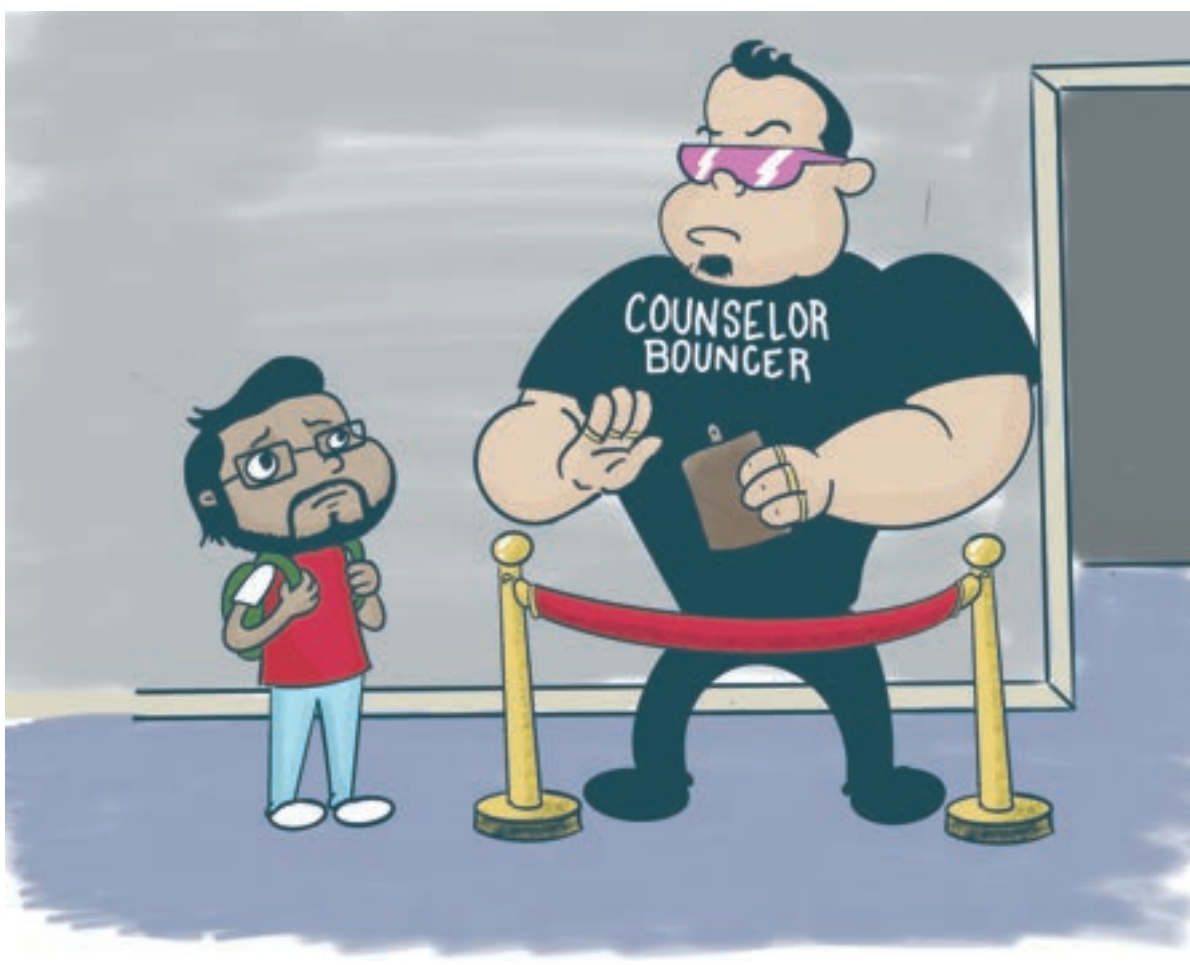


ILLUSTRATION BY DE LUNA / STAFF

COUNSELOR SHORTAGE PLAGUES STUDENTS

There are an awful lot of students who have been at Southwestern College for an awful long time.

And that is awfully frustrating. Barely 10 percent of us successfully transfer from this two-year institution in three years. The average time to transfer or “graduate” is 5.5 years. There are many reasons for this. One is that Southwestern College students work between 25-30 hours a week and cannot take a full course load of 15 units. Many of our students are parents or care providers. Some just want smaller loads because they are English learners or struggle with math. One of the biggest reasons, though, is preventable and needs to be addressed immediately. Southwestern College does not have enough counselors. Not even close to enough.

Data from the American School Counselor Association indicates that in 2022 the average counselor-to-student ratio in higher education is 1 to 250.

Southwestern’s ratios are dreadful. Special population programs like First Year Experience, Puente, Bayan, Restorative Justice, Athletics and Umoja have ratios of 1 counselor per 437 students. SC’s ratio in general counseling is an abysmal 1 counselor to 1,700 students.

That is not a typo. 1 to 1,700. Counselors cannot keep up. There is a waitlist that ranges from 800 to 1,200 with an erratic waiting period that can bounce between one week to six weeks. Three is the average. It is easier to see the mayor, DMV or Taylor Swift than a Southwestern College counselor. We need access to counselors. A lot of us, frankly, have no clue what to do. Southwestern College students are primary pioneering teenagers whose parents did not engage in higher education. Even if our parents did attend college mom and dad cannot tell us what classes to take to meet our goals. Most of our professors cannot either. The honest ones will not even try.

So, SC students take classes they do not need for transfer or certificates. They take too many units. Most transfer programs require 60 units. Too many Jaguars have more than 100 and still are not eligible to transfer.

This problem is fixable. Southwestern College needs to hire more counselors. Administrators will act sympathetic then say “Yes, but that is expensive.”

Yes, it is. It is also a matter of priorities. Now comes the sad part of this saga. Our college spends millions upon millions of our taxpayer dollars on other things. We have too many administrators already and our college president is trying to create four more administrative positions, each of which costs more than \$1 million a year for salaries, staffing, offices, creating a new division, benefits and other costs. That would buy 80 counselors.

We have bureaucratized and ballooned IT, Admissions and several other programs we will not name so as not to hurt people’s feelings. Maybe these new bureaucracies help the college, may not, but can it be argued that they are more important than counselors? Absolutely not.

Southwestern administrators and governing board members mindlessly drone on about how students are their #1 priority, but their actions do not match the rhetoric. Diverting money into empire building and making employees’ jobs easier does not help students.

Steven Baissa, dean of the School of Counseling and Student Support Programs, agrees that our college needs more counselors. Right now, SC has 24 full-time counselors, 17 of whom are for general counseling, providing guidance to all 22,000 students. The remaining seven counselors work for special programs.

“We are not looking too good,” he said. “Our ratio is one to 1,240. Best practice is to have one counselor for 350 students.”

We appreciate Dean Baissa’s candor and wish him all the best in his efforts to expand the counseling staff. He is already behind thanks to six retirements last year.

“We’re trying to figure out how we can get more hires,” he said. “I’m pushing on that with the vice president of student affairs, with my faculty, and with the department chair. Just two years ago, the state gave us a lot of money to hire more faculty. We hired almost 40 faculty. Out of that we got around five counselors.”

Since the pandemic SC has experienced steady enrollment growth which further dilutes the lopsided counseling ratio.

The status quo is simply not acceptable. Dr. Sanchez needs to cool his jets on hiring more administrators and reinvest in the foundation of this pyramid which is the students. We need our elected governing board members to steer this ship in a different direction, one that really does put students first.

Let us know when this happens. In the meantime, we will be waiting to see a counselor.

MEXICO, U.S. SWAP PLACES ON ABORTION RIGHTS

BY ALEXA LIMA
A Perspective

Reproductive rights in North America have taken a strange and unexpected turn. In the Constitutionally non-religious United States the Supreme Court has dramatically rolled back abortion rights. In conservative mostly Catholic Mexico, its Supreme Court has formally decriminalized abortion.

Mexico’s court ordered that abortion be removed from the federal penal code. This ruling requires the federal public health service and all federal health institutions to offer abortion on demand to anyone who requests it.

Southwestern College students expressed relief and happiness over the ruling. *Transfronteriza* Tanya Herrera, 27, lives in Mexico and crosses the border daily.

“I believe (abortion) is a personal decision,” she said. “If I cannot raise a child and give them a stable home, good education and a good future, why should I be obligated to bring a child to this world?”

This landmark decision reflects a growing recognition in Mexico of a woman’s autonomy over her own body and her right to make choices about her reproductive health. Mexico’s journey toward decriminalization did not happen without challenges, but this represents a critical turning point in the fight for gender equality and women’s rights.

Dr. Gerardo Rios, Professor of Mexican American Studies, said Mexico has trouble with the division of secular and tradition.

“Mexico would like to be more liberal in its economy, government and society, but the trick is negotiating its deep Catholic roots,” he said.

Mexico’s abortion ruling could have a major impact on bordering countries like the U.S. Guatemala and Belize following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022. Jose Alberto Mendoza, 25, said Mexico will be an example for the world.

“It would make people think if they can do it, why can’t we?” he said. “Whether you are pro or against abortion you have to respect a woman’s choice. They know how their bodies process and what is best for them.”

Thousands of people living near the U.S.-Mexico border cross to Mexico for health services, because of its accessibility and lower cost. Women in the U.S. are likely to seek safe abortions in Mexico, which could impact Mexico’s healthcare system.

This raises the question: How is it that in the “land of the free” women are not free to make their own personal decisions but a country that is predominantly religious and traditionally *machismo* can respect women’s ability to make decisions about their own bodies? Mexico is clearly trending in a more enlightened and liberal direction, while the U.S.A. is lurching backwards into outdated conservatism.

While there will be ongoing debates and challenges, this historic decision is a testament to the power of advocacy and the resilience of those fighting for gender equality and women’s rights in Mexico and beyond.

Bravo!