



SCCFT President Eric Hamako  
Statement to the SCC Board of Trustees  
2023.03.15  
Permalink: <https://bit.ly/SCCFTtoBOT2023-03>

Good evening. Before I begin, I'd like to congratulate my faculty colleagues who have had their tenure candidacy advanced to another year and those who have earned tenure.

And now, I ask that my comments be read into the record.

Trustees of the Board:

My name is Eric Hamako. I am the President of the faculty's union, the Shoreline Community College Federation of Teachers (SCCFT), Local 1950 of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

This evening, I'd like to speak to you about meaningful work and moral injury.

The late anthropologist David Graeber wrote a book called, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*. In that book, Graeber details the proliferation of what he calls "bullshit jobs" and differentiates them from meaningful work. Graeber defines "bullshit jobs" as jobs that workers themselves have reported aren't meaningful or shouldn't exist – jobs that are not only useless, but also have a pretense of importance. They are, however, sometimes quite well compensated. Graeber suggests a typology of bullshit jobs, including Flunkies, Goons, Duct Tapers, Box Tickers, and Task Masters. Flunky jobs exist to make their bosses look good or feel important – for example, receptionists for bosses who have no visitors or callers. Goon jobs have an aggressive component and exist primarily because other organizations also employ them – for example, corporate lawyers and lobbyists. Duct Taper jobs fix problems that wouldn't exist if an organization were better run – for example data checkers in the absence of programs that handle that data and jobs focused on correcting errors made by one's bosses. Box Ticker jobs exist so an organization can say it's

doing something it's not doing – for example, corporate social responsibility officers, internal corporate self-promotion, and consultants who conduct research that is then never implemented. And, finally, Task Master jobs supervise people who don't really need supervising and/or create more work for supervisees or more bullshit jobs – for example, strategy leaders in academia. Of this particular example Graeber said,

*“Strategic mission statements” (or, even worse, “strategic vision documents”) instill a particular terror in academics. These are the primary means by which corporate management techniques – setting up quantifiable methods for assessing performance, forcing teachers and scholars to spend more and more of their time assessing and justifying what they do, and less and less time actually doing it – are insinuated into academic life.*

In contrast to “bullshit jobs,” Graeber also discusses meaningful jobs, where workers find meaning in the work itself. For example, Graeber cites waste management, child care & elder care, and nursing. These sorts of work are necessary and recognized by the people who do the work as meaningful, but often looked down upon and poorly paid. Here, Graeber also includes teaching as meaningful work. In his analysis, Graeber also notes that, with the proliferation of bullshit jobs, there's a pervasive sentiment that people with meaningful jobs should not be paid well – because the meaningfulness of a meaningful job is supposed to be compensation unto itself. As he paraphrases, “But, you make things or care for people or teach things – you want that *and* benefits?”

The work of psychologist Jonathan Shay also seems relevant to our College. Shay, through his work with military veterans, coined the term “moral injury” to describe particular kinds of trauma experienced by military veterans. To be clear, that's “moral injury,” as in “a violation of one's sense of morality,” and not “morale” injury – though a morally injurious workplace does also harm workplace morale. Since Shay's early research, the theory of has been expanded to recognize moral injury in other jobs, such as in nurses, emergency responders, and teachers. Moral injury, which Shay also described colloquially as a “soul wound,” can be acquired in three main ways. First, by witnessing moral violations. Second, by participating in or being complicit in moral violations. And, third, through betrayal by one's leaders. Together, Graeber's ideas of meaningful work and Shay's concept of moral injury seem particularly salient as we consider the College's recent and current debacles, including but not limited to the current phase of the long-running accreditation debacle. As faculty, we contend with two bosses, the State Legislature and you, the Board of Trustees. So, tonight, I'll again address both.

In contending with the Legislature, our faculty face ongoing betrayals by the State Legislature. For example, although the Legislature has stated one of its goals is for 70% of high school graduates to complete a post-high school program, it continues to betray that goal by underfunding Community & Technical Colleges that provide much of the access to such programs. Most recently, the Legislature has refused to pass Senate Bill 5557, which would have created pay equity for contingent faculty members, increasing salaries that would improve the lives of the majority of faculty in Washington State. The Legislature is poised to grant zero dollars for faculty salary increases, despite advocacy by the State Board of Community & Technical Colleges and faculty unions and despite failing to fund substantive faculty salary increases for the past fifteen or so years. And, the Legislature is poised to underfund the legally-mandated Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs), instead passing some of that expense on to colleges, to be paid out of colleges' local funds. When the Legislature says it wants to invest in work that CTCs do and then fails to fund such work, we experience that as a betrayal by our leaders – a betrayal that is morally injurious.

The Legislature also causes moral injury to faculty by making it harder and harder to do a good job – that is, to do our meaningful work well. Due in large part to the Legislature's disinvestment in higher education, faculty jobs pay less than many other jobs requiring comparable education and credentialing. Too often it's said that faculty "don't do it for the money." But, that's not quite true. This *is* a job and we *do* do it for the money; that's how jobs work. Rather, we don't do it to *maximize* our income. Instead, we effectively take pay cuts in order to enter into jobs that feel more meaningful than some of the alternatives available to us. And, notably, such relatively lower pay also means that only those people who can *afford* to take a lower paying, if more meaningful job, can afford such choices. So, it's that much harder, then, when the Legislature's actions obstruct our ability to do those meaningful jobs well.

Through its funding decisions, the Legislature has steadily reduced the number of Full-Time, tenured faculty jobs. Not only does this make it harder for individuals to *get* such jobs, but it also harms colleges in the aggregate. By increasing reliance on contingent faculty jobs and decreasing full-time positions, the Legislature reduces the overall amount of faculty "service work" available. That "service work," which only full-time faculty are expected and compensated to perform, is work that allows faculty to engage in the innovative projects that add value to the College, to students' lives, and to our own professional lives. With a shrinking pot of service work, a greater and greater proportion of our service work is taken up with mandatory service work, such as accreditation duties.

And, the Legislature has caused further injury, both material and moral, by providing funding for raises for only some faculty, but not others. But, if we look at the low recruitment and retention

rates among faculty, you'll see that raises alone are not a fix. First, until the Legislature implements progressive revenue policies, taxing ultra-wealthy corporations, it won't ever be able to offer salaries that compete with some alternative jobs. And, second, people don't tend to gravitate to faculty jobs if we're trying to maximize our income. Rather, we're trying to maximize the meaningfulness of our work. We're trying to find better working conditions. We're trying to find places where we can do meaningful work well, rather than suffering the moral injuries that come from being set up to fail. And, while the Legislature controls the biggest purse strings, our faculty union also contends with the College. The College may not be able to control its financial allocations from the Legislature, but it *can* negotiate with our union to create better working conditions for faculty – working conditions that set us up to succeed, rather than to fail.

But, in contending with the College, our faculty also experience a steady barrage of moral injury. Like the Legislature, the College's leadership has betrayed faculty and other workers in multiple, morally injurious ways.

While faculty have focused on our teaching, advising, counseling, and librarianship duties, the College leadership has, for at least ten years, managed us in ways that are non-compliant with our accreditors' requirements – with insufficient attention and action to fix those problems. The College leadership – including you, the Board of Trustees – have failed to manage processes necessary for us to maintain our accreditation. Were we to lose our accreditation, we would also lose our college's access to government financial aid for students – and, thus we would also lose our jobs. Recently, the accreditors finally put our College on “warning” status. Now, the College is moving with greater urgency – and will be trying to cram work that should've been done over many years into a few urgent months. While faculty were doing our jobs, it appears the College leadership has, for many years, been failing at one of its key jobs: Managing workers. Now, faculty are also reasonably concerned about the College further mismanaging and overloading faculty's workload as the College tries to speed-run its accreditation requirements.

While faculty were doing our jobs, it also appears that the College leadership has been failing at its financial obligations. Over the past decade, our faculty union has public questioned and called out the College's financial practices. The College had gone years without external financial audits. The College had gone years without rigorous budget processes. Faced with such concerns, you, the Board of Trustees responded with such obtuse, straw-man arguments as “Of course, we have a budget, I've seen it; we don't know what you're talking about.” But, former and now-again Vice President Saraceno had once said that he didn't know what his predecessor Stuart Trippel had been doing, but it hadn't been sound practice. And, recently, College President Kahn acknowledged the College's long-running practice of “rolling over budgets,” –

which is what we had been saying for some time: that the College's purported "budgets" were really just warmed-over versions of previous years' budgets. This is about as close as we've come to the College providing an earnest accounting of some of its significant financial failures.

And the College's financial systems continue to be a shambles. Burnout and turnover in multiple key areas continue to make it hard for all of us to do our meaningful work well. The initially-touted ctclink system has exploded the amount of Duct Taping work for College workers. For example, the College's implementation failed to correctly credit faculty with our leave benefits, until our union intervened – resulting in many hours of Duct Taping work for a few College employees. And, the College's implementation has also failed to remit union members' dues to our union for at least three pay periods, until our union again intervened.

Our unions have also repeatedly notified you of our concerns about your management of and accountability for former College President Roberts. We presented you with concerns about your *one* employee's management of college finances, of our accreditation processes, and leadership of the College. You, the Board of Trustees, defended former President Roberts – and then you spent more than a quarter of a million dollars of our college's money for the "convenience" of not having to explain why you were firing her. And, even then, you praised her leadership as you issued her out with a golden handshake. Recently, College President Kahn made a politic gesturing toward "previous leadership's" lower "tolerance for transparency and collaboration" and its "top-down leadership" being less likely to have led us to meet accreditation requirements. Such nominal acknowledgements are the closest I've seen to a public accounting for the leadership that you and former President Roberts provided in the past decade. And it doesn't come close to redressing the wrongs. Instead, we suffer the moral injury that comes with being complicit with and following the directions of obviously poor, ignorant, unaccountable leadership. We watch former and soon-to-be former leaders fail upward, fail into lucrative severance packages, and generally fail to be called to account for their actions. Poor leadership makes it harder to do our meaningful work well. *You* have made it hard to do a good job well.

When we're set up to fail, risks of moral injury increase. Participating in the College's emergency speed-run of accreditation requirements runs a high risk of moral injury, as we can easily foresee meaningful work becoming more like a Box-Checking job. *We should* be able to articulate to students what we aim to help them learn. But, that's a process we'll be hard-pressed to do in a meaningful way in a few months. That's work that the College leadership should've been managing over the course of the last decade or more. And such work runs further risk of moral injury as faculty may have to decide whether to give up more meaningful service work that will only get done if we personally do it *or* to overwork ourselves

to try to get both the meaningful work and the newly imposed emergency work done at the same time.

And, more chronically, high class caps create incentives for faculty to overwork to meet students' increasing needs and to eventually set boundaries that feel morally injurious, though really we're just refusing to volunteer even more of our labor to try to serve yawning needs – labor that should be paid for by both the Legislature and the College, in the form of increased salary and in the form of more full-time faculty positions to carry the load.

The College's morally injurious workplace harms faculty recruitment, retention, and performance. Given that many faculty come to this work wanting to do meaningful work – and to do it well – the morally injurious management of the College is repellent. Knowing one is set up to fail is repellent. For those who do come here or who are already here, such morally injurious management is demoralizing and drives many away. For those of us who still remain, we may be demoralized and hunker down, trying to focus on the meaningful work we feel we *can* accomplish.

Increasingly recognizing the phenomenon of moral injury, corporate consultants and HR experts have suggested individualistic, palliative measures to managers and executives. “Hold listening sessions.” “Validate people's pain.” “Share some personalizing stories about yourself.” “Provide access to therapy.” “Provide more recognition events and “self-care” opportunities.” Unsurprisingly, none of those things actually get at the roots or the structures that cause moral injury. Before one can treat a trauma, one must stop the injury that is causing the trauma.

Our faculty union is taking action to address these morally injurious conditions. We advocate for better wages, yes. We advocate for better workload, yes. We advocate for more worker control for our working conditions, yes. And we do that, in part, so that we can do our meaningful work better.

On the legislative front, we will be lobbying legislators at Town Halls, urging them to fully fund our Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) and to fund long-missing salary increases. And, we plan to amplify our advocacy on April 11, through a statewide day of action, to demonstrate our concerns to the legislature.

On the College front, we are negotiating to win more specific agreements from the College for our wages, for job security, for workplace safety, for leave benefits, and for greater control of our working conditions. We do this so that we can do our meaningful jobs better. Most of you Trustees were not around during the creation or worsening of our College's current problems.

But, for all those things for which the College has not yet been accountable or made amends, you are the ones who can now do – or not do – that work. So, you are now the ones who are responsible. The past you try to bury will be the foundation for what you try to build next. As faculty, we're here because we want to do a good job. That is, we want to do meaningful work and we want to do it well. As a union, we're here to improve working conditions, we're here to make it easier to do good work and do it well.

Good night.

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