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# Board member ignites conflict over diversity

**JOEL VAUGHN**  
THE TELESCOPE

Palomar faculty are firing back at accusations made by Governing Board Trustee John Halcon that criticized the college's diversity.

During a Feb. 9 Board meeting, Halcon publicly brought into question the state of diversity among faculty hires in the English department. He criticized the last names of the faculty hires because they were not diverse enough, according to him.

"I cannot believe that we cannot find a person of color, a person diverse, who can teach English. I just can't believe it," Halcon said in the meeting.

Rocco Versaci, the English department chair, accused Halcon's actions as being illegal, based on the fact that Halcon admittedly informed his approval of three English faculty hires on how ethnic their names sounded when read.

"The fact that he voted not to hire people because of their names, what they did or did not convey, that's illegal. If he had talked to other board members

**"**  
I'm curious Trustee Halcon ... how do I gay up my last name?

**BILL JAHNEL • PROFESSOR**

into joining him, that would have been an actionable offense," Versaci said.

Versaci explained that when they are in the hiring process for faculty, he and his constituents are obligated by federal law not to judge a candidate based off of how diverse the applicants may seem.

"Just because he's willing to ignore the law, doesn't mean he'll be able to force faculty to do the same thing," Versaci said.

Teresa Laughlin, Palomar's Faculty Union's lead negotiator, explained diversity as a much broader and more complicated issue than what you can see in an applicant's name.

She added that Halcon's focus

on that was troubling.

"His intentions are to bring diverse faculty and staff on to this campus, nothing is more laudable than that. He just, in my mind, has a very narrow definition of diversity," Laughlin said.

Or as Professor Bill Jahnel put it in the March 8 meeting, "I'm curious Trustee Halcon if you could help me with these students here who have a question: how do I gay up my last name?"

Shannon Lienhart, Faculty Union president, explained that Halcon's actions -- and the Board's lack of reaction -- was a sign of laying the blame on Palomar's faculty.

She described Halcon's no vote as a slap in the face aimed at the ability of the faculty to select their own hires.

She used the College Presidential search as an example of how, in just a few hours, the governing board dismissed the faculty's "combined thousands of hours" of work that was put in by faculty and staff on the search committee.

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Illustration by Kitty Pinney and Kylie Dukes / The Telescope

## Education is power, speaker says

**BELEN LADD**  
**MICHELLE WILKINSON**  
THE TELESCOPE

"Who's got the power?" civil rights activist Dolores Huerta asked the crowd.

"We've got the power!" the audience yelled in response during her talk on equity through education.

Dolores Huerta's crowd-rousing speech was delivered to a packed crowd at Palomar's Howard Brubeck Theatre on March 8.

Throughout her talk, Huerta urged the audience to get involved, stating that all change must come from the people.

"We do have the power, we are the majority," Huerta said.

Huerta is distinguished for her work alongside social justice leader Cesar Chavez, organizing California farm workers in the 1950s and 1960s and launching the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA).

She has earned many awards including the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award in 1998 and the Presidential Medal of Free-

dom, which was given by President Obama in 2012. Huerta was also initiated in the California Hall of Fame in 2013.

Adrian Gonzales, Palomar's Interim President, referred to Huerta as "absolutely amazing" and was enthusiastic about her visit.

Prior to her career as a civil rights activist, Huerta was a school teacher. She left her teaching job with sights on improving the quality of life for members in her community and outside as well.

The creation of the NFWA was a pivotal moment for farm laborers, who were an underserved demographic due to their social, racial, and economic status. The growth of NFWA initiated contracts with the farm growers, which over time greatly aided the laborers' working and living conditions, pay, and gave them a voice in the farming industry.

During her speech Huerta spoke about her experiences with Chavez and forming the NFWA. Recalling that they knew they needed to be the catalyst for change; because no one else would.



Labor leader and activist Dolores Huerta speaks to her audience about "correcting economic injustice" through her talk, Achieving Equity through Education that was held on campus in the Howard Brubeck Theatre on March 8. Tracy Grassel / The Telescope

Huerta explained that if farmers and those with no educational background can make a difference, those who speak English and have been exposed to education can make a difference. "When you have an education, you have power," Huerta said.

Huerta added that she does not just mean a formal education. She credits knowing the issues and researching them, as ways to be educated about the issues.

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## Class study examines staff jobs, salaries

**MIKE PETERSON**  
THE TELESCOPE

The job descriptions of your favorite counselors, assistants and administrators are getting an update.

Since 2013, Palomar has been examining the duties, job descriptions and salaries of its classified staff through a classification study.

A classified employee is essentially a campus staff member who is not part of the faculty. There are roughly 350 classified staff at Palomar, according to classified union member Aaron Holmes.

"It's kind of a structured way to look at (staff) responsibilities and duties, and make sure they're current; make sure they're relevant," Human Resources Vice President Mike Popielski said.

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