The gist of this narrative is simple. The English Department is increasingly unable to staff the classes the district has scheduled it to teach. The solution is for the college to hire more Full-Time faculty and bring the department up to full strength. We ask the college to approve two Full-Time positions in English for the spring 2016 hiring process.

The English Department has hired at least 47 adjunct faculty since spring 2006, 27 of these in the last three years. We have conducted adjunct hirings in each of the last three years, as well as numerous times in the preceding years. It appears, regrettably, that under great pressure to staff classes we may have relaxed our hiring standards unduly in 2013-14 and 2014-15; 4 out of 24 new adjuncts proved unsatisfactory and were not offered further assignments, or did not return. In 2014-15 we made a conscious effort to raise standards, and added only three to our pool. One declined, because the job lacked benefits. Please note, however, that only 33 people even applied to that pool. At the same time, in the last three years we have been steadily losing young, skilled and successful adjuncts, who are leaving or greener employment pastures, including full-time employment at Community Colleges elsewhere. As a response to our staffing shortfalls in English, the adjunct well has gone dry.

We have been adding new faculty—we now have nine full-time faculty in tenure review--but with ongoing retirements the number of full-time faculty in English for the last three years has continued to hover at or below 25, compared to 33 in 2006. Last year we added one FT faculty member, and two FT colleagues retired.

In both the Fall semesters of 2014 and 2015, despite our regular and voluminous adjunct hiring, the English Department was unable to staff numerous fully enrolled classes. Most of these were 300-level classes, with high numbers of students from historically underserved populations whose retention and completion rates the college is supposedly trying to improve. We also cancelled numerous other “Staff” classes due to low enrollment, and based on anecdotal evidence from students, we suspect that a major cause of the low enrollment was the lack of an actual teacher’s name next to the class: students have caught on that “Staff” classes are at high risk of being cancelled, and so stay away or just don’t enroll. We also see from “hits” on closed class on the online schedule that we are turning away dozens, if not hundreds of students from English 1A, 1B, and 5, because we lack the staff to open sections for them.

Our much reduced core of 15 tenured FT instructors includes numerous people with major commitments to crucial college and district service, in the union, in Basic Skills, in the New Faculty Orientation Program, in Learning Communities, and elsewhere. Add in the workload involved in mentoring and evaluating the ongoing flood of new adjunct and contract faculty, and responding to district and statewide initiatives and mandates (HSI/ Connections, SLO assessments, the push for online teaching, and so on), and the English Department is straining painfully to do the basic work of maintaining and renewing its instructional program with regular, self-initiated and self-directed professional development. There is no short-term solution to the critical situation of the English Department. There is, however, a clear long-term solution, and only one: we need to hire numbers of Full-Time faculty over and above retirements for every year until we get back up to full strength, with enough tenured, regular faculty to do our jobs properly.