To: Campus Community  
From: Paul J. Zingg, President  
Subj: Facilities Use on Campus  

I know there has been some confusion and misunderstanding on campus and among some community groups about new procedures for using University facilities. Some of this resulted from a booking error that led Special Olympics not to use our gyms earlier this month. I want to explain our policies and make sure all of you know that the error with Special Olympics, in particular, in no way reflects how our University feels about that organization or other important community groups we host on campus.

The Special Olympics regional director contacted us in November to schedule our gyms for an annual basketball tournament. Unfortunately, the gyms were already reserved for the weekend in question, March 3-4, but the double-booking error was not discovered until a few weeks before the event. Several staff contacted Special Olympics to see if their event could be moved to another weekend, or if just one of our two gyms would be sufficient. Neither of these options worked out for them. We also looked at hosting both Special Olympics as well as the other events that weekend, or moving the other events. But the size and scope of the other events made this impossible.

Chico State has hosted Special Olympics events for more than 25 years and we have a Special Olympics track meet scheduled for May 4. I have apologized to Special Olympics for the booking error and told them we want to continue to host their events. We have identified how the booking error occurred and put into place a process that should prevent such errors from happening again. We will also add a checking system to anticipate important events we host annually.

There is also confusion about what and why we currently charge campus or community groups to use our facilities, which has led to frustration among some of these very important people, whether they be students, faculty, staff or our friends in Chico and the North State. For instance, there is no doubt that our attempts to rectify our scheduling error with Special Olympics was complicated by the fact that we initially quoted the regional director a much higher facility use fee than we should have. Our staff corrected that in later communication, and we ultimately waived fees altogether for Special Olympics if they could reschedule at a later date. But the initial, incorrect fee quote added to the misperception that we don’t care about Special Olympics.

For many years, Chico State has leaned toward making its facilities available to requests and accommodating those requests however and whenever possible. Whether it is student clubs or community organizations, facilitating gatherings by such groups on our campus is important, and part of what makes Chico State the special place it is. However, three audits of campus conducted by the Chancellor’s Office University Auditor over the last six years cited that the campus had no established campus plan for recovering costs, such as heating or cooling and custodial services, when facilities are used by non-state entities. A CSU executive order, EO 1000 http://www.calstate.edu/eo/EO-1000.html, holds campuses responsible for
implementing such a plan, and state law forbids campuses from “gifting public funds” through the free use of state facilities by non-state groups. Under no circumstances could we continue to provide virtually unlimited access at no cost to the campus by external groups.

After eighteen months of working with consultants and campus committees, Business and Finance staff responded by updating the previous facilities use plan in November 2011, and the new policy went into effect January 1, 2012. It established rates for state entities during non-normal business hours (state-funded campus departments and programs), non-state funded and auxiliary entities for normal and non-normal business hours (such as Regional and Continuing Education and Associated Students), and external users for normal and non-normal business hours. I recognize the rates and categories are complicated: This campus website http://www.csuchico.edu/fin/guidelines/Facilities Use Charges.shtml has a fuller explanation of our policy and rate structure as well as a list of FAQs on the topic.

Facilities fees that are charged defray costs that are incurred, such as what it costs to bring in custodians during the weekday (normal business hours) or on weekends (non-normal business hours). The University is not allowed to make a profit on facilities fees; we are simply recovering costs that are required to operate our campus. Fees are returned to the department, such as University Police, Facilities Management and Services, University Public Events, and Information Resources, that incurs the cost.

Our policy must balance welcoming groups to use our facilities – so central to student success and community connectedness – with our sustainability goals, which include a thoughtful and judicious use of campus resources. If groups can meet at times that allow us to keep from heating and cooling buildings at off hours, we can save fossil fuels and reduce our carbon-emissions.

Service to others is central to Chico State’s mission and reputation. I have asked Lori Hoffman, Vice President for Business and Finance, to convene informational sessions for campus and community members to discuss how facility use policy can best be implemented. She will send a message to campus this week, with times and locations of those sessions. I encourage you to attend.

These are extraordinarily challenging times for higher education. Many people look to us – count on us -- to enhance their lives, whether it be through a high-quality degree program or just an evening stroll around our beautiful campus. We expect and welcome their high expectations of us, and so it is that much more painful when we make mistakes that reduce people’s trust and belief in our mission or ability or attitude to serve them. But, as in the case with Special Olympics, we will do whatever we can to rebuild that trust. We will not lose sight of those things that make Chico State a warm and caring place, like community service, and we will cope with the challenges we face together, as a community. This is our strength, and our best way forward. Please let me know what else we need to do to accomplish the wisest and fairest use of our facilities. Thank you again for everything you do for Chico State.