

# On College of the Desert, let's step back from the edge and give things a chance



Can we step back from the edge for a minute?

As former president and recently retired fulltime faculty member of College of the Desert, I — like many — have been very disturbed by the continuing heated public debate about several issues surrounding the college.

While I am not “at the table” and therefore have less direct knowledge than many of the players, I do have some perspectives that given my history with the College and the community might be helpful.

I have two specific areas of consideration.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic: As the Pandemic has changed many of our lives, it has also had a similar impact on education. Yes, the most recent Bond campaign made construction promises, but that was before COVID hit and impacted the world.

Today, at least for this COVID moment, many college campuses remain very under-utilized, including a near-deserted Palm Desert COD campus. And with that comes the question of what will be the future of live as opposed to distant education, and what will be higher education’s building requirements as opposed to its expanded technological requirements?

These questions can only be responsibly answered if we can determine the new norm for education. What will it be and when will that be? Who knows the answer to those questions at this point?

With that absence of reasonable clarity, does it make sense to rush into any expensive construction project at this time, no matter what promises have previously been made?

The real issue for me is how do we best provide for a quality education experience that allows all of our valley's students to thrive in a rapidly changing technological world and that supports a diverse and up-to-date economic environment that helps to keep our students in the valley?

That may or may not justify another full-scale campus.

Second, Dr. Martha Garcia: This hiring has caused a lot of second-guessing, both within and outside the college. Personally, I can't imagine a more difficult entering process for a college president, with a split board and threats of no confidence broiling up before she has even taken her seat.

Questions of undue political manipulation aside for now (again, I was not at the table), the real question here is whether or not Garcia is a good fit for this college at this time.

Does she have the support (or can gain the support) of enough stakeholders to help lead the institution through some potentially rocky socio-economic times ahead? While I also share some concern over several actions of hers that I've seen publicly reported, I've also heard some good things from campus members.

Every new leader is different in some respects from previous leaders, and a new leader requires a period of adjustment. The COD presidency is no exception. I don't believe that a scant semester is enough time in this case.

In the meantime, for both the construction issues and for Garcia, let's step back from the edge for a minute. Let's give both the process and the person a chance to succeed. There's a lot at stake here, for everyone, especially our students and other community members.

*David A. George of Palm Desert was president of College of the Desert from 1986 to 1996.*