

Board of Trustees
San Diego Community College District
3375 Camino del Rio South
San Diego, CA 92108

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

I write to acknowledge the extensive efforts underway to fundraise and build an endowment to support our campuses. While the need to secure additional financial resources is clear, I must sound a serious warning about the profound dangers posed by increasing reliance on wealthy donors and corporate benefactors.

Endowments, often perceived as unassailable financial assets, are, in fact, a significant threat to our institution's autonomy. Unlike state or federal funding—which comes with established regulatory frameworks—endowments open the door to a more subtle yet equally insidious form of influence. Wealthy donors and corporations can exert informal control over campus priorities and culture, shaping the direction of our colleges in ways that reflect their interests rather than the needs of our diverse student body and faculty.

This influence can manifest quietly but powerfully, creating a de facto stake for donors in governance and decision-making, without the transparency or accountability required of public institutions. Over time, this threatens to erode the independence and integrity of our academic mission, replacing it with donor-driven agendas that may prioritize prestige, branding, or corporate alignment over educational equity and critical inquiry.

[As highlighted by](#) historian Allison Tait, relying on endowments as financial buffers can inadvertently compromise institutional autonomy. Tait references Henry Hansmann's analysis, which identifies three primary threats to university autonomy: the accumulation of large endowments, the increasing reliance on private donors, and the entanglement with corporate interests. These factors can subtly shift institutional priorities, potentially sidelining the core educational mission in favor of donor preferences and corporate partnerships

Therefore, it is imperative that the Board adopt stringent and transparent guidelines governing all fundraising and endowment activities. These must go beyond mere compliance with state and federal restrictions to actively protect against the subtle encroachment of donor influence. Specifically, these guidelines must:

- Mandate meaningful and ongoing participation of faculty and students in fundraising restrictions and policies
- Draw clear and enforceable boundaries to prevent donors from influencing academic programs, campus policies, or institutional governance.
- Require full transparency regarding donor identity, intentions, contributions, and any conditions attached.
- Revisit fundraising efforts on a quarterly basis to assess our commitment to equitable access and ensure that funding priorities never skew in favor of donor interests at the expense of our students or academic freedom.

If we fail to address these risks decisively, we jeopardize the very principles that define public education and the mission of San Diego Community Colleges. The pursuit of financial support cannot come at the cost of our independence, diversity, or democratic governance.

I urge the Board to lead with resolve in protecting our campuses from these hidden threats and to ensure that all fundraising efforts align with our core values and the voices of those who learn and teach here.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I look forward to your leadership in safeguarding our institution's future.

Sincerely,

Mona Alsoraimi-Espiritu

Academic Senate President, San Diego City College