

# The Role of The Journalist

**Michelle  
Morales**

**W**ith a 4-1 vote by a subcommittee for the California State University board of trustees, the result was not what I had hoped for.

"The board approves the motion," said Diane Farar, chair of the Committee on Institutional Advancement. The committee of the CSU board was the first to vote on the university's name change on Tuesday, and it was officially approved Wednesday.

I expected some sort of physical reaction, like my pounding heart dropping to the floor and my stomach doing flip-flops, but I felt nothing. I was almost completely numb except for that itching feeling to do *something*.

What could I do? I could yield my weapon of choice: the mighty pen to address the board of trustees. So I called their office and asked if they were still accepting any opinion letters regarding the name change. The secretary told me I had 45 minutes to make an electronic submission.

With my class scheduled to start at the deadline, I typed a short-but-sweet letter to the distinguished members of the board. Then I showed the letter to my advisor for his approval.

"You can't give a political opinion on

something you're covering," he said.

We had discussed this previously when deciding whether I should go to Long Beach to cover the important meeting. My dilemma was that if I traveled to Long Beach, I would want to address the board as a student, not observe as a journalist. As a result, I chose not to attend the meeting but to listen to it over the phone, like I did in November when the name change idea was first introduced to the trustees.

It was one of the toughest choices I made. How I wanted to share all my knowledge on the subject of the name change. I learned and observed a great deal in covering this historic issue, including much that wasn't published in *The Pioneer*, and I wanted to share it all and my personal opinion.

Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how you look at it, it's important for a journalist to keep their opinion to themselves and to act as fairly as possible when covering an issue. This is always challenging, but it is especially so when so many professional journalists seem to hold no such ethical standards.

Regardless of your profession, your word defines who you are. If you do what you say

you are going to do, then you are a stand-up person who takes responsibility for your actions. If you aren't the type of person who does what you say, then you are usually considered to be unreliable. This holds particularly true for journalists. It's extremely important for journalists to be true to their word, to provide observations as objectively as humanly possible.

Please note that I did say humanly possible. As humans, we all have our opinions.

This human wanted to remind the board of trustees that there is no tangible proof that changing the name of the university will improve its image, or increase enrollment or donations. Or that just the consideration alone has been a waste of needed resources in time, money and energy that could have been used to address more important issues, such as the reduction of classes being offered and the campus-wide department cuts.

This human wants to understand why the members of the board didn't realize that Cal State Eat Bay President Norma Rees already accomplished everything that she said the name change would achieve. Rees and her staff raised \$10

million dollars for the Business Technology Center during the summer. I'm sure that could not have been an easy goal to attain, but they managed to do it and even accomplished it ahead of schedule. In the fall, the university had a 30-percent increase in freshmen and was recognized by the *Princeton Review* as the "Best in the West" and enrollment applications continue to increase.

How were all these accomplishments completed if having Hayward in the name was such a deterrent to donors. And who are these donors that are saying this anyway?

Alas, I know my letter wouldn't have changed anything. At that point, it was just something that would have made me feel better, as if I did try to do something. Because if there is one thing the administration, the board of trustees and our governor have proven to me time and time again, it is this: The opinions of the students don't matter.

"You can write a commentary if you want," my advisor said.

Well, there's one good thing that come out of this name change business: my first commentary.

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