

Santa Monica Democratic Club

2026 College Board Candidate Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in the Santa Monica Democratic Club endorsement. Candidates seeking the endorsement of our Club must complete and return the following questionnaire. Only registered Democrats are eligible for our consideration. Submitting this questionnaire constitutes acknowledgment that its contents are now part of the public record and may be reproduced and distributed by the Santa Monica Democratic Club.

Please send the completed questionnaire to smdemocrats@gmail.com by 11:59pm on June 8, 2026. Interview appointment times with our Executive Committee will be scheduled on a first come first served basis for the weekend of June 20/21 as the questionnaires are returned.

None of these questions shall be construed as litmus tests. There are no questions that must be answered a certain way to be considered for our endorsement.

General Information

Candidate Name: **Tom Peters**

Email Address: **tom.milton.peters@gmail.com**

Candidate's Current Occupation: **SMC Vice Chair Board member**

Candidate's Employer: **Santa Monica College**

Campaign Contact Person (if other than candidate):

1. What qualifications do you bring to this office?

Experience: 14 years tenured professor/counselor at SMC (retired 2020), 12 years political director for Faculty Association at SMC (attended most board meetings during these years), Education: Doctorate of Business Administration

2. Why are you running?

I've served on the board from 2022 to 2026, attending and contributing at every board meeting during a period of declining enrollment, growing structural deficit, and low employee morale. In Feb 2026 it was necessary to start the heartbreaking process of eliminating positions and by May 2026 the board finalized these cuts to staff and administrators. I served this year as the Vice Chair and will serve as Chair of the Board if re-elected. The college will start the new year with a new president/superintendent, and I want to be chairing the board to ensure the transition moves the college in a positive direction.

3. What are the top issues of your campaign, and how do they differ from other candidates in this race? How do you plan to address those issues once elected?

Even after the cuts to staff, administrators and part-time faculty the college's fund balance will be 6%, maybe 7%, this is low considering the Chancellor's

Office recommends 16.7%. Employee morale before the cuts was low and not all board members are convinced it is a very serious issue. Now after the cuts, the challenge for the board is to select a new president that will immediately address this morale issue caused by a lack of shared governance with campus leaders and a poor relationship between leadership and bargaining units.

As chair I will work hard to shift the divisiveness and lack of decorum on the board to a productive, inclusive and collegial approach to leading by example.

4. Please list all endorsements received to date (individual and organizational).

At the time of this questionnaire, I haven't received endorsements, though I have reached out to Congressman Ted Lieu, Assemblymember Rick Zbur, and State Senator Ben Allen for endorsements and will seek SMRR, UniteHERE, trade unions, Faculty Association and CSEA (our staff union).

5. How long have you lived in Santa Monica or Malibu? Where else have you lived?

I have lived in Santa Monica for 17 years. I was born in Detroit, MI and raised in a downriver suburb of Lincoln Park, MI.

6. Will you pledge to serve on the College Board for your entire four year term?

Yes

7. What is your history of watching, attending, or speaking at SMC Board meetings? (If incumbent, prior to your own service.)

As mentioned in question 1, served 12 years as political director for the Faculty Association and attended most board meetings during those years. I spoke at a few board meetings and also spoke before the Education committee of the CA State Senate.

Campaign Finance

1. How much money have you raised for your campaign to date?

\$1,000 personal donation to my committee.

2. How much do you intend to raise by Election Day 2026?

\$20,000

3. Candidates for local office often choose not to take campaign contributions from particular types of organizations or industries who are out of step with their own values. Are there any such sources from which you would decline donations? If so, which?

In 2022 my main contribution came from the Faculty Association of SMC, some trade unions, and friends. These issues mainly crop up around the City Council in Santa Monica.

Party / Activism

1. How long have you been a registered Democrat? Have you ever been registered as a member of another political party, or as Decline To State? If so, which party and why?

Democrat since 1971. Always, no other party or decline to state.

2. What is your experience with political activism? Have you ever volunteered or worked for a political campaign other than your own, and if so, in what capacity were you involved?

Yes, I was a union steelworker for 30 in Ecorse, MI. Local 1299 of the United Steelworkers. I was an activist and ran for president of the union on a progressive slate against conservative southern masons and lost.

3. Which political candidates and/or ballot measures have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible, *especially where you endorsed during a contested primary.*

Ted Lieu, Ben Allen, Rick Zbur, Natalya Zernitskaya, Barry Snell, Dan Hall, Ellis Raskin, Jennifer Smith, Maria Leon-Vasquez, 2024-Measures (City) F, K, and QS (County) A, G, (State) Props 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 32, 33, 35. 2022 election, Caroline Torosis, Sion Roy, Alicia Mignano, Stacy Rouse, Nancy Greenstein, Daniel Ivanov, Ericka Lesly, Kurt Gonska, (City) Measures CS, GS, PB, HMP, RC, EM, SMC. (County) Measures A, C. (State) Measures 1, 28, 30, 31.

4. Have you ever signed for or publicly supported efforts to recall a public official from office? If so, please list the name(s) of the officials and why you felt they should be recalled.

No

5. Please list any organizations with which you are a member, including any leadership position you have held in each organization.

**Santa Monica Democratic Club - VP Membership
Santa Monicans for Renters Rights - Hotline
Faculty Association of Santa Monica College - Political Director
Santa Monica College - Vice Chair, Board of Trustee (2022-2026)**

6. Please confirm that you have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform, as found below. List any items in the CDP Platform with which you disagree.
<https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CDP-Platform-2026-FINAL-Platform-Adopted-2.22.26.pdf> (Note: Link didn't work used <https://cadem.org/our-platform/>)

Yes, I read the latest version of the CDP - Platform

SMC Governance & Finance

1. What are your top priorities for Santa Monica College over the next four years?

Work with new president of SMC to improve employee & student morale, as chair

of the board I will strive to maintain decorum and collegiality amongst board members, and ensure the college leadership stays on track to deliver services and quality pedagogy while keeping the budget trending towards the Chancellor's Office's recommended fund balance of 16.7%.

2. How do you assess the College's current financial and enrollment outlook, and what steps would you take to ensure long-term stability?

We have dropped in our enrollment from 33,000 students to roughly 26,000 in the past 6 years and numbers coming from the K-12 system are down as well. The board has taken steps this year (a year or two late in my opinion) to cut costs and since salaries and benefits take up 91% of our budget, cuts were made and finalized in the month of May. We've settled a contract with our staff union that includes cost saving and hope to do the same with the faculty union contract negotiations soon. The steps I will take will be to maintain the delicate balance of serving our students and giving our employees the resources they need to keeping the fiscal condition healthy.

3. How would you approach working with the College administration to effectively implement Board policies and ensure accountability?

Senior staff has been trimmed and a new president/superintendent is set to start the beginning of 2027. As chair of the board (if re-elected), it is critical that every employee is well informed and equipped to do the work of the college that achieves the high standards our college is known for. Fostering a positive, open, and collaborative partnership with all stakeholders is of the utmost importance.

4. How do you assess Santa Monica College's current approach to transparency, public engagement, and community trust? What specific steps would you take to ensure accountability and meaningful public input in Board decision-making?

Our open public meetings represent the ongoing opportunity to constantly improve on transparency, public engagement, and community trust. I'm constantly working on my listening and collaboration skills to maximize my effectiveness as a board member. A unique board member, I should add, in that I worked at the college for almost 15 years. In those years I built long lasting relationships with classified employees, faculty members, administrators and senior staff.

5. Santa Monica College recently faced a significant budget shortfall that led the Board to approve layoffs, prompting substantial public debate over the College's financial management and long-term planning. What is your assessment of how the Board handled the situation? How would you balance fiscal responsibility, workforce impacts, educational quality, transparency, and long-term institutional stability when making difficult governance decisions?

The board handled the budget shortfall in February 2026, a task that should have been handled by the board much earlier. The decline in enrollment was nothing new. It started with the pandemic and worsened over the years for a few reasons. When the Trump administration launched a mass deportation order, we lost an important revenue source, international students. Declining enrollment in our local high schools is low and predicted to stay low over the next 10 years or more. Courses were cut drastically as an efficiency effort was implemented causing a negative effect of driving students towards other area community colleges. Did I mention low employee morale that I could not even get agendized! Even in February of this year when the vote for layoffs originated, the vote was 4 to 3. Unbelievable in my opinion! A budget that contains 91% salary and benefits, enrollment drops from 33,000 to 26,000 and board members voted against cutting positions. In May the board finalized the cuts and now comes the most important task for the board; selecting a new president to help us correct course on the budget, improve morale, find innovative ways to operate more transparently through a more open shared governance, and get all hands-on deck to take a student's-first mentality.

I want to be re-elected in one of our college's most challenging periods to reinvent ourselves to act on long-term institutional stability and plan for a future the whole community can be proud of.

Students & Learning

1. What specific steps would you take to improve student outcomes at SMC, including transfer rates, completion, and workforce readiness? How should success be measured?

Insist on relevant data and as close to real-time feedback as possible and made understandable and available to all stakeholders. The shared governance model needs to be revamped and improved upon to take full advantage of the collective perspectives, ideas, and innovations; especially from the students.

2. How should SMC address student housing insecurity, and how should access to any new student housing be prioritized?

In the 2022 Measure SMC bond campaign, students with housing insecurity was the talking point to bolster the effectiveness of the campaign that was successful. Once on the board I have been reminding the staff, consultants and public that we need to set aside several rooms for students desperately needing housing. In the student housing initiative presently in the planning stage. This project needs to be revenue neutral which translates to making sure we have an appropriate amount of near market rate, as well as most of the housing at an affordable rate for students.

I plan to keep advocating for students with housing insecurity to be sure they are included in this student housing endeavor.

3. What role should Santa Monica College play in supporting student mental health and well-being?

I believe SMC is doing as much as it can in this area given our budget constraints. We consistently prioritized mental health and well-being for all students and staff. All colleges can do is have a trained staff led by a licensed psychologist to assess and refer students outside professional care.

4. How should Santa Monica College balance the use of digital learning tools and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, with concerns about academic integrity, student engagement, and educational quality? What guidelines or limitations, if any, should the College adopt?

The line between using AI as a tool and using AI to copy and paste answers is being addressed. Our faculty are using professional development navigate the academic integrity part of the issue.

If we're not already doing so, we should be using the relevant industry partners to assess the appropriate AI tools our students would be expected to use and how to use these tools in the workplace. As board members, we can advocate for more partnerships with the various fields tied to our programs and this is an area I plan to insist our new president prioritize.

Campus & Community

1. In light of increasing political tensions surrounding public education nationwide, how should SMC balance academic freedom, free expression, inclusive learning environments, institutional neutrality, and disruptive campus protests?

I'm proud of SMC's track record on this points and it's up to the board to ensure the our new president and reorganized staff continues to handle these delicate and critical aspects of college life through the cooperation and dedication of our faculty that play such a key role in political tension on a daily basis.

2. How should the College adapt its programs to meet evolving workforce and economic needs?

Every large institution has its challenges when it comes to pivoting quickly to market needs. I think in my 20 years associated with SMC we've had personnel in place that have kept the college relevant in this area. Though one important leader recently retired, we're fortunate to have a new board member who works in this field and has fresh ideas is an excellent advocate to keep us evolving in workforce development.

3. Do you support the [Club's resolution](#) calling for a citywide ban of artificial turf on locally owned public land?

Yes

4. In what ways should SMC strengthen pathways between K-12 education, community college, and career opportunities?

Our dual enrollment program continues to be successful but our problem here is that enrollment in K-12 is down as well.

Our career services department has been downsized like in all areas. As a board member, myself and others will be monitoring the department's performance and making sure the faculty, counselors, administrators, and staff have appropriate resources to improve career opportunities for our students.

- 5. What role should Santa Monica College play in the broader Santa Monica community and regional economy?

SMC already started by launching The Blue Economy & Climate Action Pathways, a groundbreaking workforce development partnership between a consortium of 13 Los Angeles community colleges. Building upon existing pipeline programs like the aquaculture certificate program created by Santa Monica College and AltaSea, which provides internship placements with companies like Holdfast Aquaculture.

Our college is aligning education with industry needs while supporting local entrepreneurs and connecting students to jobs and we're partnering with city and non-profit groups to provide crisis training, youth resources, and essential student aid.

We're also very proud to have pioneered the first Homeless Service Work Certificate of Achievement and the Affordable Housing Property Management Certificate of Achievement. These pipelines prepare students for impactful, entry-level careers in Los Angeles County's homeless response and affordable housing sectors.

Ballot Measures

1. Do you support the California Billionaire Tax Act, which would impose a one-time emergency 5% tax on those worth more than \$1B? Why or why not?

I'm skeptical. It is my understanding that the current initiative allocates roughly 90% of the funds to backfill federal healthcare cuts, leaving only a small fraction dedicated to education. Unless the act can be reworked to put much needed funds directly into the K-14 system, I'm opposed to the act.

2. Do you support the state ballot measure which would require voters to present government-issued identification when casting ballots? Why or why not?

No, I view this as a form of voter suppression.

3. Do you support the proposed state taxpayer initiative which would limit the ability of local governments to raise revenue through certain taxes and fees including real estate transfer taxes? Why or why not?

No, every local government has entirely different budget scenarios. Let local governments make their own decisions to balance their budgets. The state disrupted local governments with SB 79 by overriding local zoning limitations to force them to allow high-density, multi-family housing near major transit stops.

4. Do you support the proposed ballot measure which would set aside 25% of the airport land for 3000 units of affordable housing, in addition to the remainder which would become a Great Park? Why or why not?

I understand this ballot measure will not be on the Nov. election ballot.

5. Based on results from the first few years of implementation, do you believe that 2022's Measure GS should be amended? If so, how and why?

I don't think any changes need to be made unless some solid data points to any issues. I'd be open to listen, but I think it's fine in its original form.

Additional Questions

1. If elected, how would you attempt to interact with the Santa Monica Democratic Club and other political organizations to ensure community buy-in on new proposals?

Yes, I always interact with the club as a longstanding member and former executive committee member.

2. What is the most important topic that was left off of this questionnaire?

Tried to think of something clever and amusing, but I'm tired. This was a thorough and well thought out questionnaire.

3. Please describe whether and how you used generative AI tools in preparing your responses. If elected, how would you use these tools in governance, if at all?

I, along with many of my students in the past, have processing issues with the written word. Or should I say 'words', I use Google's Gemini to summarize long articles. And yes, I'll continue to use this tool but to be clear, once I process the summary, I go back the article and re-read it before collecting my thoughts come to my own understanding of the issue.