

NORTH HARRIS COUNTY COLLEGE UNITED FACULTY

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THE ADVOCATE

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THEME FOR THE YEAR: SENIOR FACULTY SHOULD NOT LOSE GROUND

Michael McFarland reached Salary Step 16 last year (September, 1988). Since that is the highest existing step, his raise was approximately 50% of that of faculty at Steps 1-15. With the hefty insurance hike, the new family rate caused him, like Alan Hall, to lose ground--to take home less pay than last year. Michael is in his fourteenth year with NHCC, and this year he was a recipient of the college's Teaching Excellence Award. Ironically, the cash amount of the award, when added to his raise, would bring him only just short of the raises of less experienced faculty. Michael was willing to share some of his thoughts on the salary cap.

The news in recent times has been full of reports that in the U.S. any person can count on changing jobs, and possibly careers, at least six or seven times during his or her professional lifetime. However, since the inception of NHCC, its faculty has provided examples of the exact opposite case. Landing a teaching job here is considered around the state to be quite an accomplishment. Presumably that is because of our excellent reputation scholastically and financially, as compared to other colleges and even universities. People hold on to their positions here.

I remember coming to NHCC with a great excitement about being on the ground floor of an educational enterprise that promised to do wonderful things--the sky was the limit, I felt. Administrators, too, expressed the feeling that as long as I continued to improve my teaching, that I could expect recognition and job security. At NHCC nothing was valued more highly than good teaching. And over the years this has been true for me. I revise and modify my syllabi, tests, and teaching techniques in each class every semester, always with the goal of meeting the students' changing needs and character. I regularly find new and more stimulating ways of dealing with literary works and students' problems (registration hours and advising duties have also increased

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"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

markedly in recent semesters). With the English Department re-evaluating its freshman composition program, I have piloted classes with TASP and some other new concepts in mind. I am always seeking more efficient ways of doing my job, so that more time can be devoted to other professional tasks: serving on committees, doing professional reading and writing, as well as sponsoring a student organization which publishes a campus literary magazine. In recent years I have published in my field and I have received writing awards--two from NHCC and one from the Southwest Writers Conference. But a very significant milestone, both personally and professionally, came this year with the Teaching Excellence Award.

Throughout the years I have felt that I was climbing a kind of ladder of accomplishment and recognition, and that things could only get better. Now, at age forty-one, it appears that I have reached a peak and am starting down the other side of the ladder.

Our institution has ridden out the oil bust without a break in its tradition of recognising accomplishments of faculty, and in doing so we have kept alive the excitement of educating. But the salary cap now sends a definite message of a different tone. Since future insurance hikes can be expected, the message seems to be that the college's philosophy, expressed financially, is different from what my teaching experience tells me and from what apparently occurs with professionals in the "business world." The new message is that my expertise actually is not increasing, at least not as much as it did the first sixteen years. What am I to do, if I want to progress further professionally? Presumably, I must either get a higher degree, move somewhere else or become an administrator.

An associate asked me in early September, before the first new paycheck, if I had done the math and figured out that I was losing ground. When I acknowledged that I had, he asked if I knew what it meant. I said, "My experience is not appreciated?"

"No," he replied. "There's a more general principle, something you're missing. You still haven't grasped it."

"What?"

"It means you aren't wanted here," he said.

I don't believe this, but I'm afraid it is what many of the Step 16 "senior" faculty are feeling. The feeling may be unexpressed, or it may become fodder for the rumor that our salaries have made us too expensive for the college's budget. I certainly hope that the feeling doesn't grow, and that in the future this problem can be eliminated.