

NORTH HARRIS COUNTY COLLEGE UNITED FACULTY

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THEME FOR THE YEAR: SENIOR FACULTY SHOULD NOT LOSE GROUND

President's Column

by Alan Hall

Any senior faculty member who purchased family coverage through NHCC's health care program lost financial ground from last year to this year. This lost financial ground resulted from a large increase in health premiums and the cap on annual increments at Step 16. The college may not be able to take any more steps to contain health care costs, but it can do something about salaries and the cap on the number of steps. The Coordinating Board recently reported that NHCC is no longer in the top five community colleges in Texas in terms of average salary. It now ranks twelfth. Worse, at the top range of the salaries where the Step 16 cap is critical, NHCC ranks twenty-fifth out of forty-nine Texas community colleges.

The major focus for AFT this year is to seek remedies to keep senior faculty from losing ground financially. We have taken several steps toward that end. First, we have drawn attention to the problem through issues of The Advocate, issues which received strong faculty support. The AFT Executive Committee then met on November 8 with Dr. Airola and Dr. Marsee at the District Office to discuss the Step 16 cap. Dr. Airola acknowledged that senior faculty losing ground is a problem and that something needs to be done about it. He indicated that the timing of our discussion was good, that the fall is the appropriate time to discuss philosophy and strategy regarding benefits, several months in advance of actual budget determinations made in the spring. He noted that he had appointed the Step 16 Task Force to study the problem, but acknowledged that many faculty, especially on the South Campus, were unhappy with that committee's recommendations. He asked the AFT Executive Committee to review the Task Force document to see if parts of it could be salvaged, apparently willing to forego implementation of the recommendations as a whole. He also asked for other proposals that the AFT might have to solve the problem
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"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

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and asked that we meet again with administrative representatives for further discussion. Accordingly, the AFT Executive Committee met on South Campus with Dr. Marsee and Ms. Bernice Tyson, Director for Personnel, on December 4 to discuss various options. Afterwards, the AFT Executive Committee met to put together a formal proposal to present to AFT members for approval. The proposal was approved and follows this column.

In addition, the AFT has shared its concerns about senior faculty losing ground with members of the Board. We plan further discussions in the spring. Ultimately, the formal AFT proposal will be made to the Board at one of its regular meetings.

AFT STEP 16 PROPOSALS

Unlike many great institutions founded centuries ago whose founding faculty members are long dead, NHCC is a college where the teachers who have created its greatness can still be seen hurrying off to class, grading papers in their offices, and counseling students about their educational progress and prospects. These proposals are offered in the hopes that long-term NHCC faculty will continue to feel dedicated to their calling, inspired by their working environment, and duly recognized by their institution.

A major concern of NHCC United Faculty is that senior faculty who have reached step 16 and who covered their families with the college health insurance lost ground financially from last year to this. An institution like ours where teaching is the primary mission should not be in this untenable position.

Another way in which senior faculty lost ground from last year to this was inflation. Step 16 faculty increases were in the range of 1-2%, while inflation in the Houston area was 4.1% for October 1988 through October 1989 as determined by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Finally, senior faculty are not offered sufficient incentive to continue to improve their teaching effectiveness, and there is no organized way of compensating them for extra service suited to their special talents.

To remedy these problems, NHCC United Faculty proposes:

A. Basic Measures

1. That step 16 faculty receive a sufficient yearly increase to offset that year's increases in family health insurance coverage.
2. That step 16 faculty also receive a sufficient yearly increase in base pay to keep up with inflation as determined by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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3. That a step 16 faculty member be eligible every long semester for the equivalent of one course reduction in teaching assignment without loss of base pay to pursue an administratively approved professional development project. Reading, writing, taking additional courses, and mastering new technology in one's field are examples of projects that should receive routine approval, and the proposal for a project should state how the project could be expected to improve the faculty member's teaching.

B. Additional Measures

4. That step 16 faculty be automatically eligible every long semester to assume extra service to the institution such as mentoring for junior faculty, student advising, teaching an additional course, community relations, curriculum development, and institutional research. They would be paid one course at the overload rate for each project.
5. That step 16 faculty recognized for extraordinary service to the College by the Faculty Senate be eligible for special awards such as early retirement, phased retirement or reduced workload, a step increase every nth year, tuition waiver or subsidy for further study, special faculty development trips, extended sabbatical, paid retraining in a vocational area, professorship (new salary category), or an endowed chair.

The following additional comments may help to explain these proposals. First, the NHCC United Faculty Executive Committee does not believe it to be in the best interest of senior faculty to extend the number of steps to 20 or more, as some have proposed. Senior administrators have repeatedly cautioned (threatened?) that a move to more steps would only result in faculty taking longer to reach the top of essentially the same pay range. Assuming an additional step increase (\$675) and a pay scale increase of 1.5%, a step 16 faculty member with a base pay of \$36,000 would receive a raise of \$1215. Under our proposals the same faculty member would receive \$2450 (twice the adjunct rate for an M.A. in Category III) for teaching five courses (four plus one as an overload: Proposal 4) and taking on a professional development project both semesters (Proposal 3). In addition, the faculty member would receive the increases covered in Proposals 1 and 2.

Proposal 3 will inevitably attract criticism from some who believe that it asks for "less work for the same amount of pay." It would be extremely important for faculty who apply for course reductions under this proposal to maintain the integrity of this provision by pursuing professional development projects that involve the same amount of work as teaching a class and that give the College an honest return for its investment.

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Blended Medical Insurance Rates

by David Dahnke

Since September of 1987 the NHCC premiums for dependent health care have been a "blended" rate; in other words, although PruCare and PruPlus rates differ (as do the benefits for each), the published premium rate for all NHCC employees is the same--the "blended" rate. It must be that some of us are paying less than the premium really is for the coverage we receive, and some of us are paying more.

The charts below indicate three rates as of September 1, 1989: the actual PruCare premium, the actual PruPlus premium, and the "blended" premium published by the college. The dependent figures include the \$20-per month provided by the State.

<u>Beneficiary</u>	<u>Actual PruCare Rate</u>	<u>Blended Rate</u>	<u>Extra Cost per Month</u>
Employee	116.30	176.50	N/A
Child(ren)	85.43	115.00	29.57
Spouse	115.00	150.77	35.17
Family	226.96	285.17	58.21

<u>Beneficiary</u>	<u>Actual PruPlus Rate</u>	<u>Blended Rate</u>	<u>Savings per Month</u>
Employee	190.75	176.50	N/A
Child(ren)	148.00	115.00	33.00
Spouse	148.50	150.17	(1.67)
Family	324.95	285.17	39.78

The most startling revelation from these charts, for me, is that an employee choosing PruCare to cover his or her family overpays at the rate of \$58.21, while the next employee choosing PruPlus for family coverage underpays at the rate of \$39.78. The main value of the resulting blended rate lies in the employee's liberty to choose the best coverage for his or her dependents without cost being an issue. However, the Prucare employee's appreciation for this liberty may begin to dwindle when he realizes that it costs him nearly \$700 per year. There may even be the exceptionally magnanimous Pruplus employee who is willing to pay the cost of his or her program in order to avoid being subsidized by the Prucare employees. As a member of the Insurance Committee, I plan to study this situation and hope to report back on a recommendation in a future issue of The Advocate.