

NORTH HARRIS COUNTY COLLEGE UNITED FACULTY

2700 W. W. THORNE DRIVE • SUITE A-217 • HOUSTON, TEXAS 77073

THE ADVOCATE

SPECIAL EDITION
November 1990

Edited by Steve Davis,
Reba Kochersperger,
Joseph Minton, and
Joan Samuelson

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

AFT LOSES GRIEVANCE, WINS ISSUE By Alan Hall

I recently filed a grievance against Dr. Larry Phillips for his repeated refusal to allow me to make announcements on behalf of the AFT at South Campus in-service meetings for the last three and one-half years, an opportunity provided to TJCTA. Prior to the grievance, I filed a complaint on the issue with the Faculty Senate, which conducted an investigation in which Dr. Phillips admitted treating me in a "non-evenhanded" way. The Faculty Senate found in favor of the AFT, urging him to allow AFT to make announcements at future in-services. When he refused a subsequent request, I filed the grievance and appealed it through the established channels to the Board of Trustees at its October 1990 meeting, a hearing in which Dr. Airola testified for the administration.

At the core of my presentation was the issue of fairness and evenhandedness in Dr. Phillips' treatment of employees and organizations. A grievant must show that he has suffered harm. My argument was that admitted non-evenhandedness which prevented me from speaking constituted harm--I was not being afforded the same opportunities as other employees.

The Board denied the grievance on a narrow definition of harm--I had not been fired, I had not suffered monetary loss, nor had my job been threatened. However, in the discussion of the issue of fairness, several board members echoed my concern. Board member Blaine Mann said that he does "see a problem," adding that institutions of higher learning are supposed to foster free thought. We may not have prevented free expression,

"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

but "we have muffled free expression," he noted.

The majority of the Board felt that this issue should have been worked out between Dr. Phillips and me, that it should never have come to the Board. I could not agree more. I tried many avenues of resolution with Dr. Phillips, and we should have been able to come to an agreement. However, he was immovable.

Board member Dr. Dwayne Collins said that the complaint should be taken back to campus and worked out at that level. Even Board member Brad York, hostile and combative toward the AFT throughout the proceedings, encouraged the parties in the conflict to sit down and talk through the problem. Board member Diane Taylor also expressed her belief that "communication needs to be strengthened." Interestingly, she felt that I "need to be more assertive" in my efforts to make announcements. Some Board members and Dr. Airola seemed to believe that when time for announcements comes, I should stand up and make one.

I was stunned by the suggestion. Like Larry Shirts, I had tried to work with Dr. Phillips in creating a smooth agenda by advanced requests to make an announcement during that portion of the meeting. But Dr. Phillips had repeatedly told me verbally and in writing that I was not to speak. Therefore, I have felt uncomfortable simply standing up and speaking.

Mr. Mann and Board member Dave Robinson were particularly concerned that a fair system that treats groups equally be derived, with Mr. Mann noting that "we should work out an equitable system." In their referral of the matter back to the campus level for resolution, the Board members indicated that they believed resolution has not occurred. I have been in communication with Dr. Phillips since 1987. Perhaps now, with admonishment from the Board, our future discussions will be more fruitful.

I will not pretend to have emerged unscathed. Both Dr. Phillips and I were chastised for not being able to work out our differences. I was accused of everything from egoistic grandstanding, seeking endorsement from the administration, wanting to control Dr. Phillips' agenda, wanting to drive a wedge between the administration and Board and between Board members themselves, and distributing newsletters full of distortion, to fanning the flames of dissent. The personal invective is beneath the dignity of a response, but I will address the issue of endorsement. I have simply requested to be placed on in-service agendas in the same manner as TJCTA, to be included in the announcement portion of meetings. I have not asked for anything not provided to other faculty organizations. Apparently, accepting the Chancellor's argument that recognition to make announcements equates with endorsement, Ms. Taylor commented, "I don't think it is the institution's or the administration's job or responsibility to endorse [by recognizing them at meetings] any group." It never seemed to occur to anyone to question how that logic then applies to TJCTA. I might hastily add that my complaint is not with Larry Shirts and the TJCTA. Contrary to Dr. Airola's claim, I was not asking for "supertreatment," rather

for equal, evenhanded treatment.

Mr. Robinson bemoaned the fact that the union and administration bristle anytime the other makes a move. Perhaps we can move beyond those feelings--the union certainly has committed itself to that effort. I am not so sure of the administration's interest, however, after reading the Boardroom Recap. Especially provocative is the closing quotation from Brad York, completely disregarding the fact that every year many of the writing and teaching excellence awards go to members of AFT. The local organization brought Lt. Gov. Hobby and State Rep. Wilhemina Delco to the South campus to receive awards recognizing their contributions to higher education. AFT also sponsored "Thoughts on Teaching" seminars in the district to promote innovation in classroom instruction.

Change will evolve from this experience. A lengthy dialogue occurred. Differences were aired. I, of course, was disappointed not to have prevailed in the formal grievance. However, the Board did recognize the problem that I brought to them. All that I asked for was to be able to make announcements when appropriate at in-service. It appears that I am going to have that opportunity in the future.

Following the Board's verbal recommendation, I will have the opportunity to stand and make my announcement at the next faculty in-service meeting. The Board members encouraged me to come back to them if at that time I am denied the right to speak: then I would be citing harm they have suggested they could acknowledge.

GUEST EDITORIAL

NHCC faculty and staff are following the current Chancellor selection process with interest. As the college approaches a new phase of its history, much of its future direction will be determined by whoever that new leader will be. As a service to our readers, The Advocate is publishing the following essay by Lee Topham, mathematics instructor at the Kingwood Campus. In September, Dr. Topham submitted his application for the Chancellor's position. While NHCC-UF is taking no formal position on the Chancellor's succession, and while the following essay does not necessarily reflect the views of the AFT, we believe that these ideas merit discussion and debate.

Lee Topham has served this college ably for many years in the classroom and in the administration. His statement reveals him to be quick-minded, creative, and dedicated to honest speech. Dr. Topham has little patience with the "smelly little orthodoxies" (Orwell) that tend to dominate talk about the state of NHCC. In this era of toadyism and conformity, his voice is a welcome relief. We invite commentary on this piece and will open our pages in subsequent issues to all who wish to participate in this exchange.

A TIME FOR CHANGE

By Lee Topham

Over fifteen years ago, North Harris County College began by offering credit classes at Aldine High School. Since that beginning the taxpayers have supported the College by approving bonds to construct physical facilities unmatched in Texas. We presently have three campuses and an administrative office to conveniently serve the educational needs of the College Community.

The strength of the College, however, does not lie in brick and mortar. The strength of the College, and its reputation, lies in the hands and minds of the teaching faculty. At North Harris County College the quality of the facilities is more than matched by the quality of the faculty.

I feel that as we enter the decade of the '90's, it is time for a change in the management of the physical and human resources of the College. Our present organizational structure is centralized and totally inadequate to serve a multi-campus College in the 1990's and beyond.

I believe we are entering a decade of unprecedented change in post-secondary education in Texas. I also believe the community college is in the best position to adapt to these changes. Indications are that by 1995 the population of college-age white males, who form the core of professional and managerial positions, will shrink by thirty-four percent. More and more single parents will be entering the work force. The large population of baby boomers will be going from forty-something to fifty-something. Minorities and females will be called upon to make up a larger percentage of the professional and managerial work force.

The work force in the 1990's will have to change by learning to communicate better, compute better, and solve problems better. The College must be flexible to respond to these changes. I believe it is imperative that we decentralize our management structure if we are to have any chance of meeting the needs of our students in the coming decade. Our present structure is patterned after a public school district with decisions made at the top and trickled down to the classroom. Decisions regarding purchasing, food-service, business operations, facility maintenance, and computer support are made off campus. It takes eighteen months to approve new programs, two months to requisition equipment and supplies, and forever to get a fresh idea up the organization.

The time has come for us to discard the idea of all campuses doing the same thing in exactly the same way. The multi-campus college concept is in reality one functioning College with two expensive extension centers. The South campus has the only library, and we use a book-mobile system to support classes at Kingwood and Tomball. The course offerings at Kingwood and Tomball do not support two full years of study, and most

sophomore students eventually attend the South campus to complete a degree. The curriculum process is in reality a South campus department meeting. The College newspaper is nothing more than an exercise for the South campus journalism department.

I envision a multi-college system that provides autonomy to each campus location. Each campus should be held accountable for meeting the needs of the students at its location. Campus administrators should have the authority to make final decisions on curriculum, purchasing, maintenance, food-service, and marketing. It is not good management to have staff personnel on a campus supervised by someone at the South campus or the District office. Each campus in the district should be permitted the freedom of choice when it comes to serving the tax payers in the immediate vicinity of the school. We spend far too much energy on inter-campus politics and far too little energy in meeting the changing needs of our constituency.

Listed below are a few ideas that I feel will breathe new life into the College District:

Library: Each campus should have a full functioning library that is open on Saturday and a half day Sunday. What better way to market the College than to make the library a center for learning in the community.

Computer: Each campus should have a mini-computer and a systems person to provide for campus needs. All sites would be networked to provide a common database for District records and to provide for electronic mail between campuses. It makes no sense in the days of fax machines and computer mail for our managers to spend time driving to and from meetings.

Employment: I would like to see each campus respond to the employment needs of our students. I believe that the majority of our students are seeking entry-level skills or job enhancement skills. I suggest the best way to meet these needs is through our Continuing Education program. I would split the Continuing Education curriculum into leisure and vocational courses. The management of the leisure course would remain under the present Continuing Education umbrella, but the vocational courses should be managed by the vocational departments. This could provide a quick response to short course needs recommended by advisory committees.

Child Care: Each campus should provide some form of child care for students. This is probably the best way to help women who need post-secondary education.

Minority: Each campus should be responsible for the curriculum it teaches. This is not to say that faculty in the same disciplines should not discuss individual course objectives. But the faculty on one campus should not have veto power over a good curriculum idea on another campus just because they are in the majority.

Newspaper: The life blood of a college is the free exchange of ideas. I would like to see a district-wide newspaper published once a week with an editorial board made up of students, faculty, and staff. This would provide an open forum for the exchange of information and the discussion of local and international affairs. There is no place in a college for one-sided reporting of events.

Competition: I believe that friendly competition between campus sites would be healthy. Inter-campus competitions in mathematics, science, and sports would provide some campus identity and a sense of togetherness that is lacking at present.

My philosophy of education places the needs of the student before the needs of administrators. I believe the student is best served by a caring and decisive faculty at the campus level.

I know most of the faculty and staff at North Harris County College personally, and I am confident we could be a great college with a little leadership. We are projecting a four million dollar budget for the District Office within the next five years. I would like to see us get four million dollars worth of leadership from that office. I believe a lot more could be done with a lot less if we all worked together and put our efforts into improving the teacher-learner environment.