

# NORTH HARRIS COUNTY COLLEGE UNITED FACULTY

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

THE ADVOCATE

SUMMER, 1992

---

Edited by Steve Davis

---

## SALARIES

Last year the Texas Legislature approved funds to provide a 2 to 3% salary increase for all employees at state colleges, including community colleges. A 2% minimum was specified. An article last fall in the Conroe Courier cited Comptroller John Sharp in regard to these funds:

"While employees of public community and junior colleges are not considered state employees in the traditional sense, the colleges by law are designated as institutions of higher education." Sharp said legislative leaders told him they intended that the community colleges receive any employee increases granted. He said each school would receive additional funds to cover the increase, but added, "These funds cannot be used by community colleges for any purpose other than a 2% employee pay raise."

This salary increase has yet to materialize in paychecks for employees of NHMCCD. It was approved by the state after our Board had authorized a 5% raise for employees. In a discussion with Faculty Senate presidents about the fate of these additional funds intended to be added to our salaries, Dr. Pickelman disagreed with the idea that the 2% had to be added last September since our raise exceeded that amount. He added that complications in the state may have resulted in the District receiving only 1.6% in additional state funds. The Chancellor said that the money would go into the District's general operating fund and would be used toward a salary increase in the Fall of 1992. It must be remembered that these are additional funds provided by the state. It might follow that we can expect a raise above 1.6% in the Fall since the Board surely will approve an increase out of the District's locally generated funds.

It will be interesting to watch what Dr. Pickelman recommends. He accepted, in lieu of a salary increase this year, a \$23,000 Suburban. If memory serves, he signed on at \$125,000 (\$27,000 higher than the

previous chancellor's salary) because his compensation package would not include a college vehicle. After one year, he negotiated the Suburban, at a value representing a little more than an 18% increase. Of course, non-CEOs will not fare as well. But if employees do not receive better than 3% (and there are indications that is all we will receive), which would include only 1.4% from District funds, there is a clear message in that. The lowest paid District employee earns \$11,398 annually. Salaries do not climb dramatically for other support staff. Faculty fare a bit better. The big jump in salary comes at the administrative level. With all of the administrative proliferation and attendant costs we have witnessed this last year, surely the CEO and Board will be careful to recognize the value of staff and faculty when determining raises. A minimum increase of 5% for all faculty and staff would be a first step toward recognizing the worth of these employees.

Alan Hall

### GRADUATION

The AFT congratulates all of the faculty speakers at this year's graduation exercises. We are especially proud of union member Michael McFarland who, in part, spoke to the importance of maintaining academic standards. In a world where legislative pressure mounts to fund colleges on output paradigms and colleges are beginning to look more like corporations run by CEOs, it was refreshing to hear Michael's reaffirmation of why we are here.

### DIALOGUE ON STUDENT RETENTION

May 12, 1992

Dear Robert,

I read with interest your essay on student attrition in the recent Advocate. You summarized the issues rather well. Clearly, the college needs to define the issue, collect appropriate information and put it in the hands of those who are in the best position to interpret and act on it--the faculty.

If one accepts, as I do, that there are many causes for students to leave a course or a program prematurely and that many of these are beyond the control of the college--and perhaps even the student--the whole discussion of retention is liberated. The focus shifts to what one researcher has called "alterable variables"--those we can control which mediate retention. Careful analysis may indicate a wide variety of options for increasing the likelihood that a student will master the content of a course or program (the only good definition of retention). These might include a different approach to orientation, assessment, placement, registration, advising, withdrawal, academic probation, scheduling, etc. It might also suggest useful interventions, such as an "academic alert system," a peer tutoring program, new resources and strategies for the learning labs, greater use of tutors, adjustments to class sizes, and a variety of special services for students with

data are available to the faculty and staff...We have no absolute retention goals--only to know we are doing all that we reasonably can as a college to support the learning of our students.

Again, I appreciate the thought that went into your essay. From where I sit, you're right on target.

Pax,

Sandy (Shugart)

May 14, 1992

Dear Dr. Shugart:

Thank you for your reply to my recent article printed in The Advocate. It was a reasonable exposition of the issues involved in what some see as a touchy issue. I appreciate your openness and thoughtful discussion, and I agree that many things should be tried to affect the "alterable variables."

As I mentioned in the letter, one project Cher Brock and I have been engaged in this last semester is compiling grade distribution data for our department to serve as a baseline against which to judge individual as well as future departmental performance. We recently completed the major part of the "data gathering" process and gave a copy to our Division Chairperson as well as a copy to Dr. McMillian and the Retention Committee.

I am also enclosing a copy of a recent article on student performance published in the American Educator. I do so because student performance, or lack of it, is from where I sit one of the major causes of the attrition/failure rate in English--and I think I can speak for most of my fellow English teachers on this. If I could figure out a way to impress upon my students the value and necessity of hard work, of conscientiously doing the reading and writing required, of taking pride in the work that they turn in--then the number of students who master the content in my classes would increase.

So I look for leadership and ideas. What can we do?

For starters, in order to see where we are, Cher Brock and I have developed for our department a way to monitor our grade distribution and retention. Each semester all members of our department will receive a grade-distribution sheet so that they can compare their grades and retention to the department's as a whole.

We would be happy to share our grade distribution with other departments in return for theirs. Thus everyone might get a sharper picture of grades and retention college-wide.

Next, Cher and I would like to propose that liasons be established at the departmental level between NHC and its feeder high schools, and NHC and the major baccalaureate institutions that our students attend. We need to discuss and coordinate programs and expectations vertically up and down the education ladder.

We would further like to see data delineating some historical overview of NHC students' scores--ACT, SAT, Asset--over the last eleven years to examine parallels, and we are also interested in establishing some sort of program to track the progress of our students within the sequence in our department as well as their progress once they enter the workforce or upper-division schools.

[We are interested in promoting] discussion and new ideas on this extremely important issue.

Sincerely,

Robert Miller  
English Instructor  
North Harris College

### REGISTRATION

I do not recall ever hearing as many complaints from faculty and staff regarding registration as I did for Summer I. The consensus seems to be that the system needs change. If you have any positive suggestions for improving registration, I encourage you to forward them to The Advocate for publication, discussion, and perhaps, implementation. Those who work in the trenches are best qualified to know what needs to be done. Let us hear from you.

Alan Hall

### A LETTER

The most stressful problem area of the college to me is the approach used in selecting recipients for the Support Staff Achievement Award. It is much akin to that used to acquit those officers in the Rodney King case. The process appears to allow too little minority participation. This practice started with the old administration and continues under the new. I think this situation is an oversight on the part of our well-meaning new officials, but the person or persons responsible know exactly what they are doing. Two or three minorities since the process began hardly represent a fair percentage. I know most of the recipients and feel that some of them are deserving. I also know some more qualified and more deserving nominees who never had a chance of getting the award. It's time to look at the process and insure that fairness prevails.

Malcolm V. Debs

(Editor's note---I have supplied a pseudonym for the writer of this communication. I can assure the readers that he/she is a living, breathing employee of NHMCCD. While it is not the usual practice of this publication to run unsigned pieces, I felt in this case it was merited. Staff employees don't have the job security and attendant latitude to speak freely that tenured faculty possess.)