



EMPLOYEE FEDERATION

of

North Harris Montgomery

Community College District

2700 W. W. Thorne • Suite A-217 • Houston, Texas 77073



THE ADVOCATE

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Edited by Steve Davis

LOOKING BACK, THINKING AHEAD

(Editor's note: AFT President Alan Hall conducted the following interview earlier this month with Sandy Shugart, President of North Harris College. The Advocate is pleased to publish Shugart's reflections upon nearly two years at the helm of NHC.)

Hall: With what are you most pleased?

Shugart: It's really difficult to single out one of the college's accomplishments as being most gratifying. There have been so many little signs of progress, and some not so little. I'm especially pleased with the beginning the Aldine Center has made. Although the number of students served in this first semester is modest, the seeds have been planted for the college to make a vital difference to the parts of our community who should concern us most. The progress in other areas--professional development, registration, campus security, the LRC, financial aid, and many other areas--is encouraging. In fact, it's the spirit of the place that pleases me the most. People are eager to contribute, open to change, willing to work hard, and hopeful for our future. That makes the specific efforts fruitful and fun.

Hall: What additional changes would you like to make in the short term?

Shugart: The daily challenge for me remains the same: to assure that people have the basic tools and resources to do their jobs well. Resources like time, space, a good environment, a supportive organizational culture, supplies, equipment, learning resources, and so on. What this means in concrete terms depends on the program area. It involves the budget, but is much more than money or positions. It's a climate in the college, the sum total of all the processes and personalities, expectations and resources. I don't have any illusions about controlling such things, but I wouldn't be here if I didn't think I had the capacity and the obligation to influence them all. For that reason, the most important new effort across the institution in the coming year may

be a thoughtful, effective planning process to focus our efforts and resources.

Hall: What frustrates you as president?

Shugart: Mostly my own limitations. I wish I was smarter, more disciplined, spread a little less thinly. In fact if I could change one thing about my situation, it would be to have more hours in the day to spend individually with faculty, staff, and students. I genuinely believe that no process is more important to a leader than listening, but increasingly I find my schedule closing in on me. Still, I'm pretty sure I'm the only one who can do anything about it.

Hall: What do you consider your biggest challenges?

Shugart: Without a doubt, there are two. First, to manage our growth well. That is, to continue to serve the students who need us without compromising the quality of our service or their learning. I expect this challenge will be with us for the long-term. Second, to help move the college to greater involvement with the community. It's natural for a rapidly growing institution to be self-involved. After all, there's plenty for us to do every day within the confines of our own campus. But there's also a community out there to be served. If we're true to our mission, it will become increasingly difficult to discern where the college ends and the community begins. I think that essential focus on making our institution an effective servant of the community sums up most of the leadership challenges here, and in most other institutions created for service, whether it's a hospital or a school, a public agency or a college.

Hall: Where would you like for NHC to be five years from now?

Shugart: The specifics of our long range objectives still have to be fleshed out and they involve a lot more voices than just the president's. I imagine North Harris College completing a major building project to accommodate its growth, but also to serve more effectively: an LRC of perhaps two to three times its current size, more classrooms and labs, more faculty and staff space, a real student center, an applied technology center, and more. I imagine the college enjoying working relationships with both public schools and universities that go far beyond what any are doing now, or are even willing to imagine. I'd like to see the college much more self-aware, equipped with solid information on the results of all of our work. I'd like to see higher graduation and retention rates. I'd like to see the college intimately involved with the community, and the community reciprocating with a level of support to sustain our excellence. I'd like to see the cultural climate of the campus greatly enriched and diversified. And I'd like to see the processes that a college community uses to direct itself fully institutionalized, familiar, and effective.

DISTRICT CONFERENCE DAY: A STAFF PERSPECTIVE

Support staff appreciated the opportunity to participate in the First Annual District-Wide Spring Conference Day at Tomball College on February 18, but many did not feel included as valued participants. The day began with a negative tone when Dr. Carl Nelson excluded support staff from the focus of his address. I find no fault with his asking faculty to rededicate themselves to quality teaching. But was he not really addressing doing a first-rate job no matter what it is? We all can benefit from working up to the highest standards of quality, being motivated to perform to the best of our abilities, and treating those with whom we work with respect and courtesy. Our goal should always be to provide the best product possible whether it be a classroom lecture, printed document, clean classroom, financial report, or cafeteria service. Support staff are an integral part of this organization and perform their jobs with pride and professionalism. They should be included in "district-wide" addresses.

Sessions for support staff were sparse in comparison to those for faculty and administrators. Since professional development workshops have diminished or become non-existent in the past two years, more sessions applicable to support staff were in order. Positive comments were heard from those attending the sessions dealing with financial planning and retirement, first aid and safety, and interpersonal conflicts. How about additional sessions in the future on topics such as customer service techniques, hazardous waste control, and tax-deferred annuity information? The conference day would be an ideal setting for communication meetings for employees in similar jobs. As the District grows, fewer and fewer opportunities are available to meet and share ideas with counterparts from other locations.

Let's take the positives from the first district-wide conference day and build on them to make the second one even better.

Patricia Plunk
Personnel Department
District Office

STAFF(ING) NEEDS

Hello out there! We are living, breathing, feeling individuals working hard to help the colleges meet their goals. We are 39% of the "District Family." We are on the front lines, often the first people students talk to. We are usually here when the faculty and administrators leave--fielding questions, executing orders, working on projects, cleaning and repairing the buildings.

In speeches by administrators we are told that the colleges could not run smoothly without us, and that we are a very important part of the colleges. So if we, the support staff, are an important part of the colleges (there are 690 full-time faculty and staff of

which 267 are non-exempt support staff) where is the consideration for more professional development, fairness in job descriptions, workloads and pay?

The growth of the colleges has been really tremendous. North Harris has added new wings, new programs, classes, faculty, administrators and their secretaries. The divisions are prospering, adding new labs and classrooms. Through all of this growth, the number of faculty secretaries, for the most part, has stayed the same (some divisions have not added a secretary for ten years, but have added numerous faculty, classes and programs). These divisions have experienced an increase in phone calls, number of students coming into the office suites seeking help, and have more faculty for which typing of tests, duplicating handouts and tests, and filling out print orders is necessary. In light of the aforementioned changes, more work has been given to the divisional and departmental secretaries--work that has been shifted from administrative areas. We are told that the administrators' workload has increased to such proportions that some of it had to be given to the divisions. As noted, the divisions' workload has also increased. Will they receive the long-overdue secretarial help that is needed?

Marilyn Kron
Division Secretary
North Harris College

STAFF AND FACULTY AWARDS

NHMCCD's annual awards dinner will be held Friday, April 2. It has been the AFT's practice to recognize and congratulate those employees who are receiving recognition for their outstanding contributions to the college. We are especially proud (necessarily) of those award winners (*) who are members of the Employee Federation. We commend these and all employees who work every day to make NHMCCD synonymous with excellence in higher education.

SUPPORT STAFF EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Trudy Burke*
Martha Carpenter
Pam Dolezal
Linda Gilbert
Florence Gutierrez
Anne Herron
Greg Mitchell*

Barbara Peterson*
Cheryl Smith*
Karen Stevenson
Mary Thompson
Sally Thrailkill*
Joy Tichenor

TEACHER EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Rich Almstedt*
Katherine Beasley
Steve Haberman
Alan Hall*
Sue Little

Hulon Madeley
Dian Petty
Dean Wolfe
Bruce Zarosky

WRITING AWARDS

Rose Austin, "Developmental Studies Options: Diversity Within the Developmental Studies Program," National Association of Developmental Educators Conference Proceedings.

Truman Clark, "Here Comes the Judge," Runner's World.

Linda Dodgen and Adrian Rapp, "An Analysis of Personality Differences Between Card Collectors and Investors Based on the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory," Journal of Social Behavior and Personality.

Geraldine Gallagher, "The Parent Trap," Entrepreneurial Woman.

Raquel Henry, "Portrait of a Woman Administrator," Women on the Move.

Link Hullar, Montana Shootout.

James Moore, Through Fire and Flood.

Scott Nelson, "The Crazy Girls of Hereford," Texas Magazine of the Houston Chronicle.

Susan Orr and Patricia Winters, Teaching Guide for GED Skill Building System, Curriculum Guide for the Houston Chronicle.

Marilyn Rhinehart*, A Way of Work and a Way of Life.

Brian Shmaefsky, "Demonstrating the Sympathetic Nervous System Function--Inexpensively," Journal of College Science Teaching.

Glenda Smith, Study Guide to Accompany Psychology: An Introduction.

Don Stanley, The Cutting Edge, Research Summaries published in Understanding Sexuality.

JOIN THE AFT!

All faculty and staff can enjoy the benefits of association with other employees committed to making NHMCCD an excellent place to work and teach--and the benefits of strong legal and professional liability protection should you ever need them. If you agree with the stances we take on educational and workplace issues, then it's time for you to join the union. Monthly dues rates are \$19.85 for fulltime faculty, \$12.70 for fulltime staff and adjunct faculty, and \$9.60 for part-time staff. Discuss membership with Alan Hall, District President (443-5544, 353-8634); Marilyn Kron, District Staff President; or any other member (Tony Foster, Thelma Jones, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Greg Mitchell, Patricia Plunk, Allen Vogt, Steve Davis) of the Federation executive committee.

Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Our "Easy" Schools

A few weeks ago, I saw a TV interview with some Russian youngsters who now live in the U.S. After some standard questions, the interviewer asked them to compare their school experiences here with their experiences in Russia. Every one of these seventh and eighth graders had the same response: They'd already learned the material they were getting in our seventh and eighth grade classes when they were in third or fourth grade in Russia. They said that school in the U.S. was very easy.

There was nothing unusual about this exchange. Indeed, most people who have met foreign students from France or Germany or Japan have heard the same things. And if we question students like these a little further, we find that they are far ahead of their U.S. counterparts because they are assigned more work and more challenging work, and they work harder to get it all done. But why do they work harder? They have the same distractions as American kids. They have TV sets and pop culture.

One of the main reasons is that these other countries have national curriculums. They have decided what students need to know and be able to do by the time they graduate from secondary school. And they've worked back from these goals to figure out what children should learn by the time they are ages 14 and 9.

That's not true in the U.S. Our 50 state governments have developed curriculum materials, but they are very broadly defined. So each school or teacher can select from this broad array and develop what amounts to an individual curriculum.

This makes for plenty of variety but very little continuity. As a result, students who move from one school—or even one class—to another often find they are out of sync because they have not studied the math or history on which the coming year's work will be based. In countries where there is a national curriculum, fewer students are lost—and fewer teachers are lost because they know what the students who walk into their classroom have already studied.

A national curriculum gives everyone involved—students, parents and teachers—a different perspective on schoolwork. In the U.S., when a teacher piles on the work, students are likely to object. They say it's too hard and too much, and they complain that other teachers or other schools don't expect that kind of work. Often parents sup-



Why do students from France or Germany work harder than our kids? They have the same distractions as American students. They have TV sets and pop culture.

port these objections. So there is a process of negotiation about schoolwork in which students, and frequently parents, play a big role.

Sometimes teachers don't ask enough of students. They feel sorry for some youngsters because of their socioeconomic or racial or ethnic background and decide they won't be able to do real work. So they teach a watered-down curriculum and shortchange youngsters who could learn if they were given a chance.

In our system, how much work students do in a given class is up for grabs. Sometimes it's determined by the willingness or resistance of students and parents. Sometimes it's based on the teacher's expectations. In any case, the level and amount of work common in countries with national curriculums is practically never reached here. The choices our system allows inevitably lead to softer standards and less work just as the mandates in other countries lead to more work and much higher levels of achievement. If a student or a parent in one of these countries does complain, the teacher says, "All the other third-grade youngsters are doing this work, and you can, too." And the teacher probably reminds the parents and child that falling behind now can lead to serious consequences later—like not passing an important exam.

Learning to write well or be competent in math is a lot like preparing for the Olympics. Youngsters have to work hard and do more than they think they can. This can be unpleasant and

even border on the painful, but it takes this kind of stretching to achieve high levels in any field. In the U.S., a teacher who pushes students to work hard is viewed as unreasonable or even mean. But where there are external standards, a teacher is more like a coach—someone who is helping prepare kids for the Olympics—than like someone who has odd, personal ideas about education.

With a national curriculum, everybody knows what is required. If there also are clear and visible stakes—getting into university or an apprenticeship program—the pressure is on to make sure youngsters meet the standards. Without national standards and a national curriculum there are no such pressures. That's why students in other countries work hard and do so well—and why students in our "easy" and undemanding schools do not. Knowing that should lead us to act.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1992 by Albert Shanker.