



EMPLOYEE FEDERATION

of

North Harris Montgomery

Community College District

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THE ADVOCATE OCTOBER-NOVEMBER, 1994

THE MERIT PAY BLUES AGAIN

I am writing to express my adamant opposition to a performance-based pay system for faculty at NHMCCD. It is not possible to identify a set of factors or behaviors that are invariably associated with excellent teaching to the same degree. Instruction is an inexact science with infinite variables uniquely fitted to a particular teacher, classroom student population, lesson or subject, and time. The research on teaching excellence is full of case studies of people who are deemed the best in their fields, but there is not a consistent set of descriptors that would allow objective rating of relative skills among teachers. Attempts to quantify factors such as "caring attitude toward students" and "effectively organizes classroom instruction" are doomed to defeat. Factors which are more quantifiable such as a level of participation in institutional activities or professional growth may, in fact, distract from a particular instructor's efforts toward teaching excellence. If criteria such as these or publications are introduced, then we are devaluing the instructional portions of our jobs and encouraging faculty to devote more time to areas that are only tangentially related to teaching. Performance-based pay encourages emphasis on activities that "show" or "count" which are not necessarily consistent with teaching excellence.

Even if it were possible to measure teacher excellence, it would not be in the best interest of our colleges to institute a performance-based pay system. Creating a college culture that promotes collegiality among faculty will have the most positive effect on our mission of providing the best learning opportunity for students. Merit pay creates an atmosphere of competitiveness among faculty. It establishes an environment that encourages being safe, currying favor with those who will do the merit ratings, and "protecting" effective instructional efforts from rivals. Those who do not receive merit pay can and will direct much of their resentment and frustration toward the winners and possibly engage in behaviors to undermine their colleagues. Beyond the tension between faculty members, there is every likelihood of adversely affecting the relationships between faculty and administrators. Administrators will find less general support from the rank and file faculty who will perceive a cult of favorites. If administrators attempt to defuse these problems by increasing the number of awards or by rotating them throughout the faculty, the awards become meaningless.

I wholeheartedly support efforts to encourage all employees of NHMCCD to be excellent. If administrators would like to participate in such an effort, I believe they can do so by initiating a number of policies and activities:

"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

1. Providing for opportunity for faculty and staff input, listening to what is being said, and making efforts to institute reasonable recommendations in a timely fashion. This would include compensation proposals already drafted by a faculty committee and presented to the administration.
2. Supporting special projects which seem likely to promote excellence in teaching such as providing release time periodically so faculty have time to plan to implement new methods or materials.
3. Acting as facilitators encouraging teaching excellence by setting up an administration that is open, positive, and supportive.
4. Employing sufficient full-time faculty and staff so that it is possible to organize departments for efficient and consistent instruction.

NHMCCD is an exciting organization. It has been a privilege to be part of a college that has remained dynamic and responsive to changes in how we can best serve students. I am hopeful that faculty will continue to be valued partners in shaping how we meet the challenges.

Sandra Lloyd
Developmental Studies Professor
Tomball College

AFTER THE FLOOD

Last month, I found myself, as many other fortunate employees, watching the devastation caused by the flooding in our area on television. My house did not flood; I lost electricity for only 45 minutes one day, and my major concern was how I was going to restructure my classes to deal with the days we had off. With many of my neighbors, I toured the Kingwood area and found areas that were affected. I was pleased to see, however, that the Kingwood College billboard stood out like a beacon in the surrounding water. I thought of that metaphorically and was inspired. I found a student who got out with her trailer home, her disabled son, and her dog. I saw others who lost everything they owned. I began to think, as I heard their stories, what would I take if I were allowed to take one bag? My cats, my photographs, and my wallet were all I decided I needed to start anew. I would leave my textbooks.

Hoping that students would not drop, I decided to do something about the texts that were lost in the flood. After polling all my classes, I had several students who lost their texts. I went to speak with the manager of Follet's Bookstore at Kingwood College. As a national corporation, surely they could donate books that I could return to them at the end of the semester. I was incredibly disappointed when I was told, very nicely, that Follet's is "not in the charity business." I suggested that they could use it as a write-off and I was informed that they did not need any more write-offs. I then listened to the manager talk about the renovations she had to make and how their profit would probably be only \$1,000.00 this year. I am sure that people who lost everything in the flood will understand their concern for their

bottomline. To be fair, the manager did not make all this up on her own. She had just gotten off the phone with her main office; they said no. Later she was kind enough to call me and let me know that Follet's would sell textbooks to flood victims at cost. She said that students would have to go through the Business Office so that their flooding could be verified. I asked her how the Business Office would be able to do that. She replied that maybe they could check the streets the students lived on. I pointed out that I did not think that there was such a list, plus some streets had been flooded at one point but perhaps not at another. Then she said that maybe the Business Office could verify the reliability of the student. I am afraid that I chuckled at that one. I think the FBI would love to hire any of our Business Office employees who are able to pick out the students who lie from the ones who do not.

Refusing to give up, I called Mike Webb who owned the bookstores that used to be located in the colleges before Follet's. I called him because he has helped me and others in the past when we had students who had problems paying for books. Mike did not hesitate at all. "Sure," he said. "Give me the titles of the books you need and if I have them, they're yours!" I was beside myself with joy. I had already pulled out my own checkbook to see how many books I could buy to lend to my students. I am not going to depress you by telling you what I found.

I know that Follet's has to make a profit. My dad worked for Ford Motor Credit Co. I taught economics to high schools students in H.I.S.D. I know all that. But I also know that there are corporations who donate in times of need out of altruism or need of good P.R. Who cares?—at least they help out the little guy when there is a need. In a time when some in education are thinking of students as "consumers" and degrees as "products," I am happy to know Mike Webb who thinks of students as people in need.

Raquel Henry
Psychology Professor
Kingwood College

PAY RAZE

I must begin this article by stating that I love my job. I really do! I know of no other job anywhere that offers so many **intangible** rewards as this one. I also understand that there are many others less fortunate than myself. But in this district, faculty and staff continually get shafted when it comes to pay increases. Oh sure, faculty have been getting some pay increases—3% this year—and staff members have been given minimum increases (\$600 was the floor this time) for four of the five years that I have been employed by the District. Our Chancellor tells us every year in his state of the union address (no pun intended) that we should expect a revamped system any time now. Well, the time is now. Many of my colleagues and I are fed up with the current state of affairs.

Perhaps a more realistic note will help. I had a net gain of \$28 on my last paycheck. That is some reward for the service I provide for my students. Yes, my students. Many may have written my service to my college district, but from my viewpoint, the latter logically flows from the former. The purpose of this article is not to bring up the issue of merit pay, which some say is on the way. The issue is pay increases for staff and faculty as a regular part of our

ongoing, outstanding work. Perhaps the major problem associated with this issue is the belief system that the current board and chancellor hold. It is a belief system that supports administrative restructuring at the expense of real people who struggle day in and day out to make life a little better for a lot of people. It may be wise to remember a central law of Discordianism: Convictions cause convicts. Don't allow your beliefs to imprison you. In other words, don't let your beliefs blind you to other realities. Our realities specifically.

Tony Foster
Sociology Professor
Kingwood College

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: STIRRING A HORNETS' NEST

After reading the debate in your last issue between Olin Joynton and Tim Howard concerning pay rates for summer terms, I feel compelled to respond to some assumptions both men make that are more than a little insulting to those of us who are forced to pursue our teaching careers as adjunct instructors.

First of all, Mr. Joynton's argument is based on the assumption that what happens in the classroom is secondary in importance to the extent of one's committee work. The thought strikes me that, if Mr. Joynton values administrative work so much, he should seek advancement in administration. Until that time, he should realize that, as a professor, his most important function is to teach his courses. (While committee work may be gratifying to one's ego, it is often a waste of resources—Mr. Joynton's own example of the District Faculty Compensation Committee that never accomplished anything stands out as a strikingly appropriate example.) As Mr. Joynton argues for exaggerated recognition for duties outside of direct contact with students, he further erodes the value of the time that is spent in class. For full-time faculty who can wangle assignments to committees with impressive names and accomplishments, this is not a problem, but for those of us who make our living only by our teaching, such erosion is extremely damaging.

Secondly, I must take exception (not to mention offense) to Tim Howard's response. While Mr. Joynton's view that what happens in the classroom is of secondary importance for true faculty members is obnoxious and potentially damaging, at least it is not insulting and demeaning. Mr. Howard, unfortunately, is both. I am still amazed at some of the statements Mr. Howard makes, particularly his proud declaration: "I assume I am paid more than an adjunct NOT simply because I must service the institution. . .but because I am a better teacher." Well, well. It is tempting to stoop to a petty level and discuss Mr., Howard's weaknesses as a writer, but I will try to rise above that and restrict myself to discussing his assumptions concerning adjunct faculty.

The first assumption we can discuss is obvious: Mr. Howard believes that adjunct faculty are automatically inferior teachers, and that, by extrapolation, full-time instructors are automatically superior teachers. The logic of this assumption is hard to discern. The status of one's contract has little to do with one's ability as an instructor. We all know too many excellent adjunct instructors and incompetent full-time instructors for us to seriously consider this assumption.

The second assumption Mr. Howard makes underlies the first: adjunct instructors do not have full-time positions because of the quality of their teaching. I don't know Mr. Howard personally. I don't know his age or how long he has been teaching at North Harris College, so I don't have any accurate idea of his familiarity with today's academic job market. I will assume, charitably, that Mr. Howard has had no contact with any faculty job searches over the past five years. If he had such contact, surely he would know that there are literally hundreds of applicants for every opening. Surely he would know that there are highly qualified, highly talented teachers out there who simply have no opportunities to teach full-time. Surely he would know that there exists in academia today a modern form of the migrant farm worker—people who teach part-time at several different schools at once in order to make a ridiculously low salary, people who have no benefits except for the retirement contribution that is deducted from their already low pay, people who have little to no professional respect from their full-time colleagues who are too busy working on their District Faculty Compensation Committees to recognize the value of good teaching.

As you can tell from my lapse into rhetoric, this issue is an important one to me. You see, every time I apply for a full-time position, I carry the baggage of being "adjunct." Too many search committee members see the world as Mr. Howard does and believe that I, and many excellent teachers like me, am inherently weak as an instructor. What bothers me is that I don't think Mr. Howard knows the extent of the work we do. Mr. Howard, have you ever taught a semester in which you had over 175 students in writing classes? Have you ever taught a semester in which you had to grade close to 1000 essays, each of which is four to six pages long? Have you ever had five or six preparations in one semester? Have you ever had to drive 500 miles a week to get to your various schools? Have you ever had to perform under these conditions without the benefits of clerical support, easy access to computers, or permanent office space? (I do have an office, but because of my schedule, I often have to park in the farthest lot.) Have you, Mr. Howard, ever had to do anything like this and still maintain a level of excellence in your teaching, even though you have virtually no respect from government professors? Have you ever had to work this hard for \$400-\$500 per credit hour?

The problem here lies not with me, Mr. Howard. I am an excellent instructor. The problem doesn't even lie with you, even though your assumptions exacerbate the problem. The problem here lies with an educational system that has fully embraced modern business philosophy. In this age of downsizing and moving to a temporary work force in order to control costs and increase profits, the teaching positions that our advisors and graduate professors told us would be here due to growth and retirement simply don't exist.

This situation is shameful and degrading, and it is getting worse,. Perhaps The Advocate could help by diverting the spotlight from Mr. Howard and shining it where it will do some good.

Nick Lewis
Adjunct English Professor
Aldine Center and KC

As a faculty senate representative for the adjunct faculty at Kingwood College, I talked to a number of my associates about Tim Howard's disparaging comments about adjunct faculty. The general response was anger and resignation. Stephanie Barrera expressed our collective feelings best. I have attached her letter, with her permission, for publication in The Advocate. I would note that many adjunct faculty are full time teachers at area high schools or retired teachers who are supplementing their retirement income.

I would like to point out that Olin Joynton's analysis of the pay controversy for mini-term classes can just as well be used to argue that adjuncts are severely underpaid. As an adjunct chemistry instructor I also have 16 teaching hours per week for a regular summer session with 4 office hours per week. This totals to 110 hours for a summer session plus class preparation and grading time that I do at home, since adjuncts do not have office space. I estimate that the preparation and grading time adds an additional 30-35 hours. Consequently I spend 140-145 hours versus a full time faculty members' 192.5 hours or 74% of a full time faculty members' commitment. However, I receive 43% of the pay of a full time faculty member. This same analysis can be extended into the regular semester.

Michael R. Childers
Adjunct Chemistry Professor
Kingwood College

This is in response to Tim Howard's comments in the August Advocate. Unfortunately, adjunct instructors do not receive the benefit of payment for "staring at walls, harassing the secretaries, washing the windows, playing basketball in the gym, . . ." Perhaps that explains why our salaries are so low-- moneys must be allocated for these purposes.

Likewise, many adjunct instructors understand how Mr. Howard "received more phone calls at home than in (his) office concerning questions about class". Many of us experience this situation every semester (not just for a 3-week mini-semester), as we make our home phone numbers available almost year around. Perhaps Mr. Howard has a point--adjuncts could receive compensation for this.

I totally agree with Mr. Howard's next proposal. Let's ask the students if they wish to be taught by adjunct instructors earning adjunct pay. Those adjunct faculty who do stick around are not here because of financial equity. We come back semester after semester because of our love for and excitement about teaching. Some departments pay the courtesy of listing adjunct instructors' names in the course schedule. I would suspect that one would find these classes filled at a rate comparable to those taught by full-time faculty.

Finally, it is hard to even touch Mr. Howard's comment that he can "assume that (he is) paid more than an adjunct. . .because (he is) a better teacher". Yikes! I will say that the full-time faculty I have come in contact with exhibit none of this attitude towards their adjunct buddies. We are welcomed, aided, encouraged (yes, and even consulted!) in our shared pursuit of teaching excellence.

Stephanie Barrera
Adjunct Biology (Nutrition) Professor
NHC and KC

In sixty-five years of life (most of them as an adult) this writer has resisted a strong temptation to write a letter to any editor. In addition, *Tanak* (Proverbs 26:17) teaches that one should not seize a passing dog (i.e. others' arguments) by the ears. The latter surely should be heeded by anyone with a mere Masters from an obscure institution (Princeton) when the original contenders are Ph.D. thoroughbreds from universities of renown (Rice and Nebraska). Nonetheless, here is trespass against seemingly innate and obviously learned wisdom. For the umpteen-thousandth time, it's *mea culpa* revisited. And what was the seductive instrument leading to this dastardly action? My favorite (your) publication! How?

While faithfully attending the August issue, it was noted a contributor made the following statements:

"I assume I'm paid more than an adjunct NOT simply because I must serve the institution. . . *but because I am a better teacher.*" (Italics mine.)

"Would mini-semester students be better served to be taught by adjunct faculty earning adjunct pay, or being taught by a full-time instructor?"

Excluding the professors' discussion of pecuniary emolument, the statements caused me to become angry—and then I got mad! Subsequently, I watched the Colts humiliate the Oilers and refocused my anger—and madness. Now, with a more stable emotion, I possess only confused curiosity.

The first assertion, after careful application by this writer of syllogistic analysis (and deleting pay factor), reduces itself to: status = teaching skill. Conversely stated by your contributor, one is a better teacher because one is NOT an adjunct. Fine, sound logic.

The second assertion: students prefer full-time instructors. This assertion comes in two delicious flavors with similar results: (1) inarguable (for me) empirical data he has experienced at registration; (2) inarguable statistical data from not-yet-existent student poll of students.

Regarding the first assertion, the premises fails. The faulting is illustrated in the following Socratic supposition: Suppose a god, a dean, a genie, or some other omnipotent, omniscient power whimsically and suddenly transposed (skill, pay, warts, everything) the status of a full-time instructor with that of an adjunct instructor. Would the lesser then become greater and the greater, lesser? Or would that transposition necessarily reverse pedagogic skills? Or more acutely, suppose that same mischievous power suddenly translated a full-time instructor to an adjunct status. Would that make that same one an inferior teacher? I am searching for more instruction to understand.

Regarding the second assertion, one cannot argue the inarguable. I simply offer my inarguable empirical data. Fifty percent of the enrollees in my current non-required course are students (no withdrawees or flunkies) who were previously exposed to my adjunct-level instruction. I am given to understand my other class is student-maximum simply because it occurs at a popular class period. It isn't even because I have a unique, fascinating, and charming personality let alone because of any teaching superiority. I am utterly impoverished

and in need of enlightenment if I am to accept the second assertion as an *a priori* truth--honest!

An additional puzzlement: how does one judge an instructor as good, better, best, or outstanding? Over the past forty years, this adjunct has taught full-time for corporations and adjunct for educational institutions. Classes have ranged from astronauts to roustabouts, and encompassed fifteen disciplines. Folks have presented only examples, not the definitive, substantial thing(s) that mark instructing as a good, better, best, or outstanding. Even the wonderful world of tests and measurements befuddle me. Example: A class turned a Scantron-scored evaluation of this adjunct's abilities. The results indicated a 6.8 out of a possible 7. At first, that was stimulus for pride. Reflection made it scary. Perhaps the students didn't understand the questionnaire! Perhaps the Scantron had an electronic fit! It could mean the students were not learning at all! Does the result mean I am easy? hard? intelligent? simple? tell funny stories? tell serious stories? give easy exams? give hard exams? cover the lesson plan? ignore the lesson plan? explain with clarity? explain with obscure profundity? their retention is high? their retention is low? After concern over the matter for about ten minutes, this adjunct decided the reason was, after all, that he is unique, fascinating, and charming, and went on to worthwhile things. Will a full-time instructor with any degree from anywhere quickly lend assistance to such ignorance? Or is it, after all, "Hail Protagoras, *homo mensura*?"

A final near-related notion. In some absurd fashion, mini-semesters remind this adjunct of his days as a young cowhand in Big Lake, Texas. It takes quite a cowboy and quite a cow to graze a West Texas range at 30 mph. Likewise, it must take quite an instructor and quite a student in mini-semester involvement. Perhaps some day some super-teachers and super-students will achieve nano-semesters that last even less than a week, a day, an hour.

Food for your thought, dear Editor: the adjunct scheme allows for better benefits and high incomes for full-timers. This adjunct is all for that! This is the end; the Cowboys and Oilers contend at 3 p.m. Did someone say "Thank you, God"?

Thomas R. Brower
Adjunct Philosophy and Religion Professor
NHC

A RESPONSE

I am sorry for giving the impression that full time faculty are inherently better and more qualified than adjunct faculty. We have some outstanding adjunct faculty, and some real losers who teach full-time. And the fact of the matter is, this institution does not reward people monetarily based on performance, no matter how it is measured.

At a recent faculty senate meeting, I mentioned that perhaps faculty should be willing to sacrifice part of their 3% pay raise so that more money can be paid to adjuncts. That idea wasn't exactly warmly received, but we did propose a ceiling on full time raises so as to make more money available to adjuncts.

Adjuncts at this college earn nearly \$500 per class less than at other Houston area colleges. The administration's attitude is best summed up as, if you don't like it, don't teach here. What I was trying to say was that I don't think ANYONE should teach a mini semester and receive adjunct pay.

As for registration and students preferring full time to adjuncts, that was a careless comment as well. Speaking only for working registration for social sciences for several years, covering hundreds of sections of History, Government and Geography, I meant to limit my comments to personal observation, which I thought was implied, but apparently not. In my own experience, full time instructors generally have their classes fill more quickly than adjuncts. This is not the law of gravity--I realize there can be exceptions.

Having re-read my previous letter, it does seem to indicate that I have the audacity to think that I am somehow a better instructor than any adjunct here. I apologize. In reality, that is NOT what I think. I think I am a better instructor than most full-timers as well.

Tim Howard
Government Professor
NHC

P.S. Ever notice how people from the Ivy league always manage to slip in the fact that they went to an Ivy league school? You'd think for the money they charge, they'd learn an ad hominem fallacy well enough to avoid using it in some stuffy, overly verbose, pseudo-humorous catechism.

THE MUDSILL CLASS

The foundation of national wealth is really people--the human capital represented by their knowledge, skills, organization, and motivations. The primary assets of a modern corporation leave the workplace each night to go home to dinner.

Hudson Institute
Workforce 2000

JOIN THE AFT!

The Employee Federation welcomes the new employees of NHMCCD. For nearly fifteen years, this local of the American Federation of Teachers has led the fight to make this a better place to work and teach. No other organization or publication at NHMCCD takes our kind of independent, critical approach to District affairs. If you agree with our perspective, show your solidarity by becoming a member. All faculty and staff are eligible. Monthly dues rates are \$20.75 for full-time faculty, \$13.60 for full-time staff and adjunct faculty, and \$10.50 for part-time staff. Discuss membership with **Alan Hall**, District President (443-5544, 353-8634) or any other member (Tony Foster, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Greg Mitchell, Patricia Plunk, Velma Smith, Allen Vogt, Steve Davis) of the Federation Executive Committee. Also, please consider writing for this publication. Send submissions to the Editor, Steve Davis, at Kingwood College.