



# THE ADVOCATE



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## A CURIOUS, CONVOLUTED HIRING PROCESS

The union carefully watches college hiring practices to ensure that they are open and equitable. A number of times we have uncovered and exposed situations where openness and equity were not well served. In each instance, we have been able to intervene before an inappropriate action occurred or, if after the hire, received administrative assurances that the particular problem would not occur again. So far, the administration has lived up to this commitment.

Over the summer, a new wrinkle in hiring emerged. One of the colleges posted a staff position requiring a bachelor's degree with a master's preferred. Somehow (the sequence of events remains unclear), an internal candidate with only an associate's degree got into the pool of finalists. As it turned out, committee members were more impressed by this candidate than the finalists with the required credentials, and the chair of the search committee lobbied the vice president to make an exception. The vice president in turn lobbied the college president. The college's interest here was intensified, according to the administration, by a sense of urgency to fill the position. A good deal of discussion ensued, including consultation with Human Resources to see if the college could hire someone who did not meet the advertised qualifications. Human Resources approved substituting work experience in lieu of a completed bachelor's degree, and the hire was made. All seemed well. However, there is something fundamentally wrong with this process.

As in several previous cases, the union has no quarrel with the individual hired. We do, however, have strong objection to the process. The logical and ethical thing to have done was to reopen the position and advertise it with the lower qualifications. The

result would have been that individuals without a bachelor's degree who did not initially apply because they did not meet the minimum advertised requirements, some of them perhaps also internal candidates, would have had the opportunity to apply. Failing to repost the position had an effect similar to hiring without ever posting the position in the first place, and that is wrong.

Alan Hall  
President

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### GROWTH

The Union is back and bigger than ever! We knew we were growing, but even we were surprised. At the recent convention of our state affiliate, the Texas Federation of Teachers, our local union took second place in the state for annual percentage growth.

### LOSS OF A VALUABLE EMPLOYEE

Unfortunately, the college district needlessly lost a valuable faculty member from Tomball College recently. This teacher was in his second year as a probationary faculty when he required surgery. Recovery demanded that the faculty member go on short-term disability for two months. He then returned to work and successfully completed the remainder of the year. In May, he was informed by his associate dean that his short-term disability constituted a break in service, his 1998-1999 academic year performance would not be evaluated, and, rather than the traditional three year probationary period, he would be required an additional fourth year of probation. These decisions are not consistent with district policy. This faculty member contacted the union, but, regrettably, he was not a member or our organization. Union president Alan Hall did offer some suggestions for what the faculty member might do.

Ultimately, the administration offered to correct these errors. However, the faculty member's confidence on issues of integrity, trustworthiness, and basic honesty was so shaken that he elected to leave the district.

### AN ISSUE OF EQUAL PAY

Several part-time police officers approached the union about discrepancies in hourly rates paid to part-time officers. They reported that they had raised the issue with supervisors to no avail. On June 1, 1999, the union submitted an open records request regarding pay rates for the college's police officers. On June 4, we received the report from Ray Brantley, Vice Chancellor for Human Resources, and, indeed, the report reflects discrepancies. Some part-time officers have been paid \$12.00 per

hour while others have been paid \$12.60 per hour. When the union questioned the difference in rates, we were told it is due to hire date: ". . . officers hired prior to 9/1/95 . . . are paid \$12.60 per hour and everyone hired after that earns \$12.00 per hour. If they work special events, the hourly rate is \$15.00." The higher rate before 9/1/95 is to reward longevity.

However, the administration's response is not consistent with the data that they provided us. A cursory glance reveals that at least seven officers hired after 9/1/95 have been earning \$12.60 per hour while at least four officers hired prior to that date have been earning only \$12.00. When we pressed for an explanation, we were told that no one had an answer for why such a discrepancy exists. One center location lists the regular pay for officers at that site as \$15.00 per hour, apparently unrelated to special events--no explanation available.

In mid-July, Steve Megregian, Vice Chancellor for Business Affairs and Chief Financial Officer, was also asked to look into this matter. To date, no one has been able to offer a clear explanation. The issue, of course, is pay equity.

The question arguably is moot because this year's salary increase places part-time officers at \$13.00 per hour. However, questions remain as to how such an inequity occurred in the first place and why no one did anything about it. Moreover, the college district has no interest in remedying the fact that for four years some officers were underpaid. The union will continue to pursue an answer and will report any progress in the next Advocate.

One important lesson in all of this is that employees should check their pay rates and aggressively pursue inequities. If you are an AFT member, we will be glad to assist you.

Alan Hall

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### SUPPORT FREEDOM

Most of us have heard of the Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi who has been fighting for democracy in Burma. She was placed under house arrest in 1990, soon after she and the National League for Democracy won democratic elections in Burma. Unfortunately, the military dictatorship, in control since 1962, stepped in to thwart the desires of the Burmese for democracy. There are refugee camps in Thailand where Karen and Karenni ethnic minorities (approximately 200,000) have fled in order to escape the atrocities committed by the Burmese military. These camps are being attacked by the military and face ongoing hardships and dangers, but the children in the camps continue to go to school and the teachers are there for them. The AFT is involved in supporting these teachers and students. The vice president of the AFT, Tom Hobart, took computers and money to the education workers in these camps in 1998. The AFT continues to support the efforts of these refugee communities who are striving for freedom and who are teaching the children in the camps to value human rights.

On another front, the AFT is one of the official sponsors of the Global Petition Campaign, a campaign which supports a petition to free the Chinese citizens who are still imprisoned as a result of the 1989 crackdown on freedom of expression in China. The petition calls for China to extend to all Chinese citizens the basic human rights of freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of religion. (Remember Tiananmen Square!)

When I pay my dues to the AFT, I know that I am supporting freedom. I know that the AFT is involved in the constant fight for freedom of expression worldwide. When you read about the struggles and the sacrifices of people for freedom, you need not feel powerless to help. You can become a part of those struggles and sacrifices. You can join the AFT!

Nell Newsom, Editor

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### PRESIDENT SANDRA FELDMAN'S COMMENTS ON LITTLETON

President Feldman reminds us that "too many children grow up surrounded by images of violence and hate on video games, in music lyrics, on television and on the Internet" and goes on to say that "children don't create those images, adults do" (Texas Federation of Teachers, May 1999). As teachers, we have a closer contact with students than many adults do. Perhaps we can have an impact on the violent culture of our times. We can talk with the students about the violence, and we can encourage them to talk with us. In the coming year, let us remember that we do have freedom of expression in America, and we can use that freedom every day to keep the flow of communication open and in this way perhaps redirect ideas and attitudes that have been influenced negatively.

Again, I encourage you to participate in the efforts of the union to protect our freedoms and to change our students' lives for the better. Look for the directions on how to join the American Federation of Teachers in this publication.

Nell Newsom, Editor

**ON THE LEGISLATIVE FRONT**

The union had a very good round this last legislative session. Our state affiliate, the Texas Federation of Teachers, played a central role on several education bills. The TFT supported the following bills.

SB 4 as amended by Paul Sadler, (D), Henderson, which included

- a \$3,000 pay raise for public school teachers, counselors, librarians, and nurses
- a program to stop "social promotion" that focuses on remedial help for children who fail the TAAS exam
- new kindergarten, pre-k, and Head Start programs to focus on early childhood education and new 9<sup>th</sup> grade programs to focus on dropout prevention

SB1128 by Ken Armbrister, (D), Victoria with a House Companion by Sherri Greenburg, (D), Austin, which increased the multiplier in the Teachers Retirement System from 2.0 to 2.2. The end result is a 10% increase in retirement benefits for employees under TRS.

HB1952 by Irma Rangel, (D), Kingsville, Chair of the Higher Ed Committee, which reaffirmed the right of higher education faculty members to grieve non-renewal or terminations. Some colleges had claimed there is no need for procedures for hearing grievances, apparently believing that such matters could be worked out informally. Other colleges argued that a terminated employee could not grieve a termination because that person was no longer an employee and the grievance procedure was only available to employees. This bill eliminates these two ridiculous arguments.

The TFT also helped to defeat SB 975 by Armbrister which would have given junior colleges immunity from suit for breach of contract or violation of employee rights

**COLLEGE BOARD PASSES PAY RAISE**

This summer, the district's board of trustees passed the following salary increases.

Salary	Increase	Minimum
\$15,000 - \$30,000	7%	
\$30,001 - \$60,000	6%	\$ 2,100

\$60,001 - 5% \$ 3,600

This is a significant boost to salaries, especially considering that some colleges awarded no salary increases for this academic year. The union appreciates the boards' recognition of our employees' value and especially applauds the efforts of Dr. Pickelman for his support for this salary increase

**RESPONSE TO INNOVATIVE ABSTRACT**

*From time to time, college employees submit articles to the union for possible publication in our newsletter. The following essay was submitted by Tom Lovell, Professor of History at Tomball College.*

*As we faculty struggle with the "new student," Tom raises questions regarding how far faculty should go in meeting these students' needs. The union invites you to consider his position and to respond in the next issue of the Advocate.*

I'm taking the opportunity to respond to the Innovative Abstract from the Community College Leadership Program which recently made the rounds within our division. Written by a professor of biology at a community college in Appalachia, the essay tells a warm and uplifting story of how the author has learned to cope with and assist what he chooses to call the "nontraditional" students in his classroom. As moving and even touching as this piece is, I found it--after a second and third reading--more than a little cloying and in the final analysis deeply troubling.

Worrisome is the author's insistence on applying the amorphous label "nontraditional" to those students he seeks to help. Long a popular buzzword in our colleges of education,

the term has become a kind of touchstone validating the egalitarian *bona fides* of these institutions. As best I can tell, it refers to students who for one reason or another--a lack of financial resources, an unfortunate handicap, a broken family, marital discord, school-age children to care for, advanced age, etc.--have found it difficult to attend or return to college. And once such students are identified, it behooves our community college faculties and staffs to make a determined effort to address their needs.

For one thing, inquiring into private lives in order to earmark such students strikes me as problematic behavior when engaged in by our institutions of higher learning. And the fact that students are encouraged and even solicited to reveal their problems, as the author recounts in his abstract, is disturbing. Over the last number of years one of the major and more valid criticisms of American society is the passion, unrelenting in many venues, for seeking out and in some cases even inventing *victims*.

It appears to me the Innovative Abstract at issue inescapably leads to just such an end. In a few hundred words, the author, John Shiber, actually tells a familiar tale: professor miscast as a university type connects with a rural community college and is appalled by the lack of academic preparation exhibited by a goodly number of his students. Told by his colleagues he must water down his offerings in order to facilitate their graduation, he initially balks at the suggestion only to wisely entertain second thoughts while eventually undergoing a major "metamorphosis."

His conversion apparently involved abandoning his customarily rigorous teaching approach in favor of one in which he learns to "admire," "feel," and "understand" the "determination," "problems," and "capabilities" of his students. Now that his head is on straight his newly acquired taste for educational altruism leads him to launch a project designed to help these "nontraditionals" better cope. By the way, one of the more important spin-offs from such an effort, or so he hopes, will be to build student enrollment. In short, Professor Shiber knows which buttons to push to insure publication in Innovation Abstracts.

But to return to my original reservation: just how does one qualify as an authentic "nontraditional" student? Are we to assume that "party animals" who hang out in fraternities or sororities at UT and Texas A & M are "traditional"? If so, how about sons and daughters of working class stiffs who themselves find it necessary to work their way through either a university or a community college? On whose chest should the increasingly coveted "nontraditional" medallion be pinned?

In past years when students suffered personal problems that wreaked havoc upon their schooling, they more often than not managed a stiff upper lip, took an F or D, or dropped from school, and, if serious about their education, eventually returned for another go at it. Nowadays life's everyday exigencies are sufficient grounds for all kinds of exceptions to be presented in their behalf. After all, they know a victim when they see one in the mirror.

Let me recount the story of someone who in more than one respect fits the "nontraditional" category established earlier. The student's mother dropped out of school in the seventh grade while his father for all intents and purposes was only marginally literate. This student was born in the Depression in a family that can only be described as living in genteel poverty. He worked as a paperboy until he was 13 whereupon he spent his summers at a moving company wrapping dishes to prevent breakage, eventually rising to the position of helper on a moving van. During these years he was required by his mother to save as much as 80 percent of his income to pay for college as the family could not afford to shoulder such a financial burden. The money was deposited regularly in a postal savings account.

In addition, the student stuttered. The speech problem plagued him through his early grades and into college and graduate school. It averted him from entering the military and postponed at

length his ability to acquire remunerative employment. At one point, he was forced to drop out of college when hospitalized with a life-threatening reaction to tranquilizers taken to help his speech. On more than one occasion, the possibility of ending his life seemed an option worth considering.

He stuttering led him to change college majors frequently and this ultimately set back his graduation date some two years. Furthermore, the shortage of financial support dictated that he forgo owning a car thus requiring him to cage rides with friends or hitch hike his way to and from college. No car, of course, meant a pinched social life. At college he worked as a waiter in a fraternity house and even took a job as a model in an art class. One semester he lived in an elderly lady's home in return for taking care of her yard.

The "nontraditional" student in question is, of course, myself. And I make this disclosure not to evoke sympathy but to make a point. While such a tale is a bit grim it pales by comparison with a host of other stories similar in spirit if not in kind that could be told by other parties. Some of your own life odysseys no doubt can top it on the pathos meter!

But my point is that with all the aforementioned trials I never considered myself part of any victimized category. And I never sought or expected special consideration. As John Kennedy once famously said, not in regard to himself but in reference to his mentally retarded sister "Life is unfair!" And indeed it is. But make no mistake; I did not walk through my Gethsemane alone. Family and teachers, as well as a few dedicated professionals, stood steadfastly at my side. At the University of Texas Speech Clinic, Jesse James Villarreal forced me to face up to my condition and, in so doing, led me to the restoration of my soul. I owe him everything!

My beef then is obviously not with the helping professions but with a system and a philosophy that places therapy at the center of its reason for existence. Insisting that an all-points bulletin be sent out to gather up life's walking wounded might snare some of the legitimately needy, but it also bags a melange of gold bricks and excuse mongers, while having the uninvited consequence of diverting attention from our essential academic mission.

Rather than offering a therapeutic embrace, what is needed is the reinstatement in the lives of our students of the all-but-forgotten commitment to postponing gratification until a date uncertain. In addition, our colleges need to revisit the notion that the best, or perhaps even the only, time to offer an intervening helping hand is when the student determines it is time to reach out and grasp it.

Twenty-five years ago John Roueche, the director then and now of UT's Leadership Program and already a major influence on community college education, came to North Harris County College, as we then were known, to speak at faculty in-service. Handsome, charming, articulate, and self-promoting, Roueche caught our attention by declaring that the solution to the problem of student retention was for us to pay house calls on our wayward students in order to induce them to return to class. The trouble with Roueche and the trouble with the author of this Innovative Abstract is that their image of the community college teacher is more that of nanny than of knowledge giver. And, I submit, a true knowledge giver, dedicated to his calling and imbued with a modicum of human decency, will in the long run give more to our students, whether they be healthy or hurting, than anything provided by the alternative Roueche and his followers so ardently promote.

Tom Lovell  
Tomball College

#### CALL FOR ARTICLES

We invite you to send us your opinions, your news, your questions and so forth. The [Advocate](#) is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your articles to Nell Newsom, Editor, Parkway Center, (e-mail at [Ira.N.Newsom@NHMCCD.edu](mailto:Ira.N.Newsom@NHMCCD.edu)), or submit to any of the following officers: Alan Hall, President, ACAD 217, NHC, Rich Almstedt, KC; Tim Howard, NHC, Donald James, MC; Allen Vogt, NHC.

**Join the AFT: You can join the union by contacting any of the above officers.**

**CURRENT DUES:**

Full-time faculty. . . \$23.80 per month      Full-time staff. . . \$16.65 per month  
Adjunct Faculty and Part-time staff. . . \$13.55 per month

The Advocate is a publication of the Employee Federation of North Harris Montgomery Community College District.  
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