



# THE ADVOCATE

September/October 2001

Employee Federation of NHMCCD

Volume 5 Issue 1



## DO THE RIGHT THING

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In January 2001, Dawn Baxley, Director of the NHC Learning Center, applied for the position of Associate Dean of Extended Learning at Montgomery College in response to a job posting released by Human Resources of NHMCCD. The job was posted with a starting salary range of \$61,000 to \$68,625 annually.

On March 29, 2001, Dawn received a call from Olin Joynton, Vice President of Educational Programs at Montgomery College and designated hiring authority for the Associate Dean of Extended Learning position, offering her the job. VP Joynton offered her an annual starting salary of \$62,200, and she accepted. They determined that her start date would be Monday, April 23. Over the next week, VP Joynton prepared and signed the Personnel Action Request (PAR), which again listed her salary at \$62,200 with a district classification level of C19. He sent the PAR to Dawn for her signature; she signed it, sent it back to him, and then he forwarded it to Human Resources.

On the afternoon of Friday, April 20, Dawn spoke with VP Joynton, and he informed her that when Human Resources received the PAR, they called him to say that the proper paperwork had not been filled out for the change in the position title, increase in pay, and upgrade in classification level. (The position had previously been called Director of Extended Learning Center, with a classification level of C16 and a starting salary range of 46,974 to \$52,846.) VP Joynton told Dawn that MC had since com-

pleted the proper paper work and he felt that everything would be finalized the first part of the following week. He said that he wanted to let her know just in case the paperwork wasn't entered in the system in time for her first paycheck to reflect the \$62,200 pay.

During the next couple of weeks, it became apparent that things would not be resolved easily. VP Joynton told Dawn that Human Resources said that since the paperwork had not been done properly in the first place, the position would remain at a C16 and she would be paid at the range for that level. VP Joynton received an email from Frances Kaough with Human Resources on Tuesday, May 29, stating that the position was officially a C16.

What went wrong here? After making appropriate consultations, VP Joynton filled out what he believed to be the necessary paperwork and tried to follow all the proper procedures for establishing the position. Even in retrospect, he sees no clear instructions on the process. For example, the online Human Resource Manual does state that "no one is authorized to tender an offer on behalf of the district without a review by the Department of Human Resources" (3.5.4-Administrative Guidelines). He assumed that submitting the "Department of Human Resources Requisition for Recruitment and Advertising" form with the salary and grade level listed to the Department of Human Resources would lead to the appropriate review before the position was posted and advertised. It obvi-

### AFT Eligibility

Full and part-time faculty, professional staff, and support staff are eligible to join the union. All employees up through the associate dean/director level are eligible.

## Do the right thing (cont'd)

ously didn't. VP Joynton has heard mention of a Supervisor's Handbook, but has never been provided with one. According to VP Joynton, clarifications of HR compensation procedures have come through loose memos with no guarantee of delivery and no follow-up that he has even received them. How can the written procedures on something so important be left to loose memos and vague instructions on the HR procedures?

The paperwork/process in question in this situation involved the preparation of the actual job description. VP Joynton says that while job descriptions correlated with pay grades do exist on the district web site, there is nothing available in writing explaining the essential characteristics that cause a position to be a C19 (or any other grade). Only HR seems to have this info, and they don't seem very willing to share it. Without such info, VP Joynton says that he and Dr. Pat Pate, MC Vice President for Support and Services, took a "relativistic" approach to the creation of the Associate Dean of Extended Learning position by determining a comparable role in the district (NHC's position of Associate Dean of the Center for Teaching & Learning) and putting the MC position on par with the NHC position, both in terms of job duties and classification (salary) level. VP Joynton worked directly with the AD in the above mentioned position at NHC to make sure that the job duties were, indeed, comparable. When VP Joynton was told by HR that the MC position could not be a C19 (as the NHC position is), he inquired as to why, and he was first told that the critical factor was that the AD position had to supervise faculty in order to be a C19. VP Joynton immediately demonstrated

to HR exactly how the MC position did, indeed, supervise faculty in the Center for Teaching Excellence and through the HUMD courses offered through the Extended Learning Center, but to no avail. Interestingly, upon further research, VP Joynton discovered that there are other C19 Associate Deans at NHC who do not supervise faculty, so this doesn't appear to be the criterion after all.

The approach that VP Joynton took certainly seems the most reasonable and equitable, especially if the district abides by its own established principle of maintaining "Internal Equity" in which "persons performing similar functions at different locations should receive equivalent pay," as stated by Sandra McMullan, Vice Chancellor for Human Resources and General Counsel, in an email addressed to all NHMCCD employees on September 7, 2000. To this day, no one at MC has been given an understandable explanation of why this position cannot be a C19 with the pay rate that was advertised and offered.

At Montgomery College President Bill Law's request, Montgomery was allowed to make one more effort at having the situation straightened out by filling out a Position Description Questionnaire and submitting it for review by an outside consultant who would determine the classification level. After the consultant reviewed the document, he recommended that the position be classified at the C17 level, which has a starting salary of \$51,672 to 58,121. A memo sent to Dr. Bill Law by Vice Chancellor McMullan on June 13, 2001, stated that the position would officially be classified at the C17 level with an annual salary of 52,705, exactly \$9,495 less than the

salary offered when Dawn accepted the position and \$8,295 less than the bottom of the salary posted by HR.

The AFT is troubled by these circumstances. How is it that NHMCCD does not have to honor the salary that was posted and was offered? Human Resources posted the job for the Associate Dean of Extended Learning, and the posted salary was at least \$61,000. The NHMCCD District logo and official information were all printed on the posting. What responsibility does HR take when it posts a job? HR's position on the posting is that they are not responsible for incorrect postings, pointing out that the individual who posts responds to information provided by the colleges and does not verify that everything is in order. Apparently, HR does not verify this information until they receive a PAR near the end of the hiring process. It seems clear now that verification should take place at posting. VP Joynton interpreted HR's posting of the job to mean that everything was fine, just as anyone else would have. How can HR say it has no responsibility here? We all depend upon each other for checkpoints as colleagues. VP Joynton is not the expert on HR's hiring processes and procedures. If he can't count on HR to review what he has submitted and notify him if there's a problem up front, then there's a serious problem with HR's system. He should have been able to depend upon them to help him, not point the finger and place blame after the damage was already done.

According to Vice Chancellor McMullan, the offer of \$62,200 was not legitimate because Board policy states that only a representative for HR can make an official offer.

## Do the right thing (cont'd)

However, VP Joynton was the designated hiring authority, so how would he or Dawn have known that the offer was not legitimate? Again, an official NHMCCD job posting listed the position in that salary range. VP Joynton made what he naturally believed to be a legitimate offer, and Dawn accepted the offer and made the move to Montgomery in good faith. It was not until several weeks after she had moved to Montgomery that both she and VP Joynton were informed that she would not receive the \$62,200. Therefore, Dawn was never given a revised offer and allowed the decision to accept or decline the position based on the lower salary.

What if Dawn had been hired from outside of the college dis-

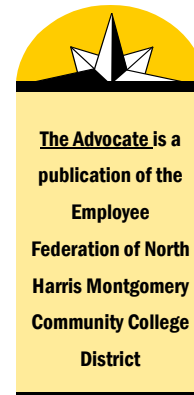
trict? If someone from outside of the district were hired, it would have been very possible that the person may have ended up taking a pay cut since there is nearly a \$10,000 difference between the C17 and the C19 levels. Perhaps Dawn is being taken advantage of because she is from within the district.

Vice Chancellor McMullan says that no Board policy has been violated. However, one wonders how the district can be allowed to post a salary, offer a salary, and then not honor the posting or the offer after the person has already accepted and started the job. The union has had several contacts with McMullan over this issue. I also met with Dr. Law to discuss it. He explained that he

made an additional effort by submitting more paperwork to justify the initial C19 and salary offer, but it was also rejected by HR. Dr. Law also met with McMullan and Dr. Pickelman. All of these efforts were to no avail. At every turn, those of us advocating Dawn's position have run into a wall.

I have visited several times with Dr. Pickelman regarding mistakes that the district has made which negatively affected employees. His response has been consistent: "When the college makes a mistake, we do the right thing for the employee." Dawn's case is one where, so far, the college has failed to do the right thing.

Alan Hall



## Reclassification Woes

The AFT recognizes that the challenges of classification of employees is huge and complex. The problem is worsened by the significant growth of the number of district employees and the different jobs performed. It is worsened still further by the relatively small staff in Human Resources. Our sense is that the tasks that HR faces are understandably overwhelming. If the HR staff all worked on the classification issue alone, it would be a tough job, but, of course, they have many responsibilities. Perhaps that is why they have engaged a consultant to help with reclassification issues. The union is often skeptical of the value of using outside consultants, but in this case it may be the right call. Reclassification has turned into a controversial subject. Many employees feel that they have not been treated equitably. Our sense is that HR has had many complaints. Tension is high. We need to remember

that employees are human. Mistakes are made. The consultant may help us all step back, take a breath, and move forward in a fair and consistent manner. However, while we are moving forward, HR needs to remember Vice Chancellor McMullan's promise to correct immediately any inequity created by HR.

The union has had success in assisting staff members on reclassification issues in the past. However, there are two current situations where we have run into a wall. We first brought these two situations to light in the Nov/Dec 2000 issue of The Advocate, but unfortunately, even after repeated efforts by the union and the affected employees, nothing has yet been done to remedy the situations. Both situations involve staff members in the NHC Learning Center. In 2001, the district initiated and then

approved a group reclassification for division assistants. However, in one particular case, a person that had been classified as a division assistant (a B8) for several years was reclassified as a department assistant (a B9), while other division assistants were reclassified as division coordinators (a B10). After inquiring as to why she was left one level below others with whom she had always been equal, she was told that she was not instructional. However, her division, the Center for Teaching and Learning, consists of several areas, including the Learning Center, the Faculty Staff Center, and the Student Success Program, and she reports directly to an Associate Dean, just as all other division coordinators. Next, we were told her level was based on her job description. With the exception of a few additional technical duties, her job description essentially matches the job description of the division coordinators. She asked that

## Reclassification Woes (cont'd)

her situation be reconsidered, but she was told that nothing would be done unless she filled out a PAQ and followed the same procedure as anyone seeking a reclassification. She submitted all of her paperwork, even though we were not arguing that her job responsibilities had increased, although they had. Our argument was that she was classified incorrectly to begin with. Next, we were told that she would not be eligible for reclassification because of a rule that was new to us. If fifty or more people report to her area, she is eligible for reclassification, but if fewer than fifty report to her area, she is not eligible. Our initial reaction was that this situation was beginning to feel a lot like the novel Catch 22 where the government/military bureaucracy keeps inventing new rules to thwart the efforts of the main character to be discharged. The union has not heard of the "fifty" rule and cannot find anyone who can point to where the rule is written. We have discovered, however, that she has had fifty-two people reporting to her area, and we will continue to pursue the issue. In spite of all these inequities, our member has most recently been told that nothing has been done because the district has decided to consider a district-wide group reclassification of Learning Centers sometime this academic year. This information flies in the face of HR's assurances that oversights or errors in reclassification will

be remedied immediately rather than having employees wait for the next general reclassification.

Caught in the same limbo are two more staff members in the NHC Learning Center. In September 2000, the Math Lab Coordinator was reclassified to a C13, which created an inequity amongst other Learning Center staff members. The technology manager, who is responsible for the student assistant staffing and technical support for the entire lab, and who has always been one level above the coordinators, is now two levels below the math lab coordinator. Also, the writing center coordinator, an academic coordinator in a parallel position, is now three levels below the math lab coordinator. The only difference between the positions is that one is called math and the other writing. Vice Chancellor McMullan assures us that the union's concerns "about the differing classification for several NHC lab coordinator positions will be addressed [this] year when [they] review all of the positions district-wide. David Sam did bring this issue to EC and the decision was not to take the positions up in isolation, and to address all similar positions district-wide." She adds that the EC's decision allows HR to "review the entire family of jobs so that we do not make another change in isolation that needs to be changed again." Heaping insult upon injury,

when Dawn Baxley left the position of Learning Center Director at NHC to go to Montgomery, NHC restructured the director position as an academic coordinator equal in scope of duties to the writing and math lab coordinators. However, even though the position changed from a director to a coordinator, HR allowed classification to remain at a C13. North Harris just hired a new employee to fill this position, while the writing coordinator, also an academic coordinator but still a B10 with two years' experience at the college, is told she must wait even to be considered for a reclassification.

While the AFT applauds a systematic review, we are still deeply troubled that these employees have been told to wait another year to address their reclassification concerns. The Learning Center coordinators will have to wait a total of two years before even an opportunity for reclassification may occur. In the case of the writing lab coordinator, she is losing \$7,000 to 8,000 per year. She and the math lab coordinator have the same titles and level of job responsibilities, and HR has known it for a year. The right thing to do is address these inequities now.

Dawn Baxley  
Alan Hall

## Salary Increases

At the August Trustees' meeting, the Board approved a 4% salary increase for all full-time employees, with a \$1,000 minimum resulting in more than 4% for the lowest paid employees. In the March/April 2001 Advocate, the union presented a compelling argument that a 6% increase was warranted. Our concern was that a 4% raise would only keep us even based on the Consumer Price Index at the time. Increasing energy and health

care costs threaten to cause employees to lose buying power this year, a violation of one of Dr. Pickleman's values regarding compensation. We are pleased to report that at least one of those threats was also addressed by the Board in the decision to pay this year's increase in dependent health premiums. That decision coupled with the raise will, in effect, provide more than a 4% increase for many employees this year. With the \$1,000 minimum,

some employees will enjoy approximately a 6% increase, perhaps even better. The Chancellor's leadership and the Board's determination to offset a large increase in premiums are to be applauded. Their actions go a long way in holding off a major erosion in compensation. It remains to be seen what effect increased energy costs will have.

There are, however, employees who

## Salary Increases (cont'd)

only broke even or, perhaps, even lost ground in the face of increasing energy prices, and those are the employees who do not pay dependent health care premiums. In fact, some of them have approached the union about an inequity on this issue. To them, the district's contribution to dependent premiums compensates those with dependents in a way those without dependents are not. In other words, in essence the district is providing employees who pay dependent health care premiums additional compensation that employees who do not pay those premiums are not provided. The union understands the argument. Make no mistake. We are grateful for the Board's decision. It helps many employees. However, we will be working with the administration over this next year to find a more equitable method to deal with increasing dependent premiums so that all employees receive equitable levels of compensation.

Alan Hall

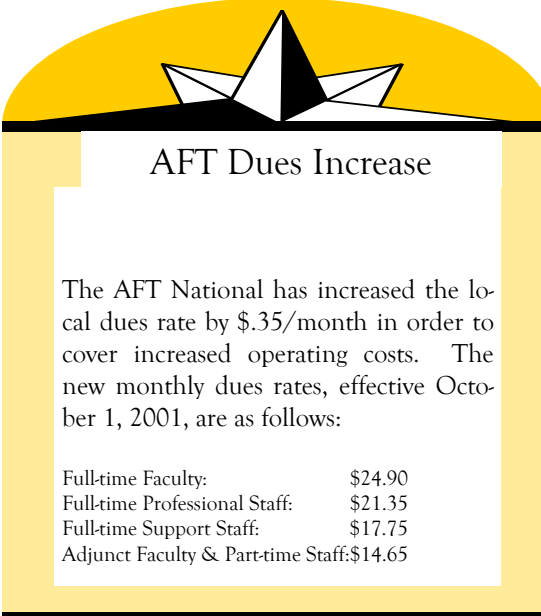
## A Bad Decision

For a number of years, the district has operated a four-day schedule in the summers. In this arrangement, staff work an extra hour each day Monday through Thursday to earn Friday off. In an October 17, 2000 email, Dr. David Sam announced that for the Summer of 2001, the NHC offices of Student Services and the Vice President for Educational Programs would be open on Fridays. However, he noted, "[...] employees will still observe a four-day work week, beginning June 8 and ending Aug. 3, 2001 with supervisors making appropriate arrangements." He sent out a reminder of this schedule on May 17, 2001. However, with only seven working days' notice, he sent out the following announcement on Tuesday, July 23: "To be consistent with our sister colleges and the district office, NHC will be open for business on Friday, August 3. This Friday [July 27] will be our last Friday off for the summer." His last

email changed a schedule that had been planned for nine months. Immediately, the union began receiving complaints about this last-minute change, and I quickly asked for a meeting with Dr. Sam.

In our discussion, I pointed out that many employees had made plans for August 3, family trips, doctors' appointments, and the like. He said that he understood. In fact, he had plans himself Friday, August 3, and would be taking a vacation day. He saw no problem because employees could use a vacation day to cover their family plans or a sick day for a doctor's or other medical appointment. I pointed out that, with such extraordinarily late notice, many employees may have already used their vacation time or may be out of sick leave. His last minute decision might cause them to cancel their plans or perhaps be docked a day's pay if they had no leave time available.

Dr. Sam was troubled by this problem but said he made the decision because he discovered that a mistake had been made in the schedule resulting in NHC's receiving one more Friday than other district employees. He had two concerns. First, he felt that other employees would be bothered that NHC folks would be given "an extra free Friday." I agreed that that perception might be out there, but the Friday is not free. NHC employees would be working over each day to earn the Friday, while other employees would only work their regular shift. He also emphasized the desire to be consistent with the rest of the district. The union has been arguing for a long time that there should be consistency in a number of areas in the district where there are huge discrepancies. However, I noted that I did not feel that this point should be the one on which we begin to move toward consistency. The value of consistency modestly



**AFT Dues Increase**

The AFT National has increased the local dues rate by \$.35/month in order to cover increased operating costs. The new monthly dues rates, effective October 1, 2001, are as follows:

Full-time Faculty:	\$24.90
Full-time Professional Staff:	\$21.35
Full-time Support Staff:	\$17.75
Adjunct Faculty & Part-time Staff:	\$14.65

## A Bad Decision ( cont'd)

present in this issue was far outweighed by the hardship of the late notice. I asked him to reconsider his decision, and he promised that he would. I waited a week. When no new announcement appeared, I contacted Dr. Sam one more time. He informed me that he had decided not to reinstate the Friday. We both acknowledged that this was the first issue upon which we had been unable to reach an agreement, and

I told him that this is the sort of event that makes its way into the newsletter. When the administration takes a position that is insensitive to employees' needs and interests, the union will always take a stand against it, explain our reasoning, and point out a bad decision when we see it.

Alan Hall

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VALID THROUGH 7/02

## Who is the AFT?

Continuing in our efforts to introduce you to those who serve the AFT at NHMCCD, this month we feature a short bio of another local AFT executive staff member, Velma Trammell.

Velma has been a crucial member of the Business Division for the last 19 years in the capacity of both Division Assistant and Staff Assistant II. She has also been an adjunct instructor in the Business Division for the past 14 years. During her years at NHC, Velma has witnessed the changes that have occurred with four Presidents and two Interim Presidents. Although there have been some changes in her division, many of the faces remain the same, making the office suite in WNSP 174 a warm and efficient center for both students and faculty and further emphasizing Velma's belief that NHC is her home away from home.

Velma is highly motivated to provide service to all students, faculty, and staff, and she promotes that attitude for others. Her smiling welcome is the first contact that many students encounter when they arrive on campus for the first time. She attends training, seminars, and workshops regularly to keep her skills updated. She has served on numerous committees and organizations through the years, such as Leadership 2000, the Bookstore Committee, the District Benefits Committee, and several hiring committees that have helped guide NHC through many of its changes.

Velma's union work has spanned seven years, and during the last five years, she has served as the District Support Staff Chapter President for the AFT. She believes that the union has played an active role in the many changes she has seen at NHC in a smooth and efficient manner.

Initiative and creativity characterize Velma's professional attitude. She is a take-charge, can-do person who believes that NHC is the place for students, faculty, and staff to build their tomorrows, today.

Cris Neuman



Welcome  
New  
Members

## Thirty-Five Hours

A number of inquiries have come in regarding faculty members being expected by their associate deans to demonstrate thirty-five hours on campus. These associate deans seem to have forgotten Dr. Pickelman's announcement at in-service a few years ago that this requirement was no more. He explained that his expectation is that the faculty are professionals and will get the job done. He expects faculty to be reasonably available to students via voicemail, e-mail, or office hours. He understands that faculty may well grade papers or perform some other job functions at home rather than at the office.

The AFT has received enough inquiries that I thought I'd better check with the chancellor to see if he had changed his position. He assures me that his position has not changed.

Alan Hall



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## Professional Development Opportunities

The AFT believes that faculty and staff should take an active role in their own professional development. Working with the union's Chair of Professional Development, Michael Harman, the AFT is offering the first in a series of programs, this one titled Classroom Assessment Techniques. Our plan is to begin at NHC and expand to other colleges in the future. If you have missed the first couple of meetings, feel free to begin attending now.

### CAT's

#### Classroom Assessment Techniques

Presented by the AFT, Faculty Senate, and Faculty Staff Center

#### What is classroom assessment?

Classroom assessment is both a teaching approach and a set of techniques. The approach is that the more you know about what and how students are learning, the better you can plan learning activities to structure your teaching. The techniques are mostly simple, non-graded, anonymous, in-class activities that give both you and your students useful feedback on the teaching-learning process.

#### How is classroom assessment different?

Classroom assessment differs from tests and other forms of student assessment in that it is aimed at course improvement, rather than at assigning grades. The primary goal is to better understand your students' learning and so to improve your teaching (from [www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/assess.htm](http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/assess.htm)).

#### What can I expect if I attend?

This faculty-led, faculty-driven program invites professors currently employing classroom assessment techniques in their courses to share their experiences and results with peers. Participants will be introduced to the technique, learn how it is successfully used in class by an NHC teacher, and explore how they might apply it to their own instruction. In addition to learning something new, the most significant outcome noted by past participants is the renewed camaraderie and revitalization that results from sharing instructional strategies with their peers.

Workshops begin Friday, September 14, at 9am in LB103. The sessions are:

- Overview & Identification of Learning Outcomes
- Attitude Survey & Conceptual Diagnostic Tests
- Weekly Reports
- Portfolios
- Concept Tests

For more information or to register for the sessions, please contact:

Michael Harman, Marcy Delesandri, Marian Ervin, or Myrna Maurer. All sessions will be repeated in the Spring.

**Coming Professional Development Attractions from the AFT**

- Psychology of Learning—Helping Students to Learn Better
- Professional Portfolios—Getting the Most out of Your Evaluation
- Testing and Measuring—The Do’s and Don’ts of Testing and Grading

**Sick Leave Pool**

Recent circumstances involving some of our employees have caused faculty leadership to come together to discuss the prospect of getting a sick leave pool established in the district. In such a program, employees may donate sick days to a pool from which employees who encounter serious illness might draw when they run out of sick leave. The concept is supported by the AFT and the Faculty Senates. On September 25, 2001, AFT President Alan Hall and Montgomery Senate Presi-

dent David Wickham, also an AFT member, met with Vice Chancellor McMullan to propose such a program. They report a productive meeting in which they found McMullan receptive and willing to investigate the possibility. The AFT will let you know more as information becomes available.

Staff

**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 Dawn Baxley, Editor, MC, or e-mail: dawnb@nhmccd.edu, or submit to any of the following officers:

Alan Hall, President	North Harris College	ACAD 217-G
Velma Trammel	North Harris College	WNSP 174
Rich Almstedt	Kingwood College	FTC 100-G
Tim Howard	North Harris College	ACAD 270-G
Julie Alber	Montgomery College	SSC 205-A
Cris Neuman	North Harris College	WNSP 120
Mary Ella Phelps	Tomball College	N 109-K
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