



THE ADVOCATE

All About Image

In the April 2003 issue of The Advocate, I wrote an article arguing that, in spite of budget constraints faced by our district, employees must be protected from increasing energy, insurance, and educational costs, as well as other increases in the general cost of living. I predicted that a 4% increase in the cost of living is not unrealistic to expect. As we get more information on changes in health insurance, the scenario may well be worse than I first thought.

Employees have received notice that our health benefits will change May 1. A cursory glance at the changes reflects bad news for us. Visits to primary care physicians are increasing from \$15 to \$20 and specialist visits from \$20 to \$30. Hospital co-pays are going from zero to \$100 per day up to a maximum of \$500 per person, per stay (not per year). After this new co-pay, the plan will pay 80% and the employee 20% instead of the current 90/10%. Outpatient co-pays, I assume for surgery or tests, are increasing from zero to \$100 per visit. Prescriptions are increasing \$5 per thirty-day supply. Mail order prescriptions will become mandatory for maintenance drugs and will increase from two co-pays for a three months' supply to three co-pays for three months. In the current plan, if an employee reaches \$500 in out-of-pocket expenses, the plan takes over at 100%. May 1, the \$500 maximum out-of-pocket will be eliminated. If an employee has a catastrophic illness like cancer and experiences \$100,000 in medical bills, the employee's co-pay will increase from the current \$15,000 to \$30,000. Get the picture? These increases, which range from 50% to 100%, are enormous and pose a serious threat to employees.

These increased health insurance costs alone, expenses that don't even include a potential increase in premiums, will have a significant effect on employees. Add increased energy costs, increased tuition and fees to send our children to college, and other general increases, and the cost of living may increase beyond 4% for us.

The Board of Trustees has within its power the ability to protect employees from what will in reality be a pay cut. As I noted in last month's article, a one-cent per hundred dollar valuation in the tax rate generates approximately \$6.4 million. According to Cindy Gilliam, Vice Chancellor of Business Affairs and CFO, a 4% salary increase would cost about \$3 million. I've heard that the board is considering a .5 cent increase in the tax rate to meet budget concerns but with no salary increase. A 1.5 cent increase would generate enough funds to protect employees from a loss in salary. How can the District tell employees that, if it raises taxes, it will not increase salaries because the Board is concerned with public image?

That concern pales when one considers the recent expenditures on the purchasing, renovating, and furnishing of the new District Services and Training Center. According to Cindy Gilliam, "The actual purchase price of the 100 acres and 2 buildings was \$11,362,500 and was paid from general obligation bonds (bonds that are paid back using a debt service tax rate). The renovation of building "#1" is budgeted for \$4.15M. Furnishings for the renovated building were budgeted at \$1.15M. We brought our computers with us, so there was nothing budgeted for employee computers due to the move. The renovations and the furnishings were paid from a combination of general obligation bonds and revenue bonds (bonds that are paid back using general operating revenues)."

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AFT Monthly Dues

Full-time Faculty	\$26.15
Full-time Professional Staff	\$22.60
Full-time Support Staff	\$19.00
Adjunct Faculty & Staff	\$10.00

All About Image (cont'd)

The purchase price was a real bargain considering what we got for it. A portion of the district's tax rate, identified by Gilliam as the "debt service tax rate," goes to retire the general obligation bonds. Renovations at \$4.1 million and furnishings at \$1.15 were paid partly out of general obligation bonds and partly out of revenue bonds. Revenue bonds cannot be paid by tax revenue or state funds. They are paid out of general revenue like tuition, fees, investment earnings, and the like, in other words, general operating funds. According to Gilliam, \$1.6 million was committed out of the general operating fund to be paid over twenty years with interest to cover renovation and furnishing of the DSTC. It should be noted that management chose to leave behind all furniture at the old District Office, some of it brand new. In fact, some of this furniture made its way to the campuses. I asked for a dollar value for this furniture that was abandoned, but none was available. Of course, the furniture was put to use. However, the campuses had furniture serving them adequately, and the abandoned furniture surely could have served the DSTC's needs for a time. The value of the abandoned furniture could reasonably be seen as an additional cost in the DSTC's furnishings. These expenditures happened at a time that the colleges were scrambling to cover budget deficits by cutting sections, freezing hiring, and other moves affecting students.

Let me hastily emphasize that I do not begrudge the DSTC. It is a fine facility that will serve the district well. What troubles me is faculty and staff's being told that we must tighten our professional belt by tightening campus budgets. We are also told we must tighten our personal belts by taking a huge financial hit in salary and benefits. Total costs for the DSTC's opening were \$16.6 million, and that doesn't include plans for building #2. How can the Board approve these funds and tell employees that they will have to endure significant increased expenses and no raise? I'm not sure that image is one we want the public to see.

Alan Hall

MW Classes: Another Perspective

Regarding the issue of Monday-Wednesday classes, what we have here is a level of analysis problem. Like much of the physical world, many phenomena which seem chaotic and random at one level are actually working quite consistently and systematically at another level. For example, quantum physics explains the behavior of phenomena at one level but cannot at another. It's a little bit like Einstein's saying that the Law of Gravity cannot be blamed for people falling in love.

Leaving aside the level of analysis problem for a moment, I would like to step up to the plate and take all the credit and/or blame for the MW morning schedule and defend its alleged "irrationality." My idea to begin offering MW morning classes was based on my experience living in pre-Colleague America.

In Pre-Colleague America, NHC faculty would work with students in the gym to build and complete their course schedules. Typically, students would try to cram as many TTH classes as they possibly could into their schedule to minimize the number of days they had to be in class (perfectly rational in an Adam Smith sort of way). They would only sign up for evening, weekend, or MWF classes when or if no sections were available during prime time (TTH 9 and 10:30 am, respectively). By offering more two-day per week morning classes, more students can actually get the kind of class schedule *they* prefer, thus increasing "customer" satisfaction.

Another problem with the old schedule was that facilities such as the computer labs were jammed up on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and "virtually" empty on MWF mornings. The idea was that adding MW morning classes would relieve some of the over-crowding occurring on TTH mornings.

Additionally, at no other time other than mornings were three-day per week courses being offered. We weren't offering Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday classes, or MWF afternoon or evening classes. So why offer *only* MWF classes in the morning, if at all?

What began as a small experiment in Government and History soon became so successful that different departments across campus began supplementing or replacing their MWF classes with MW classes on an ad-hoc basis. Even without any central coordination, the MW morning times were set to be the same as the TTH morning times (7:30/9 and 10:30 am). It was clear almost a decade ago that MW classes were the wave of the future.

We soon found that more students would sign up for two sections of MW classes than for three or even four sections of MWF classes. The MW morning classes filled, while the MWF courses were half-empty or were routinely killed. We found we could serve more students in the

MW Classes: Another Perspective (cont'd)

160 minutes of class time in a single classroom on MW mornings than we could in the 160 minutes of class time in a single classroom on MWF mornings. And isn't serving more students in the same amount of time utilizing the same amount of space a *more* efficient use of facilities, rather than less?

But in every victory are sewn the seeds of defeat. The classes became the victim of their own success, as one-day per week classes offered on Friday mornings failed to make (duh), causing not enough cars to be in the faculty lot on Friday mornings. Dr Shugart, doing his best impression of Captain Renau, expressed shock at the lack of cars in the faculty lot on Fridays, and unilaterally banned MW morning classes (presumably during a round of golf).

When I became the interim coordinator for Political Science in 2000, I re-inserted MW morning classes into our department schedule without first seeking permission. When MW morning classes filled immediately, another section was added the next semester, then another, and another. Three short years later, we have in our department alone about 200 students taking 9 am or 10:30 am MW courses, as opposed to 25 taking MWF classes. In History, the only courses they cancelled on campus were their MWF morning classes. Similar gains in morning enrollments have also been experienced in other departments. Today MW morning courses proliferate not only at NHC, but at other campuses as well. And in the vast majority of cases, the classes begin at 9 and 10:30, not 8:35 and 10:10 because it did not seem rational to make students taking two-day per week courses (which is the vast majority of them) come to class at 8:35 one day and 9:00 the other.

What has not been noted in either of the articles on MW courses is that our afternoon two-day per week schedule and our evening schedule are just as chaotic and overlapping as our MW course schedule. If the overlapping of MW morning courses and inconsistent start times is a problem on MW mornings, then it logically should also be a problem in the afternoons and evenings as well.

I question how much of a problem the MW morning courses are really causing our students. *If* MW morning classes were *really* causing all sorts of problems for students, then doesn't it logically follow that students would quit signing up for them, or never sign up for them in the first place?

In the rationality of the marketplace, MW courses should go out of business if they make our students' lives so miserable. Instead, it's the MWF courses which are empty because of the obvious, unstated fact that MW morning courses are, for the vast, overwhelming majority of our students, *more* convenient than MWF courses.

Isn't it more rational to offer courses at times students want to attend than at times they do not?

Now, no doubt, the start times and end times do not meet the MW morning "mandate," but how rational is that mandate? The only "downside" to having MW morning classes start at 9am and 10:30 am, rather than 8:35 and 10:10 am, is that the student in the 10:30 MW course will not be able to get to an 11:50 MWF course on time. Looking at the fall 2002 schedule (it was handy), I counted only six sections of 11:50 MWF courses being offered on the entire NHC campus, and not all six "made." So how much of a problem is this in reality vs. in theory?

Additionally, is it *more* rational to have *some* two-day morning classes start at the same time, or to have *all* two-day classes start at the same time? Is it more rational to offer students only MW classes *or* only MWF classes, instead of offering *both*?

As for students showing up 15 minutes late for biology because they signed up for a MW course which overlaps with their time, this is a Colleague problem, not a MW morning class problem. And from the sound of things, I'm sure Resource 25 will be just as effective at solving all of our scheduling problems as Colleague, Stargazer, and NHC cruiser have been at solving whatever problems they were supposed to fix.

Inconsistency should not be confused with irrationality. As long as we have one, two, three, four, five, or six credit hour courses, some with labs, some without, we will never be able to replicate the orbit of Mercury in our class schedules. Neither will we be able to get students to all march in a straight line in lock-step to each class, order the exact same meals every day in the cafeteria, or bounce the basketballs in the gym at precisely the same moment. It is not the logic of physics but the logic of the marketplace which drives our schedule, and rightly so.

Tim Howard
NHC, Professor of Political Science

Budget Cuts and Trashcans

I've observed much activity around North Harris College this week. Maintenance workers moving furniture in and out of buildings and offices has caused considerable discussion and controversy around the campus. Since no official announcements were made, rumors have swept the campus.

It seems District Office is leaving all furniture, including the trashcans, and buying all new furnishings for the new office located in the Woodlands. How wonderful to know that the District spent 1.15 million dollars on new furnishings, but the faculty and staff may have to take a pay cut because there will likely be no raises coupled with an increase in health insurance premiums. I think there is a double message being sent, that being that those in power can do what they want, while those affected by their decisions have little control or influence. But, historically that has always been the case. However, such situations do not create high morale or good will. One support staff member had a new desk delivered from the warehouse in which the District discards were stored and found the drawers still wrapped in plastic. Apparently it had never been used. And we are supposed to cut our budget by 7%? Is the District Office contributing to these budget cuts?

I just talked with someone in my office who knows someone who works at District, and they were told that one major concern was that there be matching trashcans at the new District Office. We can't get a decent printer in our office, but I'm glad to know that the trashcans at District match. I can't get decent markers to write with in the classroom, nor have we been able to replace the outmoded classroom desks with tables, a request we made two years ago. But, the trashcans in the new District Office match. We've been told we may have to cut the number of classes in the fall because of budget concerns, but at least the trashcans at District will match the surround-

ings. We can't travel for purposes of professional development, something that has a direct impact in the classroom, but at least we'll have a well-matched décor at District.

I keep hearing that we are to be a "Learning Centered College" (implying that previously we have been something else), and I wonder why the money is being poured into an administrative office where no direct contact with students takes place. What is our real priority at NHMCCD? It appears to be trashcans. Personally, I find this frustrating.

I watched my dean and our operations manager struggling to find \$90,000 to cut in our division budget. We don't have much to cut other than professional development, travel, and classes. So, if these cuts are made, we can't engage in professional development activities, which do have a direct impact on the classroom. And, there will be fewer classes to serve fewer students. However, I'm sure the community will feel good about the fact that the trashcans match at the new and improved District Office.

What message is being sent to the faculty, staff, and community? I've heard the Chancellor state that in hard times we can't sell the Board on significant pay raises for faculty and staff, but apparently we can sell them on the idea of upgraded trashcans and new furnishings.

Don Stanley
NHC, Professor of Psychology

Employee Federation of NHMCCD Unveils Website

The Employee Federation of NHMCCD has recently unveiled its website. Features of the website include an electronic union application that can be filled out and submitted online, as well as information on dues rates, benefits, professional development opportunities, special events, and union news. Links to the websites for the Texas Federation of Teachers (TFT) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) are also available. We hope that you will check out the new website and let us know what you think.

<http://aft-nhmccd.org>.

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MAY '03

USE THIS AD IN MAY 2003

Faculty and Staff Excellence

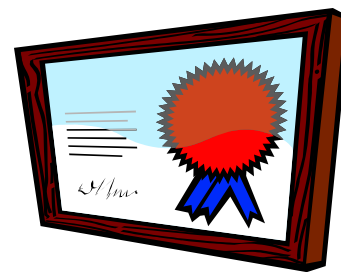
The Employee Federation of NHMCCD would like to recognize this year's Faculty and Staff Excellence Award winners. Congratulations to each of you.

FACULTY EXCELLENCE

North Harris College	Kingwood College	Tomball College	Montgomery College	Cy-Fair College
Michael Callahan	Debbie Adams	Rebecca Tate	Maureen Loiacano	Samita Ghoshal
James Carroll	Cherith Letargo	William Simcik	Michael Hickey	Tracy Samuel
Carol Crowder	Todd Miller	Stephanie Johnston	Gayle LoPiccolo	
Alice Savage				
Sharilyn Wood				

STAFF EXCELLENCE

North Harris College	Kingwood College	Tomball College	Montgomery College	Cy-Fair College
Sarah Behring	Carol Abbott	Douglas Caesar	Charlie Soliz	Susan Hensley
Carol Lucas	Kathy Stenner	Karen Gaede	Roxanne Russ	Cathy Banks
Casey Koehn	Betty Skipper	Richard Burkey	John Lavergne	
Satonya Monroe				
Sylvia Ellis				



Why Join?

The union is a professional organization regularly engaged in many activities. Membership dues support a host of activities and events, and membership is a bargain. If you believe faculty should have a voice in educational issues, you should join. If you believe employees should have a voice in the political process, you should join. If you believe in the value of employees helping out each other, you should join. If you believe employees should be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect, you should join. Your dues help support these values. Membership should not be thought of as only for “protection,” but if you need help in a conflict, we will be there for you. Don’t join because you think you might get into trouble. Join because you embrace the values we embrace.

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 other following officers:

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