



The Advocate

What We Talk About When We Talk About Student Success

Student success is the number one goal at Lone Star College—as everyone knows. The evidence is usually presented as persistence rate, completion rate, and/or success rate (also called “pass rate”). Persistence rate reflects how many students returned to enroll the following semester or year. Completion rate reflects how many students remain enrolled in their courses each semester to receive a final grade A-F, without withdrawing. Success rate (“pass rate”) is the number of those remaining students who earn a final grade of C or higher. As an example of completion/success rates, let’s take a class with 25 students on the first day. Then suppose

that, over time, 5 of them withdraw from the course and 14 earn a final grade of C or higher. That’s an 80% completion rate (20/25) and a 70% success/pass rate (14/20). But the success rate can also be reported as a number out of the total enrolled students—in this case it would be 56% (14/25). This rate will always be a lower number, but in some ways it is more valuable because it indicates a level of success calculated from the “get-go” for all students.

Understanding this dynamic, it is not hard to see why faculty are uneasy when they hear that the administration may be looking at the completion

Inside this issue:

Student Success	1-3
Allen Vogt, Former AFT Treasurer	3
Sick and Vacation Leave Balances	4
You Can Be Fired for THAT?	4-6
Tales from the Unionside	6-8
AFT-Lone Star Benefits	8-10
How to Join the AFT	11
AFT Officers	12

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and success rates in the specific courses they are responsible for teaching. They perk up their ears again when they hear LSC officials make remarks like that of Board Chair Alton Smith at the September 2019 LSC convocation, when he said that if he were teaching a class, he would take a student's failure as his own failure, not the student's. If an individual professor's teaching load success rates are discussed in their evaluation by the dean, they are rightly concerned that they may be held responsible for results that they cannot control. This is why many educators (most recently Dr. Mark Taylor who presented at the North Harris Faculty Institute, January 6) say that teaching is the most difficult of all professions—because there are so many moving parts. Students have lives with dynamics that are beyond the reach of their professors—family obligations, work schedules, financial difficulties, health issues, food insecurity, and the list goes on.

But do these complications absolve the faculty and the college of their mission to educate? Of course not. Perhaps, though, we could widen our lens, look at our students' rate of success in another way, and commit to a joint effort—from faculty, administration, and student services—which could “move the needle” for more of our students to get past academic obstacles, go the distance, and complete their credentialing by earning a degree or certificate.

If students learn to deal with their roadblocks, manage their lives, and move successfully through the system, then we too have truly succeeded. On the other hand, if we have high dropout rates and low graduation rates, does that mean the college is “failing” in some systematic way?

A new book by David Kirp, *The College Drop-Out Scandal*, proposes that the “elephant in the room” for colleges seeking to meet the needs of first generation / low income students is that the college leaders often put a lopsided emphasis on enrollment rather than graduation rates—understandable since funding is usually keyed to enrollment. But he points out how leaders at specific colleges have made changes to demonstrate that they are serious about improving long-term student success by instituting policies and committing resources to increase persistence and graduation rates.¹

Interim President Dr. Archie Blanson, in his Jan. 7 letter to LSC-North Harris, stated his three goals for the semester: (1) enhance enrollment, (2) increase student persistence rate and (3) increase graduation rates for degrees and certificates. AFT applauds all three goals, but the second and third goals should receive renewed emphasis for the health and future success of our college system.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has announced an initiative called “60 X 30” with four key provisions to be achieved by 2030.² The ones having to do with persistence and graduation rates are the first and second provisions: (1) 60% of Texans age 25-34 will have a certificate or degree by 2030 and (2) 550,000 students in that year will receive a certificate, associate, or bachelor degree.

Granted, these goals do not specify a graduation rate, but a review of LSC's graduation rates seems timely. Each of our colleges increased graduation rates over the three years ending in 2018, with the highest 2018 rate being held by UP (21.3%). The campus with the lowest rate was 16.9%. Statewide, the highest 3-year graduation rate was at Texarkana College (45.8%) and the lowest was 7% at another college (un-named).³ During the same period, the national community college 3-year average graduation rate was 22%.⁴

AFT Lone Star College



A Union of Professionals

Kirp finds three common factors in the programs of colleges that have increased graduation rates. First, they re-directed financial resources to provide a more hands-on support network for students from enrollment through coursework to graduation. Second, they provided professional development incentives to train faculty in new pedagogical approaches to reach students in the classroom. And finally, they provided lots of intensive and interventional counseling. At some colleges, these factors steeply in-



creased graduation rates among first-time-in-college students.

If this is the case, and we begin to consider new policies and promotions that are designed to increase graduation rates, what would they look like? In the next several issues, we will address each of these areas with a specific reflection on how LSC can make a difference. So stay tuned....

Michael McFarland, Emeritus Professor,
LSC-North Harris

Endnotes

1. Kirp, David. *The College Drop-Out Scandal*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
2. "60X30 Texas Progress Report." *60X30TX.com*, 20 Jan. 2020, <http://www.60x30tx.com/>. (Scroll to the bottom for a list of the goals.)
3. "Graduation Rates: Three-Year Graduation Rates at Two-Year Colleges." *Texas Higher Education Accountability System*, 20 Jan. 2020, <http://www.txhigheredaccountability.org/AcctPublic/InteractiveReport/Predefined>.
4. "The Catch-22 of Community College Graduation Rates." *Community College Review*, 20 Jan. 2020, <https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/the-catch-22-of-community-college-graduation-rates>.

Editor's Note:

Last November, at our Union celebration, we made a special acknowledgement of Allen Vogt for his stalwart service for 30 years as our Faculty-Staff Union Treasurer.

Before, and even after automatic withdrawal became available to us, sometimes this could be an onerous job. I personally remember receiving a gentle reminder or two, maybe more, which were sent my way with a smile and perfect civility.

The plaque honoring Allen is engraved with these words:

**AFT Lone Star College
Recognizes the Dedicated Service of**

Dr. Allen Vogt

One of the Twelve Founding Members

***Officer
Secretary-Treasurer
Mentor and Beloved Friend***

2019



Award Ceremony 11/22/19—Allen Vogt & Alan Hall

Here is Allen's thank you letter to us, received shortly after the Union celebration:

Greetings!

Originally, I naively thought of a Treasurer as a person who, when he/she pats me on the back, is trying to get me to cough up something. Very soon after announcing my assumption of the faculty-staff union Treasurer's position in May 1986, I discovered there is so much more to it than back-patting! For example, I found that even approaching success required as much sense as dollars. I did need time to collect my thoughts & budget my actions, but I wound up serving for 30 years as your Treasurer. In blissful retirement now, I look back on my years as your Treasurer as the most rewarding and fulfilling of my life. You were worth it! I extend to you all my sincerest and most heart-felt thanks for the recognition and evocative plaque given to me at the November 22 social. I remain your friend in Solidarity, Forever! *Solidarität für immer, Denn die Union macht uns stark.* (Translation from German: Solidarity forever, for the union makes us strong.)

Allen R. Vogt



Sick and Vacation Leave Balances

AFT Lone Star College would like to take a minute to commend the administration of Lone Star College for solving a problem that would have been burdensome, perhaps catastrophic, for a number of Lone Star employees.

Late last semester, several greatly concerned AFT members from multiple campuses contacted union leaders and staff. They had received messages saying that, based on an audit going back to 2011, the payroll department had discovered what were described as significant errors in sick leave and vacation leave balances for a number of employees. The emails the employees received stated that the college would be correcting those mistakes by taking away hours from their employee sick leave and vacation leave balances. In some cases that were made known to us, employees would have been left with a zero balance in either sick leave, vacation leave, or both. In fact, these errors were not caused by reporting omissions on the part of the employees but by something within the system that had undercounted sick leave hours which employees had earned.

Most employees, ourselves included, do not check the accuracy of our leave balances—a practice we all should change. We assume we can count on the hours reported on our pay advices. Losing hours that employees assume they have can be a significant blow, particularly for those anticipating major medical treatment or with already scheduled vacations and even for any of us approaching flu season with no sick leave available.

The AFT reached out to Lone Star College through the union's general counsel, Mr. Chris Tritico, to relay our members' concerns, and we are very pleased and grateful to be able to say that the administration quickly realized the challenges these adjustments would impose on employees. In an email to all employees sent on December 17, Lone Star CFO Jennifer Mott announced that no negative adjustments in employee leave balances would be made and that those that had already been made would be reversed. This decision was a wonderful Christmas present for Lone Star employees.

Of course, the union supports accurate record keeping and financial responsibility on the part of the col-

lege, and we endorse whatever process changes are needed to make sure balances are calculated properly in the future. However, we are deeply grateful that Lone Star put the personal well-being of our college employees first. Therefore, we wish to acknowledge and commend all of those in the administration who contributed to this very humane decision.

We wish we knew the names of everyone who helped make this happen to thank them all personally, but we especially acknowledge Ms. Mott, who has authority over financial decisions. We also acknowledge Mr. Mario Castillo, Lone Star College General Counsel who worked with Mr. Tritico from the beginning in resolving this issue. Mr. Castillo was instrumental in ensuring that this issue got top priority and understood the seriousness of the situation. Finally, we acknowledge Chancellor Steve Head for endorsing and approving the decision. Their efforts, in cooperation with the AFT, saved many employees from a potentially disastrous situation.

Alan Hall, President

John Burghduff, Vice President for Faculty,
Lone Star College-CyFair

You Can Be Fired for THAT?

Each year, all Lone Star College employees, faculty, staff and administrators—full-time and part-time—complete the Annual Mandatory Employee Compliance Training, a series of online classes that explain the importance of avoiding all kinds of discrimination and hostile workplace practices, including those related to Title IX.



Although the training is time consuming and repetitive, one only has to look at the #MeToo movement and the serial predatory practices of powerful men from Harvey Weinstein to Donald Trump to know that the issues are starkly real. Whether or not online training can dissuade the likes of Jeffrey Epstein or Bill Cosby, the rest of us need to know how to re-



spond when we ourselves, or our students, or coworkers, are threatened by men (or women) like these. One need only look at the countless stories of abuse involving businesses, churches, and schools to know that ordinary people can abuse even small disparities of power to harm others.

It is also useful for any organization to engage in conversations about how our own experiences of privilege blind us to subtle and subconscious forms of discrimination.

Although the training touches the topic, I'm not sure the videos move us beyond simply avoiding behaviors that would get us sued towards truly appreciating the richness and strength the college gains from embracing and promoting diversity and inclusion in all imaginable forms.

With that said, do we, as employees of Lone Star College, need periodic reminders of our responsibilities to ourselves and our students? Arguably, we do.

Does our administration have a legal right to require us to participate in training like this? Absolutely, they do.

Do they have a legal right to make this training a contractual obligation for employment? Certainly, they do.

If any of us fails to meet the obligation of completing this training, does Lone Star College have a legal right to impose disciplinary action against us? Yes, they most definitely do.

The union's argument is with the form that disciplinary action takes.

Noncontractual employees (adjunct faculty and all full-time and part-time professional and support staff) who do not complete all the videos in the training by the due date are terminated. All contractual employees (full-time faculty and administrators) have their contracts non-renewed. All employees in both categories have a "Do Not Rehire" (DNR) nota-

tion put in their HR files, meaning that they will never be allowed to work within Lone Star ever again.

Based on information obtained from the College under a Texas Public Information Act request, we have learned that 31 employees were terminated late in 2019 for not completing their Annual Mandatory Employee Compliance Training by the deadline. All 31 were part-time employees.

Fall 2019 Annual Mandatory Employee Compliance Training: 31 Part-Time Employees were terminated for incomplete training at deadline.

Out of the over 7000 full-time and part-time employees of Lone Star College, this may not seem significant: less than one half of 1% of all college employees. However, let us look at what this means to those employees.

Many, if not most, of these employees

rely on putting together a living from several part-time jobs. Losing one of those jobs can be devastating. Many of those jobs (certainly all at other community colleges in the area) require basically the same training that we do, so those employees are watching basically the same videos over and over. Some of the employees of whom the union is aware finished their training within days after the deadline but there was no room for mercy.

The harshest penalty is the DNR. When prospective future employers contact Lone Star College for references, the most common question is whether or not a former employee is eligible for rehire. The answer will be that they are not and, almost certainly, no further information will be given to explain the nature of the offense.

So employees who do not finish the training on time not only lose future opportunities to work for Lone Star, they likely lose other employment opportunities for the rest of their careers. Ironically, in the medical field, DNR stands for "Do Not Resuscitate." For an employee with a ruined career, the meanings are not that different.

Another irony is that employees actually accused of the unethical practices covered by the training have

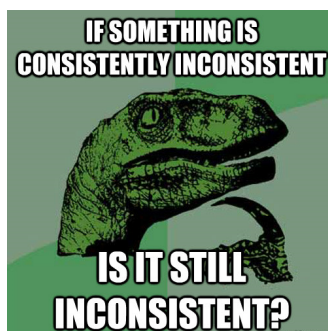


very significant due process rights explicitly written into Lone Star College policy. Those who miss watching the videos do not.

So what ought to be done with employees who do not finish their mandatory training on time?

The answer already exists within college policy. Lone Star has a very explicit progressive discipline process involving first, second, and final warnings, and corrective action plans for employees who fail to perform their duties in one way or another. A written warning with explicit instructions would certainly have been sufficient to persuade at least some of the noncompliant employees to finish their training within days. Only employees who persist in noncompliance after repeated warnings should be terminated.

As any union leader can tell you, the college's progressive discipline process is frequently implemented inconsistently. We should be able to expect that the Office of General Counsel which oversees the training and also wrote the progressive discipline process ought to be able to implement that process in handling employees who fail to complete the training on time.



Long term, it seems to us that it would be worthwhile to explore some sort of reciprocal agreement at least with our neighboring colleges so that employees who complete required training with one employer could get credit with their other employers.

It is also worth exploring whether it is productive for all employees to have to repeat essentially the same training each and every year.

Although Lone Star College has moved beyond the cultural change model of LSC 2020, two of the tenets of that model would certainly have been worth retaining: "Trust" and "No Fear." Lone Star competes for employees (especially part-time employees) with colleges, schools, and other institutions all around the Houston area, many of which pay

significantly better. We have been able to compete for some of those employees because of the positive and supportive work environment that exists in many of our offices and departments. Employees know that they will be appreciated even if they occasionally make mistakes.

When we are forced to tell them that, in this one situation, failure to comply means termination without mercy with a DNR, we lose that trust and inspire fear to the detriment of the culture we are trying to build.

We can do better.

John Burghduff, Vice President for Faculty,
Lone Star College-CyFair

Tales from the Unionside

As I sat in the Performing Arts Theater at the 2020 LSC-North Harris Convocation listening to speakers, my mind wandered back to the late 1970s when faculty members assembled in the Teaching Theater to hear President W. W. Thorne and Dr. Joe Airola discuss the state of North Harris County College. Including Mr. Thorne, I have served under seven college presidents with an eighth to be named later, as Dr. Gerald Napoles has just gone off to the Death Star in the Woodlands to become a Vice-Chancellor reporting directly to Dr. Steve Head.

During my forty plus years with the district, my one constant goal was to strive to be a good classroom teacher. I use the word "teacher" and not "professor" because I believe that good teaching is the key to the success of any higher educational institution. At North Harris, we were fortunate that our second president, Joe Airola, believed strongly in classroom instruction and not campus construction, which made him an outlier among the Bill Thornes of the community college world.

I wonder what Dr. Airola would have thought of President Donald Trump's statement, "We love the poorly educated." Without question, he would have disagreed with Trump, as Airola viewed education as a life-transforming experience. Del Mar College in Corpus Christi was the model two-year school



he held up to us as what we should strive to be. During the 1970s, Del Mar's reputation as a first-rate academic institution stood out when many Texas junior colleges were regarded as glorified high schools.

During my first year at North Harris, Walter Lindsey, a member of the History Department, told me that we, the faculty, had a responsibility to ensure that NHCC would never be viewed as the thirteenth grade. Believe it or not, many students in the 1980s referred to North Harris as "North Harvard," as transfer students and university students taking summer classes complained about the academic rigor of our classes.

It was a shared vision of administrators and faculty that North Harris County College should be offering the first and second years of higher education and not the fifth year of secondary education. NHCC had excellent English, Math, and History departments with great teachers like Pat Gray, Jim Polito, and Phil Crow leading the way. My Government colleague, Carolyn Davis, won the Faculty Excellence Award so often that I thought she might be barred from future award consideration.

But what of today? Looking back at the 2019 fall semester in which I taught five "Federal Government" sections, I began to question my teaching in light of students past and present. I could sense as the semester passed that a disconnect seemed to exist between the students and me. My perception was that things were going to be at an all-time low. Before final exams, I decided to develop an opinion survey that would allow students to grade the course and me.

Each semester I teach around 150 students in the required government classes. I do not curve grades, so students compete against the course and not each other. With no set number of A's or F's determined in advance, I have found out, however, that

my grades have approximated a normal distribution with smaller percentages of A's and F's than ten percent. This traditional result began to change over the last five years. The one qualification I make is to distinguish between an earned "F" and an assigned "F." Assigned F's go to students who do not complete all testing, fail to withdraw formally from the class, and disappear without a word.

Based on my fall grades, I did not see a high degree of student success as measured by the percentage of students earning an A, B, or C grade. Using this teaching evaluation method or business model, I had a bad semester. Although many in the field of education object to this model, it is here to stay as

long as businessmen and Republican politicians have their say. Playing the percentages goes against my basic higher education view that college students should have a right to pass and a right to fail.

During finals week before students took their exams, I had them grade various

course components from A to F on an anonymous survey. Anticipating the worst, I had decided in advance that this may be my last semester of teaching Government 2305. My spring semester schedule consisted of five "Texas Government" classes, and retirement is near. Going into the final exam, 75 percent of a student's grade is already determined, so I knew what the results would likely be. Here are my grade percentages for 2305: A-4%, B-6%, C-31%, D-17%, and Assigned F-23%. For the fall of 2019, these percentages put me at a 41% student success rate. This figure is much below the roughly 70% figures for my classes in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

With class grades in, I turned to the student survey results to see how my course grades turned out. On a questionnaire, students were asked to assign a grade of A-F on four elements of the 2305 course: books, handouts, study guides, and lectures. Finally, I asked them to give my course a general, overall grade. Here's the breakdown of that overall

While LSC and I have adjusted to the times and are doing more, what about the students? Here the answers are difficult to find. My impression is that students want to be successful in school, but there are personal and situational obstacles standing in the way of academic achievement.



grade students gave my history 2305 course: A-20%, B-53%, C-22%, D-5%, and F-0%. Comparing the grades my students gave my course, and the grades I gave my students, there is a success rate gap of 54 percent.

What explains this gap, and is anyone at fault here? LSC? Me? Students? From an educational standpoint, I believe that LSC-North Harris provides today's students with an academic support system that only college athletic departments gave to star quarterbacks forty years ago—personal advising, tutoring, special skills classes, and academic labs. As far as what I provide students in 2019 as compared to 1979, there is no comparison between now and then. Today my students receive assigned reading study guides, lecture notes assists, all multiple-choice test assessment, the dropping of the lowest test grade, extra credit point opportunities, and ten percent of the course grade based on class attendance.

While LSC and I have adjusted to the times and are doing more, what about the students? Here the answers are difficult to find. My impression is that students want to be successful in school, but there are personal and situational obstacles standing in the way of academic achievement. We are an open admissions institution where student failure is more likely to occur than at a state college or public university. While doctors hate to lose any patients, we teachers hate to lose any students, but patients die, and students fail.

The greatness of community colleges is that two-year schools open their doors to all comers and give an opportunity for students to climb the educational ladder to personal fulfillment and life success. I am one of millions who came from a family whose parents did not graduate from high school, and I attended a local junior college. From there, I went off to two state universities to earn three college degrees. If it had not been for the teachers at Morton Junior College in Illinois, none of these degrees would have been earned, as MJC teachers encouraged, assisted, pushed, and provided me with the opportunity to achieve educational success.

Bob Locander
Professor of Political Science, LSC-North Harris

Editor's Note: Locander is a regular political columnist for The Advocate.

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AFT Local Union # 4518

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- To ensure that faculty have an effective voice on all matters pertaining to their welfare
- To secure for all members the rights to which they are entitled
- To raise the standards of the profession by establishing professional working conditions
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Debra Stamper	Tomball	S-114	281-357-3731
Van Piercy	Tomball	S 153-J	281-401-1814
Martina Kusi-Mensah	Montgomery	G 121-J	936-273-7276
Louise Casey-Clukey	Montgomery	B 100-G	936-273-7394
John Burghdoff	Cy-Fair	HSC 250-G	281-290-3915
Cindy Hoffart-Watson	Cy-Fair	LRNC 101-C	281-290-3265
Dr. Stephen Washington	Victory Center	Faculty Office	832-810-5612
Dr. Adrienne Patton	Fairbanks Center	Faculty Office	832-782-5086
Heather Mitchell	Cypress Center	200-E	832-920-5027

The union encourages employees to join because they believe that college employees should have a voice in their professional lives. We don't encourage employees to join because they anticipate conflict or are already engaged in a conflict. In fact, if they are already embroiled in a situation, we are unable to help them. It is all too common for someone to approach the AFT and say something like, "I've been an employee for the district for several years, and I've just recognized the importance of joining." Typically, following that comment is, "I'm in trouble and need help." I finally lost track of how many times in the last year I've had to say, "I'm sorry, but member benefits don't cover anything that pre-dates membership." The individuals to whom I had to give this message were invited to join and provided some advice on how to proceed with their situation, but assistance

ended there. Were they members, a host of benefits would have been available.

The AFT provides its members with advice and guidance as well as representation in conflict resolution and grievances. We have our own local attorney and can seek legal advice and counsel for members. We maintain a local legal defense fund. In addition, membership dues include, at no extra charge, \$8 million in professional liability insurance for claims arising out of professional activities.

Most of our members don't join because they believe that they may need the AFT's help in a conflict. They join because they believe in the values of the AFT—that employees should be treated with dignity and respect, that employees should help each other, that employees should

have a voice in their professional lives, that employees deserve fair pay and good working conditions, and that the district needs a system providing checks and balances. They join because they want to support an organization that helps others in so many ways. A nice benefit is that, if they do need help, AFT is there for them.

If you believe in these values and are not a member, now is the perfect time to join. If you believe in our values, take action now and join the AFT.

—Alan Hall

