



# The Advocate

## Greetings from AFT-Lone Star College

It is my great pleasure to introduce to you the first issue of The Advocate for the 2021 – 2022 school year flying through the internet and directly to your email inboxes. In case you haven't met us yet, The Advocate is the official newsletter of AFT – Lone Star College, local 4518 of the American Federation of Teachers, a union of professionals representing both faculty AND staff of Lone Star College.

With special thanks to Link Alander, Vice Chancellor of College Services, and his technical team we have been able to work out some technical difficulties and we are now able to share this newsletter electronically with all Lone Star College employees.

We sent out our first electronic issue in Spring, 2021 but the gods of the internet were not smiling on us. If you missed seeing our January - April issue (which you probably did!) you can read it, and all of our past issues going back to 1979, on our website. Go to [www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org). Select the drop-down menu labelled News and then select Archives of the Advocate.

My goodness, a lot has happened since we were last able to get a paper issue of The Advocate to your office or cubicle. First, we must take a moment to honor all of the dear colleagues, family members, and friends who have been taken away from us by this terrible pandemic and by all of the regular challenges of life that the pandemic has made more complicated. May their memory be a blessing.

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Whether faculty, staff, or administration, everyone has stepped (jumped!) way outside of their comfort zones to do their jobs in ways they would never have imagined they could. The resourcefulness and dedication of everyone who had to learn to work remotely cannot be overstated and your union appreciates you. What a tremendous accomplishment!

Next, on behalf of the Executive Board and staff of AFT – Lone Star College and myself, we want to congratulate all employees of Lone Star College for the herculean efforts that you all have made to keep this college running and serving the needs of our students.

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We want to take a special moment to recognize those who have sacrificed the most for Lone Star College. I am referring to our professional and support staff, our workforce faculty, and other employees who have returned to work face to face over the last several months. While many of us, particularly faculty, have had the option of working safely from home, you have been expected to make yourselves vulnerable, in spite of concerns over your own health or that of your loved ones, to come back on campus to do the work of the college. Your personal sacrifice cannot be emphasized enough, and we encourage all employees to recognize and thank you for the depth of that sacrifice. Your union stands in solidarity with you. It has been our honor to support many of you in your efforts to remain as safe as possible. Please know that we understand the anxiety you have felt, and we admire your perseverance and courage. All employees of Lone Star College are heroes; but our staff and all of you who have been coming to work on campus are our superheroes!

The Covid pandemic, sadly, is far from over. What the world seems to have decided (although I don't remember anyone asking me!) is that we're going to go on with life whether the pandemic is really over or not. So restaurants are open, people are going to sporting events, families are gathering again, and colleges and universities are returning, largely, to the way they did business before the pandemic. In fact, all colleges and universities I know currently have a greater on campus presence than we do. So, starting November 1, it has been decided that all staff and administrators will be back on campus five days a week. Starting with Spring Semester, a substantial number of classes will return to face to face format. By the start of Summer Sessions we are expecting life as normal. Whether we agree or not that that is smart, it seems that this is what society wants.

*"AFT – Lone Star has been and will continue to advocate for measures that will keep our employees and students as safe as possible. Given the constantly shifting landscape, we want to make sure that what we advocate for is what you, Lone Star employees, want us to advocate for."*

As you know, our governor has banned public entities from choosing mask mandates as a precaution to keep employees and the public safe. Austin Community College and Dallas Community College

have decided to initiate mask mandates anyway and are bracing for the backlash from the state government. Lone Star, like many other community college systems across the state, is limiting class size to allow for social distancing. Most other community colleges continue to have check in stations and contact tracing. Quite a few offer Covid testing and vaccinations on campus.

AFT – Lone Star has been and will continue to advocate for measures that will keep our employees and students as safe as possible. Given the constantly shifting landscape, we want to make sure that what we advocate for is what you, Lone Star employees, want us to advocate for. This is the purpose of the survey we've been emailing you about. As of the writing of this article, we are approaching 1000 responses, but the survey won't be complete unless we hear from you!

**It's not too late to fill out the survey. We have extended the deadline to Wednesday, November 3. If you haven't done so already, please take a moment and visit:**

<https://bit.ly/aftls-covidsurvey1>



Our goal is to have some initiatives to advocate for in preparation for the start of Spring Semester. Please watch for the November / December issue



of The Advocate where we will share the results of the survey and our plans for January!

In the meantime, please do everything you possibly can to protect yourselves and the people you love. First, get vaccinated. Very few people who get vaccinated get sick. Almost none of them die. Vaccines are safe. Vaccines work. Second, wear a mask. Masks are how we protect our students and colleagues who can't get vaccines. Masks are how we protect our children.

In concluding this greeting, let me share with you a little bit about what you will see as you open The Advocate this month.

This issue includes the very last episode of the column Tales from the Unionside, by Bob Locander, government professor at LSC – North Harris. Bob has retired and is moving on, but he has promised to continue to be involved in our union. Thank you, Bob, for writing this column for so many years and for all you have contributed to the life of our union. You have been our political guru and the lessons you have taught us will live on. We love you and you will be missed.

Watch for an exciting new column contributed by LSC – Kingwood history professor Steve Davis starting with the November / December issue.

The issue you are now reading also includes the very first episode of a new ongoing column entitled Know Your Rights. We want Lone Star faculty and staff to know their rights as employees so they can serve our students with confidence. This is a huge topic so we will have episodes of this column with each issue of the Advocate for the foreseeable future – years!

You will also see a wonderful guest article by retired professor Michael McFarland focusing on Freedom, Labor Day, and the union movement (both here and across the country). Finally, you will see an article by yours truly focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion – high priorities for us as a union.

We hope you will enjoy this issue! Please note that your responses to our newsletter are always welcome and we are always interested in guest writers. If you have anything to share, please write us at [aftlonestar@yahoo.com](mailto:aftlonestar@yahoo.com).

Also, if you are not currently a member of AFT – Lone Star College, we would love to introduce ourselves to you. Please visit our website, [www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org), and explore.

**You can join our local at:**

**<https://bit.ly/AFTLONESTAR-JOIN>**

We are always happy to answer any questions or concerns you have about our union. Our contact information is on the front and back of this publication, so feel free to reach out!

And go Astros!

John Burghdoff, President  
AFT – Lone Star College



*AFT Lone Star College*



*A Union of Professionals*

**If you are interested in membership, benefits, or would like to discuss a work-related issue, our AFT Faculty and Staff Vice-Presidents are here to assist. Please don't hesitate to contact them. See the back page of this publication for contact information.**



## Joining AFT-Lone Star is the best thing you can do to ensure that you have a voice on work-related issues that matter to you!

Whether you have been at LSC for a long time or are just beginning your career, joining AFT-Lone Star is the best way to ensure your voice at work on issues that matter to you.

Our Union has a solid history of going to bat for our members when they need help and speaking up on issues that concern our members system-wide.

- ☐ If you believe faculty and staff 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 advocating for 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.

**Join AFT-Lone Star**

**[Click here to Join AFT Lone Star TODAY!](https://bit.ly/AFTLONESTAR-JOIN)**

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# Join Today!



*A Union of Professionals*

## AFT-Lone Star College

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- \$8 million in professional occupational liability insurance (in case you get sued)
- Local staff and leaders ready to assist you when you need help and information
- Legal defense funds (in case you need an attorney)
- \$25,000 Accidental Death and Dismemberment policy
- Strong leaders and lobbyists advocating for your rights at the local, state, and national levels
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- Strong. Active. Vocal. When you join AFT-Lone Star, you join the best!
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## Freedom on Labor Day: LSC and the AFT

This year E.J. Dionne (*Washington Post*) wrote a reflection for Labor Day, saying that the holiday “honors the struggles of American workers to live lives of their own choosing with a degree of prosperity and security. No less than July 4, this September day is a celebration of freedom.”

He reminded his readers that our three great summer holidays—Juneteenth, Fourth of July, and Labor Day—are built upon the premise of freedom. But unlike the first two, Labor Day is specifically focused on freedom in the work-place.

“Most of our discussions of freedom,” he wrote, “focus on negative liberty, ‘freedom from,’ rather than positive liberty, ‘freedom to.’ Americans instinctively worry about coercion by government and the dangers of an overweening state. This concern can express itself differently across ideological lines, but it spans from left to right. Yet the freedom to accomplish one’s ends is just as important, and its moral worth was recognized by our nation’s founders when they proclaimed their devotion to not only life and liberty but also ‘the pursuit of happiness.’”

Samuel Gompers, the first president of the American Federation of Labor, was instrumental in the creation of the first national Labor Day holiday. In 1910 he defined the purpose of unions as leading people to freedom “from [their] own weakness [and from] unfair, unjust and unnecessarily cruel environments.” Later, in 1941, FDR declared that “unionism has helped to give to everyone who toils the position of dignity which is his due.”

Our administration tends to focus on the market side of the organization (think enrollment numbers over graduation rates), and rightly so. But that perspective can sometimes obscure what employ-

ees [and students] need. On the other hand, the role of labor is to advocate from a different perspective. Dionne again: “The achievements of labor show a history of pushing for the kind of freedoms that give employees healthy situations which in turn make them more productive to the organization.”

*Productive to the organization.* In other words, the union in making employees feel heard, also makes them feel free to exercise creativity in their work. They become more productive and that makes the college the kind of place where people like to come to work. In an ideal world the union and

the college leadership, together, achieve a kind of symbiotic balance for the good of all employees. Of course, sometimes employees feel ignored and college leaders feel challenged by the employees’ needs. Our AFT chapter was formed more than forty years ago, and since then there have been incidents of AFT leaders and college leaders in sharp conflict (see Bob Locander’s “Tales from the Unionside” pieces in past *Advocate* issues). But whenever both sides realize that their well-being depends on seeing things from the other perspective, and they begin to truly listen to each other, then the welfare of all is improved.

Dionne specifies a series of worker benefits that have occurred as a result of this kind of dialogue: “The legislated 40-hour week increased the time workers had to themselves — a genuine form of liberation. Social Security meant that a decent retirement did not depend solely on how much a lower-paid worker could manage to save and invest from market income. Medicare, Medicaid and Obamacare created health security for those unable to afford market-based private health insurance.”

Almost any AFT officer can in turn tick off our efforts on projects for the benefit and freedom of both employees and students. Here are just a few:

“..whenever both sides realize that their well-being depends on seeing things from the other perspective, and they begin to truly listen to each other, then the welfare of all is improved.”



- Made wellness calls to employees during pandemic along with a survey to determine other pandemic issues
- Supported LSC efforts to maintain transparent, accurate and regular reporting to the employees regarding COVID cases at each campus.
- Assisted employees in negotiating ADA accommodations
- Formed an LSC-AFT Health and Safety committee to study issues at campuses and recommend solutions
- Helped employees with various employment concerns related to pay/benefits, workplace bullying, harassment, re-assignment as retaliation, and termination.
- Established an endowed scholarship (four years ago) providing \$1000 to a deserving student.
- Attended Board meetings to note decisions and various presentations for the improvement of employees' welfare.
- Presented an issue of employee concern to the Board at each regularly scheduled meeting (with a 5-minute time limit).

*“Over time, the AFT has sponsored many activities directly affecting and benefitting employees by freeing them from worries, allowing them to serve*

And those are just during the past year. Over time, the AFT has sponsored many “activities directly affecting and benefitting employees by freeing them from worries, allowing them to serve students better” (see “What Does AFT Do for Students?” in *The Advocate*, January-February 2019).

Finally, I'll reach back even further to cite a joint LSC-AFT partnership document. In 2011, union faculty worked as members of the Chancellor's Select Committee on Student Success to develop “What We Believe About Student Success,” a document which addresses the freedoms of both employees and students. Though it no longer appears on the college's website, it can still stand (even in a Covid world) as a worthwhile college credo:

1. **We believe**, in the context of a community college, student success means that students achieve their individual goals as participants in the college community.
2. **We believe** the community college guides

students in setting goals that are realistic and attainable and yet challenge the students to achieve their full potential.

3. **We believe** successful community college students operate on timelines that do not match traditional expectations, and that understanding student success means identifying specific short-term steps along the path to any student's long term goals.

4. **We believe** student success requires a healthy partnership between administrators, support services, faculty and students, each taking responsibility for their respective roles. Administrators provide the resources and environment for faculty and staff to perform their roles effectively. Student Services plays the key role of positioning students to maximize their

performance and complete their educational plan. And *faculty* have a profound impact on any student's sense of his/her ability to do the work. However, the ultimate responsibility for learning resides with the *students*, who must actively respond and persistently engage in the requisite activities prescribed by faculty, staff and administration.

5. **We believe** student success occurs when students are challenged to achieve high standards of excellence.
6. **We believe** that, because student success is the college's core mission, gathering data to research our effectiveness is essential. As our students are diverse in their goals and experiences, an array of new measures will be required to address this diversity.

The statement shows how the AFT and LSC administration can actually complement each other in standing for student success and for employees--supporting their right to do their jobs with the freedom that leads to professional and community pride.

Unfortunately, LSC officials have sometimes seen the AFT as an adversary, one that seeks only to denigrate the college. During the Civil War, both



the North and the South claimed to be fighting for “freedom,” so we know that word can be narrowly defined at times. LSC leadership often (rightly) focuses on one side of the college’s cycle of operation—enrollment and revenue, both crucial factors. But the overall health of the college community also depends on the other perspective—the welfare of employees and students. If the union speaks from this perspective, it is seeking to keep the welfare of the whole college community in balance—so that all sides feel the freedom of honest dialogue.

A belated but hearty Happy Labor Day to all!

--Michael McFarland, LSC Professor Emeritus

E. J. Dionne on Freedom and Labor Day:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/09/05/labor-day-celebrates-solidarity-freedom/>

Samuel Gompers on the establishment of a national Labor Day (Sept. 4, 1910):

[https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1910/09/04/105089490.pdf?pdf\\_redirect=true&ip=0](https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1910/09/04/105089490.pdf?pdf_redirect=true&ip=0)

Advocate past issues:

<http://aftlonestar.tx.aft.org/archives-advocate>

**We Care.  
We Show Up.  
We Advocate Together.  
AFT-Lone Star College**



As a labor movement and as the American Federation of Teachers, every day, we care, we fight and we show up for our families; for the patients, children and citizens we serve; for our communities; and for the freedoms we cherish as Americans.



—AFT President Randi Weingarten



## Tales from the Unionside

For the past 37 years, North Harris English professor Alan Hall has been the indispensable man for the AFT at Lone Star College. Along with some 140 LSC employees, Alan decided to participate in the Separation Incentive Plan (SIP) and retired in August. My March retirement preceded Hall’s college exodus, but I witnessed his entire union career as he became a historic figure in Texas college teacher labor circles.

During his presidential tenure, Hall was tireless in his efforts to make the union a strong force for fair and equal treatment of faculty, staff, and students. He championed the AFT’s advocacy for justice for members who felt wronged. No case was too big or too small for Alan not to give it his full attention. His life outside the classroom was occupied with union business and countless meetings in Houston, Austin, and Washington, D.C.

It is fortunate for our local union that AH held a volunteer and not a paid position, because he spent thousands of hours on the phone or in face-to-face conversations with members and nonmembers seeking out help, encouragement, and a sympathetic response to professional and personal concerns. Although Alan Hall’s formal degree is in English, he should have been awarded honorary degrees in counseling and law. I have never met a person who was a better listener and imparter of sage advice.

As I look back on my relationship with Alan, some memorable moments stick out. After Kevin Bailey initiated the first AFT sign-up campaign at North Harris County College in 1979 – 1980, I went down to Hall’s office to introduce myself and to talk about AFT membership benefits. Before I could start the discussion, Alan looked at me and said, “Sign me up.” I told Kevin about this experience and said I expected to sign up 10 instructors by the end of the week. I was wrong. While I signed up nobody in my division, Alan had recruited half the English department to join the AFT.



While the first AFT-LSC President Kevin Bailey and I were political scientists and the supposed election campaign experts, our friend in the English office suite put us to shame in the 1983 Board election when our union recruited, endorsed, and worked on behalf of three trustee candidates. Kevin felt strongly that the only chance to win seats held by NHCC President W.W. Thorne backed incumbents was to man all polling places on Election Day with candidate card pushers. To get volunteers to pass out cards to unsuspecting voters at the polls is something no sane person wants to do.

*“..Hall was tireless in his efforts to make the union a strong force for fair and equal treatment of faculty, staff, and students.”*

With this in mind, we handed off the job to Alan Hall thinking he does not know how hard it will be to get volunteers to work the polling locations in Aldine, Humble, and Spring school districts. A week before the election, Alan came back to us with an action plan and an army of volunteers ready to cover the 15 – 20 polling locations from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Volunteers agreed to work three to six hour shifts with every polling place covered for the Saturday election in January.

Most of the campaign volunteers had no prior political experience, but they agreed to participate in the election out of respect for Alan’s judgment that the three challengers would make good trustees committed to college instruction and community interests. This volunteer group became so large that we rented a banquet room at a local motel as a training site and distribution point for election packets and candidate signs. The entire election operation was set up by political “novice” Hall as the “experts” Bailey and Locander looked on in awe. The only person more surprised than us by what happened was Bill Thorne who watched the returns as two of his political cronies went down to defeat.

During the early 1980s, President Thorne and the Board of Trustees engaged in an effort at union busting and discriminatory treatment toward the North Harris AFT and its membership. Our union

local appealed to the state and national AFT organizations for legal assistance to safeguard the First and Fourteenth Amendment rights of faculty union members. Both the state and national AFT legal departments examined the actions of the college president and the trustees and approved our local’s decision to sue the administration in federal district court.

George Kirk, our AFT attorney, had talked to Kevin Bailey and me about the case specifics and asked us to gather certain college policy documents for use in court. At the time, Alan was the union vice-

president, and he worked with us to gather the policy materials Kirk requested. After George filed the court case, Bailey and I found our names as the listed plaintiffs in the lawsuit against the NHCC president and the board members.

It surprised me to see my name listed alongside Kevin’s in the official court filings that became part of the public record and the press accounts in local newspapers. As one college administrator said to me, “You are one of the S-O-Bs who sued the college and embarrassed the school.” When Alan Hall found out that his name was left off the court documents by mistake, he felt let down and left out. While my knees buckled a bit over this, Hall’s back was straight and strong, and he never wavered from the position that the lawsuit was the right thing to do for the right reasons.

While Alan is no longer the AFT-LSC president, John Burghdoff is now the third president in our local’s history. John is well aware how towering a figure AH has been to all past and present employees at Lone Star College. I do not envy Burghdoff as he is following an act that no one could top. John knows this, but he will be an excellent AFT leader in a new educational environment far different from the one Alan and I lived through. I expect JB will be the right man for these new times as Hall was the indispensable man for the past four decades.





A Personal Note – This column will be my last for The Advocate as my time at Lone Star has ended. Officially, I retired on March 4 due to health and age concerns. It is hard to believe that my first column under the heading of “Tales from the Unionside” appeared in the January / February 2015 issue of the newsletter.

It was quite by accident that I began writing a political column on local and national events, unions, and education. The Advocate’s first columnist was history professor David Davis whose writing appeared for several years under the “Time and Labor” masthead. Having encouraged David to write a political column, I succeeded him by default when he decided to leave his North Harris teaching position. No such default action will be needed this time around as a former Advocate editor will be returning as a columnist to the pages of the newsletter.

Newsletter readers can look forward to the work of Kingwood history professor Steve Davis who will be offering up his views and ideas on a variety of subjects beginning with the next issue. Steve is a talented and creative writer whose focus on politics and culture will be a treat to read. For me, I will carry off my typewriter into the sunset and free myself from colleagues and friends who continue to push Microsoft Word on this Wordless man.

Bob Locander  
Professor of Political Science  
LSC – North Harris: 1977 - 2021

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Note from the Editor:

Bob and Alan, thank you for your years of tireless service to LSC, your students, the community and to the union. You will be missed! Enjoy your new adventures!

Thank  
You

## You Can’t Be Who You Don’t See

In 2017, the American Federation of Teachers at the national level, in collaboration with the National Education Association, sponsored a conference entitled “Grow Your Own: Teacher Diversity and Social Justice Summit.” The event was attended by government officials, educators at the K-12 and college levels, and community activists. The conference focused on the problem that, in recent years, the number of teachers of color in public schools has been in decline even as the number of students of color has been increasing.

Randi Weingarten, national president of the AFT, pointed out that research shows that there are compelling benefits of a teaching force that reflects the diversity of communities. Positive exposure to individuals from a variety of races and ethnic groups, especially in childhood, can help reduce negative stereotypes and unconscious bias. Low-income black and brown students who have just one teacher of color in grades 3 – 5 are more likely to stay in school, to take AP classes in high school, to graduate from high school, and to enroll in college. As Margarita Blanco, who runs the Pathways2Teaching program in Denver said: “You can’t be who you don’t see.”

I wish I had had the opportunity to attend this conference. This research is important to all of us on the faculty here at Lone Star who teach courses designed for prospective teachers. Those courses include everything in our education departments but also include our Mathematics for Teachers classes which, personally, make up a significant portion of my own teaching load. Because of the demographic nature of our college, a large percentage, if not a majority, of the students in these education focused classes are students of color – Hispanic, African American, Asian, and others.

Therefore, Lone Star, and community colleges like us, are essentially the front door to the process of developing a more diverse body of public school teachers for the future. Making sure that these



students actually make it through the program and become successful teachers is profoundly important.

Now, those of us that teach education courses or courses targeted for future educators make up a rather small percentage of all of the faculty at Lone Star College but there is a larger message to take away from the research presented at this conference.

The principle of “You can’t be who you don’t see” applies to far more than just teachers. Other research has shown that, in low-income communities of color, children do not encounter in their daily lives doctors, or lawyers, or accountants, or engineers who look like them. In fact, they may not even know what all of these people do. They cannot be who they do not see and, therefore, they don’t pursue these careers.

The point I am making is that whether students of color are successful at Lone Star College impacts both the future of this generation and the future of the generation that comes next.

As part of this year’s SACS accreditation process, Lone Star College is focusing on overcoming barriers to success among students from minority groups. Some of these barriers are starkly visible; others are far more subtle. Many of them are baked into a system of bias and exclusion that has been held in place for generations and to which we can become blind. To overcome these barriers, all of our students, and all of our employees, need to feel welcomed, engaged, supported, and included in tangible and equitable ways.

This is probably a good point to remind everyone of the Annual Mandatory Training that every employee must complete by November 29. Don’t forget that the penalty for not completing this training on time is termination if you are not on a contract and non-renewal of contract if you are on a contract – plus a “do not rehire” notice in your HR file. The training can be accessed at [https://](https://lonestar-tx.safecolleges.com)

[lonestar-tx.safecolleges.com](https://lonestar-tx.safecolleges.com).

Many of the videos in this training focus on discrimination in one form or another. Although it is important to know how to avoid breaking the law

or getting sued, this knowledge is only the floor to building a strong edifice of diversity, equity, and inclusion. A loftier goal is to educate ourselves to understand how a commitment to these values makes us better people and Lone Star a better college.

ter college.

Vector Solutions (the company that brought us our mandatory training), based on research from the Center for American Progress, the American Council on Education, and the Century Foundation reports five benefits that students experience in a diverse higher education setting:

1. Campus cultural diversity enriches the educational experience.
2. Diversity on campus improves communication and thought processing skills
3. Campus diversity challenges stereotypes
4. Students can see themselves in their leaders
5. Diversity better prepares students for the workforce

Lone Star College has recently hired Dr. Carlicia Wright as the new Chief Diversity Officer. Working with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion teams across the system, Dr. Wright is helping to build programming to help all of us appreciate the wonderful gifts that people of all backgrounds bring to our institution. Currently, these programs are mostly online. I have been able to attend many of them and I recommend them highly.

A commitment to diversity is not an add on or a side issue for Lone Star whether one is talking about employees or students. Diversity, equity and inclusion are at the heart of impacting the lives of generations and therefore must be at the very center of our attention.

Because “You can’t be who you don’t see.”

*“Dr. Wright is helping to build programming to help all of us appreciate the wonderful gifts that people of all backgrounds bring to our institution.”*



## Know Your Rights – Informal Dispute Resolution Meetings

Katherine Persson, retired president of Lone Star College – Kingwood, once remarked that the relationship of an employee with his or her employer often lasts longer than the typical marriage. Humorous (and imperfect) as that comparison may be, there are ways in which the relationships we have at work can be like the relationships that exist within a marriage or, more broadly, within a family. We sometimes speak of the Lone Star College Family. Of course, the Connors are a family, with or without Roseanne, and so, when we think about family, blissful Normal Rockwell paintings don't reflect everyone's reality.

That is true at work, too. Although we are united in a common commitment to providing a superb educational experience for our students, we are still human beings, with differences in perspectives and experiences, and with character flaws and fragile egos. Differences of opinion are guaranteed and can be constructive, conflicts are likely and are not constructive, and abuse is, unfortunately, possible. Those issues can happen between any two employees but, if the issue is between an employee and his or her supervisor, we add in the complication of disparity of power. If employee / employer relationships are like a marriage, they are not like the equal partner model of marriage. They are like an old school patriarchal marriage where one party is the head and the other most definitely is not. The patriarch may be benevolent, caring, and supportive, but the patriarch is still the boss.

So, what is an employee to do if there is a problem in the work family? In a literal marriage, one has counseling, and books, and Dr. Phil. At Lone Star College, there are policies and procedures.

This article is the first in an ongoing series AFT – Lone Star College is planning entitled “Know your Rights”. In this series, we plan to provide information, in layman's terms, to help you, as employees, to navigate the ups and downs of your work family life. Everything we will say is contained in “Board Policy”, “Chancellor's Procedures” or other supporting procedures. Board Policy is the overarching rule of the college debated publicly and approved by our Board of Trustees. Board Policy is not hidden in a walled castle on top of a mountain. It is available online for you to read any time you want at: [www.lonestar.edu/policy](http://www.lonestar.edu/policy).

Board Policy is the Ten Commandments of Lone Star College except that it is a lot wordier and there are actually only nine sections. Much of what governs your life as an employee is located in Section IV on Human Resources.

“Chancellor's Procedures” are not debated and approved by the Board. These procedures are written by various folks in System Administration, vetted by the Office of the General Counsel, and finally approved by the Chancellor. Chancellor's Procedures fill in the gaps on how to actually implement the Policy the Board approves. Other documents, such as faculty, staff, or student handbooks, clarify those procedures for specific groups of people but are always congruent with Chancellor's Procedures and must always support Board Policy. Some of the Chancellor's Procedures are posted online with the Board Policy. Others are available on the HR page of the intranet and in other places.

In this series we will slowly go through almost everything in Section IV with its corresponding procedures and other policies that are relevant to your rights as well.

Since we've been talking about conflict, we're go-



ing to devote this article to a mechanism Board Policy provides you as a first step towards resolving that conflict, whether the conflict is with your supervisor or with anyone else. We are going to talk about Informal Resolution Meetings.

Before we do that, we need to emphasize that there are problems you might encounter at work that have to be addressed with their own special policies and procedures. If your problem falls into any of the following categories, there are special processes for addressing these problems that we will get to over time:

- 1) Termination of contractual employees
- 2) Changes in contract status
- 3) Employee performance evaluations
- 4) Allegations of discrimination, harassment, and retaliation EXCEPT for allegations of retaliation for filing or participating in a non-discrimination or harassment grievance
- 5) Reduction in force terminations
- 6) Challenges to ownership of intellectual property

This leaves lots of other areas around which you might encounter conflict at work. That list includes but is not limited to:

- 1) Job duties
- 2) Work hours
- 3) Working conditions
- 4) Campus assignments
- 5) Personality clashes
- 6) Lack of training opportunities
- 7) Pay questions
- 8) Vacation and sick leave
- 9) Breaks
- 10) Absences
- 11) Anything that is a source of distress that does not fall into the six special categories above

Generally, in the language of human resource departments and labor unions, all of the above and other issues like them are considered “grievances”. In the AFT, we find that many employees who are experiencing grievances like these

feel that their only options are to either put up with the drama, or to leave the college. Like making yourself put up with an unhappy marriage or getting a divorce, we would hope that there are other options you can try first. At Lone Star College there are. These options are included in the College’s Grievance Policy in Section IV.E.6 of Board Policy which you can read in full at [www.lonestar.edu/policy](http://www.lonestar.edu/policy).

Lone Star recognizes that leaving conflicts like these to fester hurts not only the individuals involved but the ability of the college to focus on its mission. Hear these words from the preamble to the Grievance Policy in section IV.E.6.1:

“This policy establishes a fair and uniform process for resolving employee grievances that exceeds state and federal laws. Employees who use this process may do so without facing discrimination or retaliation. This policy nurtures an employee culture that values and respects all employees by encouraging early collaboration and resolution of employee concerns.”

The process that is outlined after this preamble includes many steps and those steps can sound very legal and intimidating. In this article, we are only going to focus on the first of those steps, partially to avoid being overwhelming in one article but, mostly because, in our experience, the first step is often all that is needed to get a grievance resolved and a relationship back on track. That first step is called Informal Resolution and is described in section IV.E.6.8. Here is a portion of that section:

“The Board encourages employees to discuss their concerns, complaints, and grievances through informal conferences with their supervisor or other appropriate administrator. Concerns should be expressed as soon as possible to allow early resolution at the lowest possible administrative level. An employee or group of employees who has a concern shall participate in an alternate dispute resolution process in an attempt to resolve the concern prior to presenting a formal grievance.” When you first read this, you might think, “Gee,





I've already talked to that old so-and-so and he wouldn't listen to me at all. How is this any different from what I've already tried?" This Informal Resolution Meeting is different for two important reasons:

1) Requesting the meeting under the guise of Board Policy lends significant gravitas to the meeting that may have been missing from previous conversations.

2) You can bring a representative to help you.

Board Policy section IV.E.6.7 describes the right to representation. Here is a portion of that section:

"At all informal or formal grievance or appeal levels, the grievant and/or the administration may be represented, including by legal counsel, provided that the selected representative does not claim the right to strike. The College will not pay any fees or expenses for the grievant's representative."

If you are a dues paying member of AFT – Lone Star College, one of the benefits you can count on is that we will provide a representative to help you prepare for an Informal Resolution Meeting and to go to the meeting with you. We do this free of charge. Under Texas law, most public workers, including college employees, do not have the right to strike. We, at AFT – Lone Star, do not even claim the right to strike, so we have the right to serve as representatives. In practice, the representative we provide would either be the president of the local or another member of our executive board. Although we keep a law firm on retainer as our general counsel, in keeping with the informal nature of this step, we do not, as a general practice, bring attorneys in at this point. If you are a member and you are in need of exploring an Informal Resolution Meeting, please contact us so that we can provide you this service.

If you are not a member of AFT – Lone Star you still have the right to a representative, but it would be up to you to recruit that representative and to pay any expenses. That representative can be a trusted colleague, friend, or relative. It could also

be an attorney. In any case, your representative would need to become conversant with the Lone Star Grievance Policy in order to represent you effectively.

Note that the other party in the Informal Resolution Meeting (whether that is your supervisor or someone else) is also allowed a representative if he or she so chooses. It is our practice in AFT – Lone Star College that, if we are representing you in an Informal Resolution Meeting, we make sure the other party knows we are coming. Not doing so would be unfair to the other party.

What is the role of a representative in one of these meetings? Board Policy Section IV.E.6.7 goes on to give some details:

"The grievance and appeal conferences held at all levels of the grievance process are informal conferences and no cross-examination of any person who attends the conference is allowed. The College's administrator handling the conference may ask questions to get information to help in reaching a decision. The grievant's representative may assist the grievant."

The important thing to note here is that these meetings do not look like court trials as you would see in the CSI TV series. Because they are informal meetings, the exact format can vary a bit based on circumstances. Sometimes someone from HR will sit in as an observer; sometimes the HR representative may actually officiate; other times only the two people involved and their representatives are present. Sometimes there is a set time limit. Other times the meeting continues on as long as needed.

The meetings are intended to be a frank but civil conversation between the people involved. The grievant (that would be you) has a chance to lay out in uninterrupted manner the issues and problems at hand. The respondent (that would be the other person) also has an opportunity to lay out his or her concerns. Then hopefully there will be an open dialog in which, if all goes well, both sides



agree to some sort of resolution that will make the situation better. A representative will not present your case for you, neither will he or she question the other person, or yell, or pound fists on tables.

So what does the representative do for you? We can describe what we do at AFT – Lone Star when we represent you if you are our member.

1) We meet with you well in advance of the Informal Resolution Meeting to talk through all of your concerns. We will help you organize your thoughts so you can clearly identify in concise form the issues that are bothering you. (We may give you “homework” asking you to organize your thoughts in writing. This can be a useful tool in focusing in on the key issues you have.)

2) We will help you identify your “ask”. This is incredibly important. Just talking to the other person about your concerns can be cathartic but, to really solve the problem, you need to be able to clearly state what you would like to see change so that you can work with the person better.

3) We will help you organize your thoughts into a clear presentation. (Interestingly, once we’ve done this preparatory work, some of our members have confidence to just go speak with the other person involved one on one. Sometimes that is all that is needed.)

4) In the meeting itself, we are there first and foremost to provide you with moral support.

5) Although we cannot ask questions of the other party, we can remind you of points that you wanted to make. We can also ask you questions to help you clarify your “ask” and to make sure you are OK with any proposed resolutions that come up.

6) If you are getting flustered, we can ask for a recess so that we can meet with you privately to help you gather your thoughts and feelings.

7) After the meeting, we will visit with you again

to debrief and to discuss possible next steps. It is usually a good idea to give yourself and the other person a little time to try to make whatever resolution you agreed to work out.

(It is probably good to point out at this juncture that AFT is unable to represent you in an issue that is already ongoing at the time you join the union. We can give you some general advice, but we can’t afford to use our resources to support employees that only jump in when they are in trouble and then jump out again.)

The amazing thing about the Informal Resolution Process is that it very frequently works. Although we may not resolve every concern completely, and our member might not get everything he or she asks for, the meeting clears the air and at least provides a first step towards getting the working relationship back on track. Rebuilding trust completely takes some time but, with the lines of communication open, there is often a good foundation to build on over the next few weeks and months.

The step is worth taking. If it doesn’t work, there are other steps. In future installations of this Know Your Rights series, we’ll explore what those are. Be sure to check for this column in every issue of *The Advocate*.

In case you never got to read our previous issues of *The Advocate*, (along with all of the back issues of the newsletter going back to 1979)

Please visit us at:

[www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org).

Select the dropdown menu at “News” then select “Archives of *The Advocate*.”



# AFT-Lone Star College

AFT Local Union # 4518

## GOALS

- To promote academic excellence
- To protect academic freedom in higher education
- To preserve and protect the integrity and unique identity of each of the institutions of higher education in Texas
- To protect the dignity and rights of faculty against discrimination
- 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
- To encourage democratization of higher education
- To promote the welfare of the citizens of Texas by providing better educational opportunities for all
- To initiate and support state legislation which will benefit the students and faculty of Texas
- To promote and assist the formation and growth of Texas United Faculty chapters throughout Texas

Membership provides  
professional career  
protection and a united  
voice at work.

Join us today!

## BENEFITS

- \$8,000,000 Occupational Liability Insurance provides
  - security while teaching
  - protection against litigation
  - malpractice protection
- \$25,000 Accidental Death Insurance
- Legal Assistance
  - Free consultation and representation on grievances and job related problems
  - Services of leading labor attorneys
  - Legal Defense Fund protection
- Political Power
  - Texas AFT lobbyists in Austin
  - AFT lobbyists in Washington
  - Representation at the Coordinating Board
  - Support for local electoral work
- Affiliations
  - Affiliated with the Texas AFL-CIO
  - Affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and Texas AFT
- Staff Services
  - Professional representatives to assist and advise in processing grievances

## 21-22 Monthly AFT Dues

|                              |         |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Full-time Faculty            | \$44.90 |
| Full-time Professional Staff | \$29.06 |
| Full-time Support Staff      | \$29.06 |
| Adjunct Faculty              | \$17.98 |
| Part-time Staff              | \$17.98 |

## Membership Eligibility

Membership in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is open to full-time and part-time faculty and staff up through the dean level. If you would like to join or find out more information about membership, please contact any of the officers listed on the back of this newsletter, or check out our online information and application at:

[www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org)



[www.texasaft.org](http://www.texasaft.org)

American Federation of Teachers  
Texas AFT  
AFL-CIO



[www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)

## JOIN AFT - LONE STAR TODAY!



<https://join.aft.org>



### Here's the best way to sign up:

1. Go to <https://join.aft.org>. From the pull-down menu in the box under "FIND A LOCAL," choose "Texas." Click "search" and then scroll down to find "AFT Lone Star College, Local 4518."
2. Fill out your information in the boxes.
3. You're then asked to identify your membership category: Full-time faculty, Full-time professional staff, etc.
4. You're then asked to provide your credit card information or bank name, routing number and account number. check boxes authorizing the semi-monthly deductions for dues, and type your name. Then, press "SUBMIT." **YOU'RE DONE!** (in minutes!)

Contact us at [aftlonestar@yahoo.com](mailto:aftlonestar@yahoo.com) or visit our webpage: [www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org)

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membership dues by  
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AFT PLUS BENEFITS  
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- ◆ Save on Southwest Airlines
- ◆ 15% off AT&T
- ◆ Free 2-year online college degree for members and qualifying family members
- ◆ Plus much more!



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- ◆ Home mortgage program
- ◆ Dental, prescription, vision and hearing programs
- ◆ Scholarships for members and their family members
- ◆ Plus much more!

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[www.facebook.com/AftLoneStarCollege](http://www.facebook.com/AftLoneStarCollege)

If you are interested in membership, benefits, or would like to discuss a work-related issue, our AFT Faculty and Staff Vice-Presidents are here to assist. Please don't hesitate to contact them. See the back page of this publication for contact information.



**New mailing address:**

AFT Lone-Star College  
PO Box 310404  
Houston, Texas 77231

**We're on the Web!**

[www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org)

**Call for Articles**

We invite all employees to send us their opinions, news, questions, and so forth. *The Advocate* is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your ideas. Send your articles to **John Burghduff** via e-mail: [aftlonestar@yahoo.com](mailto:aftlonestar@yahoo.com), or submit to any of the following officers.

| First Name | Last Name      | Officer title                        | Campus            |
|------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| John       | Burghduff      | President                            | Cy-Fair           |
| Alan       | Hall           | Secretary                            | North Harris      |
| Chris      | Phlegar        | Treasurer                            | North Harris      |
| Steve      | King           | North Harris Faculty Vice President  | North Harris      |
| Chris      | Davis          | Kingwood Faculty Vice President      | Kingwood          |
| Pat        | Chandler       | Kingwood Staff Vice President        | Kingwood          |
| Cliff      | Hudder         | Montgomery Faculty Vice President    | Montgomery        |
| Martha     | Neely          | Montgomery Staff Vice President      | Montgomery        |
| Adrienne   | Patton         | Cyfair Faculty Vice President        | Cy Fair           |
| Cindy      | Hoffart-Watson | Cyfair Staff Vice President          | Cy Fair           |
| Van        | Piercy         | Tomball Faculty Vice President       | Tomball           |
| Debbie     | Stamper        | Tomball Staff Vice President         | Tomball           |
| Britney    | Hall           | University Park Staff Vice President | UP                |
| Travis     | Hammons        | System Office Staff Vice President   | System Office     |
| Stephen    | Washington     | Houston North Faculty Vice President | LSC Houston North |
| Donna      | Kroll          | Houston North Staff Vice President   | LSC Houston North |

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.

