



The Advocate

Lone Star Employees Have Spoken (and AFT listened)

Welcome to the November / December, 2021 edition of The Advocate, the official newsletter of AFT – Lone Star College, your employee union. We are especially excited to bring this edition to you as we approach Final Exam Week and think about wrapping up the Fall Semester.

Once every year or two, our local of the American Federation of Teachers conducts a poll of Lone Star employees to determine what issues are of greatest concern to faculty and staff. Our latest poll ran from early October through early November and, we are pleased to say, garnered the highest number of responses we have ever received to one of our employee surveys. Over 1100 faculty, staff, and administrators filled out the form. This is a very significant rate of return from among the 5000+ employees of our college.

We want to take a minute to especially thank Vice Chancellor Link Alander and his team at OTS who helped us figure out some technical difficulties that had been keeping our communications from getting into your email inboxes. We credit the success of the survey both to their efforts in helping us improve our accessibility and to the very questions we asked. The questions we asked focus directly on issues that are of great importance to employees as Lone Star College makes its way back towards something that looks like normal in the face of the Covid pandemic.

You have spoken!

In this edition of The Advocate, we are pleased to be able to present the results of our survey. We think you will find the results both fascinating and important to the life of our college at this point in time. Our first article focuses on questions we asked that relate to Covid safety as we approach the Spring. We were able to identify some clear common ground in the midst of all the confusion and conflict in society today.

We have listened!

In conducting surveys like this one, AFT is not simply looking at gathering data. We are looking for the issues that are of greatest concern to both faculty and staff and thinking of creative ways we can help employees come together to solve those issues.

In our second article, we unveil a campaign that we believe will help us all to work from that common ground we see in our survey to make a practical difference in the Spring. Covid is not gone, it is sad to say, no matter how sick we are of it. "Let's Stop Covid!" (which has the initials LSC) will launch in January and will give an opportunity for employees AND students to get excited about simple steps that will make our greater re-



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turn to campus safer for everyone.

The steps are well known but we believe we've found a way to reinvigorate our commitment to those steps AND to have some fun in the process!

In our third article, we look at the final question we asked on our survey, "Do you feel that faculty and staff are treated as equals in the college system?" The survey uncovered some very important concerns that can't be fixed instantly. In this article, we hope to get everyone starting to think about these concerns and, once Let's Stop Covid! (LSC) has had its impact, we will turn our attention to a greater conversation about addressing those concerns.

Rounding out this edition of The Advocate is the second installment in our new and ongoing series Know Your Rights in which we will explain the policies and procedures Lone Star has in place for addressing grievances.

We hope you will find our newsletter a great read. As always, please know that your responses and feedback are welcome. You can reach us any time at aftlonestar@yahoo.com.

Best of wishes to you as you get through Finals and prepare for the great holiday season that is actually already underway! Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hannukah, Diwali, Kwanzaa, the Winter Solstice, New Years, several of these, or none at all, we wish you peace and good will and look forward to seeing you again in January.



John Burghduff, President
AFT-Lone Star College



What Do Lone Star College Employees Feel About Covid Safety?

A thought that, no matter where we may stand on any political or social spectrum, I think we can all agree on:

We are all sick and tired of Covid.

Here's another thought that we're not going to like but which we probably can all admit is true:

Covid is not sick and tired of us.

Although infection rates have been dropping over recent months here in the Houston area and around much of the country, other parts of the world and some parts of the U.S. are experiencing yet another surge. The holidays are coming and, so far, every holiday has been followed by at least some level of uptick in infection rates as people travel and mingle more.

And then there's Omicron! We don't even know what that's going to look like yet. Will it be more or less dangerous than Delta? Will the vaccines still work? Why didn't I sign up for that Classics class in college so I'd know how many more Greek letters we have to live through before the pandemic has to be over?

One more thought that, like it or not, is the way things are:

We're getting on with life no matter what Covid is doing.

Here's where we're not all going to agree. In some parts of the world, countries are going into new lockdowns. Maybe it will come to that point here in the U.S., too, but it seems that, as Americans, we're done with those measures and we're going to try to live like normal no matter what. (Did we have a vote on that and I missed it?)

Here at Lone Star that means that we slowly but surely will be moving back towards face to face classes on campus with full in person staff support. We are among the last colleges in the area to make that transition. The union applauds our Chancellor and our administration for the caution they have shown. The reality is that we probably can't survive if we continue to hang on to a

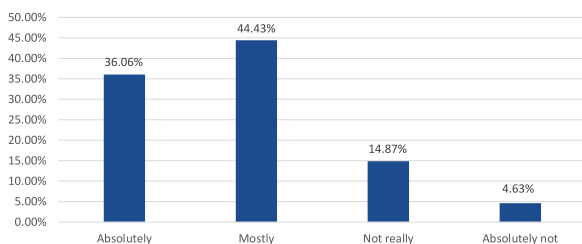


mostly remote model when no one else is. Unfortunately, if there is a post-holiday surge, it will happen right about the time Spring Semester starts and we open up all the new face to face classes.

When the AFT decided to launch our fall survey we had several issues we were interested in but by far the most important one was, given that the college is transitioning towards normal, what steps would Lone Star College employees support to keep us and our students as safe as possible? As a union, it is our intention to support the priorities that you, the employees of the college, value the most. For that reason, we are exceedingly grateful that so many of you, more than 1100, took the time to answer our survey. That is a solid representative sample of Lone Star's 5000+ employees. You have spoken. We are ready to report what you have said.

Our first question to employees was very broad – “Do you feel that your current working conditions are conducive to you feeling and doing your best?” The answers to this question are very encouraging, with over 80% of employees indicating that they either mostly or absolutely feel that their working conditions are positive even in the midst of so many challenges. This is hopeful news to build on as we bring more students and employees back to campus. The following chart shows employee responses in detail.

Do you feel that your current working conditions are conducive to you feeling and doing your best?

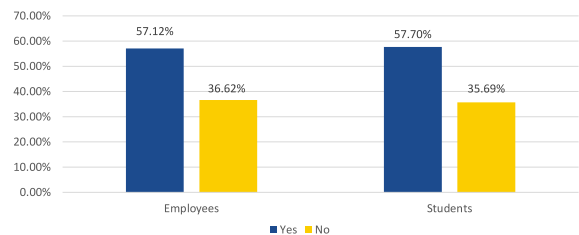


The next three questions relate more specifically to possible Covid safety measures.

To give a little background, we know that Governor Abbott has banned mask mandates by public employers across Texas, although a number of ISDs and two community college systems (Austin and Dallas) have decided to require masks anyway. We wanted to know what employees would think about having mandatory mask

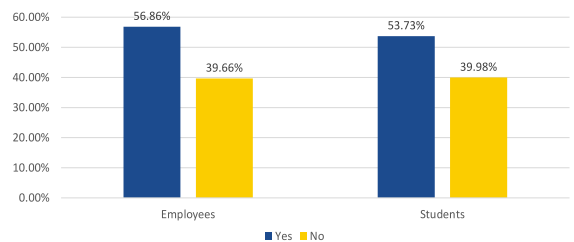
requirements here at Lone Star. In the following chart, the first pair of bars relates to mandatory masks for employees and the second pair relates to masks for students. Blue bars represent yes, and gold bars represent no. As you can see, yes responses outnumber no responses by over 20 percentage points! A solid majority of employees would support mandatory masking should the college find itself in the position of implementing such a mandate.

Do you support mandatory mask requirements at Lone Star College for:



Given discussions of vaccine mandates at the national level, we also asked whether employees would support making vaccines mandatory except in cases of documented health related problems that prevent someone from taking the vaccine. Again, a significant majority said yes although the gap between yes and no was slightly narrower.

Do you support mandatory vaccination requirements at Lone Star College for:

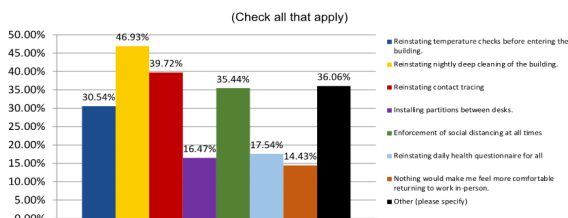


Besides masks and vaccines, we asked employees to indicate their support for a variety of other safety measures. There were a number of options and employees could pick all they agreed with. The measure with the greatest support was nightly deep cleaning of the buildings. Also receiving significant support were reinstating contact tracing, enforcing social distancing, and temperature checks. It should be noted, however, that none of these measures garnered as much support as masks and vaccines and none of them reached a 50%



approval level. Since these are not measures that individual employees can implement on their own, we have shared this list with the administration for their consideration.

Which of the following would make you more comfortable returning to your campus/worksites?



An important question is “What can we do that is within our own control?”

In conducting surveys like this one, the AFT is not just interested in gathering data. We are looking for ways we can engage employees to find common ground and work together to solve identified issues. In this case, although employee support for mask and vaccine mandates is quite strong, we realize that the political winds are against these measures here in Texas. Also, from looking at comments that employees posted, some of those who oppose these mandates, although in a minority, tend to be very passionate. Some of those who said no in our survey, however, support voluntary masks and vaccines and are just opposed to the idea of making them mandatory.

So, as we analyzed the data, we began to think, “Can we find consensus on efforts to promote masks and vaccines short of mandating them?” We were thinking, “Can we reframe the discussion about masks and vaccines away from whether one’s own personal rights are being violated and towards voluntarily stepping up to protect other people?”

As sick of Covid as we may be, we believe we can reframe that question and come up with a campaign that most employees can support and even be excited about. This campaign will address the issue of returning to “normal” and keeping us all safe at the same time. Also, while we’re involving our employees, why not get our students involved, too?

Does that sound intriguing? Read on to the next article!

Let’s Stop Covid! (LSC)

AFT – Lone Star College proudly announces our new college-wide campaign:

Let’s Stop Covid!

Notice that the campaign abbreviates to LSC.

We may be sick and tired of Covid, but Covid isn’t sick and tired of us. For the health and safety of our colleagues and our students, let’s pull together, put aside our weariness, roll up our sleeves (literally!), and take it on ourselves to be responsible to do our part. And let’s make it fun!

This campaign will launch with in-service week before Spring Semester. The week beginning January 10, 2022, watch for emails from AFT – Lone Star, information tables on campus, posters on bulletin boards, union members and organizers visiting the buildings with information, and lots of excitement.

We will be inviting everyone associated with Lone Star College, faculty, staff, students, and community, to voluntarily step up and take a pledge to do six critical things. These six things are all within our own power to do as individuals. They will go a long ways towards making our college healthier and safer and moving this terrible pandemic one step closer to its end. We invite you to pledge to:

- 1) Wash your hands!
- 2) Maintain social distance!
- 3) Wear a mask!
- 4) Stay home if you feel sick!
- 5) Get vaccinated (if it is medically possible for you to do so)!
- 6) Encourage others to take the pledge!

You will have opportunities to sign the pledge in person, but you will also be able to sign online using a QR code to access the pledge on the internet. Watch for all of this in January!

There will be giveaways for any student or employee who signs the pledge – buttons to wear, lanyards, first aid kits, stickers, masks with our Let’s Stop Covid and AFT logos, other fun chachkis, and, for union members



and employees who decide to join the union, cool polo shirts. Also, each time an employee OR a student asks a friend or colleague to sign the pledge and they do so, the person doing the asking will get a virtual ticket to a drawing for one of eight \$200 gift cards to be awarded around the middle of the semester.

Let's not wait for someone else to tell us what to do. Let's not even debate whether or not we think someone else should have the authority to tell us what to do. Let's take ownership of our decision, pledge to follow common sense, proven safety measures that we know work, encourage others to do the same, build some excitement and a greater sense of community among everyone associated with the college, have some fun, and . . .

Let's Stop Covid, LSC!

*AFT-Lone Star College wishes to acknowledge and recognize the following members of a task force we appointed to build this fall's survey, analyze the results, come up with a plan of action, and get this show on the road:

John Burghdoff, CyFair College
 Britney Hall, System Office – University Park
 Cindy Hoffart-Watson, CyFair College
 Cliff Hudder, Montgomery College
 Kat Kupelian – Texas AFT
 Adrienne Patton, CyFair College

These are the folks who are spearheading Let's Stop Covid (LSC). Thanks, guys!



Are Faculty and Staff Treated as Equals?

Like just about any worthwhile undertaking, successfully educating college students takes a huge team of people bringing unique talents and training to bear to meet a host of needs.

Professors are obviously the front line, imparting knowledge and guiding students in the classroom. However, neither we nor our students can begin to be successful without a host of people backing us up.

Without librarians, our students don't have the outside resources they need for our classes and are on their own to figure out how to navigate those resources. Without advisors they don't know what classes to take to reach their goals. Without financial aid advisors they don't know how to afford to stay in school. Without counselors, they have nowhere to turn for help when the pressures of school and life pile up too high.

Office staff build the classes for the students to take and make sure faculty are paid so we don't starve. Without lab and studio coordinators, students can't have the experiential learning they need to understand science and the arts. Without stage workers, plays and music programs go on in the dark. Without technology services, no one can navigate D2L or make PowerPoint work in class. Everything comes to a standstill if our buildings aren't clean, functioning well, and safe. It is telling that, in the age of Covid, the lowest paid of all employees have been labelled the "essential workers".

Actually, the group of employees who have the least direct contact with our students is the group we pay the most – our administration. Administrators may go months without interacting with a student, yet their contributions are essential, too. They make sure laws and policies are followed, that the college gets the funding it needs, and that all the different pieces work together smoothly.

There are many other examples, but the point is that EVERYONE is essential, and it is futile and foolish to think of any one of us as less or more important than any other.

To borrow an analogy from another setting, St. Paul the apostle, in his first letter to the Corinthians, compares

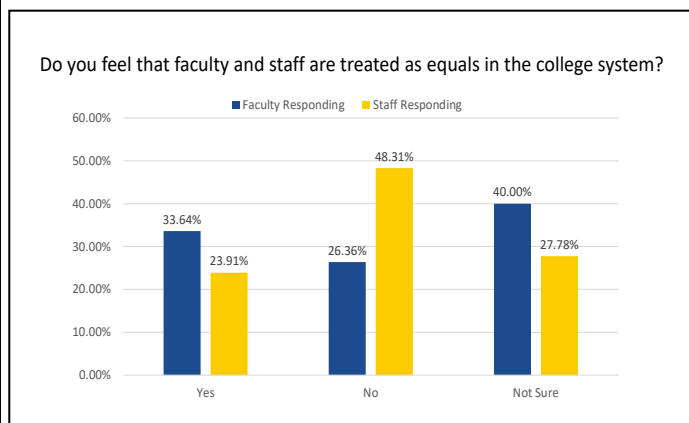


the Church and all the people in it to a body with many parts and functions no one of which is more important than the others, whether that part is a hand or a foot, an ear or an eye. In fact, the famous thirteenth chapter which includes the sentence “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude”, although we often read it at weddings, is written in the context of all the people in the Church, priest or parishioner, treating one another with love and respect as equals in value though different in function.

Similarly, we can think of all the employees of Lone Star College as a great big body with thousands of parts – hands and feet, arms and legs, eyes and ears. For convenience, we tend to categorize all those parts into three groups: faculty, staff, administration. Whatever group you as an employee belong to, you have the right to expect patience and kindness from your coworkers and to spend your day at the college without being victimized by envy, boastfulness, arrogance, or rudeness.

Although equal in value, not all of these groups are equal in authority. AFT, in our role as a union, focuses our care on those who are lesser in power: our faculty and staff. It is paramount to us that these two groups feel that they are equal in care and value in the eyes of the administration and everyone else. Therefore, in our recent survey, it was important to us that we ask the question, “Do you feel that faculty and staff are treated as equals in the college system?”

The following graph shows the answers to this question disaggregated between faculty and staff. The blue bars show how faculty responded to this question. The gold bars show how staff responded.



We find these results deeply troubling. Nearly half of all

staff responding say that, no, they are not treated as equals with faculty. On the other hand, the most common response to this question among faculty is that they do not know if faculty and staff are treated as equals.

What is the source of this disparity? We invited survey participants to post whatever comments they wanted on this question. The comments are anonymous. The survey results are kept on a server the AFT does not own. There is no way for us to know who made which comments. One or two comments were critical of the union and that's OK, too. We appreciate your honesty. All the comments are so eloquent we wish we could share them all with you but there are 479 of them! In the interest of space, we have picked out a small handful as samples but, looking at the aggregate, the comments leave no doubt where some of the problems are.

Let's explore some.

Different Opportunities to Work from Home During the Pandemic.

155 responses directly address this issue.

In the early days of Covid, all employees were working from home. Staff began to be required to return to work on campus starting in Spring, 2021 with no options to remain at home. At first, staff worked on campus some days and at home on other days. Starting at the end of Summer, 2021, all staff were working on campus for the full work week. Many staff employees with medical conditions or family members with medical conditions, asked our union to help them file ADA requests to work remotely. Few, if any at all, of these appeals were granted.

On the other hand, most faculty are teaching remotely even now. Although Spring, 2022 was originally planned as the semester classes would return to campus in nearly normal levels, shortly before Spring registration started, faculty were given the opportunity to change their minds and convert classes back to online if they had concerns about Covid.

Comments indicate that staff do not oppose faculty being given this choice, but many are concerned that they weren't given the same choice. Here are two sample comments from the survey that illustrate this point.



There are literally dozens that mirror this perspective:

“Faculty are given preferential treatment. For example, they had the choice to return to work or work from home. Staff was given no such option, even when jobs could be done 100% remotely. If supervisors think the work is being done well at home, the option should exist for staff to work remotely if faculty are given that option.”

“While Faculty continue to have the option to teach fully online through Spring 2022, staff are required to work on campus. Faculty should exercise their right to do what is best for them and their families, but staff do not have the same options. Faculty should be required to work on campus the same as staff is required.”

Messaging that Implies that Staff are Not Pulling their Weight

Over the course of the pandemic, several emails went out to all employees that included statements to the effect that staff working from home needed to be really working. The implication was that some were not pulling their weight. Faculty, on the other hand, were routinely praised for their efforts in taking classes online. Whether it was intended or not, when a negative message meant for a few is addressed to all, what people will hear is that the message is intended for all. Are they talking about me? This can be very hurtful, especially to the many, many staff members who, through herculean efforts, took on tasks they were never trained to do in a modality they were never prepared to operate in.

If there are any employees truly not pulling their weight, the right approach is for the appropriate managers to address those problem face to face with the specific employees. Lone Star College has a progressive discipline process to address ongoing performance issues and it is quite a good process. The focus is on helping employees improve if at all possible. Those conversations are hard, but they are the only way to get the few who are in trouble back on track without

distressing the many who are working their hearts out. Few things can be more hurtful to morale.

The following comment from the survey addresses the previous issues about work from home but also layers in the concern about the impact of messaging far more eloquently than I am able to do:

“Staff aren't treated the same as faculty. As Covid was still hitting communities hard last year it was staff told to return to building. It's still the case. We're mid delta

and the chancellor had forced us back 100% and offered faculty the choice of remote or in person classes. The excuse was that support had slipped from staff which is why enrollment is down. This couldn't be further from the truth. We're in a pandemic so it's obvious enrollment will drop. Not all students like or want to take online classes. Also it doesn't help that there's staff cuts and that they don't backfill part timers when they leave. I think it's amazing that the faculty can work remote. I just wish it was a luxury afforded to all staff as well. Work from home works. If someone doesn't work while they're at home

then correcting it is a management issue, not a fault of the staff being lazy.”

A General Feeling that Faculty have Always Been Treated Better than Staff

Undoubtedly, this was likely a concern before the pandemic, but the realities of Covid have brought it to the forefront. Part of the problem is that most of us don't actually know what our colleagues do. All of us are very busy with our own duties and it is easy to take what others do for granted. However, what we don't understand, we often don't appreciate. Then, whether we mean to or not, we treat people differently. Here are a couple of sample comments:

“More interaction [is needed] among faculty and staff so faculty understand what staff requirements are for their job duties. [We need] Faculty Champions on each campus who know how to promote and praise staff for

“All of us are very busy with our own duties and it is easy to take what others do for granted.”



all the good they do; all the invaluable support they provide to faculty.”

“Faculty always have it easier than Staff. It seems that our administration is always going out of its way to accommodate the Faculty. This survey is a start in the right direction as long as the information being provided is actually acted on.”

Perhaps the very labels all of us use to classify ourselves into faculty, staff, and administration are actually part of the problem. This comment is intriguing and worthy of consideration:

“Faculty clearly receive preferential treatment. AFT acknowledges this in the latest newsletter. It's interesting that a college that teaches so many classes with justice and equity as a theme has a deliberate caste system of its own. In most industries employees are just employees, and they're not intentionally divided into groups where one can be elevated over another.”

The companion reality to this feeling on behalf of many on the staff side is that many on the faculty side are unaware of how staff are treated. The following comment from a faculty member was repeated over and over in slightly different phrasing in our survey results:

“..it concerns us that so many staff feel they are not treated equally and so many faculty members are unaware of this. This is not a good situation and we need to face it head on.”

“Not sure how staff are treated.”

We should hasten to add that, as the survey data indicates, there is a measurable percentage of faculty and staff who feel that all employees are treated equally. There are many comments that reflect this. We suspect that what employees of all categories experience correlates to the quality of management that they individually experience. We have many supervisors within the Lone Star system who do an excellent job of supporting their employees – faculty and staff – and making them feel valued. Our hats are off to those supervisors.

Nevertheless, it concerns us that so many staff feel they are not treated equally and so many faculty mem-

bers are unaware of this. This is not a good situation and we need to face it head on. We assure you that this issue is going to be a priority for the AFT. We want to start the Spring Semester focusing on Let's Stop Covid (LSC) but as time goes on, it is our commitment to engage in deep dialog with employees of all categories to explore this gap and find solutions. Watch our messaging and our actions and hold us to it!

A few simple thoughts come to mind that might serve as starting points for the discussion.

1) We all need to be intentional about getting to know employees who do different work than we do and to understand both their contributions and the challenges they face.

2) We need commitments at all levels of the organization that, whenever any of us has a problem with what any of the rest of us are doing, we will go to that indi-

vidual and try to address that issue person to person rather than taking the easy way out and make blanket statements.

3) We need an honest and thorough dialog about what place remote work can have at Lone Star. What we're hearing people say about staff working at home mirrors what many of us on the faculty who teach online will

remember hearing said about us years ago. It was not uncommon maybe 15 or 20 years ago to hear people say that teaching online was easy and that online teachers laid around at home in their jammies all day and pushed a few buttons now and then. Now that everyone has had a chance to see what online teaching is like, we don't hear that much anymore. It seems like our perceptions about work from home in general now match our perceptions of online teaching long ago. Does online learning work for all students? No. Is online teaching the best fit for all faculty. Also no. Similarly, there are probably job functions that are best done face to face and job functions that can be done equally well remotely. There are also probably employees who are better suited by personality, talents, etc. for working face to face and others who can be very



effective working remotely. Other industries are exploring this question effectively and the face of the modern workforce is changing forever. There are committees and individuals at Lone Star right now who want to look at this issue. We should support these inquiries and be open to where they lead us.

4) We need to commit to the principles of Let's Stop Covid (LSC). As stated in other articles, the writing is on the wall that society expects us to find ways to work in ways that are more like normal, even though the virus is not done with us yet. We need to do everything we can to watch out for own safety and the safety of our coworkers and students. This includes a conscious realization that some are at greater risks than others and we need to be ready to find ways to be flexible with these folks to make sure they are as safe as possible. We also need for people who are sick to stay home. Standard quarantine times are 10 to 14 days. That eats up a lot of sick leave. Reinstating the special leave we had for Covid early in the pandemic would be very useful. Omicron is coming and we don't yet know how severe the impact will be.

5) We need to embrace the reality that some of us may be eyes, others may be noses, and others may be toes but we are all part of one body – equally valuable and treated with dignity and compassion.

AFT Lone Star College



A Union of Professionals



Know Your Rights – The Grievance Process

This is the second installment of what will be a regular series in The Advocate for the foreseeable future called "Know Your Rights." This series is designed to provide information, in layman's terms, to help you, as employees, to successfully navigate challenges you may face at Lone Star College.

This month's article is a companion piece to the first installment in the September / October issue on Informal Dispute Resolution Meetings. In case you missed that article, please visit our website, www.aftlonestar.org, select the link entitled News, then select Archives of The Advocate, and finally select the September / October, 2021 issue. The article begins on page 11.

Both that article and this one deal with the question of what you should do if you have a problem, conflict, or issue with a fellow employee. Most generally, the process we talked about last time and the one we will talk about this time relate to conflicts or problems you might have with a supervisor, but the procedures we outline apply to any conflict between any two employees.

First, let us point out again that there are special procedures to follow if you have a conflict that specifically falls into one of the following six special cases:

- 1) Termination of contractual employees.
- 2) Change 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.

We will deal with these types of conflicts at a future date. If, in the meantime, you think you might have a complaint, problem, or concern that falls into one of these areas, contact us at aftlonestar@yahoo.com and we can get you the information you need.

The vast majority of job conflicts and complaints do not fall into these 6 categories. Most of them involve job duties, work hours, working conditions, pay questions, campus assignments, treatment by supervisors, personality clashes, etc. For any problems like these, Lone Star College policy is very clear that the goal is to try to solve the problem at the lowest possible level. Therefore, the first step must be to set up an informal resolution meeting as we described in the last issue. You can't bypass this step. These meetings really do work and many times they either completely resolve or at least substantially improve the problem at hand.

What if that doesn't work? What if you participate in an informal meeting like that, you give it a couple of weeks to see how the issue plays out, and the problem you were concerned about remains or gets worse? If that happens, the college has a formal grievance process you can appeal to and that is what we will discuss in this article.

Everything we will describe is covered in the official Lone Star College Policy manual. You can read this manual online at www.lonestar.edu/policy. The grievance policy is included in Section IV, the Human Resources section, and is specifically covered in Section IV.E.6.

The idea of filing a grievance probably sounds rather scary, particularly if you are considering filing a grievance against your boss. The first and most important thing you need to know is that you do not have to go it alone. In fact, we in the AFT strongly encourage you to get help. The policy manual (section IV.E.6.7) specifical-

ly states that you may have a representative helping you at all levels of the grievance process, informal or formal. This representative can be literally anyone you trust and feel comfortable with, provided that they do not claim the right to strike. You can get the assistance of a friend, colleague, family member, or even a lawyer. (Note that the college will not cover costs you may incur.)



One of the benefits of being a member of AFT – Lone Star College is that we will provide a representative for you free of charge to assist you with this process. We do not claim the right to strike (because it is illegal for public employees in Texas to go on strike). We have a number of officers trained in this process, and we have our own attorney on retainer whenever we need more experienced legal help.

If you are a member of the union, we encourage and invite you to contact us first. Sometimes we can find ways to solve problems without even needing to file a grievance. If you are not a member of the union, we invite you to join with the caution that we cannot represent you in a matter that is already ongoing at the time you join. We can, however, certainly assist with future problems.

So how does this process work? Remember that it is required that you try an informal resolution meeting first, so we'll assume that has already happened.

Presentation of a Formal Grievance

The next step is the Presentation of a Formal Grievance. There is no specific form, but you do have to file a request in writing within 15 working days from the event, occurrence, or conclusion of the informal resolution process whichever is later. Suppose you participate in an informal resolution meeting and everything seems to go fine with your boss for six months. But then the problem flares up again and there is an incident of some sort. Even though the informal resolution meeting is now far in the past, the new incident starts the 15 working day clock.



If you work on a campus, the formal grievance is filed with whichever vice president is in your chain of command. System Office employees must file their grievance with their respective associate vice chancellor or chief area officer. Again, the grievance must be filed in writing and must include all supporting documentation you want to be considered. (If the relevant vice president, associate vice chancellor, or chief area officer collects additional information that he or she plans to rely on in examining your case, you are allowed to submit additional information in response.)

The relevant vice president, associate vice chancellor, or chief area officer must confirm in writing that they have received your grievance within three working days of receipt of your grievance and will also notify the chancellor that a grievance is underway.

An actual grievance conference must be held within 10 working days of receipt of your grievance by the relevant administrator. The conference will be informal. You will have time to present your case with your representative assisting you. Generally, both parties are in the room and the other side will also be able to present their case. Neither side is allowed to question or cross examine the other. This is not a formal court proceeding. The vice president, associate vice chancellor, or chief area officer is free to ask any questions he or she deems necessary.



Within five working days after the grievance conference, the vice president, associate vice chancellor, or chief area officer must render a written decision. That decision must set forth the basis for the decision and must include any additional information or documents that he or she obtained after the conference. (The vice president, associate vice chancellor, or chief area officer may consider information presented at the grievance conference, AND any other relevant docu-

ments or information he or she believes will help resolve the complaint.)

First Level Appeal

Suppose that you believe that the Presentation of a Formal Grievance that we just described did not resolve your issue. On the other hand, suppose that the vice president, associate vice chancellor, or chief area officer failed to act within the time limitations described above. In either case you have the right to file, in writing, a First Level Appeal with the campus president (if you work on a campus) or with the vice chancellor in your chain of command (if you work at System Office). When you file this appeal, you can include additional documentation in response to any information introduced at the previous level by the vice president, associate vice chancellor, or chief area officer. You have 10 working days from the day you receive the decision at the previous stage to file your first level appeal.

The president or vice chancellor will schedule an appeal conference which will be run by the same rules as the grievance conference including your right to representation. He or she will also follow the same timeline:

- Acknowledge receipt of your appeal within 3 working days of receipt
- Schedule the conference within 10 working days of receipt of your appeal
- Return a decision in writing with relevant documentation within 5 working days of the conference.

Second Level Appeal

If you believe the First Level Appeal did not resolve your issue, or if the president or vice chancellor failed to act with the required timelines, you can file a Second Level Appeal in writing to the chancellor. You again have the right to include extra documentation in response to anything that came up at the First Level Appeal. The Second Level Appeal hearing with the chancellor will be run by the same rules as the previous two levels including your right to representation and all of the timelines are the same.

- You have 10 working days from receipt of the deci-



sion at the First Level Appeal to file in writing for a Second Level Appeal.

- The Chancellor has 3 working days from receipt of your appeal to acknowledge receipt
- An appeal conference must be held within 10 working days of receipt of your appeal
- The Chancellor must return a decision in writing with relevant documentation within 5 working days of the conference.

Appeal to the Board of Trustees

If you believe that the Second Level Appeal does not resolve your issue, there may be an opportunity to appeal to the Board of Trustees but you can do so **ONLY** if you can demonstrate that there was some irregularity in process along the way – that someone at some previous level did not follow the process as we have described it. You cannot appeal on the merit of your case – that you disagree with the decision. You can only appeal for a procedural irregularity. This means the window of opportunity for an Appeal to the Board is quite narrow.

If you file an Appeal to the Board, they will look at your case at their next regularly scheduled meeting. They will decide in open (public present) session whether you have demonstrated that there was a procedural irregularity. If they agree, they will conduct a hearing in closed session (public excluded) at that same meeting. Each side will be given an agreed upon amount of time to present their case. Your representative can assist you. (You can actually request to have the hearing in open session, but if the other side objects, the hearing will be in closed session).



The Board of Trustees is not required to render a decision at all, but, if they choose to do so, it will be announced at that very same meeting in open session. If they choose not to render a decision, whatever decision the chancellor had made will stand. Also, if they decide that you did not demonstrate a procedural irregularity and they did not agree to hear your case, the chancellor's decision stands.

What Happens Next?

If you have ever worked in a K-12 setting in the State of Texas, much of what we have described so far will sound at least somewhat similar to how grievances were handled in your school district. You may also remember that, after an appeal to the School Board, K-12 employees have the right to appeal to the Texas Education Association (TEA) in Austin. No similar appeal exists for community colleges. We answer to the Texas Higher Education Board (THECB) instead and that agency does not provide this function.

If you disagree with the decision of the Board of Trustees, you may make a public speech in open session at the Board meeting describing your situation. They have no obligation to respond in any way; this just gives you a public forum to air your concerns if you so choose.

Other than that, you could file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to see if they would be willing to examine your case. You could also file a lawsuit. If you are a member of the AFT and you were considering a lawsuit, we would have you meet with our attorney on retainer and he would give you a very honest evaluation of whether you have a case that you have a chance of winning. Texas is not a labor friendly state and legal options are very limited.

AFT will absolutely, resolutely represent our members at all informal and formal levels of the grievance process up through Appeal to the Board. If you should choose to file a lawsuit, please note that those are very expensive and time consuming and that state law provides you very few protections. The union would need to discuss your legal options with our attorney and our Executive Board would need to vote to agree to support you with representation based on his insight and recommendations.

One final word about timelines. To avoid confusion, the



Policy Manual sets the day of the triggering event as Day 0. For example, suppose you decide to appeal your grievance to the Chancellor and you send him an email announcing that you intend to file an appeal to him. The date of that email is Day 0. Suppose you file your appeal on a Wednesday during the summer when most offices are closed on Fridays. He must acknowledge receipt of your appeal within 3 working days. Wednesday is considered Day 0. Thursday would be Day 1. We're not open on Friday so the following Monday would be Day 2. Tuesday would be Day 3. The Chancellor must acknowledge your request by close of business Tuesday.

We hope that you will never need to make use of the Grievance Process because that would mean that something bad had happened to you. However, please know that this process is available to you if you need it. It is absolutely the case that we've seen bad decisions at lower levels that got overturned at higher levels.

We hope that knowing your rights will give you greater confidence in working at Lone Star College even if you never need this process.

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.

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.

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

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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

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AFT-Lone Star College

A union of Professionals

- \$8 million in professional occupational liability insurance (in case you get sued)
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 - Strong. Active. Vocal. When you join AFT-Lone Star, you join the best!
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- <http://www.aftlonestar.org>

WEB: www.aftlonestar.org

PHONE: 281-889-1009

E-MAIL: aftlonestar@yahoo.com



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 AFT locals 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



American Federation of Teachers
Texas AFT
AFL-CIO



www.texasaft.org

www.aft.org

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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

**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, 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	Houston North
Donna	Kroll	Houston North Staff Vice President	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.

