



EMPLOYEE FEDERATION

of

North Harris Montgomery
Community College District

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THE ADVOCATE

FEBRUARY/MARCH 1995

Silence

In the January issue of The Advocate, the union published a series of questions that we had received that seemed to have grown out of all the change that District has undergone of late. These questions reflected a degree of discomfort among at least some employees, and the union recognized that their concerns must be taken seriously. We invited appropriate administrators to forward responses to the questions in writing to Steve Davis so that we might publish them in this issue of The Advocate. Regrettably, the administration has chosen silence over honest discussion, even debate, on these questions. The questions were asked in earnest and deserve thoughtful response. The silence is troubling.

The AFT has another avenue, the Texas Open Records Act. Some of these questions can be answered through using it. We will pursue the answers and share them with employees as they become available. Our view is shared information beats silence.

Alan Hall

An Hour's Work

For some time I have heard complaints about abuses of part-time and full-time staff regarding the number of hours that they work. The AFT checked out the complaints and found that they appear to be true.

First, part-timer staff by law can only work twenty hours per week. If they work beyond that amount for four months, they are entitled to retirement and benefits (health and dental insurance, disability, and so forth). The complaint received was that a number of part-time staff have worked beyond the legal limit but have received no benefits. Now, due to the low salary paid to them, many part-time staffers are happy to get all the hours that they can, and they may well be displeased with my sharing this information. However, several part-time folks have told me they work the excess hours

"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

because of an implied suggestion of a full-time position in the future. No explicit promises have been made---it is just a sense among them that working the hours without demanding benefits is a path to full-time status. To complain officially or demand benefits, they believe, is a sure path to termination from their part-time job.

Recently, I requested from Human Resources a report on hours worked by part-time police officers throughout the District for '92-'93 and '93-'94. I did not want to burden HR with a report of all part-time staff hours for the District, and the police departments were the areas that seemed to have the most difficulty. The report that I received included what I expected to find.

First, I found across the various District locations five to six part-time officers who intermittently worked in excess of twenty hours per week, enough to seem to warrant hiring additional full-time officers. Eight officers worked over the limit between 4 1/2 and seven months, sometimes as many as 40 hours per week. At \$12.00 per hour for twenty hours per week, a part-timer should make \$480 per pay period. The record indicates checks for \$1,200 + in several cases.

Then the real problems begin. One part-timer worked over the limit for two different periods of four consecutive months for '92-'93. Another officer worked over the limit for 7 1/2 straight months during that same period. A third worked over the limit, with the exception of two weeks, twelve straight months in '92-'93 and, with the exception of two weeks, ten and one half months in '93-'94. Another employee worked over the limit for twelve months in '92-'93. These employees were entitled to benefits. Moreover, the number of hours worked indicates an need to hire more full-time personnel.

Although this problem exists beyond NHC, I scheduled a meeting with Dr. Sandy Shugart on February 7, 1995 to review this information with him. He stated that he was not aware of any of the specific situations, but noted that the old system of record keeping made tracking of hours worked by part-timers difficult at best. He added that the new Colleague system makes tracking easy and eliminates the problem of excess hours. I have since asked around and found part-timers who report that they continue to work beyond twenty hours per week.

In addition, in the course of the AFT's investigation, I have heard that this problem is rampant outside the police departments. I have requested additional information from HR and will report what it reflects in a future Advocate.

The second area of complaint focuses on full-time staff who work overtime. The law requires that they be compensated in time or money at 1 1/2 the normal rate, i.e. one hour overtime worked should be compensated by 1 1/2 hours compensatory time or 1 1/2 the hourly rate in pay. The complaint is that some staff are working overtime without any compensation or they receive comp time but at a straight rate. Again, the complaint appears to be true. Specifically, the union has discovered several instances, in one NHC area in particular but not limited to the area, where overtime has been mishandled in the manner alleged. I have submitted a request to HR asking for specifics regarding comp time and will report these findings in a future Advocate as well.

You may wonder why the Federation would make an issue on these topics. First, we recognize that many departments are stretched too thinly and need more full-time personnel. Overuse of part-timers does not help eliminate the problem. Secondly, part-time employees who work over twenty hours are entitled to retirement and benefits. Thirdly, full-timers who work overtime are entitled to appropriate compensation. And finally, on these issues, the college appears to be outside the law.

More information will follow on these topics. In the meantime, if you are a part-time or full-time staff member, be aware of your rights and don't let them be abused.

Alan Hall

THE STATE OF THE CLASSROOM-1995

I am proud to say that the state of the classroom is sound. The doors work, the lights go on and off, and usually there is heat and/or air conditioning (just not in the proper amounts). The chalkboards have not crashed, and there seems to be plenty of desks, especially this spring.

That's not to say there aren't problems. Our Hewlett-Packard file servers, CPUs so advanced even Hewlett Packard technicians don't know how they work, crash on a fairly regular basis. This causes a great wailing and gnashing of teeth, especially during registration this spring. While the standard excuse for such goings on is that we are experiencing growth pains, or we're still learning, or whatever, in fact there is no excuse for this. First, administrators were told not to hook up more than 200 terminals at the same time. They hooked up 230. Then they tried to run payroll during registration hours, resulting in the crash. What is most remarkable is not that the system crashed, but that people actually seemed surprised when it did. What is more

damning is that when they crashed, there was no back-up plan. We had to blindly approve admission to classes where we had no idea how many students were already there. No one had anticipated this or had formulated a back-up plan.

If we do choose to blame the hardware rather than human error on these ongoing failures, the question then becomes why did we purchase HP mainframes when we had nothing but positive experiences with the old Compaq system. Compaq is made right here in our own community college district, "Why was the decision made to go to HP?" Was it purely cost-driven? Compaq pays part of our taxes in this district. It employs many of our students, spouses, friends, relatives, etc. Apart from reliability and cost, is it such an outdated idea that you dance with who brung ya? What if Compaq were to hook up with HCC and form some sort of computer training program, how would our district react to such a slap in the face?

It has been observed that we have quickly become dependent upon this new technology. Well, yes and no. We don't have a choice. When our terminals are hooked up to an unreliable network, rather than hardwired to the office printer, we're stuck! When the software we use is loaded onto the network rather than our own C drives, we're stuck! I did check out some software and got some of it to load onto my C drive here and at home, but some of the disks were flawed. It took several trips back and forth to the LRC, checking out software, returning faulty software, checking out other software, before it worked. The consensus is that the network has hurt our productivity, not helped it. When I had my own computer in my office, I didn't have to worry about having my drives scanned for pirated software, or worry if the network was up today so I could print my test/syllabus/class assignment/vitae. And when I was given a computer, I was still able to work on it anytime and simply physically carry the disk with the document to the secretary's computer to get it printed. Now-I'm back doing computer work at home because I cannot trust this system. On the other hand, I now have E-mail, which has replaced actual human contact, and has cut down on phone messages.

Which is probably just as well, given the state of our phone system and our under-trunked phone lines. The act of making a simple phone call can require several attempts when either calling in or calling out. Imagine the joy of registering for classes in the fall, when our unreliable computer system is hooked up to our inadequate phone lines!! You thought this semester's enrollment was down.....

You'd think with all the money we're saving from having students purchase their own NCS forms that we could upgrade our phone system. There's another idea which was made outside of the classroom with little or no

consultation with faculty. Having students purchase their own NCS forms has caused several problems including: 1. the forms are folded, spindled and/or mutilated and will not go through the machine, 2. students purchase the wrong form, and 3. students have been found showing up to class with pre filled out forms. It makes it easier to cheat. The last thing we need to do here is to make it easier for students to cheat.

Interestingly enough, I have been told by off campus bookstore employees that the college has asked the bookstore to quit giving away NCS forms to their customers. Why the college would or should care is seemingly one of those great unresolvable mysteries.

So far, the biggest campus mystery is the vanishing day care. Whatever happened to Day Care on campus? Our enrollment is down, the fear is that this campus may soon become a warehouse after we expand the empire to Montgomery and future Cy-Fair campuses. Last fall it was pointed out that we will have to compete with interactive TV, moderm classes from private corporations etc. One way of attracting students to this campus would be to provide day care which could be merged and run through our child care classes. Yet, when I recently sent a student out to check on the day care situation, she said one of the deans said that day care is not a high priority, and it is felt that there is little need for it. I am confident that, someday, attitudes will change about daycare. The only question is whether the attitudes will change before enrollment drops or after enrollment drops.

The college isn't even offering courses in an efficient manner. Several campuses are now expanding into independent study and telecourses. Why does every campus need independent study or telecourses, courses designed for you to stay at home? The difference is where you register for the class, and which instructor supervises. The colleges need to co-ordinate their efforts in these areas, and not duplicate services. However, with the new administrative structure in place, such co-ordination is more difficult to achieve. Maybe we need to add some administrative positions to sort this problem out.

In the private sector, companies are becoming more customer friendly, going out of their way sometimes to keep the customer satisfied. They're also down-sizing-cutting out unnecessary middle management. And what has NHMCCD been doing? Ignoring students needs while searching for *lebensraum*. Maybe it wouldn't be so difficult to get Cy-Fair and Klein to join the team, if the team wasn't so fat and bloated. (I would use the example of the Nebraska offensive line vs. the Miami Hurricanes' offensive line, but it would be too self-serving. While we're at it, shouldn't we change Hurricane lane to Cornhusker lane? Never mind. When we have to start competing

against the private sector, who will offer in-house telecourses, taught by first-rate instructors, utilizing high end technology, where will we be?

Maybe we'll still be working on the mini-semester concept. The current ruling on mini-semester pay makes no sense. It is not borne of ignorance and/or arrogance, like our other policies, rather, it belies a complete and total lack of even a shadow of logic. Rather than pay instructors per-diem, like last year, and rather than deciding on adjunct or over-load pay, the decision is that instructors will be paid per diem for one class and one class only. So if an instructor wishes to receive full summer pay, the instructor will have to teach one mini semester class, one six week class in session one, and two six week courses in session two, thus giving up a three week break between semesters! When I first heard of this, I thought to myself, who the hell would do this? As it turns out, almost nobody. The latest word is that few full time instructors are willing to teach the mini-semester. Duh!

At least if the college had decided on adjunct pay, you could reason that the college was making some sort of greedy, soak the students type of decision, where the students would be paying full time tuition but the instructor would only be receiving part-time pay. But this makes no sense. The college saves nothing. For example, if we want to offer two sections of government in the mini-semester, we could have one full-timer teach one section, another one teach another section, which would cost the college the same as if one instructor were teaching two sections!

Again, I raise the question, why should an instructor teaching six hours a day for three weeks be compensated any differently than an instructor teaching three hours a day for six weeks???? The students pay the same tuition, receive the same credit as a six week course. The college still gets the same tuition for three weeks as it does for six. The only people in the equation not being treated the same are the instructors.

In closing upon my comments on the state of the classroom, I would respectfully ask the administration to revisit each of these decision areas, and explain what the hell is going on. I would also respectfully ask the college to leave the classrooms themselves alone. They are about the only things still working right around here. Let's not replace the chalkboards, paint the walls or change desks. God knows what the results might be.

Tim Howard

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

At the risk of opening myself up for further retaliation, I feel compelled to make a few statements.

When Steve Davis called me before publishing the last Advocate to read me the letters in response to my letter, I decided that further response was not necessary. After all, the letters seemed to be primarily defenses of Olin Joynton, and while both writers are correct in their assumption that I do not KNOW Olin Joynton, I am unaware of any rules of conduct, decorum or argumentation that compel me to disagree only with those people whom I personally know. (For example, I do not KNOW Newt Gingrich, but I often disagree with his ideas.) Consequently, the letters didn't seem to require a response on my part.

But then, when the Advocate came out, I had the opportunity to read the letters carefully, and now feel that I must respond to statements made by Joan Samuelson. First of all, Dr. Samuelson, if my tone seemed "insulting and demeaning" to you, good. I didn't intend to create that impression, but if that is the way you read it, that suggests to me that this might be a sensitive area for you, and since you are the person responsible for coordinating English at KC, you should be sensitive to this issue. And yes, it is true, I do not currently teach at KC. I have there in the past, though, and last fall, I tried to continue teaching there, but a certain English Coordinator wouldn't return my phone calls inquiring about available classes. At that time, I thought you were insensitive to the needs of adjunct faculty; I am glad to see that I was wrong.

Secondly, and more importantly, I must take exception to your statement that my letter insulted full-time faculty "who do all that [I do] in the classroom PLUS serve on committees, participate in community outreach, sponsor organizations, inaugurate new colleges as we grow, develop new programs and courses, [and] attend state and national conferences. . . ." (Ask someone who KNOWs me, Dr. Samuelson--if you throw down a glove, I'll throw it back.) Shall we take these one by one?

Yes, you serve on committees. You get to establish the rules. Do you think for one moment that adjunct faculty wouldn't love the same opportunity? Here's a radical idea: start appointing a few adjuncts. I'll bet the District Faculty Compensation Committee would get a nice jolt. Yes, you participate in community outreach, but so does every instructor. If you want to see community outreach, come to the Aldine Center or one of the Aldine ISD high schools where we teach. We have tapped directly into a community's needs here; it is the single most fulfilling and rewarding teaching experience I

have ever encountered. And, strangely enough, all of our instructors are adjunct. Yes, you sponsor student organizations, but does every full-time faculty member sponsor one? I wouldn't think there are that many student organizations. I'm not entirely sure inaugurating new colleges is among your duties. After all, look at Montgomery College. How many full-time faculty have been teaching there so far? How many adjuncts? Yes, you develop new courses and programs. Again, so would adjunct instructors, if we were given the chance. I see a couple of courses at KC that I would like to help revise, and I have ideas for several independent or selected studies courses, but since I will never get to teach them as an adjunct, why should I develop them? Finally, yes, you attend state and national conferences. You also get reimbursed for that. If I attend a conference, I have to pay all of my own expenses, including registration, travel and lodging. Furthermore, since I am adjunct, I do not receive sick leave, much less the luxury of paid leave to attend conferences; in fact, it is very possible that I would have my pay docked if I were to miss class to attend a conference.

I maintain my position: as long as we accept this system that shafts the adjunct instructor, we are participating in the continued erosion of higher education. As long as adjunct instructors are paid ridiculously low wages to do nothing but teach, we will see the value of teaching slide. As the value of teaching slides, the number of full-time positions will dwindle. There already exist community colleges with a 100% adjunct faculty. (Administrators are not stupid people, regardless of public opinion; they recognize a good way to drastically reduce their budgets when they see one.) Perhaps you are right, Dr. Samuelson. Perhaps my tone was insulting. If so, I apologize to all full-time faculty in this district. I do not mean for one second to antagonize you. (Not all of you, anyway.) What I am trying to do is start and maintain a dialogue about one of the most pressing issues facing academia today. While we are bickering over my audacity in attacking committee work, someone is having a good chuckle, and it sure isn't me.

Nick Lewis

**Adjunct Professor at the Aldine Center of NHC
Tutor in the Academic Support Center of KC**

Editor's note: Joan has responded that Nick was not ignored when he inquired about a job--he was sent a letter telling him no spot were available. She adds that a copy of this letter has been sent to him to remind him that this was the case.

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The Employee Federation welcomes the new employees of NHMCCD. For nearly fifteen years, this local of the American Federation of Teachers has led the fight to make this a better place to work and teach. No other organization or publication at NHMCCD takes our kind of independent, critical approach to District affairs. If you agree with our perspective, show your solidarity by becoming a member. All faculty and staff are eligible. Monthly dues rates are \$20.75 for full-time faculty, \$13.60 for full-time staff and adjunct faculty, and \$10.50 for part-time staff. Discuss membership with **Alan Hall**, District President (443-5544, 353-8634) or any other member (Tony Foster, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Greg Mitchell, Patricia Plunk, Velma Smith, Allen Vogt, Steve Davis) of the Federation Executive Committee. Also, please consider writing for this publication. Send submissions to the Editor, Steve Davis, at Kingwood College.