

THE ADVOCATE

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Edited by Olin Joynton

Bob Williams: Responsive Administrator

By Olin Joynton

The *Advocate* commends Dr. Bob Williams, NHC Vice-President for Administrative Services, who recently intervened to solve a problem on behalf of some adjunct faculty members at the Parkway Center. The faculty members were expecting to be paid for some tutoring work they had completed, but the tutoring wages had been combined with the last installment of their teaching salary, which they could not collect until completing all steps of the checkout procedure at the end of the semester. Federation President Alan Hall went to see Bob about the problem, and Bob helped to expedite the process of getting the checks to the faculty members who had been counting on them. We salute Bob for his understanding of the problem, empathy with the faculty members, and adeptness in distributing the funds.

Interview with Sandy Shugart

Dr. Shugart is president of North Harris College and was recently interviewed by Alan Hall on NHC's efforts to reach its changing student population.

AH: You have said in various arenas that faculty need to change or modify instruction to adjust to the non-traditional student. Just as a frame of reference, what specific needs do these students have?

SS: Actually, this is more what I hear from faculty who already have made significant adjustments in their teaching strategies in hopes of getting better results with their students. I don't think it is arguable that much about our students has changed over the past ten years. This, by the way, seems to be true of students throughout the higher education enterprise, at every kind of institution and at every level. Many of our students come to us with very little preparation for college level academic work, and we have programs to help address this. But the difference seems to run deeper. It has something to do with what happens between classes, what kind of learning occurs or doesn't occur independently. Do students handle outside reading assignments, even merely reading textbook material, in the same way as you once expected them to? I can only speculate on the causes, and leading my list is the loss of discretionary time to commit to studies. This is no accident. In fact, it has been an objective of national policy that past decade and a half to expect students to support more of their costs of their own education by working. They are certainly doing this! And along with other choices and responsibilities, the result is that much of what we used to expect to occur on the students' time just isn't happening. The result is great frustration with what can and cannot happen in class.

To get more directly to the question, I think the students' needs vary greatly, but many need a more richly supported learning environment - tutoring, learning labs, problem sets on video tape, new extended classroom formats, instruction in reading and study strategies, peer tutoring, and many other responses. In fact, most of this is well into development in the college.

AH: What adjustments do you foresee faculty making to adjust to these student needs?

SS: Whatever works for them and leads more students to achieve the high standards of learning that the college cannot compromise. I believe most of the faculty are already well into a process of changing their approaches and tools in the classroom to meet the needs of their students. There are some department-wide and college-wide strategies at work, as well. Look at what has happened in the mathematics program and writing program over the past few years. All of this is driven by the faculty, not prescribed by anyone else.

AH: What resources are available to faculty to help or guide them in these adjustments?

SS: The faculty's best resource is one another. Resources like the Title III grant, the substantial commitment to professional development (more than five times what it was in 1991), and extensive funding of release time for development of curriculum and instructional strategies are examples of resources already brought to bear. I don't see this changing.

AH: What would you say to faculty who are traditional in their approach to instruction and who might feel anxiety or pressure to change?

SS: The issue isn't whether the approach is "traditional" or "non-traditional"; the issue is what works. And what works for one professor and one student may not work for others. The key, I think, is to be flexible and responsive and focused on results.

AH: Are you saying that a traditional approach no longer works?

SS: "Traditional" approaches work for some and not for others. Each teacher has to wrestle with the question of what works for her and what engages the best efforts at learning from the students. The expressions of frustration and effort I hear from the faculty here are the best evidence I have that many faculty from all teaching traditions are wrestling with just these issues.

AH: You are quoted by some as saying, in the January inservice meeting, that faculty ought to allow class time for students to do homework. Did you say this? If so, what was your rationale? Do you still stand by the comment?

SS: No, I did not say that. I do believe that because students are failing to meet our expectations for independent learning outside of the classroom, there is a profound and frustrating effect on what we are able to accomplish in class. The solution to this isn't to do homework in class, but to find ways to equip students to be prepared for class and keep the expectations for their preparation high. I have no special wisdom about how to do this, but I am deeply impressed with the vigor with which the faculty here are engaging just that issue.

Response to "Report from the Adjunct Ranks"

By Nell Newsom

The article by the anonymous author lamenting the great hordes of adjunct faculty, especially at NHC, reflects the heartaches that many of us feel about the hiring practices of the District, the sad salaries, and the even sadder benefits of the adjunct. This disregard for the part-time professional is part of the 1990's *Zeitgeist*. As Bob Dylan so aptly noted (many long years ago), "the times they are a changin'."

Every profession has its hordes of temps and part-timers, it seems. Corporations are "downsizing" even as we speak--which means hiring temps and part-timers. There is, of course, the attraction of not having to pay benefits, when benefits have become so costly; and, unfortunately, the bottom line is the almighty dollar, not a concern for people.

Teachers are particularly sensitive, I believe, to people. And we are closely connected to history--the history of the sciences, of art, of literature, and of societies. Being lovers of people and students of history, we may have come to believe that times are best when people are concerned more about people than about money. So, we are saddened by the times.

But, let's look back to the article's lamentations: "What kind of a message does our district send to its students about serious standards when 71% of its teachers are almost provoked into doing a poor job?" This is in reference to the difficulties of a "have books will travel" profession. Well, the message that our

District is sending is that money is more important in today's world than people, and our District is acting well within the ethical standards of the day.

The further message that the District is sending (inadvertently), and which is often delivered to the student by the adjunct professor, is that today one must be prepared to do many things well, to pay his or her own insurance, to be willing to travel distances, and perhaps, to work for more than one company or campus, and finally to be true to oneself, to one's own standards, rather than to the "Company." This is verily the direction of the future, and therefore we are preparing our students when we alert them to these hard "facts."

Facing the facts about the new workplace is a first step toward change. Adjuncts are becoming the majority, and as the majority we can insist on better treatment. For instance, we want salary adjustments. When we have the same credentials as the full time faculty, why should we be paid so much less for teaching the same curriculum to the same students? Why should we not form some kind of organization that can find insurance for us at a reasonable rate? Why should we not participate in committees, and make decisions concerning our college, as the majority of faculty always has? These are questions that I heard asked this past summer when we met on Adjunct Professional Day at NHC.

The union (AFT) could be our voice. Perhaps we should give it a try. Will you be willing to come together to make some changes, or do you see yourself as the adjunct who just may be hired by the District if he keeps quiet, if he is very good, if he doesn't make waves? Or perhaps, you see yourself as the adjunct who will be fired if he raises his voice in protest.

Some of you are disgruntled with the AFT for recently demanding that the District abide by the rules on limiting the course loads for adjuncts. We were being "used," and the union felt that forcing the District to pay us our due or not have us available to them would eventually result in more of us being hired full time. But thus far the result is fewer hours and less money for us. Perhaps the rules should be changed so that the District has a permanent pool of carefully hired professional adjunct faculty who are allowed to teach more hours and who are better compensated. Hiring more adjuncts to teach fewer courses just enlarges the "rank" of part-time faculty who are already voicing their discontent. The District must know that as our members grow, with no change in policy, our voices may grow even louder.

Finally, we must ask ourselves if we are concerned with the money and security alone, with our interests alone. Do we truly believe that our students will be better served by teachers who are paid better salaries, who are given more responsibility in the District, who are treated as the professionals they are? If we do, then we must be willing to work for change. Otherwise our complaints will simply be "sour grapes" because we do not have our interests met when others in power have their interests met.

As Tom Stoppards' Moon says, "stand-ins of the world stand up!"

Tenure?

By Alan Hall

A recent hiring situation has highlighted the fact that we all need to be careful about defining our words. A faculty member was hired in the district this year who was told by an administrator at some point in the process that he or she was being hired for a "tenure track position." The faculty member was surprised to discover that what the district really offers is a continuing contract renewed annually. Many of us, both faculty and administration, often refer to faculty who have completed the probationary period as "tenured" faculty. Typically, we all know what we mean. This summer, several hiring committees are meeting to fill positions. The unfortunate situation for this faculty member underscores the importance of committee members and management being careful in describing our policies. To have the excitement and enthusiasm of a new teaching job marred by the feeling of having been misled is unfortunate indeed.