



EMPLOYEE FEDERATION

of

North Harris Montgomery
Community College District

2700 W. W. Thorne • Suite A-217 • Houston, Texas 77073



THE ADVOCATE

SEPTEMBER 1996

GETTING BY ON THE CHEAP, AT LEAST IN SOME ARENAS

The college district spends a great deal of money in many areas. For example, we recently spent \$100,000 on new automobiles for upper level administrators. One area where money appears to be lagging behind is with providing adequate support staff. Last year the union highlighted problems of staff abuse in which part-time employees were working more than half-time, and full-time employees were pressured to work excessive overtime, work overtime for which they were never compensated, and work overtime for which they were compensated at straight time rather than the required rate of time and one half. We are happy to report that the administration responded to our call to follow the law on these matters and remedied the problems. However, a powerful problem still exists. More and more work seems to be heaped upon support staff lately. Registration has been expanded to a continuous process, which has in turn caused increased pressures and difficulties in admissions, the business offices, payroll, and the computer system, among the more obvious areas. While administrative positions appear on the rise, staff are hurting.

In his "State of the District" address at this fall's in-service, Dr. Pickelman characterized our staff as lean, pointing out a ratio of .8 staff for each faculty and administrative employee. Later, Bob Brown, Vice-Chancellor for District Services and Chief Financial Officer, voiced his pride in these statistics, pointing out that the state average is 1.3 staff for each faculty and administrative member.

The chancellor and vice-chancellor's pride may have been premature, for within a few days the computer system crashed. No doubt, the computer system has some hardware and software limitations that must be addressed. Another issue that must be addressed is an adequate staff to maintain the system, which barely limps on a good day.

After this recent computer crisis, the union looked into the number of people employed to maintain our district computer system to see how that number compared to other Texas colleges that were about our size and also multi-site. The numbers below reflect full-time employees, excluding technicians assigned to support machines on campuses. In other words, these are employees assigned to support the district systems.

Houston Community College	80
El Paso Community College	33
Dallas County Community College	32
Tarrant County Jr. College	32
Alamo Community College District	30
Collin County Community College	30
San Jacinto College District	15-20
NHMCCD	12

"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

The results of our computer problems are well known, In a September 3 memo to the NHC employees, Dr. Sandy Shugart noted the following:

The administrative computer systems have been stabilized. The Executive Council received a very detailed technical briefing from Bob Brown on the several causes of system failure during registration. In addition, we heard a wide range of efforts underway to address the weaknesses. Problems and solutions ranged from esoteric software issues to rather mundane data management procedures. The district folks will be sending out a full report on all of this very shortly. . . .

The chancellor, the vice-chancellors and I have a clear understanding of the significant problems caused by the system's failure: section management and advising was a mess; grades were posted very late from the summer, causing problems for former and current students; transcripts could not be provided in a timely manner; data was input several times in some cases, multiplying the burden on staff; technical staff, as well as others, were forced to spend extra-ordinarily long hours trouble shooting the system; adjunct faculty were left wondering until very late whether they had class assignments that made or not; and students were left frustrated, sometimes venting on staff who had nothing to do with the problems.

. . . The failure of the system is intolerable.

Insiders know that every payday is a crisis because of the demands placed on the computer system. When we add to payday the final grade reports, continuous registration, and other demands, we get a meltdown. The toll on everyone is high. We hear over and over of our mission to serve students. Our computer system has not served anyone well of late, especially students. Perhaps the ratio of .8 staff for each faculty and administrative employee is not something of which to be proud. In our efforts to highlight staff problems last year, the union also suggested that if the district needs to work full and part-time staff that many hours, we need to hire more staff. As the powers that be move to remedy this mess, perhaps adding to the meager twelve people employed to maintain our district computer system would be a step in the right direction. Then it will be time to look to other areas that are stretched beyond thin. What the college is doing to some staff may no longer be illegal, but it is contrary to common sense.

Alan Hall
PRESIDENT

Another registration, another disaster.

Once again, the District's computer system has failed us when we needed it the most. Who is at fault? Nobody. What's wrong? Everything. The problem is the registration process itself. So rather than point fingers and lay blame for yet another registration fiasco, let's solve the problem at the root.

Analogy - Imagine you're in the fast-food business (since we are the McDonalds of Education this is appropriate) and you run your restaurant by telling customers that between 10:30 a.m. and 11:50 a.m. you will only serve 350 hamburgers. If they come in for a burger after 350 have been sold, they have to wait to eat. Or they can eat now, but not burgers. How long would you stay in the burger business?

This is how North Harris runs the business of registration, and of course nobody should run their business like that. Business lets the market decide how many burgers to sell, not visa versa.

Currently, the catalogue lists 3 sections of government offered at the same time like this:

CLASS	SECTION	TIME	INSTRUCTOR	ENROLLMENT	
GOVT	2301	11097	9:00-10:20	Marx	35
GOVT	2301	11098	9:00-10:20	Hitler	35
GOVT	2301	11099	9:00-10:20	Stalin	35

This method causes a great many problems, not the least of which is that one or two sections may fill, but the third may remain empty. Also, more than 105 students may want that time slot, and when it's not available, they may have to change their entire schedule. Often people have to go through the process of registration several times in order to get the schedule they need.

We need to re-do the registration process. And, this is how.

* The same 3 sections of government offered at the same time could be listed like this:

CLASS	TIME	INSTRUCTORS
GOVT 2301	9:00-10:20	Marx, Hitler, Stalin

Note the changes. Section numbers are assigned AFTER registration, not before, and no more maximum enrollment.

* The next change would be in how the student would sign up for the course. Under the new proposal, this is how students would request a class:

Course Preference Form

required Student SS#	required Course Pref.	required Time Pref.	optional Inst. pref #1	optional Inst. pref.#2	date
Smith 000-00-000	govt 2301	9-10:20	Marx	Stalin	3-9-97

The student would come to the office suite, submit the Course Preference Form to the secretary or attending faculty member, who would input this data into an Excel spreadsheet set up on each department's computer. Once several students have registered, the spreadsheet would look something like this:

Column 1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
required Student SS#	required Course pref.	required Time Pref.	optional Inst. Pref	optional Inst. Pref.	date
Smith 000-00-0000	govt 2301	9-10:20 TTH	Marx	Stalin	3-9-97
Jones 000-00-0001	govt 2302	2-3:20 MW	Madison	Adams	3-13-97
OJ 000-00-0002	govt 2301	9-10:20 TTH	Hitler	none	3-17-97
Cher 000-00-0003	govt 2301	9-10:20 TTH	Marx	Hitler	3-19-97

Once a day, an hour, or whenever, the person who is assigned the task uses the SORT function in the spreadsheet, and the spreadsheet automatically sorts students into different classes. The SORT function can be set up so that the data is sorted by column 3 first, then 4, then 5 and then 6. The spreadsheet would then look something like this:

Column 1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
required Student SS#	required Course pref.	required Time Pref.	optional Inst. Pref	optional Inst. Pref.	date
Smith 000-00-0000	govt 2301	9-10:20 TTH	Marx	Stalin	3-9-97
Cher 000-00-0003	govt 2301	9-10:20 TTH	Marx	Hitler	3-19-97
OJ 000-00-0002	govt 2301	9-10:20 TTH	Hitler	none	3-17-97
Jones 000-00-0001	govt 2302	2-3:20 MW	Madison	Adams	3-13-97

Ta da! Students are placed into different sections depending upon their preferences. The advantages of this method of registration are almost too numerous to mention. But I'll try.

Advantage #1: We simplify registration. For most students, the time is more important than the instructor. If their preferred instructor's class is full, then they are placed in another section of that class at that same time. If 105 students sign up, 3 sections will be taught. If 140 sign up, an adjunct is hired to teach a 4th. The 4th section would be comprised of students who had No Preferences listed in the instructor column, or students who signed up after their 2nd preferred instructor's classes were full. Tie goes to students who register early (thus the date column). Excel will automatically group those people together. This leads to another advantage:

Advantage #2: More efficient use can be made of Adjuncts. Assume 175 students sign up for 2301, and full-time faculty is covering 105 of them. The other 70 would be divided into 2 sections. This system would enable us to use fewer Adjuncts to teach the same number of students, saving money for the college, or better yet, passing the savings on in pay increases for Adjuncts and over-loads.

Advantage #3: We virtually eliminate scheduling conflicts for students. A few conflicts will remain, such as the student who absolutely wants a particular instructor whose classes are full. In such an instance, if the student would rather wait until the next semester, we simply delete the student from the spreadsheet.

Advantage #4: This system is more personal: (a.) students and faculty have actual contact in the office suites rather than in the artificial environment of the gym; (b.) faculty can work in their offices when few students are registering; (c.) students learn where each department is located for the classes they want; and (d.) faculty has greater control over making sure students are signing up for the right classes with the proper prerequisites, and so on.

Advantage #5: NO CENTRAL COMPUTER CRASH.

The District could keep track of which students have registered for which classes in the following manner: Every day, or hour, each department would e-mail a copy of their spreadsheet to the District. The District would merge all these spreadsheets from all these departments into a single spreadsheet with thousands of entries. Then, by using the SORT function, and sorting by SS number, the spreadsheet would automatically group together students by SS number. So, let's say, Student Smith with a SS# 000-00-0000 signs up for History 1301, Government 2302, and English 2214. After sorting the data, the spreadsheet at District would look like this:

name	SS#	class	time	instructor
Smith	000-00-0000	English 2214	7:30-8:50am	Shakespeare
Smith	000-00-0000	History 1301	9-10:20am	Lincoln
Smith	000-00-0000	Govern 2302	10:30-11:50	Stalin

The District would set up the SORT function so that column 2 would be sorted first, then Time, then Class. Then the District would simply print up the schedule, or refer to this for billing and confirmation. If a student goes back to change from Government 2302 to Government 2301 at 10:30, then that change is e-mailed to the District, the District sorts the data again, and the change appears on their records.

WHAT WOULD CHANGE? Under the new system, when students wish to register for classes, they begin in admissions, get the forms, etc. and then go from office suite to office suite, signing up for the classes they want. No more sitting in the gym for anyone. No more District computer crash. Almost no one would be denied a course they need; instead more sections would be created to accommodate the students needs and expectations. In other words, no more limited burgers sold just between 10:30 and 11:50 at the McDonalds of Education!

WHAT WOULD REMAIN THE SAME? Almost everything, as far as Faculty members are concerned. Faculty would still submit to their coordinators their preferred schedules. This may even enhance faculty's ability to teach when they would like to.

Finally, even if the District were able to guarantee that we would never again have another system crash, this new proposal is still better than the old system. Under the old system, even IF the computers were running, there were/are many problems. Having one person input the entire schedule for a student doesn't work.

I propose this system as an alternative to our messy, error-prone, chaotic system of registration, which makes college more complicated than it has to be. The system is simple, eliminates most problems we now have, and makes scheduling more student friendly. I invite comment and criticism, and thank you all for your attention to this idea.

Tim Howard

9/11/96 TODAY, SOMETHING SHOCKING HAPPENED.

A secretary and a full-time faculty member came into the adjunct office toting 30 adjunct mail boxes from a division office and grumbling about "things being stolen" from the office suite. I became so caught up in this new addition to our already over crowded space, (the approximately 16' x 25' space is for the use of over 60 teachers) that the implication of all this did not "hit" until I was on the road to my second set of classes on another campus. Suddenly, it struck me that these folks were implying that having the adjunct mail boxes in the division office was somehow connected with the recent theft. I was alarmed. There has always been discrimination--against one's skin, one's sex, one's religion: and now, in this time of growing temporary ranks, especially in the field of education, was there discrimination against those who don't have full-time jobs?

I tried to reconstruct the incident. The faculty member had suggested that a desk could be removed to accommodate the mailboxes, if need be. The secretary wondered out loud whether an adjunct needed a whole file drawer for himself. All the while, I was feeling more like chattel by the minute. There were other adjuncts in the office at the time--I wonder how they felt. I suggested that rather than give less drawer space to adjuncts, adding shelf space against the wall for adjunct use might be a solution. Someone said that file cabinets were expensive and "they" (the administration?) wouldn't buy any, but that there might be extra shelves in storage. Let me quickly say that not all staff and faculty are as insensitive to adjunct faculty. And perhaps these folks did not mean to imply that adjunct teachers were suspected of theft. Perhaps they meant something else. But there can be no doubt as to their insensitivity to the adjuncts' integrity and needs.

In trying to find a reason for the discrimination against part-time faculty that I felt, saw and heard today, I can't help but wonder if this problem of disrespect for adjunct faculty is trickling down from the top. In our Adjunct Faculty Handbook, President Shugart tells us "we are especially proud of our long tradition of excellence among the adjunct faculty and are acutely aware of the college's dependence on your service to meet the needs of our students." Are these words backed up with action? There is reason to be proud of the adjunct faculty at NHC: Think of this, if NHC enjoys a reputation of excellence in the community, and it does, then the excellence must be attributable in part to the adjunct faculty, who represent over 3/5 of the faculty!

My favorite professor in graduate school said, "we pay attention to the things we love," and that observation becomes clearer in its truth every day. Does administration cherish the adjunct teacher? Do they pay attention to us? Facilities for the adjunct teacher should be a top priority for administration, and they are not; pay for the adjunct teacher should be a top priority for administration, and it is not; pay for the adjunct teacher should be higher, and it is not; adjunct teachers should have input on the core curriculum, and they do not (this means that over 3/5 of the faculty's input is disregarded), and the list goes on.

In my division, our mailboxes are alongside the full-time faculty's, and, just as we do in our neighborhoods, we often gather around the mailboxes to chat. It is when I get my mail that I get to share the laughter, the experience, the piece of cake, or the latest news, and it is at these times that I feel a part of the faculty. It is around the mailboxes that I have gotten to know the people that I work with and for. I value these brief meetings. The life of an adjunct teacher can be a lonely one.

Nell Newsom
EDITOR

WELCOME TO NELL NEWSOM

It is my pleasure to introduce Nell Newsom as new editor of the *Advocate*. Nell is an Adjunct Instructor of English at North Harris College with many years of fine service to the district. She has a wonderful enthusiasm for her work and a real dedication to serving her students. Among the ways that she expresses these commitments is her union activism, especially in recruiting new members among adjunct instructor and in keeping abreast of changes in district policies that affect them. She was excited when I approached her about becoming editor, and we all wish her the best in her new role.

I relinquished the *Advocate* editorship in order to take on my duties as NHC Faculty Senate president. The senate and the union are separate organizations with differed missions and memberships, but they have worked productively together throughout the district on projects of common interest and concern, such as letter-writing campaigns to political leaders, representation of faculty in difficulty, professional development, and communication with our own administrative leaders and board members. I look forward to continuing this tradition in the coming year.

Olin Joynton
NHC

JOIN THE AFT!

In this Fall Semester, we have many new people on campus. Welcome to all of you. We hope that you will join us in the membership of the AFT. Why join the union? I quote our union president, Alan Hall: "The union is here to see that employees are treated fairly and with dignity. Joining the AFT provides the individual with strong support, including representation in grievances and conflict resolution, legal advice, and union lawyers when necessary. In addition, each member is provided two million dollars in professional liability insurance." These are not all of the benefits, so, if you would like to know more, address your questions to Alan Hall, President of the NHMCCD Employee Federation, Suite A 217 North Harris College (443-5544, 353-8634 or e-mail Alan Hall/nhmccd/employee) You may also contact other member of the Federation Executive Committee, Rich Almstedt, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Allen Vogt, Tim Howard, Mary Ella Phelps, Donald James, Velma Trammel or Nell Newsom.

1996 Deadlines for submission to the *Advocate*

October 18 - Friday

November 18 - Monday

December 18 - Wednesday

FROM THE EDITOR:

I want to say thank you to those who asked me to serve as editor of the *Advocate*. This newsletter has always been a forum for honest expression—for the freedom of speech which we all hold so dear—and it will continue to be. Certainly, it has always been interesting to read. As a former editor has said, "No other. . . publication at NHMCCD takes our kind of independent, critical approach to district affairs." So, I am particularly proud to serve as editor of such a publication. We welcome submissions to the *Advocate*: Grievances, congratulations, condolences, interviews, or new ideas. We are happy to receive and spread your words. Send your contributions to Nell Newsom, editor of the *Advocate*, North Harris College, A 217 (e-mail ira.n.newsom)

Nell Newsom