



THE ADVOCATE

Volume 1 Issue 1

Employee Federation of NHMCCD

September 1997

SUMMER TEACHING ANOMALIES

It's generally a good thing to work in an environment where people are encouraged to think "out of the box." Our leaders regularly try to convey the notion that if you want to take a new tack, and you have done the appropriate planning and preparation, you will be supported even if your experiment fails. The risk-supportive environment, however, requires us all to be watchful in case the innovations go too far beyond common sense or our basic institutional values. If they do, we must be ready to voice constructive criticism in a way that fuels instead of quenching the creative spirit. We therefore offer several recent examples of innovations in the administration of summer teaching that, in our view, need further work.

At one college to avoid budget overruns a strict minimum of twelve students to make a class was established by the vice president for educational programs. Nevertheless, in one instance, when registration for a class fell below twelve, a full-time professor was offered an enrollment pro-rated percentage of his ordinary salary to teach the class anyway. (For example, if nine students enrolled, he would receive 75% of his salary. He was *not* offered extra pay if more than twelve enrolled!) He refused. In another instance, an adjunct instructor was offered a pro-rated salary to teach a class with fewer than twelve students. He also refused. Out of a desire to have the class make, the administration relented and offered the regular compensation, which he accepted.

At more than one college, again because of inaccurate budgeting, several classes scheduled to be taught by both adjunct and full-time instructors were canceled even though they had more than enough enrollment by normal standards to make. In some cases the classes were canceled in order to meet average class size goals that had not been communicated to faculty or even program coordinators.

At one college, full-time faculty were limited to two summer classes and will be similarly limited in 1998. Again, better budget oversight should prevent such drastic limitations. Faculty often depend on both summer sessions. To be forced to forego one due to budgetary mismanagement is hard to defend. It is curious that such budgetary constraints do not result in a commensurate

reduction in administrative positions for the summer.

In addition to these well-intentioned efforts at innovation, the past summer contained a typical quota of non-innovative lapses of attention to our basic values and goals.

The district's leadership frequently cites serving students as our primary mission. We have no systematic way of knowing whether or not the students in canceled classes were able to move to other classes. If they were able to do so, one could argue that they were served, but one could not argue that they were served well. If they were unable to move, then the college failed to serve them. Managing a budget is a difficult task, but mismanaging to this degree appears to be indefensible and to undermine our district's fundamental mission.

For at least the last two summer schools (1996 and 1997), one of our libraries has closed down over the long Fourth of July weekend, probably for budgetary reasons. This past summer, unfortunately for students, that weekend was also the last weekend of Summer I.

The library closed on Wednesday afternoon not to re-open until Monday morning. The following Monday, some English 1301 students had major research papers due. Final exams were Tuesday. Distraught and chagrined when her students learned they would not be able to use the library nor the Internet that weekend, the professor suggested they go to the Montgomery College library, which was open for them to do their research.

The Monday night before Summer Session II was over on Thursday night, a librarian came into a professor's 6:00 p.m. class and asked if she REALLY had paper due Wednesday night. (Absurd idea!

IN THIS ISSUE

- 1) Summer Teaching By Alan Hall
Olin Joynton
- 2) E-Mail - praise by Nancy Reichart
- 3) Response to Distance Learning

Dedication to Al Shanker, former leader of the American Federation of Teachers and an out standing American Educator.

We would like to dedicate this "first volume" of our new Advocate to the work of Al Shanker, a great fighter for high standards in education. The following comments were made by Shanker during an interview on ABC News in 1976.

"I think that the curriculum over the last ten or fifteen years has gotten kind of soft. We had student protests in the 1960's and many schools capitulated and said, 'All right, you don't have to take math any more, you can take "Learning to Live and Play Well with Each Other. You don't have to take English any more. You can take a "Sitting and Happily Listening to Records" course.'"

Many of us have students in our classes who are products of the softening of curriculums across America. Let us dedicate ourselves to meeting the challenge those students bring to us.

**Nell Newsom
Editor**



Albert Shanker and Alan Hall - 1993 Texas Federation of Teachers Convention - Omni Hotel - Houston, TX

Having a paper due the last night before the final! The librarian informed the professor that students could no longer check out books that close to the end of the term. Later, a special dispensation was given to the students to be able to

check out books right up to the end of the term. Imagine that!

Thursday night, exam night, the last night of Summer Session II, about 8:30 p.m., a computer technician came into an 8:10 p.m. English 1302 class in a computer lab. He asked if the class was using the computers. Apparently they were since all the students were in the computer lab sitting at the computers doing an Interchange (chat) on the final exam topic before they began to type in Word their responses to the exam questions. He told the professor that they were the only class on the ENTIRE campus using computers. He needed to take the server down. "When would the class be through?" he asked. He was told that the class was over at 10:10 p.m. He then announced that he was taking the server down at 10:12 p.m.

In the last three situations, the students heard the exchange between the professor and the librarian or the technician. Bad form. Why should a professor have to beg for the privilege of using the library and the computers at NHC during regular school hours?

Olin Joynton and Alan Hall

Catastrophe Major Medical Insurance Plan

**CALL TOLL-FREE:
1-800-272-4AFT**

VALID UNTIL 12/97

For those of you who enjoy an old-fashioned dose of sarcasm will enjoy the following response to Don Stanley's article which appeared in the Advocate's March-April-May issue. Certainly, the author of the following response shares Don Stanley's concerns.

In response to "Some Ethical Concerns About Distance Learning Programs"

In reference to Dr. Stanley's article raising ethical concerns about distance learning at North Harris College, it is painfully obvious to me that he is laboring under an antiquated and obsolete thought process. He is living in the past, most likely when we were referred to as, "North Harvard."

Our latest and newest approach (well, for now) is one that he has yet to recognize fully, must accept. May I remind Dr. Stanley and others that we now have customers, not students. May I also suggest to Dr. Stanley and other faculty members to include the following statement in their orientation session in order to properly reflect our new "customer" orientation.

"Hi, my name is Don and I will be your instructor this semester. Our special this semester is an "A" for reading at least 25 percent of the assigned readings. Thank you for attending North Harris College. Please drive through.

Name Withheld

In Praise of E-mail

At the end of this past summer, a supervisor at Montgomery College sent out an E-mail noting the end of a process that had begun in May. The supervisor also interpreted for those of us on the distribution list how we should feel about that process. Personally, I hadn't felt that the proceeding had gone well, but I was glad it was over. If the supervisor had not told me how pleased I should be, I would have never answered the E-mail. Instead, I stewed over my answer for awhile. I wrote it and rewrote it. As I wrote, I tried to look to the future suggesting we learn from the process, and I tried not to point fingers of blame. I then E-mailed my response to the same list of people to whom the supervisor had sent the original E-mail. The supervisor responded by sending me an E-mail telling me that

E-mail wasn't the best forum for my reply.

I was a bit surprised at the response. Why was E-mail a good medium for my supervisor's opinions, but not a good medium for my own? My supervisor's retort made me think. I had heard my colleagues and others voice their views on the uses of E-mail, and a few of them viewed E-mail as a tool that should be used primarily for distributing information. For these people there seemed to be an unwritten code that controversial issues should not be put in writing.

I have never agreed with this view, but for the first time I sat down to try to fully understand why I didn't agree. After a lot of thinking, I determined that the potential of E-mail goes far beyond informing people of meetings and agendas: the type of stuff administration used to leave in our mailbox. E-mail allows for dialogue. Dialogue does mean we may hear the disrupting/resisting voices of troubled people equally with the informing voices of district/administrative leadership. However, this is a good thing.

In Writing and Sense of Self, Robert Brooke, a composition theorist interested in the dynamics of classroom communities, finds that every classroom, (for our purposes, every community) has members of that community who resist the authority imposed upon them. In traditional classrooms, disrupting/resisting voices are heard in whispers within the community, more openly among friends outside the classroom, and are rarely heard by the teacher/leader of the community.

Brooke finds that when classrooms revolve more and more around open discussion of issues and concerns, voices resisting the authority of the teacher are heard more within the context of the community and become "contained underlife" because the community allows members an outlet for their concerns. In the end, Brooke determines that actually hearing these students out within discussions causes these students to become stronger members of the community as they negotiate their

identity within the group. These students feel less alienated from the community and the community leaders.

E-mail opens up channels for resistance/disruption to be voiced in classrooms and the academic community at-large. Some of my colleagues may feel uncomfortable when people voice their resistance or dissension through these mediums. However, I think that administrators, faculty, and students who wish to voice concerns over district and school policies feel they can impact decisions if they're allowed such tools as E-mail to voice their concerns. E-mail can play a positive role in our academic community. Following are a few reasons why:

1. Speech is ephemeral while writing is more permanent. The oral nature of speech often allows people to forget what EXACTLY has been communicated. Thus we get the "he said/she said's" that don't often accurately present what actually WAS said. I would love to have a dollar for every time someone has said to me, "I didn't say that" or "I didn't know that was what you thought I said." When we feel we have represented ourselves poorly to a group, it is often human nature to represent ourselves in a more positive light in a retelling of the situation. Speech allows us to reinvent what has happened so that we can appear in the best light. Writing actually creates permanence and thus may allow us to see a truer version of what was actually said.

2. Because writing is more permanent than speech, it records what was said for all to see. Having worked often with people from other campuses to create conference panels, I have enjoyed the way E-mail has allowed me immediate access to them and a record of

Dear Readers:

Thanks for all the support you give us. It is particularly nice to receive the encouraging comments such as we received for the March-April-May issue of the *Advocate*. Glad you liked it. We enjoy keeping you informed.

We are beginning this Fall with a new format for the *Advocate*.

We hope you enjoy our new face. This issue is named Volume 1, Issue 1 in order to have our files more easily accessible in the future. Soon, we hope to have current and past issues of the *Advocate* available on the net. Of course, you will be informed! Let us know what you think of the new format.

Nell Newsom
Editor

history of how our panel evolved. I have also found such histories or records to aid discussion among faculty members and administration concerning issues important to the immediate campus. These histories often make it quite clear what has been done and said and what future goals have been set. Because we can bring the E-mail back up at will and place it with other pertinent E-mail, we can then go back and interpret more easily than we could if we had only spoken on the subject.

3. E-mail allows us to respond more thoughtfully. When we speak to people on the telephone or face-to-face, we are obviously expected to answer immediately. E-mail allows us to respond after a great deal of thought--if we so wish. It allows us to rewrite and rethink before we send messages out to others. We can even do some research if we so wish. Therefore, E-mail allows us the chance to better state our views--to even find supporting evidence for them.

4. E-mail also allows faculty who don't work both summer terms to keep up on the discussions of the divisions/departments during these times without having to go into the office at specific times to meet with specific people. It thus opens wider doors to communication.

5. The egalitarian nature of E-mail benefits us in a number of ways. It allows us to voice our opinions if we can't attend a meeting or if meetings aren't held. At Montgomery College, faculty are often spread across a number of committees. As we have worked on the process of building a college, we haven't all been able to

meet for discussion. E-mail has helped further the communication and discussion among members of divisions, departments, and committees, not to mention across the district.

6. Because E-mail is egalitarian, it fits with the North Harris Montgomery Community College District's philosophy that we should run an egalitarian process of administration, thus showing that we value input from students, faculty, and administration. E-mail allows ALL people to have access to the president, the vice president, the dean, faculty members, and students without having to arrange meetings around people's busy schedules.

7. E-mail allows us as well as our students to interpret through reading and writing the conditions that surround us. Consider:

...[D]iscourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle; discourse is the power which is to be seized. Michel Foucault's *The Order of Discourse*

"Who controls the past," ran the Party slogan, "controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." George Orwell's *1984*

Every semester I have students write memoirs. I tell them that their ability to interpret their own past gives them power over it; that if they allow others to interpret their lives, their papers, their worlds without first interpreting these things themselves, they give up a great deal of power to others. They may find their lives, their writing, and their worlds interpreted in ways that don't benefit them. They may allow others to control how their past is read, thus having their futures controlled as well.

As faculty members, reading and writing through E-mail gives us the chance to interpret our district and campus practices. It gives us a chance to publish these interpretations to others. It allows others to not take part in the discussion--no one must read what is said--or it allows others to respond to and interpret our writing as well.

writing, we can then respond again. We can clarify if we feel we were misread. We can take days and write long, thoughtful responses, or we can take a minute and write a short response. We can include :-) or ;-) to indicate what our feelings might be on the issue. Thus, E-mail gives us some of the benefits of oral discussion: immediacy, conversation-like response, and characters indicating facial expressions, and some of the benefits of written response: periods of time to research, rethink, and rewrite.

E-mail offers us the chance to read, write, interpret, and open lines of discussion. It offers us the right to exercise our freedom of speech and allows people to see the many sides of an issue. Each of us has different and important interpretations of issues. I welcome discussion because it allows us a broad examination of ideas and practices. I welcome any response--written or oral--because our country and our school are built upon the free exchange of ideas.

If you have read though this long exploration of the benefits of E-mail and what happens when we interpret through reading and writing, I appreciate it. I guess the final benefit of E-mail is that we are able to write fully what we wish to say without interruption.

Nancy Reichart
Associate Professor
Montgomery College

CALL FOR ARTICLES

We invite you to send us your opinions, your news, your questions and so forth. The Advocate is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your articles to Nell Newsom, Editor, A 217 (e-mail at Ira N. Newsom.NHMCCD.edu), North Harris college, or submit to any of the following officers: Alan Hall, President, A 217, NHC, Rich Almstedt, Kingwood College; Tim Howard, NHC, Donald James, Montgomery college; Allen Vogt, NHC, Mel McFadden, NHC; Mark S. Dial, District Office.



Join the AFT