



THE ADVOCATE



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QUALITY EDUCATION . . .

The following are some excerpts from John Leo's article, "Dumbing down teachers," in the August 3, 1998 U.S. News:

A reader sent in a list of teacher education courses at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, along with a note: "This explains why 59 percent of prospective teachers in Massachusetts flunked a basic literacy test." The courses listed were: "Leadership in Changing Times," "Social Diversity in Education," "Embracing Diversity," "Diversity & Change," "Oppression & Education," "Introduction to Multicultural Education," "Black Identity," "Classism," "Racism," "Sexism," "Jewish Oppression," "Lesbian/Gay/Oppression," "Oppression of the Disabled," and (get this one) "Erroneous Beliefs."

Leo goes on to say that the basic literacy test referred to by the reader was a "basic 10th grade test in language, math, and other subjects, given to 1,800 would-be teachers in Massachusetts," who as it turns out "couldn't spell simple English words like 'burned' and 'abolished.'" They could, however, "drill children in separatism, oppression, and erroneous beliefs." The problem is, of course, with what is not being taught to would-be teachers who need to be able to teach the basic three R's. Leo reports that Heather Mac Donald, a journalist for City Journal, "recently visited New York's City College to see how a modern education school manages to fill its class time without making the dread, professional mistake of having any actual content or clear purpose." She emerged from the experience feeling that "the credo for ed schools. . . is 'Anything but Knowledge.'" Ed Schools are putting a "heavy emphasis on feelings and the self. An actual curriculum, listing things students ought to know, is viewed as cramping the human spirit," Leo reports. I recently tuned in to a talk show on which three women were discussing the education of their children. I hadn't gotten in on the beginning and did not stay for the end, but what I clearly heard was that they would rather have their children learn to be nice to other children than to learn to add. Scary! Perhaps if your child is going to make a living just talking, say on a talk show, or just making friends, the kind of emphasis on "feelings and self" that we see too often in schools would be okay. But in reality, the

world is becoming more competitive all the time and our children must be educated in the basic skills to be given the chance to find their place. I feel very strongly that we are doing our children, our students, a disfavor by this either/or approach to education. I say teach the basic skills while emphasizing love, tolerance, and brotherhood.

The AFT has put together a task force to study issues regarding teacher education. The task force will be "investigating how to ensure that pre-service programs for teachers have high standards for entry and exit, require rigorous preparation in pedagogy and the academic disciplines, and have strong clinical components. Task force members will study the development of a strong core curriculum in teacher preparation, tied to the best research knowledge about effective practice."

The AFT passed a resolution to create this task force because its leaders "recognized that assuring all children are taught by qualified, competent teachers is an essential union responsibility". . . and that for a quality teacher corps we must take particular interest and action in how teachers are recruited and how they are trained for the profession." ("AFT Leaders Scrutinize Quality Issues" Leader, March, 1998)

Al Shanker, long time leader of the AFT, was always a proponent of quality education. And the AFT continues, under the leadership of Sandra Feldman, to be very concerned with seeing that children are taught the basic skills. If you are interested in knowing more about the AFT task force investigating issues of quality, contact Larry Gold (202-879-4426) at the higher education department.

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Leo concludes his article by saying that "various experiments are underway to let bright college graduates bypass education schools." He feels that "people should be able to qualify as teachers simply by passing rigorous tests in their area of

competence," and, in fact, he sees "scrapping the ed-school requirement" as "clearly the way to go." What do you think?

Nell Newsom
Editor

(Responses are welcome. Send your thoughts to Nell Newsom, Advocate Editor, Parkway Center or e-mail me @ ira.newsom/nhmccd.employee. This e-mail address is in NHMCCD's open mail system.)

HIRING INCONSISTENCIES

At NHC's in-service this semester, Dr. Shugart announced a re-organization plan. This plan included eliminating the executive director positions at the Parkway and Carver centers. Each center will now be run by an associate dean. One current director will move to a position with external affairs, and an associate dean for that center will be selected through a search. The other center's director, who had been an interim director and was an associate dean, will stay on as the associate dean at her center. This element of re-organization probably raises some eyebrows. However, the re-organization also included appointing a director of instruction at one of the centers to a new associate dean position and promoting one NHC assistant dean and one interim assistant to the vice-president to associate deans. An interim associate dean at NHC was also moved to permanent status in that position. For these six positions, there was no posting, no advertising, no interviews. The changes were simply announced by the president, a behavior which always raises eyebrows.

Before proceeding, let me emphasize that these six appointees are highly talented, well qualified, and perfect matches for these positions. They are also personal friends of mine. I want to be careful not to offend them or suggest that the issue is with who was appointed. The issue is with the process.

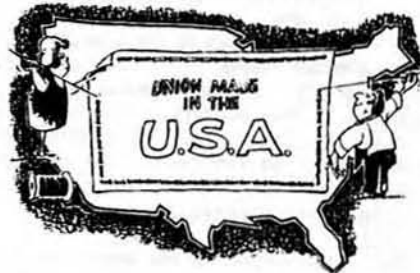
I understand and, to a degree, accept the argument that the college needs the

flexibility to try out employees who are interested in administrative positions. If these employees work out, it could be reasonably argued that it only makes sense to make them permanent and even to improve their titles as their responsibilities expand. Why go through the grief of a search when we know whom we want? While I nod in understanding, I am reminded of a situation last year at one of the colleges. A full-time faculty member requested a leave of absence. When filling this slot with a temporary full-time faculty, the administration failed to follow proper posting procedures, and the situation had the appearance of simply moving an adjunct, who was a personal friend of the associate dean, into the position. The union got involved in the situation, and the next semester, when the full-time faculty member extended the leave, another temporary hire was made, this time following proper procedures. The union received assurances from the administration at that college that proper procedures would be followed in the future. The problem with appointments is that they always raise the questions of propriety and fairness. Are there other potentially able candidates who were denied the opportunity to apply in a process that is closed at the outset?

These appointments occur, arguably with some justification. They should, however, be few, indeed rare exceptions, because they are inconsistent with regular hiring practices. When faculty and staff positions become available, they are usually followed by proper posting, advertising, a screening committee, and so on. An appointment circumvents that open process, and the college should be mindful of the risks involved. Certainly, even in the best of circumstances, eyebrows are inclined to elevate. More significantly, institutions such as ours put themselves at risk with EEOC complaints when it can be demonstrated that our hiring practices are inconsistent.

Alan Hall

Look for the Union Label



REGISTRATION AND STUDENT PERSISTENCE

At NHC, it is easy to find someone with a comment about the registration process. The old "cattle drive" mode of registration has been revamped to eliminate huge

crowds of students standing in long lines in the gym. Instead, students now have a lengthy, almost open-ended, period in which to register. Something lengthy is often described as lasting "until the cows come home." In the case of NHC, the cows have come home, died of old age, and registration is still going on. The cattle drive is over, the cows are dead, but is the system working?

Advantages of the current system

There are decided advantages to the new system. Students who take advantage of earlier registration times no longer face the frustration of the lengthy waits in the gym. No longer confronted with a five-day window of registration, they may register at their leisure. Most faculty are no longer engaged in advising, which frees faculty to focus on class preparation during in-service week. Faculty are required to be available, on a rotating basis, in the office for discipline-specific questions, but they are no longer sitting at tables in the gym advising students frustrated by long lines or sitting there wasting valuable time at off-peak periods.

Two fundamental problems

The problems discussed here may or may not be unique to NHC. Changes must be made, some perhaps only at NHC, but some may need to be broader because registration is a district-wide function.

One fundamental problem that underlies a good deal of what is wrong is that the system places an undue burden on Student Services staff. The current system's long window of registration does not accommodate reality. No matter when we begin registration, the first two days are busy, so the first couple of days of this long window are busy. However, the volume then trickles down to an average of fifty students per day until what we usually think of as "regular" registration arrives. For the period prior to "regular" registration, the colleges advertise registration times to be 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. M-Th, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Friday, and 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Saturday. Those students who do trickle in often show up to register outside these posted times but are not turned away. In reality, Student Services staff are available from open to close each day, causing intermittent interruptions to staff members. This system makes it difficult for staff to focus on anything that requires much concentration. Adding to this burden is the fact that the average early registrant initiates a drop/add two times during the early part of registration, the result of changes in the student's circumstances. This last round of registration saw a rare instance in which one student changed his schedule sixteen times.

The truth is that 30-50% of our students register the last three days of registration, creating an enormous burden on the staff trying to handle these numbers. Eight to ten terminals in the South Dining Room,

eight full-time counselors, and a handful of part-time registration advisors simply could not handle the peaks of the last three to four days, resulting in students waiting in lengthy lines, in the heat, often with children in tow. It was not a pleasant environment. Students were frustrated; staff felt abused. Our calendar said that regular registration began Tuesday. Monday was in-service day at the Humble Civic Center. Nevertheless, Student Services staff at NHC were "encouraged" to skip in-service to be available to register students Monday, some chose to do so, and they did register approximately 450 that day. Tuesday and Wednesday saw 300-400 students each day, while 500 students registered each day Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. We registered another 300 each day Monday and Tuesday of the first week of classes. Staff also processed 250 drop/adds those two days as well. Registration is supposed to be over after the first class meets, but it still is not over! Some students show up the third week of classes and are told by Student Services that registration is over. The students go to individual faculty who let them in, and Student Services works with the faculty to register them. These late students are often allowed into classes that were closed during regular registration. Students who registered on time were denied entry into those classes, but the late comers are allowed in. An enormous burden fell on the shoulders of just a few individuals in Student Services. They did a remarkable job considering the odds against them, odds that left them exhausted and extremely stressed. Our advisors, who are part-timers supposedly working 19 1/2 hours per week, were putting in twelve-hour days during the crunch time. Most of the full-time staff clocked significantly more than the normal 40 hours that week. This level of stress makes it difficult to provide quality service. This last registration has been characterized as "wonderful" due to their efforts, but one is moved to wonder, "At what cost to our personnel?"

A positive support to early registration would be one to three weeks of registration available only through telephone registration. The students could see an advisor and then telephone register, reducing the demand for data entry. Of course, we already have a telephone registration, but it still presents some challenges. Many of the students who used it for this semester were unable to get in all the courses they wanted due to TASP requirements and prerequisite checks. These students had to come to campus and be manually entered by staff into those courses the system would not allow. There are mechanisms that could be put into place to eliminate the TASP and prerequisite problems associated with our current system. Students are paying a technology fee, and telephone registration is one piece of technology which could be modified to be more effective. It also seems that reducing the sheer length of registration might also make sense.

A second fundamental problem is that few faculty actually engage in advising in the new advising system, resulting in students being inappropriately placed in courses. A cursory review of this last registration yields some curious situations. One student was placed in both English 0304 and 0305, sequential developmental reading courses for students with different reading skills. Another student was placed in both English 0306 and 0307, sequential developmental courses for students with different writing skills. The new convoluted TASP rules make advising more complicated, but not that complicated. Moreover, some students who should have been advised into ESL courses were placed in developmental English courses instead, the result of confusion over test scores or, perhaps, at the students' insistence.

In another instance, two Anatomy and Physiology classes were cancelled due to low enrollment. The catalog states that this course is designed for health occupation majors. As the department worked to get the twelve affected students enrolled in other courses, they discovered that seven of the students may have been inappropriately placed in the courses because they were not in health occupations. Anatomy and Physiology will transfer to SHSU as a core course, biology majors may use it as an elective, so one could argue that the students were not necessarily inappropriately advised. However, all seven chose to go into other courses. Had these English and biology students begun the semester placed in courses which they were not prepared to handle, they surely would have become frustrated and dropped out, lowering NHC's retention rate. Certainly, there must have been other students inappropriately placed in courses. Misplacements will occur in any registration system, but they could be reduced by full-time faculty's involvement in advising.

A big concern throughout our district is retention. At NHC, the new buzz phrase is "student persistence." It is almost impossible to attend a meeting without this topic arising. The administration wrings its hands wondering why faculty are not retaining more students. Around the coffee pot, faculty are wringing their hands in fear that pressure to "dumb down" courses may be the outcome. Of course, that solution is not the correct one, and, to their credit, the administration has consistently maintained that this is not the solution. We all know that there are circumstances in students' lives over which neither they nor we have any control which force them to drop out. This last registration may have pointed the way to an area over which we do have some control. A better system of advising may reduce the number of students misplaced in courses, reducing the likelihood that they will fail to persist.

Too many students faced inadequate academic advising. The system of requiring faculty to be available in the offices in-service week simply failed.

Counselors and advisors who were involved in registration often had students with discipline-specific questions about various courses and other information only someone in the discipline could be reasonably expected to know. Counselors and advisors would call the suites sometimes to find no one available who could answer the students' questions. Faculty scheduled in the offices were out-of-pocket, leaving the students, who had already been sent all over campus, left with no answers and long lines at the terminals to face. Often counselors and advisors simply had to make their best guess to students' questions.

The lack of faculty involvement in advising results in a good deal of confusion. Counselors and advisors cannot reasonably be expected to keep up with all the pertinent information regarding the disciplines. Only the faculty in the disciplines can do so.

The lack of faculty participation adds to the logjam at the terminals. Many of the morning classes close in regular registration. With few people available to approve overrides and too few staff available to counsel them, students were lining up at the terminals waiting patiently for their turn. Afternoon classes were available, but staff who did advising report that many students could not take afternoon classes due to work schedules or other complications. Efforts to force students into afternoon schedules will not work for all students.

Data entry people, faced with long lines of frustrated students, were asked to do overrides and for information about different classes. There were few faculty in the room to answer those questions. Some faculty sent memos to the terminal operators including specific instructions regarding particular classes. There were memos everywhere, most unread by frazzled terminal operators. It is unfair to put these operators in such a position.

The most significant change we should make is to involve all full-time faculty in registration advising. Full-time faculty should be involved in advising during the peak times of registration, which include the first two days. Student Services can manage well beyond those two days until the next rush arrives during in-service week. For in-service week, I do not believe that we need to go back to the old system where faculty were assigned lengthy shifts where sometimes there is nothing to do. We do need to add some personnel to handle the peak times during in-service week. Engaging the faculty in advising would make it easier for students to have discipline-specific questions answered. More direct involvement would give faculty more control over management of the courses. Under the current system we often see a class with eight students offered at the same time as an identical course with twenty four students. Sometimes the smaller class is killed, and the larger class

is overridden. Counselors and advisors do not place students in sections. Instead, they work to ensure that students have met basic prerequisites and then approve courses—not sections. Sections are selected by students or data entry personnel. Faculty in the discipline who are engaged in registration can better watch enrollments and balance them than a data entry person who has no time, instructional experience, section management training or vested interest in keeping that balance. No memo will replace faculty presence in the room, advising students, promoting classes, and managing enrollments.

Faculty once had the strongest voice in registration. Over time, we have abdicated that power. Having a couple of faculty from each discipline on duty for a few hours of peak registration would greatly reduce the enormous pressure that now falls upon Student Services. Faculty often complain of students who are misplaced in courses or the imbalance of enrollment in their classes. We should not complain if we are not willing to accept some ownership of the problem and see ourselves as partners with Student Services in an event that has a significant impact on instruction.

Alan Hall

(special thanks to the following people who shared information for this article: Bennie Lambert, Jim Carroll, Connie McMahan, Jennie Harrison, and Gary Clark)

\$ALARY INCREASES

In the April *Advocate*, we highlighted a problem regarding staff salaries. A number of staff salaries were so low that those employees qualified for welfare. In their case, the national focus on welfare to work was ineffective because, while working full-time for NHMCCD, they still qualified for welfare. The union is pleased with Dr. Pickelman's recommendation to the Board that this problem be remedied. He recommended, and the Board rightly accepted, that employees receive a 4% raise with a \$1,200 minimum, with the caveat that, after the percentage adjustment, any employee still below \$15,000 annually would be raised to a minimum of \$15,000. We do not know exactly how many employees were affected by this new minimum. In our earlier article, we pointed out that 106 were potentially below the poverty line (determined by income and number of dependents). We also know that one employee was working full-time for \$12,151. The new minimum means that this employee has received a \$2,800 pay increase.

There was one wrinkle. When the salary adjustments were announced, they were announced as applicable to all full-time

employees, with no exceptions or limitations mentioned. However, a handful of full-time staff work nine or ten and one half months, typically faculty secretaries. The \$1,200 minimum will be pro-rated for them. It is unfortunate that the announcement originally led them to believe that they would receive the full

amount. Alan Hall has visited with Dr. Pickelman, who acknowledged the announcements contained no exceptions. Dr. Pickelman expressed regret for the confusion, assured Hall that it was simply an oversight, and committed to closer attention to such announcements in the future.


Overall, this recommendation by the chancellor and its acceptance by the Board is a significant step in the right direction. The union applauds this step and is grateful for Dr. Pickelman's recognition at fall in-service of the union's role in working on this problem of low salaries.

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, Parkway Center, (e-mail at Ira.N.Newsom@NHMCCD.edu), or submit to any of the following officers: Alan Hall, President, ACAD 217, NHC, Rich Almstedt, KC; Tim Howard, NHC, Donald James, MC; Allen Vogt, NHC, Mel McFadden, NHC;

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