



THE ADVOCATE



Volume 4 Issue 1

Employee Federation of NHMCCD

September 2000

WELCOME

The AFT welcomes everyone to the 2000-01 academic year. We especially want to extend a warm welcome to all new employees. The AFT is an organization that represents faculty and staff throughout the college district. Membership provides you with important connections to other employees and a good deal of professional camaraderie. We ensure that the employee voice is heard in decision making, and we affect policy and procedure, which are issues important to all employees. We consult regularly with the administration and do a good deal of problem solving and conflict resolution. We believe in employee rights and responsibilities and work to protect and preserve them. We routinely assist employees who encounter a problem, providing anything from advice, to a representative in meetings, to a lawyer. We advocate educational issues that are in the best interest of students. We do a lot. Whether you are a new employee or a returning one, we hope you'll join us.

Staff

AFT Hosts District-Wide "Welcome Back" Party

The AFT will host a district-wide "Welcome Back" party on Friday, October 20, from 4 – 6 p.m. at SRO Sports Bar on FM 1960 at Cutten Rd. All NHMCCD employees are invited to attend. We will provide the munchies; all

you'll need to do is purchase your own drinks. Please RSVP to Cris Neuman at North Harris College by Friday, October 6 if you plan to attend. Cris can be reached by phone at ext. 5712, in her office at WNSP 174M, or by e-mail at crecentia.neuman@nhmccd.edu. We hope to see you there!

A Matter of Privacy

Several years ago, I got into an argument with an upper level administrator over employees' rights to privacy on health issues. We were in a meeting on health benefits and their costs to the district when this individual stunned me with a piece of information. He told me that he routinely reviewed health claims of employees and insurance company pay outs. I can't recall the process in place at the time, but claim forms did track through the district office. Alarmed, I asked, "Do you mean that you review a general report on the number of claims and the total pay out, or something more specific?" The exchange that followed went something like this:

"No, I look at individual claims, costs, and so forth."
 "Do you mean with a name and diagnosis attached?"
 "Sure."
 "What makes you think you have the right to know that information?"
 "The college is paying the premiums. We have the right to know what we're paying for."

Of course, the union's position was that the college may have the right to know the number of claims and the amount of pay out by the insurance company annually, but the college certainly is not entitled to know any employee's specific medical diagnosis or related information, and we took steps to ensure the privacy that employees should enjoy today.

In this Issue

Welcome Staff
 Party Staff
 A Matter of Privacy..... Alan Hall
 Let's Cut the Cheese..... Tim Howard
 Summer Surprise..... Staff
 Building a Profession... Sandra Feldman

Imagine my surprise to revisit this topic again this summer. A union member needed to go on short-term disability and was told to complete a PAR(Personnel Action Request) to reduce salary to the appropriate level. Our member was then to attach a doctor's letter with a diagnosis to the PAR and turn it in to the department secretary. The secretary would then turn the paperwork over to her supervisor, who would turn it over to the dean, who would send it to the business office. The business office would then send it to the office of the vice-president of administrative services, and that office would send it to Frances Kaough at the district office. Ultimately, this paperwork, with very personal medical information included, would pass through at least six people before getting to Frances, who is the appropriate recipient of such data.

Our member was horrified that this process, which violates personal privacy, was in place and contacted me. I immediately contacted Sandy McMullan, General Counsel/Vice Chancellor Human Resources at the district office, and we quickly worked out an agreement whereby the union member sent the information directly to McMullan, who passed it on to Frances, significantly reducing access to the employee's personal information.

McMullan explained to me that this problem resulted from NHC's not having a person with full-time responsibility for the full range of Human Resources functions. She assures me that the college is interviewing now for this position. When that individual is hired, NHC employees will send required medical information to that person, who will send it to the appropriate person at the district office. In the meantime, NHC employees should not track medical information through the normal leave process. Instead, send it directly to Glenn Powell, Director of Employment Services at the district office.

After the union resolved the problem, our member commented, "During one of the most difficult and fragile times for me professionally the union, within a matter of minutes, guided, counseled and helped protect my privacy. The minimal dues I pay to the union will never outweigh my appreciation and peace of mind that I have received from union representation."

The union appreciates McMullan's sensitive and common-sense approach to this delicate situation. One lesson from all of this for all employees is that you do have some rights here at the college. If you feel that you are being treated inappropriately, get some assistance.

Alan Hall

AFT SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

New Yorker \$22.98
Newsweek \$24.99
Reader's Digest \$13.96

- ✓ Hundreds of other titles.
- ✓ Call to order or to obtain our list.



Your union's
magazine
program

1-800-877-7238

VALID THROUGH 12/00

LET'S CUT THE CHEESE

Having endured the same speech two years in a row regarding change (ironic, don't you think?), I have a few thoughts regarding the direction of the district.

First off, the district is aggressively pursuing inherently conflicting goals. One goal is to increase retention. Another is to promote and expand distance learning. The problem here is that the literature suggests that distance learning classes have lower retention rates. By expanding distance course offerings, this will inevitably cause overall retention rates to fall. If distance is the wave of the future, fine, but the district must be prepared to endure lower retention rates. If retention is more important, and becomes the basis for funding, then one sure way of increasing retention is to cut back on distance education. We cannot do both at the same time. Which direction should we move the cheese? It can't go both ways at once.

Another conflicting goal is section management vs. a guaranteed schedule. In order to cut "personnel" costs, a huge emphasis has been placed on reducing class offerings in order to raise the "average" class size.

I would bet that faculty salaries, as a % of overall district expenditures, is a smaller slice of the budget now than it was a decade ago. We all know that the increase in personnel costs has come in staff and administration. And yet, to save money we do not seek to minimize either, but instead seek to cut

back on instruction costs so we can spend more money on, well, instructional support. (If we eliminated instructional costs altogether, this would be quite a boon to the instructional support budget).

Secondly, it has been suggested that once a class is put in the schedule, it should be allowed to "make" so that students displaced by a cancelled class do not have to go back and completely re-do their schedules (a sort of domino effect, as it were). Again, both cannot be achieved at the same time. The district must tell us which has priority, section management OR guaranteed schedule. Both have their merits, but we cannot do both at the same time. Either the district will have to tolerate some sections having small numbers of students to achieve their "guaranteed schedule" goal, or they will have to cancel the smaller classes and risk alienating the displaced students.

Additionally, section management also conflicts with the goal of retention. Again, the literature indicates that smaller class size enhances student performance. The district should again beware that increasing average class size will most likely adversely affect retention.

So, which is it? The district needs to rank these goals in order of importance. I realize that would take vision and foresight, but it must be done. Tell us to charge, tell us to retreat, but don't tell us to do both.

Speaking of vision and foresight, remember the comment two years ago that "in 25 years the college or university as a physical entity, with buildings and campuses, will cease to exist"? Then why are we building a campus in Cy-Fair, which only has an operating life of 23 years left? And why have we invested so much capital investment into a dying campus like NHC if in 23 years it will only exist as a series of warehouses?

Perhaps the most disturbing thing I heard at the opening day ceremonies regarded the zero tolerance policy on pornographic web sites: If you go there once, ok. If you go there twice, you're fired. Now first, and least importantly, that is not technically a zero tolerance; it's a ONE or TWO tolerance policy, but never-mind that. Just exactly how frequently are our computers being

scanned by the administration? And what assurances do we have that they are only being scanned for pornographic web "cookies" left on computer hard drives after web site visit?

Even better: What is the definition of a sexually explicit or pornographic web site, and who determines whether the visitation to one of these sites by employees is "justified" by researchers? Who can and who cannot access these sites? Where do we draw the line for academic freedom and legitimate academic research? You know, there are probably some books in the libraries around the district which also have what would be considered "sexually explicit" or "pornographic" content by some in our community. Should we go through library records and fire employees who checked out such books? Should we set up some goon squad to go through our libraries and place such books on high shelves so children visiting the campus are not exposed (so to speak)?

Which takes us to the issue of minors in classes. Long ago, a group of us raised the issue of what will happen when dual credit students come into a classroom setting where issues are discussed at the post-secondary level which are not even allowed to be discussed at the secondary level. What artwork will have to be removed from the classrooms and hallways?

And when ANYONE in the administration talks about how we need to embrace change, I almost gag on my cheese. It has again been my experience over the last decade or so that it is the administration that sometimes impedes change by sending faculty mixed or contradictory signals.

It was the administration who spent tons of money on an ITV system that nobody was lobbying for and nobody knew how to use. And when it was imposed on us, many of us took the time and effort to get trained on the system, but were specifically told that we would NOT receive any additional compensation or class-load reduction for having done so, or for teaching an ITV class. Yet, at the same time, other faculty had been given such consideration for developing Web-based classes. As a result, we have an expensive white-elephant ITV system which is under-used, and lots of

internet classes which relatively few students sign up for.

It was the administration who told us we could not have MW morning classes anymore, because, well, there never really was a very good explanation of that, other than it leaves the campus relatively empty on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. So its NOT ok to have MW classes in a 15 week semester, but it is ok to have 4 day a week classes during the 12 weeks of summer, in which the campus sits relatively empty on those very same days.

It is the administration who pushed on us a new workload policy and is pushing a new evaluation model, neither one of which is wildly popular with faculty. Programs are often implemented due to the general apathy and ignorance of the faculty at large. Any changes WE propose, modifications WE suggest, are the ones ignored.

So who is it, then, who really has a problem with embracing change? The district and administration want the rest of us to embrace change all right, but on THEIR own terms. They only seek input and feedback so long as it is positive and reinforces their own "vision".

Over the last decade, what I have witnessed at NHMCCD is a general deterioration of the basic mission of the college. This is largely due not to a lack of vision per se, but a lack of COHERENT vision. Increasingly we are being asked to be all things to all people in our district community; one size fits all. But in doing so, we have become less of a college and more of a glorified community center. Less the "North Harvard District" and more of the "McDonald's of Education." My congratulations to those who have made this so. In a few years, when students drive thru to sign up for classes, we'll just ask them "would you like that plain or with cheese?"

Tim Howard

Summer Surprise

A number of faculty were shocked in June when they received their first summer paycheck. They were being underpaid anywhere from \$1,500 to almost \$5,000, some being paid less

than what they were earning five summers ago. Calls to the union swelled enormously. Pay is obviously a sensitive issue.

After assuring members that the underpayment must have resulted from some mistake and that salaries surely would be restored, union president Alan Hall made a few phone calls to start the process of discovering what had happened.

Ultimately, the answer was fairly simple. The underpayments resulted from how the summer pay formula was applied to some individuals. Once the problem was discovered, the college agreed to restore the salaries as quickly as possible.

Staff

Building a Profession" by

**AFT President
Sandra Feldman**

June 2000

AFT calls for higher standards for new teachers and teacher education programs.

When AFT recently released its report on how to improve teacher education, our call for a national test for those entering the teaching profession got a lot of favorable notice. And it should have. Although our proposal that prospective teachers pass a rigorous exam in a subject-matter field as well as pedagogy is no more than other professions expect—and most states already have some form of test—we proposed a high-level national exam because we believe teachers should know and be able to teach their subjects well whether they are in California or Mississippi.

But to some extent this excitement about teacher testing has obscured the rest of our report. That's too bad because what we were offering was nothing less than a blueprint for redesigning the way U.S. teachers are educated and inducted into their profession.

Poles Apart

There are two schools of thought about the best way to educate future teachers. While both sides agree that current teacher education programs don't do a very good job, their proposals for change could not be more different.

According to the people I'll call the "deregulators," we should forget about demanding that prospective teachers meet high academic standards or offering them any kind of teacher-specific education. In fact, the deregulators recommend that we get rid of teacher education programs and most requirements for licensing. Let college graduates who have academic majors and want to be teachers go into the classroom and figure out for themselves how to teach. After all, the deregulators say, teaching, unlike heart surgery, is primarily a matter of trial and error.

The other school of thought, the one represented by our report, calls for raising standards--both for teacher education programs and for prospective teachers.

We believe all new teachers should have a strong liberal arts education, an academic major, and on-the-job mentoring with master teachers and that they should pass high-level professional exams--all of which would strengthen the professional component of teaching and bring teaching more in line with other professions like medicine or law. Here are some of our specific recommendations:

Require two years of core courses in subjects like mathematics, science, and English language arts to ensure that future teachers have a good foundation in the liberal arts.

Raise the GPA required to enter a teaching program from 2.5 (a C average) to 2.75 and, eventually, 3.0; and replace the low-level exam testing basic literacy that is used by many states with one requiring students to show college-level proficiency in core subject areas before they enter a teaching program.

Require an academic major so students have a firm grounding in the subject they are preparing to teach.

Develop a core of pedagogical knowledge that all teachers should

have. Today we have a body of knowledge based on new research, and the research evidence has led, for example, to a consensus that has ended the "Reading Wars." College-level courses that reflect this new knowledge will help young teachers make the important decisions about how best to shape their lessons.

Strengthen what we call the "clinical experience"--that is, the actual training on the job. Much of the practice teaching that prospective teachers get is brief (10 to 12 weeks) and it is often hit or miss. Spending an extended period of time in a well-run program, under the tutelage of a master teacher, would give young teachers an experience similar to the one that physicians get from an internship.

Require a tough licensing exam that would demand college-level competency in subject matter and pedagogy. This would replace the current state exams that are often set at a basic level.

Strengthen induction programs. In too many--perhaps most--places, sink-or-swim is still the rule for beginning teachers. A good induction program in which beginners get help from experienced teachers not only strengthens young teachers' skills; it also prevents teacher drop-out.

Teaching is far more complicated than people who have never tried it understand. And it will become more complex as we go forward in the information age. We owe it to our children to be sure their future teachers are able to meet that challenge.

These are ambitious changes, necessary ones, we believe, and they will require a new and unprecedented cooperation between institutions of higher education and public schools. But we already have some pioneer programs, like the ones at the University of Cincinnati and Montclair University in New Jersey, and the work now is to make that excellence universal.

The report, "Building a Profession," is available for download.

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO - 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW - Washington, DC 20001

Copyright by the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. All rights reserved. Photographs and illustrations, as well as text, cannot be used without permission from the AFT.

CONCERNED ABOUT RECLASSIFICATION ISSUES? So are we. The AFT is examining your concerns about reclassifications. Stay tuned for more information.



©RF

CURRENT DUES

FULL-TIME FACULTY - \$23.80 per month
FULL-TIME STAFF - \$16.65
ADJUNCT FACULTY and PART-TIME STAFF
- \$13.55

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 Dawn Baxley, Editor, NHC, or e-mail: dawnb@nhmccd.edu, or submit to any of the following officers: Alan Hall, President, ACAD 217, NHC, Velma Trammell, WNSP 174, Rich Almstedt, KC, Tim Howard, NHC, Julie Alber, MC, Cris Neuman, NHC, Mary Ella Phelps, TC Bob Locander, NHC, or Allen Vogt, NHC,;

*Tired of paying high prices
for the books you need?*

Shop the



Bookstore

Save up to **30% off** publisher
prices!

www.aft.org/aftplus

VALID THROUGH 12/00

Join the AFT - Call Alan Hall

The Advocate is a publication of the Employee Federation of North Harris Montgomery Community College District.
2700 W. W. Thorne Dr. - Suite A 217 - Houston, TX 77073