



THE ADVOCATE



Volume 4 Issue 6

Employee Federation of NHMCCD

May 2001



Personnel Records and Portfolios

When I first heard some faculty and administrators pushing the idea of portfolio evaluation a few years ago, all I could think of was the amount of work that doing a portfolio seemed to require. The effort did not seem worth my time considering that I was receiving good evaluations anyway. I knew that a portfolio would be a great thing to have when pursuing a position elsewhere, but I was quite happy with my position at NHC and did not plan to leave. Because I worked hard and I felt that I had a decent reputation at the college and received good evaluations, I simply did not see the need. What I never factored into my thinking was the fact that decisions affecting job security are not necessarily made by people who know me well, but often by virtual strangers in a growing district with layers of upper administrators.

Accusations of inappropriate behavior directed at district employees by students or co-workers have been taken very seriously by the district in recent years. Although many situations are handled within divisions, associate deans must apprise their supervisors of any issue that is not easily settled. There are quite a few of us who have learned the hard way that once this happens and an investigation ensues, the years of hard work and dedication that we have invested in our careers here often don't seem to carry a lot of weight. The investigation seems to take on a life of its own, sometimes progressing way past the original incident or issue. Employees who have been through this probably recall feelings of helplessness, anger,

and disillusionment. Probably most would tell you that they never, ever thought such a thing would happen to them.

Each such case is a little different, but one aspect common to most is that the administrator(s) investigating the situation don't really know the employee being accused of an impropriety. Quite a few administrators are fairly new to the district and cannot be expected to know or appreciate a faculty member's history or contributions. To gather background information on an employee, it is a logical step for the investigator to access that person's personnel files. What he or she finds there may form the default image of the employee in the mind of the investigator.

Several months ago, I would have assumed that not only would my record stand on its own, but that some aspects would be somewhat impressive. I expect most professional educators would think that. But, when evaluations are completed using the traditional evaluation form, there may be a lot of checks in the right columns, a few nice words, and signatures, but there is little record of what a faculty member actually did or did not do to receive those checks. It may well be that the supervisor who signed a form stored in the permanent record is no longer in the district or available to explain what good and bad checkmarks mean. If you throw in the fact that at some level, all evaluations are subjective, a lot of nice checks

may not do much to enhance your image with an investigator.

From what I understand (because the policy manual is extremely uninformative about files kept on faculty), a faculty member actually has two personnel files. The permanent personnel file kept at district does not contain all that much information. It does contain signed evaluation forms, along with any records of serious problems. An associate dean must clearly inform a faculty member before entering such records into his/her permanent file. Oddly, there is no mechanism in place allowing a supervisor to add documentation of noteworthy actions to a faculty member's permanent file. Unless the evaluator mentions it in the small amount of space on an evaluation form, a faculty member's permanent record would not even contain records of faculty excellence awards or honors from outside the district.

This is not to say that there is no documentation to support faculty evaluations included in the permanent record. This documentation is normally kept in a second personnel file in the A.D.'s office — this is sometimes called a desk file. This file would contain notes about any events that the A.D. judges to be important about a faculty member. There would be more detail here than in the permanent file at district. So, this personnel file is where, if you get in a pinch, there might be documentation of the good job you're doing. Since there are really no guidelines in the policy manual or training given about how to

keep such records, it is hard to say how complete these files might be. In all practicality, many people in a dean's position might interpret keeping records as primarily documenting negative incidents. It is inherently obvious to supervisors that they need to document student complaints, disagreements, careless statements, etc. But, how often would a busy dean think to record some nice thing that a student shared with him/her in a hallway about a professor? Would it occur to the dean to write down anything about how a senior faculty member frequently helped out someone new? Would all those extra hours you put in be mentioned? Would an overtaxed dean even be aware of things like these? In addition, what happens if your A.D. retires and a new dean takes over? Old desk files may be lost or disposed of. There doesn't seem to be a policy preventing this. Then, if there's a problem, where are your records?

Does any of this matter? Only if you find yourself accused of something. Then investigators have access to both the permanent record kept at district and to personnel files kept by the A.D. If these files contain mainly nice checks and a few words about the good things you've done alongside thorough documentation of missteps you've made, how will this be interpreted by an administrator who doesn't know you? None of this means that anyone in the picture is a bad guy. It may well mean that many aspects of evaluation and record keeping are in dire need of improvement. That may eventually happen. In the meantime, it just may be prudent to protect ourselves, considering that the system is not set up to protect us.

On more than one occasion, I have been quite troubled by the way that the district has treated faculty accused of wrongdoing, but the process for dealing with accusations doesn't seem to be changing much. Taking the time to create a portfolio that is a real reflection of priorities and accomplishments, and then having a dean sign off on it during an evaluation cycle is something that I can do as a form of insurance. In our increasingly impersonal district, should an administrator who doesn't know me have cause to access my personnel file, it couldn't help but be to my benefit to be able to present a more complete and valid picture. Under our current

system of evaluation, portfolios will not be a part of the permanent record kept at the district office. That won't happen unless our evaluation system is changed to provide faculty with more of a voice in their own evaluation, a privilege that professionals deserve and should have. However, a portfolio reviewed and responded to by one's associate dean at least provides evidence of positive efforts and accomplishments not documented elsewhere.

Most faculty members may never need a portfolio. The effort will certainly not net any of us a raise. But, if you can acknowledge the possibility that you might one day find yourself at the wrong end of an absurd accusation, here is some advice from someone who's been there. Join the union before you're in a bind, be sure you know what district policy says about the issue and about your rights, and start creating a safety net now by keeping up with some type of portfolio.

Shelley Penrod

Construction Woes and Lessons

NHMCCD is in an enviable position among community colleges in the state—we are growing. That growth has resulted in a boom in college construction, including Cy-Fair College, which will open as a full-service campus. As the district builds this campus and other future buildings, we should learn from our past mistakes, most notably at NHC.

The foundation problems with NHC's Childcare and Applied Technology buildings are well known. There was a problem with the application of the vapor barrier which allowed moisture to come through the slab into the buildings. Core samples were drilled into the slab to determine the problem. People who looked at the samples say there were about eight inches of packing dirt between the plastic vapor barrier and the concrete. None of the people I spoke with had ever seen this technique before. The plastic is typically between the packing dirt and the concrete, preventing water from wicking up through the slab. I contacted Dr. Bob Williams about this issue, and he responded as follows: *The foundations for these two buildings were designed by the*

architect as a part of the overall construction plans for these buildings. The contractor simply built the foundations to the specifications of the architect. The slabs were designed and built according to approved standards (American Concrete Institute) for pre-fabricated steel buildings. This was a new construction experience for NH as we had never built this type of building before. The slabs for these 2 buildings were constructed differently than our standard buildings, but did meet all the certifying criteria and were tested at all the critical times, etc. Unfortunately, in spite of following all the accepted procedures, the floors did initially hold too much moisture for the floor tiles to adhere properly. (In the "old days", when tile glue could be petroleum based, this most likely would not have been a problem. Environmental regulations now require non-petroleum based glue and this results in reduced sticking capacity.) The cost to fix the problems, labor and materials to replace floor tiles, was born by the contractor (maybe some by the architect), but not the college.

In addition, several Applied Technology faculty found that there were other problems as their new building was being constructed. I learned some interesting information from visiting with Dwaine Cooper, Supervisor of Plant Operations and a Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning adjunct, Harish Shah, Professor of HVAC, and Larry Brillhart, Associate Dean of Applied Technology. OSHA requirements state that nonessential personnel must not enter a construction site. The regulations do allow temporary permission so long as our employees wear adequate safety equipment. Cooper and Shah say that, after they visited the site a couple of times and pointed out problems, they were told by the Gilbane representative on site that they could only return in the company of Brillhart, a feat hard to manage with everyone's complicated schedules. In fact, they say they were told by the representative that they would be arrested if they returned without Brillhart. When they were allowed back in, the faculty discovered that 220 volt electrical lines had not been run in the labs, even though the specs called for them. On this problem, Dr. Williams commented,

During the "programming phase" of design for this part of the APT building, consensus was never reached between the users (HVAC faculty) and the architect as to exactly what instructional, electrical infra-structure would go into these labs. As a result, the engineer hired by the architect designed a basic infra-structure that could theoretically be modified as needed by the faculty/staff to meet their needs after the facility was completed. A mistake was made in the transformers (specified by the architect) that were installed and these had to be replaced. This cost was born by the architect. Costs to complete the wiring, etc. came from the construction budget for the project and were simply done "after-the-fact" rather than up front and there was little to no extra cost. This was a MOST complicated problem and took almost super human effort from Steve Wooten to finally determine the specific needs of the users.

Cooper, Shah and Brillhart see things differently. They say that there was clear agreement among the teachers about what was needed, and they showed me preliminary drawings containing the 220 volt lines which they submitted to the architects. Beyond that point they were not given an opportunity to review mechanical/electrical drawings, nor were they provided adequate access to see if the information they had provided was actually being followed.

More recently, the new wing in the Winship building has presented problems. I interviewed Gary Clark, Associate Dean of Natural Sciences, about these developments. He says that his program coordinators and lab managers met with the architects and went over in great detail the diagrams for the lab installations. Plans called for electrical plugs to be placed on top of the desks. However, they were installed on the front edge of the desk, requiring students to lean over and feel for the outlet to plug in a piece of equipment. To solve the problem, Natural Sciences had to purchase power strips and affix them to the tops of the desks. Emergency showers in the chemistry labs are another problem. These showers are designed to dump fifty gallons of water on someone who has spilled a chemical on himself. The water is supposed to

flow down a drain and into a special holding tank for hazardous materials. The architects did not have drains in the original plans. Reportedly, their explanation was that they checked with a nearby college that had not used its emergency showers in approximately fifteen years, so they deemed the drains unnecessary. Clark notes that NHC's emergency showers have been used three times in the six years he has been associate dean. The drains were added to the plans and were reviewed by the Natural Sciences folks. However, something happened between their review and construction completion—no drains. It is interesting to note that the general contractor was Gilbane, the same company used by the college for NHC's Childcare and Applied Technology buildings. Although the plans clearly called for them, no drains were installed for these showers. These labs are on the second floor, one next to a stairway. Fifty gallons of water dropped on a flat floor will travel a long way, perhaps cascading downstairs or down interior walls. Clark says that for such an event the EPA requires that HAZMAT be called to the scene, no doubt followed by the media. He has nightmares about this kind of public relations for the college.

According to Clark, an even bigger concern in the new Winship wing is the HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) system. He speculates that this problem is the result of architectural error. The system was designed after an HVAC system used by the intensive care unit of a local hospital. This intensive care unit brings air in from the outside and vents it back to the outside rather than re-circulate it in order to reduce airborne contaminants. This is a logical system where one wants to reduce the spread of infection, etc. The college does not need such a system because we do not face the same issues as intensive care does. Cooling re-circulating air places less demand on an HVAC system, and we would assume, therefore, that our system, which continually cools outside air, is less economical to run. However, there is a bigger problem. The intensive care system that the architect modeled our system after has a boiler system to help control humidity. Without getting too technical, the new system (reheat system) needs hot water to help condition the air. Air can be conditioned five different ways for

better human comfort: cooled, heated, humidified, de-humidified, and cleaned. Dwaine Cooper says that in the initial discussions with engineers, plans included a separate boiler for the Library and new wing of Winship. However, somewhere along the way the separate boiler was eliminated, one would assume as a cost cutting measure. The Library and Winship wing were added to our existing boiler system, which so far hasn't proven to have adequate capacity, especially in colder times of the year to handle these new demands. The new Applied Technology Center and Childcare Development Center buildings were both built with their own independent boiler systems, and heating/cooling problems like this don't exist. The result for the new Winship wing? Air is brought in from the outside, cooled, sent to the rooms, vented back out, causing a moisture level as high as 80% in the Winship lab rooms, according to Clark. The result? Mold began to grow on desks, paper, glassware and equipment such as microscopes. Mold presence signals the presence of mold spores to which many people are highly allergic. In fact, students and the faculty member in one of the labs reported respiratory problems and had to be moved to a different lab in the older part of the building at mid-semester. Clark reported the problem to the administration and praises Dr. Sam and Steve Megregian for their concern and quick and aggressive efforts to relieve the situation. Cooper says that the Library has better control and is not affected as much because the outside air handling unit (controlled ventilation) is not designated to supply conditioned air to any given floor. If need be the outside air handling unit could be turned off, because each floor in the Library has its own separate air handling unit. The Winship wing, where humidity has been such a problem, gets its conditioned air to the lab areas only from outside air after it has been conditioned and sent to each room from the outside air handling unit. That cold air has to be warmed up. The unit has to run even if the outside air temperatures are in the 50s or 40s, etc. Do you run your air conditioner at home within that temperature range? So, the question arises, why does the humidity problem lessen as summer approaches and outside temperatures rise? Above 65 degrees or so the rest of the campus wasn't designed to need hot water. The boilers now only have to supply

the Library and Winship science wing 18 hours a day no matter what the outside temperature is. Unless something changes, the humidity will rise to unacceptable levels again this Fall.

After moving the class, the next step was to assess the degree of the problem. An environmental testing firm was brought in to take samples from three rooms where the mold is obviously the worst. Clark says that the testing cost approximately \$4,000 for the three rooms. Actually, we know an A&P lab, a prep room, and a Microbiology lab on the second floor and two geology classrooms and a lab on the first floor (all in the new east wing where conditioned air enters) are affected. The firm found mold in the duct work but not dangerous levels of mold spore in the air. The firm also recommended testing the rest of the building. Clark estimates that the cost to test just the second floor would be \$15,000 to \$20,000. He emphasizes that some remediation of the situation will be required. Again, according to Cooper, the humidity has dropped to acceptable levels but will rise again this Fall unless a change is made in the system. Long term, the college could replace the HVAC system or perhaps seek some other remedy. The question is, who will pay for these unexpected expenses?

Dr. Williams has a differing view on the HVAC system:

Although the new system for the Winship and Library buildings is different from the rest of the system at North Harris, the problems experienced in Winship are not because of design issues. While I've been gone awhile, it's my understanding that whatever equipment was not functioning correctly at Winship has been repaired/replaced and that the system is working properly. I can't speak to the issue of whether the mildew has been cleaned up, but I think the cause has been corrected. [. . .] All expenses for this problem were to be covered by the contractor or the appropriate subs.

Knowing that this is a more complex system than we have been used to, I would imagine that minor adjustments will need to be made on a continual basis for some time to come.

I did question the mixing of the designs, which now requires more training and skills for the staff and an integrated control system, but this does not make the choice for a different system a bad one. In fact, the new system provides improved temperature and humidity control as it relies on heated water from the boilers on a continuous basis rather than ambient air, etc. This, generally, is the type of system one would see in hospitals, research labs, etc., so air quality and temperature, which has been a concern in other areas of the NH facilities, should be far better.

Gary Clark says that the original humidity problem created academic problems. Clark says that his division has been working for two and a half years to secure approval for a cadaver lab for Anatomy and Physiology. He believes we would be the first community college in Texas to get such a lab, which would be quite an honor. The application process, which was moving swiftly, is now on hold because strict environmental regulations are placed on cadaver labs. As one might imagine, mold is forbidden. In addition, the original humidity level deteriorated Tom Hobbs' extensive collection of mineral specimens for geology students, a collection which has taken ten years to assemble. Clark estimates a cost of \$10,000 to \$15,000 to replace the destroyed specimens. Again, Clark appreciates Steve Megregian's swift action to get the humidity levels balanced in the new science wing.

Clark is clueless as to how all of these problems with the labs and HVAC occurred after his folks reviewed the plans. The lesson in all this is that the district needs to involve our employees and listen to them when determining building specifications. The college should also seek their input on whether or not specifications are adhered to during construction and listen to them. This issue is especially critical when one realizes the same architect has been selected to oversee construction of Cy-Fair College. One can only conclude there should be some accountability for the architectural and construction errors. Ultimately, the district must be more careful on what we approve in building construction.

Alan Hall

AFT Social Security Meeting - Thursday April 19, 2001

What a hit this meeting was – like between the eyes, in the stomach, but mostly in the pocket book.

There were 80 employees in attendance. That shows you how concerned many people are about their retirement options.

I was going to attempt to explain some of the social security options to you that I learned at the meeting. What a joke – to think I could explain any of this when the Social Security claim representatives had a hard time getting their information across to the group.

The younger employees (those that do not want even to think about Social Security) should have been at the meeting. They still have time to get out and find a job that does pay into social security. But we old timers, in both age and employment, are stuck with what we have.

There are a few facts that I do know:

- 1) If you have 30 years or more of "substantial" earnings in a job where you paid Social Security taxes, then you work somewhere that does not pay Social Security taxes but has a retirement program, you will be eligible to receive both Social Security and retirement without reduction.
- 2) In order for a social security eligible employee of NHMCCD to receive FULL benefits from both Social Security and retirement, he or she would have to, on or before the day they plan on leaving the college, go to work for a school district or government entity that pays full Social Security taxes and also offers a separate retirement program. The employee would retire from the new job and resign (not retire) from NHMCCD. You cannot, as we have been led to believe, go to work just anywhere that pays Social Security taxes and receive full benefits. Be careful on the topic of resigning from

NHMCCD, which would cause you to lose your health benefits. While attempting to secure full social security benefit, you could lose health coverage in retirement. You would have to make sure that you work at the other institution long enough to have health care paid for upon retirement.

- 3) Unless the first two situations are met, your Social Security benefits WILL BE REDUCED.
- 4) Some employees who have been with the district 20 years or more had the Social Security benefits explained to them – but somewhere along the line a change in Social Security benefits was made which significantly reduces their social security benefits. The employees were not informed of the changes by NHMCCD and continued working believing they would be compensated as originally explained to them.
- 5) NHMCCD could choose to start paying Social Security taxes. Social Security eligible employees would then be entitled to full social security benefits upon retirement. The rate today is 7.65, which would be paid by the employee and matched by the college district. Probably because of budget constraints it seems NHMCCD has not chosen to offer this as an employee benefit.
- 6) The statement you may be currently receiving from Social Security stating you would receive this amount if you retired is a little misleading. The amount is correct as stated, but the amount you will receive will have an offset because you are not participating in social security at retirement.
- 7) All employees should be informed concerning the ramifications not paying Social Security taxes will have on their retirement at NHMCCD. All employees should be notified of changes in the Social Security system as they occur, not years later.

The AFT strongly suggests that all employees get in touch with the

Social Security Administration for information on their personal account. You can do this by checking their website at www.ssa.gov or calling their toll-free number at 1-800-772-1213 to speak with a service representative.

Who is the AFT?



Continuing our series of articles in which we present short bios of the executive staff of your AFT in an effort to introduce you to those who serve the AFT at NHMCCD, this month's bio introduces you to Alan Hall, our local's president.

Alan earned a master's degree from Sam Houston State University in May of 1974, taught part-time for the college that summer, and joined the district as a full-time English teacher that fall. Over the course of his career here, he has seen the college grow from twelve full-time faculty in 1974 to five colleges. He and the union have been instrumental in some of the growth. For instance, the union advocated an extension center in southern Aldine, which came to fruition as The Carver Center. Because of his active involvement, Alan was asked to serve as the first faculty coordinator for Carver, a position which he accepted on the condition that he would remain in the classroom as well. Once Carver was up and running, he returned full-time to NHC. Over the years, he has pursued additional course work from the University of Texas and the University of New Hampshire. He is also a recipient of a Teaching Excellence Award.

Alan first served the union in 1980 as vice-president but took over as president when Kevin Bailey left the college to enter politics a few years later.

With better than two and a half decades in this business, Alan has amassed a wealth of experience as well as contacts on the local and state level. He serves as Chair of the Higher Education Committee of the Texas Federation of Teachers, our state affiliate. In that position, he assists in developing the TFT's agenda for higher ed, including the TFT's legislative agenda. He has testified before House and Senate Higher Education Committees and works regularly with the TFT's legislative staff. Alan also makes presentations to college employees around the state regarding higher education issues.

Here in the college district he meets regularly with Dr. Pickelman and other administrators to discuss a wide variety of topics and is regularly consulted on various issues. One would be hard pressed to find an employee with stronger connections on as many levels which gives Alan the ability to lead faculty and staff across our district.

Most of his time devoted to AFT activities is spent improving union programs, offering advice to members on issues of concern, participating in mediation of conflicts, and representing members involved in disputes. He has always been proud of the union's work and is pleased that membership is open to faculty and staff. While we are known as a "teachers union", Alan says our union's activities are pretty evenly split between faculty and staff. He is also pleased with the makeup of the union's executive committee, a group that recently completed training in conflict mediation. Alan notes, "We have enough people trained now that the union can provide highly skilled assistance to all of our members, no matter their location in the district."

Alan has no plans of slowing down anytime soon. He thinks he has a perfect job. He gets to engage students in activities focused on great literature, and his political activity in the district is rewarding. He says, "The union is a force for change in the college. We have made a tangible difference in the life of the college and its employees. I plan on maintaining that course for as long as I'm able."

Staff

A Matter of Priority

I recently worked with an AFT member involved in a curious situation. She was excited to have been invited by an organizer of a career fair at a private girls school in Houston to speak at their career day on what it is like to be a female college professor. The program would run from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., which would conflict with two of her classes, so she asked her associate dean for approval to secure a sub. One part of our workload is institutional/community service, and this engagement would serve both, providing a bright, energetic college professor as a role model for these girls and spreading the college's name in the community. However, our member was surprised to have her request for a sub denied on two grounds. First was the location of the private school—it doesn't lie in our district (we do know that at least one student lives in our district and therefore is a potential student). Secondly, the associate dean proposed alternatives to a paid sub. One suggestion was for our member to get another faculty member to sub without pay, in other words to cover the class for her, a proposal she found unacceptable. The AD also encouraged our member to trade classes with another instructor. Our member found this idea unacceptable because it would disrupt two faculty members' schedules for the week and would not best serve the students. The AD also volunteered to sub for free if our member could provide an appropriate activity. All this disruption was over \$45 for a voluntary institutional and community service our member wished to provide! For our member, a matter of principle was involved. She saw this speaking engagement as a professional behavior which warranted the college's providing a paid sub. She would have felt differently if the presentation had been a personal favor for her own child's class or school, but this was not the case. The union was willing to pursue this issue, but the member chose not to fight and decided that making the presentation was no longer possible.

Frankly, the administration seemed petty on this issue. Ironically, the AD's supervisor left shortly after for four days on a SACS visit. I have seen a number of administrators make these

visits. I should point out that, while their expenses are paid by the Southern Association, their salary and benefits for that time are paid by NHMCCD, and the union has no complaint about that arrangement. We recognize the value of the work. We recognize that serving on SACS committees is hard work. However, we also recognize that it's not all work. It is often a nice trip to a nice place. Committees are treated like royalty by the colleges they visit. A lot of important political and professional career enhancing contacts are made, all on our college's nickel. We accept all of that as coming with the territory. What we don't accept is those same administrators turning around and quibbling over \$45 when a faculty member is asked to speak to impressionable young minds, an event as close to the college's mission statement as service on a SACS site visit.

Alan Hall

Recognizing Excellence



The union applauds the district's efforts to recognize excellence in our faculty and staff each year. Therefore, we would like to formally recognize this year's excellence award winners. Congratulations to each of the following people:

Adjunct Faculty Excellence Award Winners (NHC)

Karen Buckman
Pamela Pak
Peter Schreiber

Faculty Excellence Award Winners

Lin Dawson
Bill Dunn
Kathy Emmite
Michael Harman
Linda Head
Ron Jones
Dian Petty
Terra Ruppert
Donald Stanley
Mark Stelter
Charles Trevino
Beverley Turner

Linda Woodward

Staff Excellence Award Winners

Patty Blueitt
Wanda Box
Tommie Byrd
Barbara Carter
Bertha Cossey
Joe Croisant
Del Fayard
Gilda Foster
Cecile Lejeune
Alex Martinez
Cynthia Maudlin
Carla McPherson
Peggy Morris
Jena O'Neall
Danny Osburn
Sandro Sarang
Juanita Werner

More Congratulations

The Coordinating Board recently completed a site visit at NHMCCD with some very good results for some of our programs. One of the union's primary goals is promoting educational excellence. Therefore, we wish to recognize and congratulate the following programs which received an exemplary rating. We are particularly proud of the faculty in Automotive Technology at NHC. Just a few years ago, the college was on the brink of eliminating this program, but the faculty's hard work turned it around. To go from potential elimination to exemplary status in a few short years is a fine accomplishment. Congratulations to all faculty involved in programs awarded this status.

North Harris College

Automotive Technology
Machining Technology

Kingwood College

Computer Graphics Arts
Community Education

Tomball College

Computer Information Technology
Veterinary Technology
Student Services

Montgomery College

Vocational Nursing
Student Services

Staff

Adjunct Update

House Pensions and Investments Committee Hearing

April 9, 2001
8:00 am

(What follows is an update sent to us by the Texas Federation of Teachers, our state affiliate, regarding a bill which would provide health care to adjuncts, a bill the union supports)

The Texas House Pensions and Investments Committee heard testimony today on HB 3510 by Rep. Roberto Gutierrez, a bill that would provide insurance benefits to adjunct faculty members who have taught six or more hours per semester for five or more years. Testifying in favor of the bill were ACC/AFT members Dan Dewberry and Allison Mosshart.

Mr. Dewberry spoke of his experience and dedication teaching at Austin Community College. He told the committee he has worked for eight years at the college, teaching as many as ten classes per year. He described himself as a new breed of teacher that he referred to as a "perma-temp". These are people who teach at or near the same number of classes as full-timers, for half the pay and no benefits.

Dan drove his point home by providing the committee some current statistics. He said he is currently teaching nine hours but normally teaches twelve in a long semester. He also compared the numbers of full-time faculty to adjuncts at ACC. He estimated the current full-time numbers to be slightly lower than 40% while the adjunct numbers were at just over 60%. Finally, he closed by saying this practice is fairly common throughout the state used to help keep costs down at community colleges and universities.

Allison Mosshart, ACC/AFT Chair, picked up where Dan left off. She spoke about how the current practice was nothing short of "a misuse of adjunct faculty". According to her,

adjuncts "work in the trenches" doing the same work full-time faculty members do.

Ms. Mosshart was most effective when she corrected what she perceived as a misconception, saying many of her colleagues were not temps—most have been teaching at the college for ten, fifteen, and twenty or more years.

She described the situation in the Fall 2000 semester where hundreds of her peers taught overloads because of a severe teaching shortage. At the time, the college had to hire many in temporary full-time positions, working for full pay, but no benefits.

Allison also provided the committee with specific numbers. At ACC, she said there were approximately 350 full-time teachers and over 1100 adjuncts. The disparity in the numbers spoke for itself making clear Dan's point about percentages of instructors at the college. This makes the percentages at ACC approximately 26% full-time / 74% adjunct.


In closing, Allison got the committee's attention when she described a most ironic situation. She spoke of the questions she asks her students when they come into her class. She asks them why they come to ACC and says their reply invariably is to get a good job. She questions further by asking what "good job" means to them. Most respond by saying, "good pay with good benefits". The end she works so hard to help her students reach is denied to her working for half the pay and no benefits.

Two committee members expressed concerns about HB 3510. Irma Rangel and Ignacio Salinas worried about the cost of providing health insurance to adjuncts. Based on a cost analysis, the state would have to pay approximately \$18.3 million to provide this benefit. They wondered why the state should pick up the cost instead of the community colleges.

The House Pensions and Investments Committee left the bill pending.

Staff

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