



The Advocate

Happy Holidays from AFT

As we approach the end of Fall Semester and the upcoming Holiday Season, I am excited to share with you our November – December, 2023 edition of The Advocate, the union newsletter of AFT Lone Star College.

I want to begin with a HUGE thank you to the over 1200 Lone Star College employees who responded to our 2023 All Employee Survey. This is the highest level of response AFT has ever gotten to any of our surveys in our 43 year history and we are thrilled. We left the survey open a few weeks longer than we had originally planned because we had some technical difficulties at first. (Special thanks to Associate Vice Chancellor Butch Juelg and the good folks in OTS for their assistance with this.) As a result of this extension it is going to take us a little longer to analyze and report on the results. Watch for our next edition of the Advocate for January – February 2024 in which we will devote a large section of the issue to reporting on the survey results.

In the meantime, I believe you will find this edition of The Advocate to be a great read.

We start off with two articles by yours

truly on current events at Lone Star College. E Pluribus Unum reports on positive developments in the culture of Lone Star College. Two Wins reports on two very exciting early decisions by our new Chancellor, one with a positive benefit to staff, and the other of help to faculty.

Following that, we continue with a report on ANOTHER survey, this one conducted by our sister union, the American Association of University Professors, on the climate of higher education in the South. The results are deeply concerning but important to understand. I outline steps the Board of Trustees and the Administration of our college have taken that should help put employees' minds at ease, at least for our college. AFT Lone Star has also done our part in providing comprehensive information about legal changes in Texas and how they impact us as college faculty and staff.

Next, Steve Davis returns with his ongoing column Dispatches from the Front with an article about the new movie Rustin. Bayard Rustin was a Civil Rights activist who was instrumental in organizing the pivotal 1963 March on Washington. He was a fascinating and courageous man as you will see. The movie and Steve's article also

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trace the intersection between the Civil Rights Movement and the Union Movement.

We are always thrilled to welcome new writers to The Advocate! Contributions are welcome from all Lone Star College employees. Following Dispatches from the front are articles from two LSC faculty and AFT members Steve King and Aaron Alon. They both present visions for positive change at our college with the common goal of making Lone Star a greater place to work and to go to school.

We close this issue with a special message from the president of our national union, Randi Weingarten, about the heartbreaking events unfolding in Israel and Gaza. The conflict is incredibly complex and there are so many perspectives to weigh and consider. One thing I think we can all agree on is that no human being should have to live in fear of a stranger breaking down their front door or a missile hitting their home in the middle of the night. The impact of this horror is especially devastating for children. We may wonder what we can do to help. President Weingarten writes about an opportunity AFT has organized for concerned faculty and staff to contribute to the humanitarian needs on both sides of this terrible conflict.

Because we are blessed with a wealth of wonderful contributions for this issue and it's a bit long, I am taking a break from my usual column "Know Your Rights". Watch for its return in the next issue.

I believe and hope you will find this issue of The Advocate to be interesting, informative, and inspiring. Thank you for reading and please know that our doors at AFT Lone Star College are always open for new members. Wishing you all the best for a glorious holiday season.

John Burghduff, President
AFT Lone Star College



E Pluribus Unum

John Burghduff
LSC - CyFair

"E Pluribus Unum", Latin for "Out of Many, One", has been the motto of the Seal of the United States of America since 1782. Referencing the coming together of thirteen distinct British colonies into one unified, independent nation, the motto also reflects the fact that ours is a country in which persons of many races, cultures, national origins, religions, socio-economic stations, genders, and orientations have come together as one people committed to the notion that all persons are created equal and are worthy of liberty and justice for all.



It is a beautiful and meaningful motto for our beloved country – plus everything sounds more cool in Latin.

E Pluribus Unum could also be a decent motto for Lone Star College. Rather than thirteen colonies, we are eight colleges coming together as one system bringing together employees and students from diverse backgrounds to achieve a common goal for the benefit of our greater community. At the level of the United States, there are important identities and roles for both the individual colonies (now states) and for the nation. Similarly, here at Lone Star we experience our connectedness to the specific colleges for which we work or at which we study, and also to the Lone Star College System as a whole.



There are others in our College who could speak both more eloquently and more accurately about the genius of the Federalist System under which we operate as a nation as reflected by E Pluribus Unum. I will limit myself to observations about how that phrase and concept apply here at Lone Star.

There are community college systems in the United States in which individual colleges within those systems are essentially autonomous institutions with a loose affiliation between them. (This would be more similar to the Articles of Confederation that predated the U.S. Constitution.) Alamo Colleges in San Antonio used to very much follow this model although their current administration is exerting more system level control. At Alamo, each college is separately accredited by SACS which must make preparing for site visits a nightmare.

There are also colleges where all decision-making power rests with central administration and the colleges within those systems exist basically in name only with little or no authority of their own. This model is all the rage at the moment. Recent consolidations at Dallas College and Houston Community College reflect this trend and both have been chaotic and disruptive for employees and students alike.

Lone Star has sort of trended both ways at different points in its history. Under Chancellor John Pickelman, we trended in the autonomous direction. Under Chancellor Richard Carpenter, we trended in the centralized control direction. The fact of the matter is that large community college systems like ours and the others I've mentioned are simply too big to be completely ruled out of the "capitol of the empire" in any way that is responsive to the varied needs of the community and not bogged down in red tape. An autonomous model may be more responsive to local needs but can lead to situations where there is unnecessary overlap of services, inconsistency of policies, and fruitless competition over the same students.

In our Spring 2023 Chancellor Search Survey, AFT asked LSC employees "When it comes to leadership and decision making, where do you think most of it should come from? (ex: personnel issues, course offerings, student services)". We gave employees a slider they could move to the number of their choice between 0 (decision making completely centralized at System Office) and 100 (decision making completely site-based at individual campuses). The average response across all employees was 58.81, right about in the middle with a slight tilt towards local control. The results, when disaggregated by employment category, were remarkably consistent. (fulltime faculty 63.81, parttime staff 61.31, adjunct faculty 58.77, administrators 55.70, fulltime staff 55.22)

The message was very clear. Lone Star employees reject both extremes and want a balance between system and campus authority (with a very slight leaning towards a bit more local control). There are important roles for both system and campus administration to play and, in the judgment of employees, it is worth finding the perfect, delicate balance between them. Who knew we were such ardent federalists?

As I look at the first few months of Chancellor Mario Castillo's tenure as chancellor, I am impressed that he is striving towards that balance of campus and system authority that employees said they value.

One of his very first actions was to end 7:30 AM enrollment reports. If you don't know what that was, every weekday morning the college presidents were sent a report from System Office on that morning's enrollment figures at each campus. Whether it was intended or not, it gave the impression that the individual colleges were in competition with one another and were being judged by their numbers.

To counter that sense of unhealthy rivalry between colleges, the Chancellor has instituted weekly meetings of his executive cabinet (college presidents and system vice chancellors) to try to break



down silos and build a sense of team. In the process, he has also been empowering the team to make local decisions at the local level within a collaborative systemic environment.

As reported in our August – October edition of The Advocate, the Chancellor has restarted committees to look at flexible work options for staff and flexible teaching schedule options for faculty. Those discussions are now well underway. (In fact, please read the article Two Wins elsewhere in this edition for a report on summer teaching loads.) The hallmark of these discussions is setting guidelines that are applicable systemwide and delegating individual decisions to campuses, divisions, and departments. That would be exactly consistent with what employees believe should be the proper balance. Faculty and staff want to feel confident that decision making processes are fair and clearly enumerated across the system, in order to feel confident that individual decisions at their location are equitable.

Looking at this balance from the point of view of students, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Michael Stoma, once said that a student seeking advising on how to get started at Lone Star should not get contradictory answers at different campuses. That is the consistency we need at a system level. On the other hand, class and program offerings have to be responsive to the needs of students locally. Those needs could be significantly different in the Woodlands versus East Aldine, for example.

E Pluribus Unum. Many campuses; one system. Many employees with many different work situations; consistent guidelines of fair and equitable treatment. Many students with many needs; one standard of excellence in meeting those needs.

The college has adopted its own motto to describe this principle: One Lone Star. We in the AFT believe that this phrase carries or should carry the same meaning as Out of Many, One. Employees want

this balance. Students need it. The current administration is showing by its actions that it believes in consistent systemwide policies with decision making authority delegated to those at the local level closest to where those decisions have impact.

One Lone Star, in that context, is a good motto and we, as a college, are currently on the right track to fulfilling it.

It would be cooler in Latin.

Two Wins for Lone Star Employees

Since Chancellor Mario Castillo has taken office in August, he has moved quickly to resolve a number of issues and concerns brought to him by the AFT. We are pleased to report to you about two changes that he has already spearheaded that are definite wins for Lone Star College employees – one affecting staff and one affecting faculty.

1) For Staff – Cost of Living Increases for Employees at the Top of their Pay Bands.

Some staff employees have reached the top of their pay bands and, in the past, been ruled ineligible for annual cost of living increases. Most people probably don't know this, but we have employees that have not received a raise in years. They were frequently given one-time stipends, but those stipends did not go into their base salary, so each year began with the same starting salary. These stipends also did not count for TRS calculations, thus negatively impacting future retirement benefits. This situation primarily affects employees who have been with Lone Star a long time, so it felt to them like their loyalty was not respected.



In October, Chancellor Castillo graciously accepted our invitation to meet with the Executive Board of AFT Lone Star College and several members of our Board brought this problem to his attention. He took swift action.

We are pleased to report that, starting with Fiscal Year 2025 (September 2024 - August 2025), staff at the top of their pay bands WILL receive the full cost of living increase for the year as part of their base salary even though the increase will put them above the top of their official pay bands. This will not just be a stipend. The pay increase will go into the base so, in future years, salary increases will continue to accumulate. The pay increases will be counted for TRS calculation purposes as well. The change can't go into effect for the year we are now in because that budget is set in stone and there is no extra money. But it WILL go into effect in September 2024 and for all time thereafter, so help is coming!

If you are a staff employee, this may not affect you right now but, if you choose to spend your career at Lone Star, which we hope you will, at some point your salary will reach the top of your pay band. You can now be confident that you are not going to find yourself on a fixed income.

Special thanks are due, not only to the Chancellor, but also to the AFT Executive Board Members who spoke so eloquently and passionately on behalf of their colleagues.

2) For Faculty – Elimination of the System Mandated Maximum Number of Online Classes for Summer 2024,

There are a number of workload issues for faculty that Chancellor Castillo has put back on the table for discussion including whether full time faculty should be limited on the number of online classes they teach in a given semester. AFT has appealed for reconsideration of this limit as have others. As you will recall, under Chancellor Head, Lone Star instituted a

systemwide limit that no more than half of a full-time faculty member's teaching load could be taught online in a given semester. There are a host of important issues affecting and affected by this decision. Not even all faculty members are in agreement about whether or not this policy should change. What is good is that the Chancellor has restarted the conversation about this issue.

As an initial step towards addressing this question, Lone Star College will drop this restriction as a matter of system procedure for Summer, 2024. This does not necessarily mean that any faculty member who wants to teach 100% online for summer will be able to do so. What this decision does is to give Deans and Vice Presidents of Instruction at each campus the authority to make decisions about allowing additional online classes in accordance with enrollment needs at their campus. Enrollment trends over the last several years have brought us to the point that up to 70% of our summer enrollment is online. This decision frees leaders on our campuses from an arbitrary mandate and allows them to plan proactively for this trend.

Raising the limits for fall and spring, at least under certain conditions, is by no means off the table, but it not decided at this point. The Chancellor was able to build consensus among VPIs and Presidents for this trial period for Summer, 2024 and discussions will continue based on the outcomes.

These are two quick and very important wins for Lone Star College employees, and they illustrate Chancellor Castillo's commitment to considering the concerns we bring forward. They also demonstrate his collaborative leadership style. Rather than issuing mandates unilaterally, he is seeking consensus among his leaders on the ground. Decisions that everyone can buy into are more likely to succeed and to last!

TOGETHER
WE CAN
ACHIEVE
MORE





AAUP Publishes Survey of College/University Faculty in the South

By John Burghduff

While AFT Lone Star College organizes the results of our Fall, 2023 Employee Climate Survey, let me take a moment to tell you about another survey whose results should both interest and concern all of us.



This survey was conducted over the summer by the American Association of University Professors. In case you are not familiar with them, the AAUP is a union that focuses on higher education and does much the same work that we do in the American Federation of Teachers. AFT, with 1.7 million members nationwide, is by far the bigger of the two, but AAUP has a long and respected history of advocating for academic freedom with an impact that dramatically “punches above their weight” of 44,000 members nationwide. Here in Texas, AFT has focused on K-12 school districts and community colleges while AAUP has focused on four-year colleges and universities.

The two unions, in fact, are currently entering into a formal alliance and all AAUP locals in Texas are in the process of transitioning into AFT locals while keeping their AAUP branding as well. This collaboration will greatly expand

AFT outreach to higher education across Texas and the nation. I have had the chance to get to know some of our new AAUP brothers and sisters and I am excited about the impact we can have together on higher education issues at the state and national level.

The AAUP survey was sent to college and university faculty members in three Southern states: Florida, Georgia, and Texas, states where significant legislation has recently been passed that impacts higher education. AFT Lone Star College sent the survey to all faculty members in our local. Over the three states, over 4000 faculty members responded.

Here in Texas, the legislation that AAUP wanted to focus on included Senate Bill 17 which eliminated Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices at public colleges and universities, and Senate Bill 18 which added some new parameters around tenure rights. Similar legislation has been enacted in Georgia, and Florida has been especially aggressive in imposing new regulations and restrictions on colleges and universities.

The two unions, in fact, are currently entering into a formal alliance and all AAUP locals in Texas are in the process of transitioning into AFT locals while keeping their AAUP branding as well. This collaboration will greatly expand AFT outreach to higher education across Texas and the nation.

Alarming, based on these developments, two thirds of respondents said that they would not recommend their state as a desirable place to work to colleagues looking for an academic position. 31% said that they were actively considering applying for positions outside of their state this year themselves. 20% said they have already done so. About a third stated that they do not plan to stay in academia long term.

When professors who were considering or actively seeking to leave their states were asked for their reasons, 60% cited salary or the political climate in their state, 50% noted a loss of academic freedom, more than 40% quoted issues related to tenure or



DEI, and more than 30% cited shared governance, LGBT rights, and access to reproductive health services.

In addition, respondents were asked about the impact they were seeing on recruiting new faculty. About 50% noted a decrease in the number of applicants for positions within their departments. About the same percent reported that they had encountered candidates reluctant to proceed with the interview process because of issues in their state. More than 45% claimed to see a decline in the quality of candidates. More than 40% stated personal knowledge of candidates who refused job offers because of the higher education climate in their state.

All of this is rather depressing. Results have not been disaggregated by institution, so we don't know specifically how Lone Star College faculty responded to these questions. We expect that will become somewhat clear in our own survey results. One takeaway is that LSC may well see a negative impact on recruitment of faculty when the college begins to ramp up the hiring process for next fall.

Internally, there are many things that all of us can do, and are already doing, to alleviate concerns among Lone Star faculty. In August, the Board of Trustees passed judicious amendments to college policy to affirm that federal and state non-discrimination laws will be rigorously enforced at our college. The Board, the Chancellor, and other administrators at all levels have publicly and unequivocally affirmed that Lone Star will continue to be a welcoming place for every employee and every student regardless of who they are. The Office of Culture and Engagement continues to provide excellent programming to celebrate all of our students and employees and to make sure that we all feel valued.

For our part, the union published a thorough analysis of Senate Bill 17 in the August – October, 2023 edition of The Advocate. We emphasized that the bill explicitly states that nothing in the law restricts

the content we teach in class, the speakers we bring to campus, the research and creative work that we and our students do, the activities of our student organizations, or the good work we do to promote student success. If you missed that article, please click the link below to our archived edition and scroll to page 9: Know Your Rights: DEI, SB17, and YOU. With solid information, we hope that we have alleviated some of the fear faculty maybe feeling.

Tenure is not an issue at Lone Star, but we have good policies in place to protect the due process rights of our faculty and we can work to make those policies even stronger.

It is unfortunate that there are some that see higher education as a political punching bag, especially at a time when the economic future of Texas and other Southern states is so dependent on building a better educated workforce. The AFT statewide has and will continue to lobby our political leaders in Austin to strengthen higher education rather than to hurt it. This past session, our new AAUP brothers and sisters worked side by side with us. It has been great to have them with us.

Here at home, all of us working together can continue to assure our faculty AND our staff that Lone Star is a college that champions their work and supports their academic freedom.

<https://aftlonestar.tx.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2023/2023%20Advocate%20August-October.pdf>

Other References:

<https://www.aaupgeorgia.org/#h.k0fsg8plpbzx>
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Dispatches from the Front #8 "Rustin"

*Steve Davis, Professor of History, Lone Star College
-Kingwood*

Sometimes inspiration for this column strikes suddenly. It certainly did this time in the form of the new movie, "Rustin," which began streaming on Netflix on November 17. The day before, I had collaborated with two Kingwood colleagues on a program which considered the lasting importance of three men who each died sixty years ago on November 22, 1963---John F. Kennedy, Aldous Huxley, and C.S. Lewis. In my segment on JFK, I had stressed the importance of his TV speech of June 11 of that year in which he articulated the moral imperative of racial justice in this country and for the first time, endorsed a major civil rights bill. The month before, papers all over the U.S. had featured a photo of a racist Birmingham cop siccing a vicious police dog on a teenaged Black protester. The president privately said that the picture "made me sick" and opened his heart and mind finally to the necessity of action.



In this new film's telling, this spurred a veteran Black activist named Bayard Rustin to revive the notion of a massive March on Washington, one that would pressure Kennedy and Congress on the proposed legislation. Rustin, then 51, was a Quaker, Socialist, radical pacifist, and gay man whose work in the movement began during the Depression. He

was a great, great leader whose name should be known to every American, along with that of his mentor, A. Philip Randolph. "Rustin" is a stunning contribution toward that objective.

Most of us know the March on Washington for the famous "I Have a Dream" speech with which Martin Luther King concluded the massive gathering on the National Mall on August 28, 1963. What is less known is the monumental work of organizing this gathering that brought an integrated crowd of 250,000 to the capital for a militant and peaceful afternoon of protest. No one was better equipped for this task than Bayard Rustin with his passion for justice, capacity for work under enormous pressure (he had only a few weeks to put the March together), and attention to detail. In regard to the latter, there is a scene in which he reminds volunteers that the thousands of sandwiches they need to prepare for participants had to be peanut butter and jelly rather than cheese as the forecast heat of that day might cause the latter food option to spoil during the several hours the event would last. We see the frenzy of activity in the March's Harlem HQ where activists secure transport to bring marchers in from all over the country, work on security, and plan for the hygienic needs of a crowd of the projected size. Rustin instructs all the women to answer the phone as "Michelle Harwood," the better to ensure repeat callers that they were communicating with the same person. His mantra is "Details!" and that focus paid off on the appointed day with the unanticipated smoothness of event's unfolding.

I am so proud of the role that American unions played in this epic tale. A bit of background is required on the man called "Chief" by the other civil rights leaders, Asa Philip Randolph. Phil Randolph was a giant in Black America through his leadership of the Pullman Porters union. These men who worked in passenger trains were natural leaders in the African American community due to their relative status. They traveled extensively, wore uniforms, were extremely skilled in their work, and made decent money by the standards of that era for



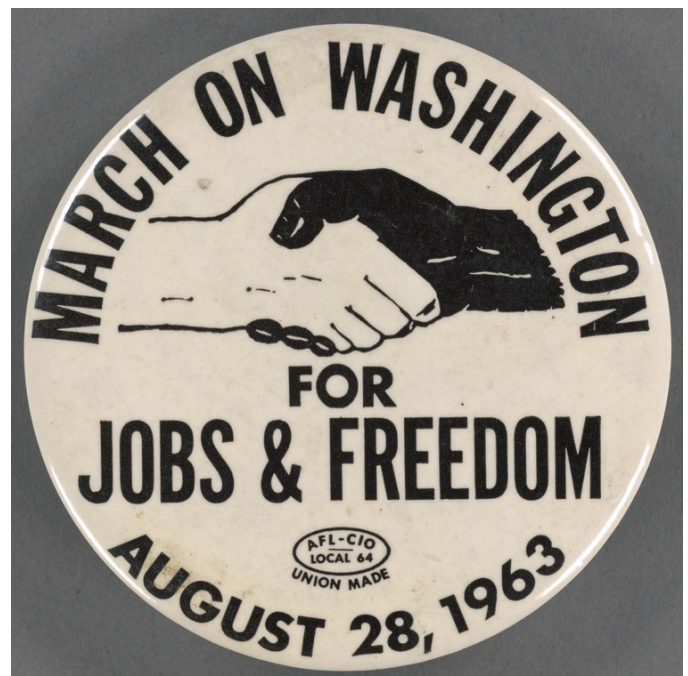
Blacks. People listened then when Randolph on the cusp of World War II, announced a massive March on Washington to protest job discrimination in the defense industry and segregation in the armed forces. President Roosevelt was scared witless by the prospects of 50,000 Negroes (the term of that era) voicing their discontent on the White House lawn. Phil Randolph had FDR in a cold sweat. The president resolved matters by calling the union leader into the Oval Office where he issued an executive order banning racial discrimination in defense hiring in return for the march's cancellation. Randolph declared victory and accepted the deal as a good union president will often do in the course of a negotiation.



So, an actual March on Washington didn't happen in 1941, but twenty-two years later. When it did, unions were in the lead along with the key civil rights organizations such as the SCLC (over which Dr. King presided), SNCC (the young John Lewis was its head), and the NAACP (whose director Roy Wilkins is played brilliantly in the movie by Chris Rock). The United Auto Workers, led by the intrepid Walter Reuther, gave key support, paying for several planeloads of its members to be flown to D.C. Cleveland Robinson (recognizable in the movie by his Jamaican accent) of District 65 of the Retail Workers, sent thousands of his members to the capital by bus and train. Marlon Brando, Charlton Heston, and Sidney Poitier flew in with other show business luminaries from Hollywood and New York. To a person, they were members of the Screen Actors Guild, the same union which just recently won a months-long strike against Netflix among other employers. Finally, the Garment Workers and Auto

Workers ponied up \$20,000 for a state-of-the-art sound system for use in the vast area between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument that would be filled with demonstrators. In the movie, we see Rustin consulting with engineers about its installation, which would be so instrumental in transforming the crowd into an audience and thereby helping maintain control.

Trade union influence is also seen in the official billing of the March as one for "Jobs and Freedom." Social democratic leaders like Rustin, Randolph, and Dr. King understood that the fight was not just against Jim Crow, but one also for economic justice. MLK would later explain after the passages of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that the fight wasn't done, that it didn't matter if a Black man could now sit at the lunch counter but didn't have enough money in his wallet to buy a hamburger or had gone to a school that was so bad that he couldn't read the menu. Hence the movement's next stage would be an all-out war to eradicate poverty, an effort that would cut across all racial lines. The linkage of the fight against segregation to that for economic equality was explicit in the 1963 March on many of the banners carried and buttons worn that day.





I would be remiss if I didn't address the movie's treatment of Rustin's sexuality. As he tells King in one crucial scene, he was born both Black and gay and could never deny either of these aspects of himself. As the March date neared, Rustin was gay-baited by Black machistas such as Congressman Adam Clayton Powell jealous of his role in the movement and by racist homophobes such as South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond who were simply filled with hate. The latter in 1963 was still a Democrat though he had led the Dixiecrats as a presidential candidate in 1948, enraged by President Truman's integration of the armed forces. In 1964, Thurmond would switch to the Republicans, thus playing a key role in the South's ultimate transition to GOP dominance. At the beginning of this term, a trans student in my HIST 1302 asked if I might teach some queer history in the course. My response was, "you bet!" "Rustin" will be a great addition to that part of the curriculum when I offer it to my students as potential extra credit. In the film, we see a gay man's need for love treated in the most empathetic way. It is a far stronger production for it.

Watch this movie and discuss with friends and family. The coming holidays should provide perfect space. It raises still vital issues about our history and politics. Check out the forthcoming nominations for the Oscars, Golden Globes, etc. It will be criminal if Colman Domingo is not recognized for his brilliant portrayal of Bayard Rustin. Other players in the making of "Rustin" (including co-producers Michelle and Barack Obama) deserve plaudits as well. Finally, I urge you to join our AFT local if you aren't a member already. I once knew a great man named Michael Harrington who told then-young activists like me that the lowest circle of hell was reserved for the "dues chiseler," the latter being someone who agrees with practically everything an organization advocates yet never manages to enter its ranks. Don't be one of those people. This film highlights the leading role that unions like ours have played in making this a better society. Now more than ever, we need your participation.

ERRATUM—More Benefits Than You Thought

From my days working on my junior high newspaper some time back around the invention of the printing press, I have known that one of the key realities of journalism is that, no matter how hard you try to be accurate, you're going to make mistakes and have to follow up with a correction in the next issue.

Eating crow is rarely tasty but, every once in a while, you're happy that your correction is actually good news. This is one of those cases.

Among the benefits you receive if you are a member of AFT is an Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance benefit. In the August – October issue of The Advocate we reported that the amount of that policy is \$25,000. One of the staffers at AFT national office in Washington was reading our newsletter and noticed that the amount was wrong.

AD&D benefits for AFT members are actually \$36,250: \$31,250 paid for by the policy purchased by our local and \$5000 more paid by AFT national office.

This is a screw-up I am happy to report!





A New Beginning?

Stephen King, Professor of English,
Lone Star College – North Harris

The Lone Star College System has a new chancellor, one who has pledged to put greater emphasis on student success. Unfortunately, he sits atop a machine that was built for other purposes. While we should all earnestly hope that he is able to bring about real change, we should be realistic about the chances.

We are fond of saying that we provide access to a college degree, but enrollment is clearly insufficient to such an achievement. In fact, selling enrollment without at least checking for other necessary conditions amounts to malpractice. An enrolled student without reliable transportation does not have access to a degree. An enrolled student with children without reliable childcare does not have access to a degree. An enrolled student who has to work so many hours that they have little time or energy left over for study does not have access to a degree. An enrolled student assaulted by such depression or anxiety that they can't concentrate long enough to learn anything does not have access to a degree. Giving a blind man keys to a car does not provide him access to the highway.

And of course, there are plenty of students who otherwise have the resources they need to succeed but simply aren't mature enough yet, committed enough yet to their college studies and thus waste the access we provide them. The best we can do for such students—absent an effective mentoring program—is to flunk them quickly when they fail to meet the standards required of our disciplines.

A logical consequence of this sort of thinking, however, is that our enrollment should be *lower*. That is, advisors should be encouraged to tell those students with marginal or clearly insufficient off-campus resources *not* to enroll before they have them. But this, of course, flies in the face of the community-college-as-business model in which every sale is a good one, and every student who walks away from Student Services without signing up for classes is a missed opportunity to make money.

Treating students as young, perhaps naïve people who need guidance rather than simply customers does not require that we deny anyone who wants

to sign up for classes, but when they do so without the conditions necessary to success, we should stress just how difficult finishing college will be for them. For example, we could have them sign waivers that they have been warned about the likelihood that they will drop out. Cigarettes come with warning labels; when more than half of community college stu-

dents neither graduate nor transfer, community college should come with a warning label, too.

Far from being customers, students are our partners in achieving the personal transformations that result not only in their gaining soft and hard job skills but also a better understanding of the world they will join and contribute to as adults. As such, enrolling in college is less like buying tickets to a cruise ship voyage than like joining the military. They are here to *change*, and personal change is almost always difficult. Products are sold for a bundle of various reasons, very few of which are advertised with adjectives such as *difficult* or *extremely challenging*. Yet our current graduation and transfer rates testify that such adjectives rightly describe community college studies.

Far from being customers, students are our partners in achieving the personal transformations that result not only in their gaining soft and hard job skills but also a better understanding of the world they will join and contribute to as adults.



The question now is whether, having so long pursued enrollment and expansion as our first priorities, we are now so big that we can't afford to provide the support that students, especially those on the economic margins, require to succeed.

The truth is that at LSC, it's business as usual, as conventional, at American community colleges. We perceive ourselves as successful, as exemplary, as a result of our size, as measured in campuses and enrollment, not because of any exemplary student success numbers.

It's easy to believe that won't change.

Four Recommendations for the Improvement of Lone Star College

Aaron Alon, Professor of Music,
Lone Star College – University Park

As a Lone Star College faculty member since January 2012, I am incredibly proud to be part of such an excellent college system that has impacted the lives of millions of people over its more than 50-year history. Over my 11+ years at the college, I have served as a faculty member, a lead faculty, and a department chair. I've worked at two different campuses and under 4 college presidents and 3 deans. This year, I spent some time reflecting on what kinds of changes the LSC system could make that might make our college into an even more exemplary one. In setting this challenge for myself, I wanted to attempt this as an exercise in radical growth – imagining what changes could really benefit the college and its students and employees, even if the changes would require substantial reimagining of the college's approach. Lone Star College proudly sees itself as a leader and innovator, but too often, we kowtow to precedent at peer institutions, local universities, or our own long-established practices. In so doing, we risk missing out on the opportunity to truly be leaders in early college education.

To that end, I've arrived at four recommendations specific to the LSC system and share them here in hopes that others may find value in them and that these might perhaps, at some point, be considered by college leadership.

Recommendation 1: More Robust Supervisor Evaluation

When trying to find out what an institution values, the questions they don't ask are often even more revealing than the questions that they do. To that end, a significant part of the job of deans is the supervision of full-time faculty, and a significant part of the job of chairs is the supervision of adjunct faculty. However, in over a decade in the college, I've never seen any attempt to get full-time faculty feedback about the performance of their deans. Similarly, my own assessments have never included surveying the adjuncts that I supervise as a chair. As VPIs assess their deans and deans assess their chairs, it is telling that the college does not have any mechanisms in place to determine their strengths and weaknesses as supervisors. It suggests that the focus of these observations deprioritizes the supervisory nature of these positions – in effect, it devalues those who are being supervised.

To that end, I propose that Lone Star College develop a more robust evaluation strategy wherein confidential surveying (ideally, by an independent, external source that can guarantee the anonymity of responses) is conducted of all employees that someone supervises. Chairs should be assessed, in part, based on the feedback of their adjuncts, deans based on the full-time faculty and division suite staff, VPIs based on the feedback of the deans and chairs, and presidents based on the feedback of the vice presidents and deans. Ideally, this structure would be mirrored in staff and non-instructional areas as well. For instance, DOMs should be evaluated, in part, on the collected, anonymized feedback of the division staff they supervise.

Furthermore, it is not enough to collect this data, but it should be reviewed and acted upon.



If a supervisor is shown to have significant weaknesses based on this data, a Performance Improvement Plan should be instituted.

The reasons for this recommendation are likely clear, but I will add that I have spoken to countless faculty and staff members throughout the years who have struggled with profoundly problematic supervisors – sometimes, outright abusive ones. This usually goes on for years without intervention – often out of fear, but equally so out of a lack of transparent mechanisms for the safe sharing of this information. There is a sense that if the college cared about this information, they would be asking for it. In the absence of such anonymized collection mechanisms, I’ve seen talented faculty and staff leaving for other institutions and some suffering extreme mental health issues as consequences of unchecked supervisor abuse.

Research reported by the EEOC confirms that this is common in workplaces: “Roughly three out of four individuals who experienced harassment never even talked to a supervisor, manager, or union representative about the harassing conduct. Employees who experience harassment fail to report the harassing behavior or to file a complaint because they fear disbelief of their claim, inaction on their claim, blame, or social or professional retaliation.”ⁱ

Numerous studies link job satisfaction to productivityⁱⁱ and even to longevityⁱⁱⁱ, and research also suggests that the largest determinant of job satisfaction is a highly competent immediate supervisor^{iv} with whom employees have a good working relationship. Lone Star College stresses that it cares about its employees, so we should act in accordance with that value. This would be a good first step to identify and hopefully remedy problems that are largely invisible at present.

Recommendation 2: Flexible Work Scheduling

While the pandemic was inarguably calamitous, there were some lessons learned that we can ap-

preciate as benefits of this challenging period in our history. During COVID, many of us learned how to better work, collaborate, teach, and fulfill many or all of our job duties remotely. While I, like many others, have celebrated a return to the classroom after the release of the COVID vaccine, we shouldn’t be too quick to forgo lessons learned during the pandemic. Even in the years preceding the pandemic, a great deal of industry research supported varying schedules, flexible work hours^v, hybrid and remote employment^{vi}, and other flexible measures to increase worker productivity, job satisfaction, and even equity^{vii}.

Despite extensive research on this topic, LSC has failed to innovate in accordance with the data. For instance, full-time college faculty are required to be on campus 4 days a week during every week of their contract. A recent proposed change to board policy (should it pass) clarifies that this even includes during the summer, even though an overwhelming majority of students choose fully online courses in the summer.

I have always thought that hours or days on campus is a remarkably poor way to measure employee effectiveness, but this is especially the case during the summer, when a large majority of students are enrolling in online classes and want to be able to engage with their instructors in a fully online modality. This causes faculty to waste precious time commuting unnecessarily when that time could be better spent on preparation, student support, and institutional service. It’s a wasteful policy and something of a historical relic based on what we now know of efficiency research and contemporary student needs.

The same applies to course modalities. Currently, full-time faculty (excluding those teaching for LSC-Online) are expected to teach no more than half of their course load online every semester. That typically includes over the summer, where, again, students overwhelmingly enroll in online courses. Some faculty excel at teaching in person; others are



real experts of online education. LSC needs both of these, and not just at LSC-Online. Course schedules should be built based on enrollment trends, student needs, faculty strengths, and the most effective and efficient use of the faculty talent pool. Quota systems are archaic and likely lead to more classes being cancelled and greater job dissatisfaction by those who are forced to teach more courses in person, even when all the data points toward them having more educational impact in online courses (such as during the summer terms).

These concerns extend to staff as well. I have friends and colleagues throughout the system in staff positions and many report that their best, most focused work is done from home. On campus, there are too many interruptions and distractions, too many needless meetings, and too little time left to do the core work of one's job. Certainly, someone working the welcome desk or a member of the grounds crew will likely need to be fully in-person in their work. However, most staff would likely be more productive, more efficient, and more satisfied with their jobs if they had the flexibility of a hybrid schedule with flexible hours.

Lone Star College is justifiably proud of its employees. I hope that the college will consider trusting them and their supervisors enough to be good stewards of their jobs – working from home when that would most benefit their productivity and their job functions, and working from campus when that would be of greater benefit. This should be something that's negotiated between employees and their supervisors based on campus needs and employee strengths, not a top-down mandate from the board manual.

Recommendation 3: Improved Treatment of Staff & Adjuncts

While faculty had immense flexibility to keep themselves safe by working remotely until they could be fully vaccinated during the early days of the pandemic, staff were forced to return to working in-person quite early and often needlessly. Perhaps it

is because of the strength of the teacher's union (though it also represents staff) or because administrators see faculty as more valuable, less disposable employees than staff, but the faculty-staff distinctions cut across a number of policies and the general impression I can't help but reach is that staff are simply not as valued as employees.

Perhaps this is obvious, but without the tireless efforts of our staff, faculty would have no one to teach and very limited ability to carry out any part of our jobs. As a case in point, I don't know anyone on any campus who works harder than or is more knowledgeable or competent than the Division Operations Managers I've had the pleasure to know and work with. When I don't know something, my surest path to an accurate and quick answer has always been to ask a DOM.

It is time that the college recognizes the importance of our staff – not with attaboys and lip service, but with substantive changes: flexible work schedules, improved pay, and measures put in place to reward those who stay on with the college. With low staff pay and poor treatment, the inevitable result is constant turnover. I've seen numerous departments throughout the system have an almost ceaseless turnover. The lack of institutional memory and the constant retraining and transition to new staff makes the college inefficient and prone to errors and ineffectiveness. As an example from my discipline (music), newer advisors often counsel music students to take their core classes, complete their general AA, and save their music courses until they transfer to universities, rather than completing the AA in Music at LSC. Sadly, this is terrible advice, because unlike many other majors, bachelor's degrees in music require 4 years of music major coursework. Students who complete a general AA with us and transfer to university as music majors won't enter as juniors, but as first semester freshmen. While we've spoken to advisors about this and they alter course, as new advisors cycle through, this errant advising returns again and again. I've seen this problem at two different campuses for over a dec-



ade. Our advisors are great, but if turnover is high, old mistakes are bound to keep recurring, and the negative impacts on students can be substantial.

On a related note, the adjunct crisis is such old news that to speak of the poor pay and treatment of adjuncts across the country has become something of a truism in higher education. I've come to be the annoying person in every meeting that asks about better treatment of adjuncts or how we plan to compensate adjuncts for added work. The answers are inevitably the same. We write off the problem as a higher education issue, not a Lone Star issue; we claim that the extra work is built into their pay (poor as it is); or we find ways to claim that the problem is more negligible than it may first appear.

In the movie *Awakenings*, Robin Williams plays Dr. Sayer, a neurologist treating a group of patients who appear catatonic. He asks an older doctor, Dr. Ingham, "What's it like to be them? What are they thinking?" The doctor replies, "They're not. The virus didn't spare their higher faculties." When Sayer asks how we know that to be true, Ingham replies, "Because the alternative is unthinkable."

In the current adjunct crisis, we engage in this type of thinking to some degree. Administrators will sometimes say that "adjuncts knew the gig they signed up for" and suggest that they should do whatever we ask of them without complaint or extra compensation, because that's the path to a full-time job, despite the fact that that path is by no means assured. Other administrators (and even other full-time faculty) have told me that the adjunct crisis isn't really the problem it appears to be, because most adjuncts have full-time jobs elsewhere and this is just supplemental income. Especially as that has run counter to my experience as a lead and chair, I have to ask how they know this about our adjunct population. I've never seen any substantive attempt to survey adjuncts and discover if this is true and no one who's made such a claim has been able to point me in the direction of any LSC institutional data that supports their assertions.

I can only conclude that we believe this to be the case because "the alternative is unthinkable."

Our worthy goal as a system to reach a 50:50 ratio of adjunct to full-time faculty never really came to fruition. At my campus, about 75% of courses are taught by adjuncts. In my department (visual and performing arts), the adjunct-to-full-time ratio is currently over 7:1 (just in music, it's 24:1). Especially in the absence of seeing this goal realized, we need to consider what we can do now to improve the situation for adjunct faculty.

First, if we claim that faculty use adjunct work as a steppingstone to full-time faculty positions, we should support that growth. In addition to on-campus professional development, we should robustly increase funding for professional development departments (on our campus, total funding was halved last year) and open that funding up, system-wide, to full-time and adjunct faculty both at the same funding levels. Most campuses currently do not fund adjunct professional development at all. My campus is slightly better, with full-timers allowed up to \$1,500 in funding and adjuncts allowed up to \$250 in funding (though the most recent funding rubric made it nearly impossible for them to exceed \$150). This means that, as an institution, we recognize the value of external professional development in teaching, but that we dramatically underfund those who are teaching a majority of our courses.

While some full-time faculty have expressed a feeling to me that adjuncts are paying their dues and that this should be a benefit for full-time faculty only, we found that, among full-time faculty at our campus, while those voices may be the loudest, they are not representative. This semester, I worked with an *ad hoc* committee on our campus to work on the issue of adjunct equity. As part of those efforts, we surveyed full-time LSC-UP faculty on the question of adjunct professional development funding. With 2/3 of all full-time faculty responding, we found that *all but one* respondent fa-



vored adjuncts having access to external professional development funding. 38% of respondents most favored adjuncts and full-time faculty having access to the same level of funding for external professional development funding, and 63% of respondents listed setting adjuncts at a max of \$1,250 (75% of full-time professional development funding) as their first or second choice.^{viii} At least on our campus, the data is clear: we recognize the value of external professional development funding and full-time faculty overwhelmingly support adjunct having access to robust funding for those external professional development opportunities.

Second, if we ask adjuncts to do anything outside of teaching their classes, we should pay them for that work. Currently, adjuncts must complete the annual mandatory training – that’s about 3-4 hours of their time – without pay. (Allegedly, their recent 8% COLA was meant to cover that, even though most sources place inflation in 2022 at around 8%.) We also encourage adjuncts to be active on campus. We ask them to participate in on-campus events, such as film screenings, debates, panels, performances, and tabling. While many adjuncts are willing to take on this work out of a passion for education, it falls outside of what they’re paid to do. This is effectively unpaid institutional service, and while some campuses have found ways to gingerly fund these efforts occasionally (such as by stipend), the infrastructure and budget should already be in place to support paying adjuncts for work outside of their classes.

Finally, we need to do robust and regular surveying of our adjuncts. Let’s find out who they are, how dependent they are on their LSC adjunct income, and if they do, in fact, have full-time external positions as many claim. If we’re using these assumptions to justify our decisions about their compensation and treatment, we owe it to them to periodically gather the data that will either support or refute those assumptions.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen Advising & Student Emailing

Since joining the faculty of LSC over a decade ago, I have attended innumerable meetings where we try to brainstorm how to improve student success rates. With funding shifting from an enrollment model toward a completion/success model, I have to imagine these discussions will only increase. Unfortunately, the often unspoken second part to the question of how we improve student success rates is: “without spending much money on it.”

When you look at the standout community colleges in the country when it comes to student success (*sans* grade inflation), one common factor is the remarkably robust and personalized advising that they do. I remember listening to someone from one such institution who said that they employed dozens of additional advisors, each assigned a small caseload of students. The advisors had detailed access to all the students’ classes. If they missed a couple of classes or failed a quiz, the advisor would see that and would personally call them, check in, and try to get them back on track.

We do some of this at LSC. Faculty do often reach out to students to offer help, though the high number of adjuncts teaching a majority of our classes can limit that effectiveness, as they are often overwhelmed with balancing so many jobs and typically know less about campus resources for students. Concerns about FERPA have also made it scary for faculty to reach out to students except through their LSC emails, which too few check, especially those who have disconnected from their education. We can also use Early Alert as another touchpoint to help connect with students in need of resources. Early Alert reaches out to students through phone in addition to email, but the most common result of an Early Alert report in my experience is a message back to the instructor saying that the student didn’t respond and the case was closed.

Some campuses have created robust websites for students to access their campus’s resources, such as



this excellent site from my campus:

[Lonestar.edu/UPStudentSupport](https://lonestar.edu/UPStudentSupport). Other campuses have invested in extensive additional resources specific to their populations, notably at Houston North. While these efforts are excellent and part of the solution, what we really need is close advising with people who know the students personally and are empowered to connect with them through more than just their LSC email addresses.

In the last few years, I've run a loose experiment in faculty advising. Every semester, I've started emailing students who have taken music major courses (usually around 150-200 of them) with personalized degree plans showing their progress and my recommendations for the next semester. My emails to them also give them an overall progress report, showing them the percentage of credit hours completed toward the AA in Music. While it's challenging without a control group to show a causal link, I've observed that sending these emails (even though it's through their LSC email addresses) boosts enrollment, helps students who have suspended their education resume, and helps students get into the right classes for pursuing their degrees. This has paid off for us, but the workload is immense (like many faculty, my institutional service cup runneth over).

I recommend that we increase our advising staff, make efforts (including through higher pay) to reduce the frequent turnover in advising, and award faculty stipends or releases for becoming faculty advisors to small groups of students. With more people advising a smaller number of students, we can forge real relationships with the students, and use those connections to help them stay on their degree paths and realize their goals. The college also needs to address the issues around FERPA when it comes to contacting students, as faculty advisors would need guidance on how to safely call and email students through any means they provide us, so that we have a chance of actually reaching them. At a minimum, there should be a simple way for emails from certain people to auto-

matically trigger a message to students' personal emails letting them know that they should check their LSC email for an important email from their faculty or academic advisor.

Summary

Lone Star College is an exceptional institution, but it suffers from weaknesses that reduce job satisfaction, productivity, and efficiency. Ultimately, this leads to a poorer quality of work, wasted money, and inferior service of our student body. I've offered these four recommendations in the hopes that they may inspire others with more power than I possess to take them up and that others with several years of experience at the college, like me, may springboard off these suggestions to think about large-scale changes of their own that could really improve our culture and success. By improving our supervisor evaluation process, opening ourselves up to greater flexibility of work schedules and modality, improving our treatment and thereby reducing our turnover of staff and adjunct faculty, and strengthening advising and better empowering advisors and faculty to contact students, I believe we can make significant and meaningful changes to our culture that will pay off for our students, employees, and institution. We have a lot to be proud of at LSC. Still, we can and must do better.

ⁱFeldblum, Chai R., and Victoria A. Lipnic. "Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace." *US Equal Opportunity Employment Commission*, US EEOC, June 2016, www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace.

ⁱⁱFor instance, see: "Happy Workers Are 13% More Productive." *University of Oxford News & Events*, University of Oxford, 24 Oct. 2019, www.ox.ac.uk/news/2019-10-24-happy-workers-are-13-more-productive.

ⁱⁱⁱCharlesworth, Edward A., and Ronald G. Nathan. *Stress Management: A Comprehensive Guide to Wellness*, Ballantine Books, New York, NY, 2004, p. 33.

^{iv}Artz, Benjamin, et al. "Boss Competence and Worker Well-Being." *ResearchGate*, Industrial and Labor Relations Review, www.researchgate.net/publication/268491675_Boss_Competence_and_Worker_Well-Being. Accessed 12 Nov. 2023.



^v See, for instance: Castrillon, Caroline. "Why Flexible Work Boosts Employee Productivity." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 12 Sept. 2023, www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2022/03/23/why-flexible-work-boosts-employee-productivity/?sh=281925146e4b.

^{vi} Ray, Tapas K, and Regina Pana-Cryan. "Work Flexibility and Work-Related Well-Being." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 21 Mar. 2021, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8004082/.

^{vii} Ray, Tapas K., and Regina Pana-Cryan. "The Radical Promise of Truly Flexible Work Tapas K. Ray." Edited by Paul B. Tchounwou, *Harvard Business Review*, 18 Aug. 2023, <https://hbr.org/2023/08/the-radical-promise-of-truly-flexible-work>.

^{viii} Full results of preferences by max amount for adjuncts with full-time faculty at a \$1,500 maximum:

The war right now in the Middle East has created a

	\$0 max	\$250 max	\$750 max	\$1,125 max	\$1,500 max
Top Choice	1	12	20	7	24
2nd Choice	7	11	9	33	4
3rd Choice	3	5	35	13	8
4th Choice	3	36	0	11	14
Last Choice	50	0	0	0	14

The War in the Middle East— How You Can Help

A message from Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, Washington, DC,

grave humanitarian crisis. On Oct. 7, Hamas, an Islamist political and military organization governing the Gaza Strip, conducted a horrific assault on Israeli citizens. Many remain as Hamas' hostages. Israel then declared war on Hamas, and over the last weeks the residents of Gaza have suffered greatly. This war between Israel and Hamas has taken a huge toll on innocents, particularly children. Many have been killed and displaced.

While we may differ on who's at fault, and what to do in the short and long term, what we can agree on is the fight for life and our shared humanity.

I'm sure many of you, like me, are asking yourselves, "What can I do?"

That is why I am writing to you today, urging you to

contribute to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund to help us assist those who are on the ground caring for the victims in this war and pressing for the release of hostages. As members of the AFT, we have shared values: a common commitment to peace, tolerance and human dignity.

The need continues for basic necessities—water, food, fuel, medicines, shelter and counseling. Your contribution will go directly to the on-the-ground relief work of three AFT partner organizations:

- [Hostages and Missing Families Forum](#) is working on all fronts—diplomatically, in the community and through the media—to immediately end the hostage crisis and bring the hostages safely back to their families.
- [NATAN Worldwide Disaster Relief](#) is providing medical, dental, psychosocial and educational aid to thousands of Israel's citizens and migrant workers and their families—from many nationalities and religions—who live or were present on the border of Gaza and have been affected by the Hamas assault.
- [Anera \(American Near East Refugee Aid\)](#) is providing emergency relief in Gaza by delivering meals, hygiene kits, water and cleaning equipment. Anera is located in Gaza.

[Click here to make your contribution to the AFT Disaster Relief Fund.](#) We will divide your contribution among these three groups.

In the long term, the only choice is peace, and dignity and respect for the rights, freedom and security of both Palestinians and Israelis (20 percent of whom are Palestinian). That is why we have advocated for a two-state solution—two states for two peoples. And that work of shared humanity is what the school we partner with in Israel—Hand in Hand—does every day.

But right now, the humanitarian and hostage crisis is grave. That is why we are acting.

In solidarity,
Randi Weingarten, President
American Federation of Teachers



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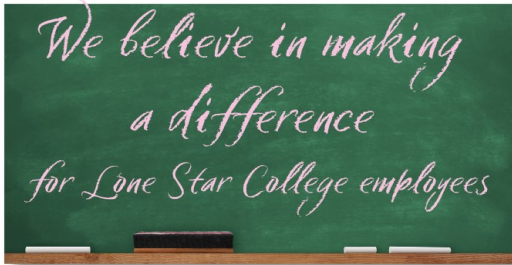


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The union encourages employees to join because they believe that college employees should have a voice in their professional lives. We don't encourage employees to join because they anticipate conflict or are already engaged in a conflict. In fact, if they are already embroiled in a situation, we are unable to help them. It is all too common for someone to approach the AFT and say something like, "I've been an employee for the district for several years, and I've just recognized the importance of joining." Typically, following that comment is, "I'm in trouble and need help." I finally lost track of how many times in the last year I've had to say, "I'm sorry, but member benefits don't cover anything that pre-dates membership." The individuals to whom I had to give this message were invited to join and provided some advice on how to proceed with their situation, but assistance

ended there. Were they members, a host of benefits would have been available.

The AFT provides its members with advice and guidance as well as representation in conflict resolution and grievances. We have our own local attorney and can seek legal advice and counsel for members. We maintain a local legal defense fund. In addition, membership dues include, at no extra charge, \$8 million in professional liability insurance for claims arising out of professional activities.

Most of our members don't join because they believe that they may need the AFT's help in a conflict. They join because they believe in the values of the AFT—that employees should be treated with dignity and respect, that employees should help each other, that employees should

have a voice in their professional lives, that employees deserve fair pay and good working conditions, and that the district needs a system providing checks and balances. They join because they want to support an organization that helps others in so many ways. A nice benefit is that, if they do need help, AFT is there for them.

If you believe in these values and are not a member, now is the perfect time to join. If you believe in our values, take action now and join the AFT.

