



# The Advocate

It is with great pleasure that AFT Lone Star College presents to you the January – March, 2024 edition of our newsletter, The Advocate. This issue has a lot to offer you. It may take you a while to read through it, but we believe it will be worth your while.

A very large part of this issue is devoted to sharing with you the results of the all employee survey we conducted in October and November of 2023. We have so much data that we are going to present part of it now and part of it in our April/May issue. You will notice that we devote separate articles to share the responses from each of the five major employee groups at Lone Star College: full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, full-time staff, part-time staff, and administrators. We offer commentary on the results we got from each group, but it will be immediately obvious that the data says so much more. If anything strikes you as interesting and worthy of attention, we'd love to hear from you about it.

AFT is fully committed to the belief that ALL employees are valuable contributors to the work of the college and deserve a voice. Our official name is the American Federation of Teachers because, in our view, if you work in a school in any capacity you are a teacher. You may directly stand in front of a class, you may advise students one on one, you may help stu-

*AFT is fully committed to the belief that ALL employees are valuable contributors to the work of the college and deserve a voice.*

dents with their research in the library, you may work with students to help them with their personal and financial challenges, you may work to provide a clean and safe environment for students to learn in, or you may juggle the budget and wrangle the state legislature for funding so the lights can stay on. Whatever you do, you are teaching our students how to think, how to serve, and how to lead.

This is the reason why, when we conduct a survey, we want to hear from EVERYBODY.

By the way, AFT doesn't conduct these surveys just because we are nerds and like to play with data. (Although, in fact, many of us are nerds and we do like to play with data.) The real purpose of our surveys is to discern common themes that need to be addressed and to affect positive and practical change.

This year's survey is already affecting change. We've been looking at this data since the first of it started trickling in during early October and we've been sharing it with Chancellor Mario Castillo and others. Although we can't claim that we were the only people talking about the issues, our data brought some concerns into stark focus and swift changes are already underway or are already done! Here's some examples:

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1) We noted that our staff employees were worried about reaching the top of their pay bands with no possibility of future pay increases ever. Some have not had a raise in years. Chancellor Castillo has already taken action and, starting with the 2024-2025 school year, all staff will receive their full cost of living increases even if those increases put them above their pay bands.

2) Faculty were frustrated about the practice that arbitrarily limited them to teaching no more than half of their teaching loads online even though student demand for online classes was going unmet. That practice has been reversed and faculty may now teach more online classes subject to student demand.

3) Staff have been expressing interest for some time in having flexible work options including hybrid work and alternate work schedules. Existing policy only allows a traditional 40-hour work week fully on-site. Even as you read this, proposals are coming together and will soon be made public that will allow greater flexibility. Those proposals are informed by our survey results.

Other issues brought up by our survey are being noted and, although solutions are not yet ready, the conversations are underway. One of those conversations relates to the overwhelming concern the survey uncovered about untreated mental health issues among students (and employees, for that matter).

So, we don't do research just to do research. We are looking to identify and solve problems and tangible solutions are already coming together.

While we study our survey, life goes on both around Lone Star and around the world. So this issue has more to offer.

Steve Davis returns with the next installment of his column "Dispatches from the Front." In this issue he

writes about the value of study abroad and academic travel in general.

Steve King returns with a follow up to his previous article focusing on student success. He suggests a new approach: the radical notion that the expertise to affect real change is already here among the faculty and staff who work with students day to day.

While much of what we cover in The Advocate relates to what is happening here at Lone Star or perhaps in the slightly larger circle of community college education, what is happening in the world demands to be noticed. The ongoing War in Gaza and the suffering it is causing directly impacts the families of many Lone Star College students and employees. Meanwhile, the wave of controversy over the war that is very publicly washing over university campuses nationwide is being felt at Lone Star, too, with outside attacks on free speech, and outright hate aimed at students based on their nation of origin or religion.

At the national level, the American Federation of Teachers, has issued a resolution about the War in Gaza and the impacts on American campuses. It is a remarkable document: balanced, compassionate, thoughtful, and practical. We publish that resolution in this issue of the Advocate in its entirety. Not everyone will agree with everything stated in the resolution, I am sure, and some may say that the union should stay out of politics. But if the important issues of the day can't be discussed in academic settings where can they be discussed, especially when those issues overtake the lives of our students and employees and their families?

Finally, I take up the rear with the latest installation of my ongoing column, Know Your Rights. In this issue I write about our college's policy on Ethical Standards – a policy with important implications for all employees of the college.

It's an action-packed edition! It seems like, as time goes by, there is more and more to say, and more



and more people saying it. I believe that this is a sign of a vibrant and growing union. Take The Advocate with you on Spring Break. And let us know what you think. We welcome letters to the editor and contributions from our colleagues. You can reach us at [aftlonestar@yahoo.com](mailto:aftlonestar@yahoo.com).

John Burghdoff, President  
AFT Lone Star College

## Introducing the 2023 Lone Star College Employee Survey

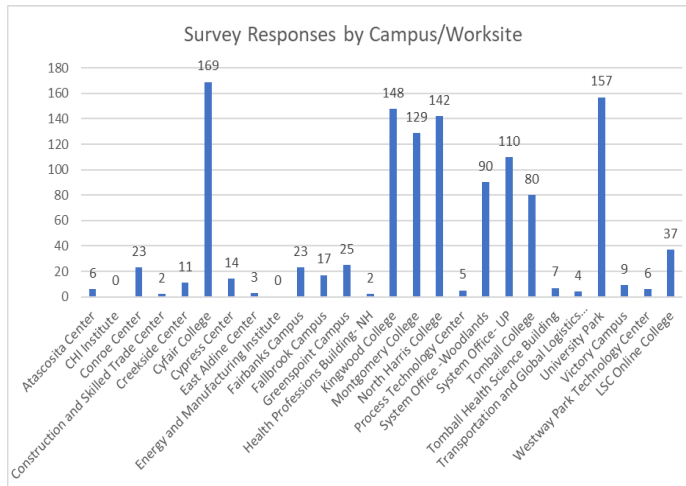
We are making it a tradition that every fall, AFT Lone Star College surveys all employees across the system to determine the workforce climate of the college and to identify concerns and issues that employees share. We conducted this year's survey between the beginning of October and the middle of November, 2023 and we are pleased to begin to report our data in this edition of The Advocate.

Our 2023 survey garnered responses from 1219 employees of Lone Star College – a record high level of participation for our union! The responses represent all categories of employees at our college:

- 267 Full Time Faculty
- 263 Adjunct Faculty
- 461 Full Time Staff
- 166 Part Time Staff
- 62 Administrators

We will devote separate articles in this issue to each of these job categories so each group can have their own say. We will also have an article summarizing major themes in the free response questions.

In addition to robust responses from each category of employees, we got a solid response rate from campuses and worksites throughout the Lone Star College District as indicated in the graph in the next column:



Special kudos are deserved by our colleagues at the two locations of System Office who participated at an especially high rate. We noted some important differences in responses between the different locations. In this issue we are going to present results based on job category. In our April/May issue we will examine the results based on campus/worksite.

As an important note, our survey predated the survey conducted by Chancellor Mario Castillo. We have shared our results with him and there are many common themes between the two surveys. Also, Chancellor Castillo has taken swift action on some of the most visible themes that came to light in our survey. We will be careful to point those themes out because some employee issues have either already been solved or are in the process of being solved.

Before we get to the results, the union would like to thank all Lone Star employees who participated in our survey. We do not do these surveys simply to gather data. We want to make a difference. Your viewpoints are important and, by taking the time to answer all of our questions, you will have an impact on the quality of work life at Lone Star College. **SCRATCH THAT!!!** Your answers are **ALREADY** making an impact on Lone Star College!

So, with all of that said, let's hear what Lone Star College employees have to say, giving each category of employee their own chance to speak!

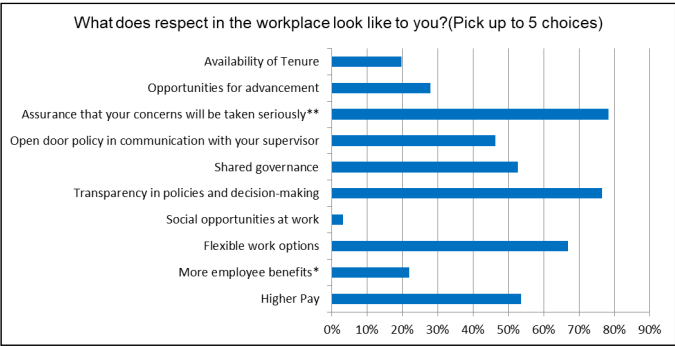


# 2023 Employee Survey- Full Time Faculty Speak!

As stated in the introduction piece to this edition of The Advocate, all employees of Lone Star College are teachers. All of us make important contributions to the college and all of us deserve the right to speak. And we will give everyone that chance in this issue. There is no particular reason for the order of the articles, but we set up full time faculty in our survey first so we will let full time faculty come to the podium first.

As you will see in the charts below, full time faculty in overwhelming numbers want assurances that their concerns will be taken seriously and without retaliation, and they are looking for transparency in policies and decision making. The single issue that causes them the greatest amount of concern is untreated mental health issues they encounter in the students they teach. They believe that years of loyal service should be rewarded financially. They look for flexible options in the modalities in which they teach. And they are generally happy to be here at Lone Star College.

The first question we asked full time faculty (and every other category of employee) was “What does respect in the workplace look like to you?” The following chart shows the percentage of full-time faculty who chose a given option. Faculty could choose up to five options, so the sum of the percentages is well over 100%.

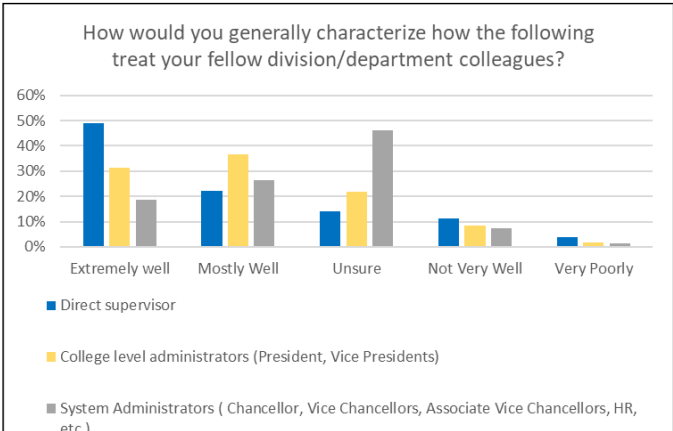
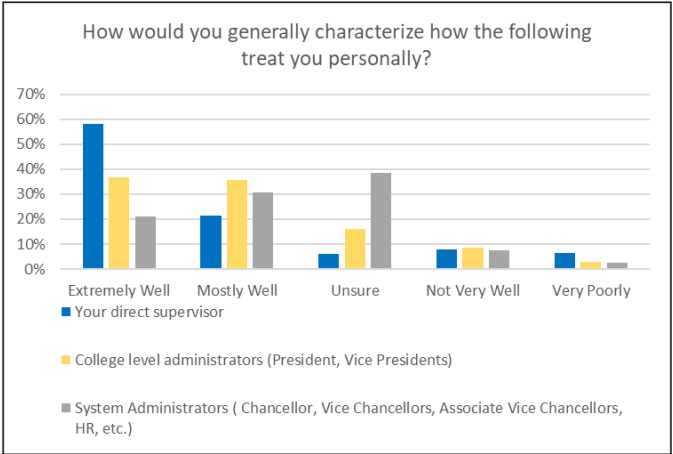


\* other than health care  
\*\* and without reprisal

Closely behind assurances that concerns will be taken seriously and transparency, other indicators of respect that were chosen by more than half of full-time faculty were flexible work options, higher pay, and shared governance. Availability of tenure and social opportunities

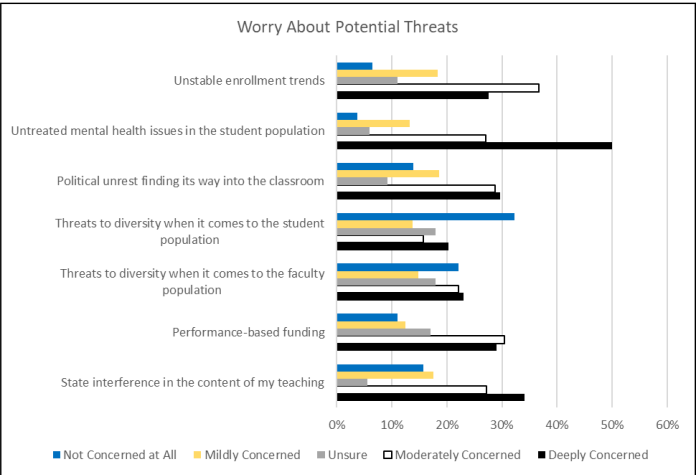
at work were chosen the least. The reason we added “other than health care” to “more employee benefits” is that health benefits are controlled by the state and out of the hands of the college.

Our next two questions relate to treatment by authority figures either of the faculty member personally or of his/her colleagues.

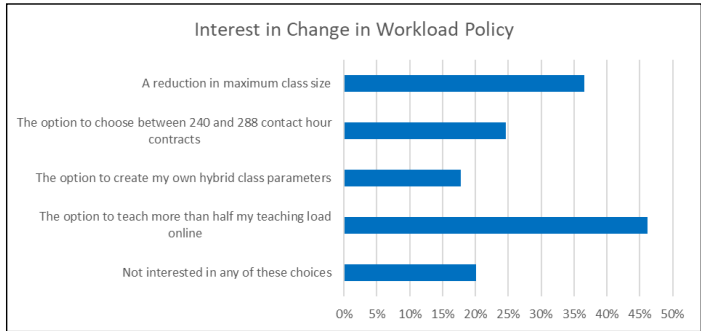


We conjecture that the reason that the “unsure” option is so high for system administrators is that many full-time faculty have little personal contact with system office. It is interesting that, in general, the supervisors that full-time faculty answer most directly to are the ones most favorably perceived.

Our next several question asks “To what degree do the following potential threats worry you most?” As noted above, untreated mental health issues in the student population tops the list, but there is real concern about state interference in teaching, performance-based funding, political unrest finding its way into the classroom, and unstable enrollment trends as well.



Our next question was “If changes were made to workload policies, what would you personally be interested in?”

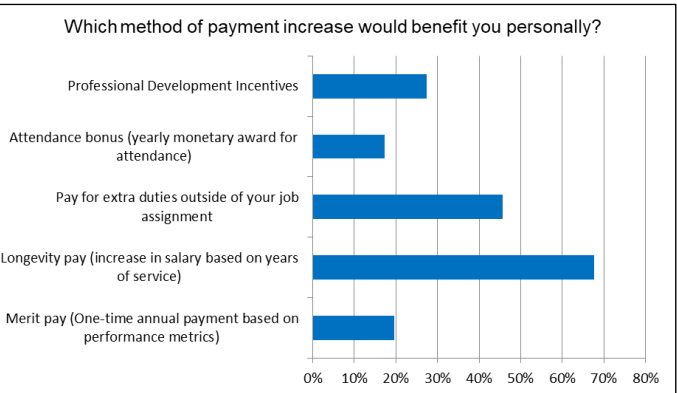


The option that got the highest rate of interest was the option to teach more than half of one’s teaching load online. We brought up this concern with Chancellor Castillo early in the data analysis phase and changes have already been made. The former ruling that faculty could not teach over half of their teaching load online has been modified. Now a higher number of online classes will be allowed IF doing so serves student demand (which, rightfully, must be the first consideration) and with appropriate approvals.

Work is also ongoing regarding reduction of maximum class size. Early proposals were that curriculum teams should recommend appropriate class sizes for their respective disciplines. We hope conversations will continue in that direction recognizing factors such as the variability of grading load based on discipline (e.g. English composition classes) rather than a “one size fits all” approach.

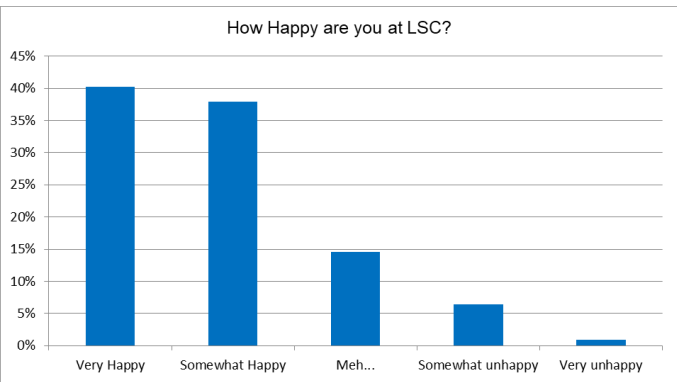
Next, we asked “If more money were to flow to employees, which method of payment would benefit you personally?”

sonally?” Respondents could pick up to two choices explaining why the total percentages exceed 100%.



Longevity pay, the most popular option, would reward employees for length of service over and above a standard cost of living increase. Attendance bonuses and merit pay were the least favored options. Since “merit” is difficult to fairly quantify in teaching and often puts colleagues in competition with each other over money, we were especially glad to see that this option was not popular.

Since many of these questions get us into the weeds of specific worries and issues, for our final question we pulled back to a higher and more fundamental level. The question, simply, was “How happy are you at Lone Star College?”



It is encouraging that over 78% of full-time faculty at Lone Star College are either somewhat or very happy here. This is a really good number, but we’d like to move the needle farther. Some of the changes we have reported here as already underway should make a difference. Hopefully, as we all look together at the other results in this survey and take thoughtful action based on the results, we can help those numbers shift even further.

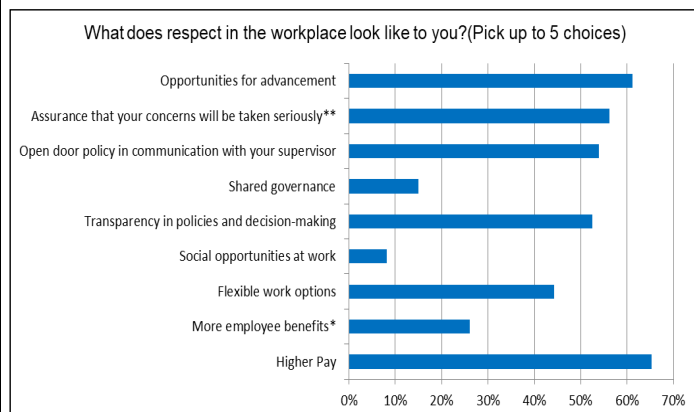


## 2023 Employee Survey- Adjunct Faculty Speak!

Next up to the podium are our adjunct faculty. We in the AFT deeply appreciate our part-time instructors without whose passion for teaching and dedication to the profession a large percentage of our students would go untaught. It is an enormous tribute to their character that they give so much for low pay, no benefits, precarious class assignments, and limited or non-existent office space. Some of our adjuncts teach their classes as a side hustle because they want to contribute to the success of the next generation. Others are trying to eke out a living driving from Lone Star to HCC to San Jacinto and other places to create something that looks like full time employment.

Our survey indicates that, like full time faculty, adjuncts want assurances that their concerns will be taken seriously and without retaliation, and they are looking for transparency in policies and decision making. However, of even greater concern are higher pay, and opportunities for advancement. They worry most about the declining availability of classes, but they also share their full-time colleagues' concern about untreated mental health issues they encounter in the students they teach. They would like to be financially rewarded for serving the college faithfully for a long time. In spite of the many challenges of adjunct life, fully two thirds say that they are very happy at Lone Star College

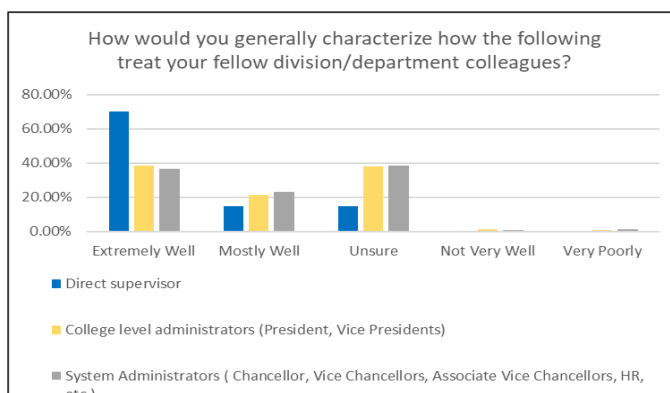
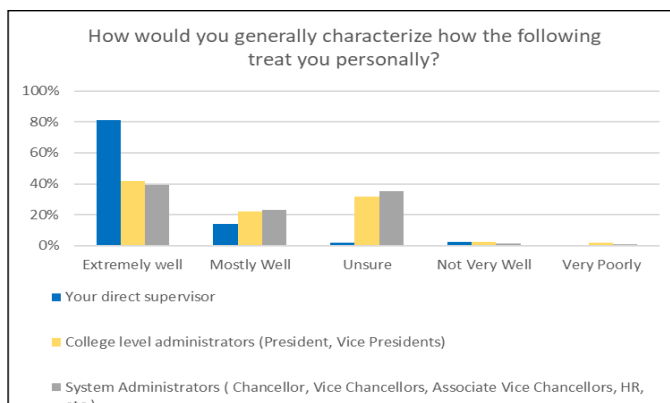
The following chart shows responses to the question "What does respect in the workplace look like to you?" Like full time faculty, adjuncts could pick up to 5 choices.



\* other than health care

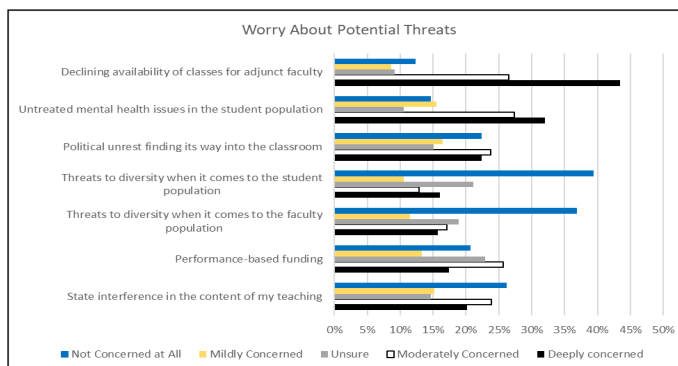
\*\* and without reprisal

Our next two questions relate to treatment by authority figures either of the adjunct faculty member personally or of his/her colleagues.



For adjunct faculty, the direct supervisor will be their department chair or director. These charts testify to the high quality of leadership provided by our chairs and directors.

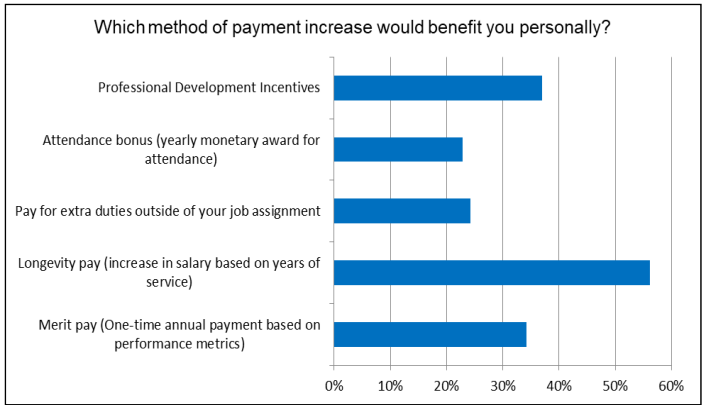
Next is the question "To what degree do the following potential threats worry you most?" As noted above, declining availability of classes for adjunct faculty tops the list with untreated mental health issues in the student population not far behind. In addition, there is real concern about state interference in teaching, performance-based funding, and political unrest finding its way into the classroom.







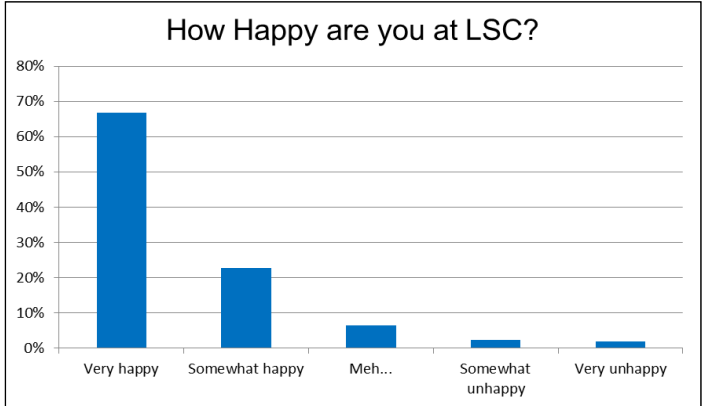
Next, we asked “If more money were to flow to employees, which method of payment would benefit you personally?” Respondents could pick up to two choices explaining why the total percentages exceed 100%.



Adjuncts are currently all paid at the same hourly rate (with a few exceptions for specific workforce disciplines that are hard to staff at our standard adjunct rate). There was a time in the 1990s and earlier when the pay rate at Lone Star increased for greater years of service. The survey clearly shows that returning to a longevity pay model would be a welcome change in the minds of our adjunct faculty.

Professional development incentives registered higher than for full time faculty. Generally, adjuncts have less opportunity to attend conferences or trainings. Making it more possible for them to experience these opportunities would be of interest to a significant number of adjuncts.

Like for full-time faculty, our final question simply asked “How happy are you at Lone Star College?”



90% of adjunct faculty at Lone Star College report that they are either somewhat or very happy here. That is a phenomenal statistic.

As we think about our adjunct faculty, we can focus our attention on how to address what some in the union movement are referring to as the issue of “precarity”: not knowing whether employment will be available in the future and worrying that the income is not enough. Of course, creating more full-time opportunities is the obvious answer. Professional development opportunities that help adjuncts to be better prepared for those full-time positions is another key.

Community colleges in other parts of the country are beginning to explore additional options which we would like to explore in future issues of The Advocate.

### 2023 Employee Survey- Full-Time Staff Speak!

The largest number of responses to our survey came from full-time staff. “Staff” is a very broad category of employees that encompasses, basically, anyone who is not faculty and who is not administration. Included in this category are everyone from building and grounds, to technology services, to office support staff, advisors, financial aid experts, division operations managers, directors, and so many more. Without these employees, there can be no faculty and no students. Staff are an integral part of the education enterprise and so, when the union calls itself the American Federation of Teachers, we are absolutely thinking of our staff siblings as under the umbrella of teachers.

It is time to listen to what our Full-Time Staff have to say!

The single greatest indicator of what respect in the workplace looks like to full-time staff at Lone Star College is flexible work options. Yet, contrary to what many would assume, for most full-time staff flexible work options does NOT mean working 100% at home. It is true that just under a quarter of full-time staff believe that 100% remote is an option under which they could work effectively. However, many more would be interested in a hybrid (on site sometimes / remote sometimes) option or some flexibility in work hours or days.

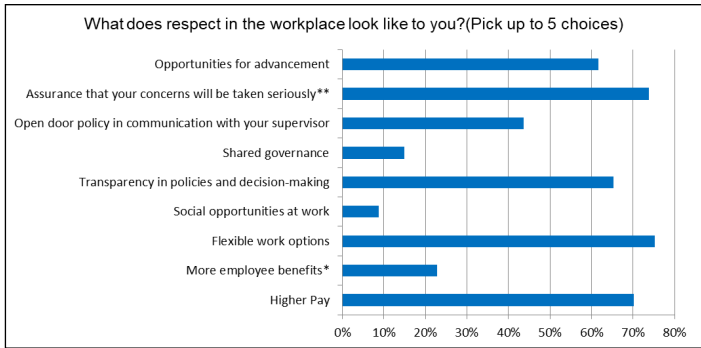
Almost to the same degree as flexible work options, full-time staff value assurances that their concerns will be taken seriously and without retaliation. A majority believe that higher pay, transparency in policies and decision-making, and opportunities for advancement are



important signs of respect in the workplace. Their greatest worries are financial – inability to make a living wage at Lone Star, and reaching the top of their pay grade with no room for further advancement. They also believe that years of loyal service should be rewarded financially.

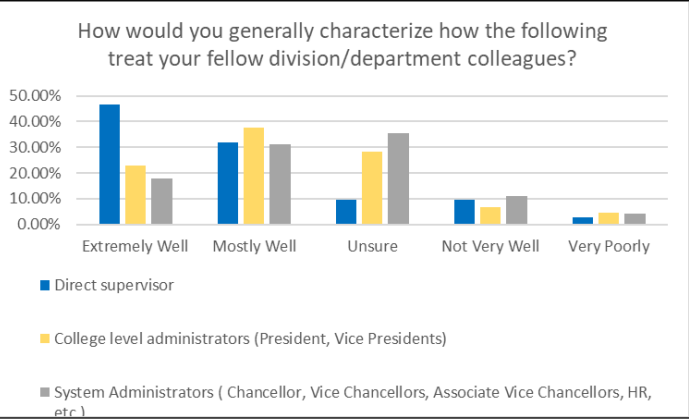
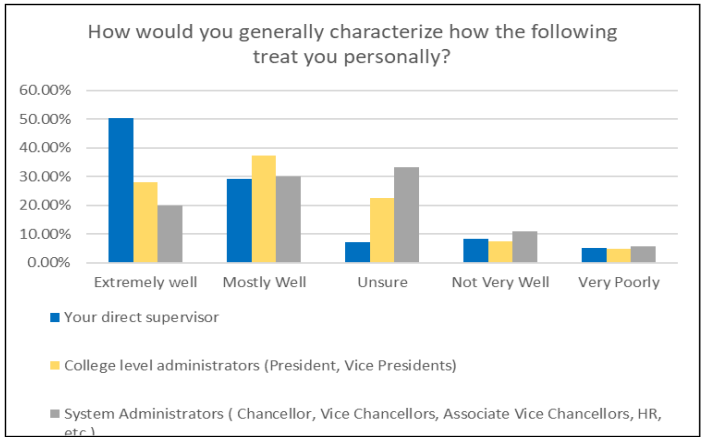
Full-time staff are more likely to report that they are “somewhat happy” as opposed to “very happy” at Lone Star College which indicates a less robust enthusiasm for working conditions at the college than what we saw for faculty. In fact, of all the categories of employees we surveyed, full-time staff express the lowest level of satisfaction working at Lone Star College. The numbers are overall positive but with marked room for improvement.

As it was for our full-time and adjunct faculty, our first question was “What does respect in the workplace look like to you?” The following chart shows the percentage of full-time staff who chose a given option. Staff employees could choose up to five options, so the sum of the percentages is well over 100%.



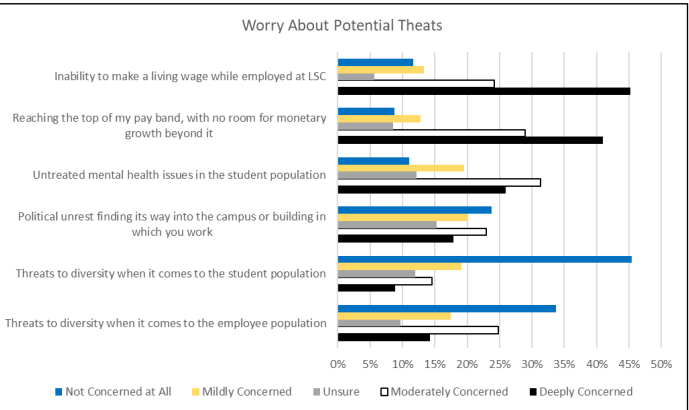
\* other than health care  
\*\* and without reprisal

Our next two questions relate to treatment by authority figures either of the staff employee personally or of his/her colleagues.



These results are undoubtedly good but lag slightly behind full time faculty.

Our next several questions ask “To what degree do the following potential threats worry you most?” Although similar, the options we suggested for staff (full-time and part-time) vary a bit from those we suggested for faculty, anticipating some differences in life experiences.



For full-time staff, the greatest worries involve financial precarity. 69% of full-time staff are either moderately concerned or deeply concerned that they will not be able to make a living wage working at Lone Star College. This is disturbing data. First, obviously, it is disturbing that such a large percentage of our employees are worried about meeting their basic needs. However, it also represents a threat to the College about our ability to hire and retain employees for these vital roles.

At least part of staff concern about wages springs from concerns about reaching the top of a pay band with no chance for further financial advancement. This is an issue that the AFT was aware of before we wrote the survey and we discussed this with Chancellor Castillo when





he met with our Executive Board last fall. Unlike full-time faculty, full-time staff live within pay bands that have a minimum and a maximum. Formerly, there was the very real scenario that, after a number of years with Lone Star, cost of living increases would bring a staff employee’s salary up to the top of the band and their salary would be fixed for the remainder of their careers. Some staff employees had already reached this impasse, and a few had not gotten a salary increase in years. Even for employees who had not reached the top of their salary bands, knowing that it was coming at some point was terrifying.

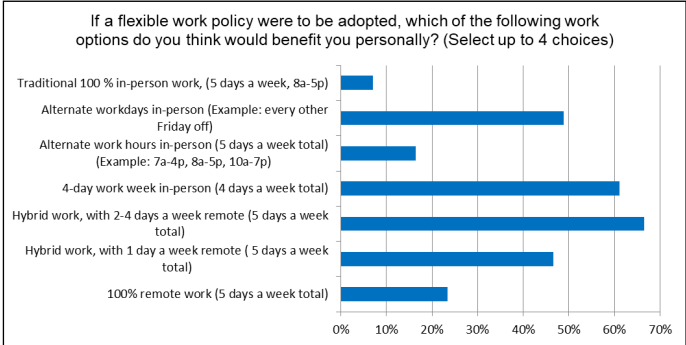
We are very pleased to say that Chancellor Castillo and his team took swift action on the pay band issue once we brought it to his attention. This fiscal year’s budget had already been set but, beginning with the coming fiscal year (September, 2024 – August, 2025), all staff employees will get their appropriate cost of living increases even if those increases put them above the official top of their pay band. Their salaries will continue to rise thereafter from year to year mitigating concerns about rising costs.

Our survey was conducted before this decision was made and announced and full-time staff were responding to the reality they were aware of at the time. Next year, we should see a difference in survey results. Hopefully, this will help a little with the worry about being able to make a living wage although there will need to be further work.

Our next question was “If a flexible work policy were to be adopted, which of the following work options do you think would benefit you personally?”

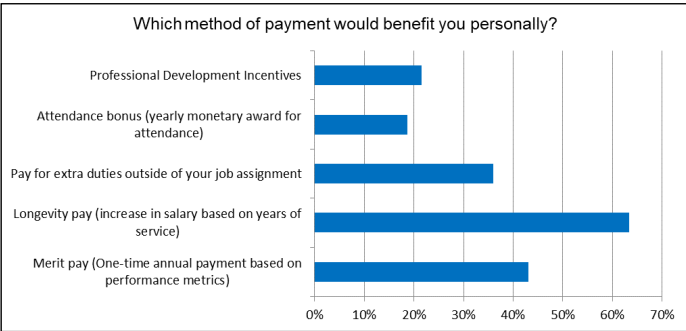
To say that the face of work has changed since the pandemic would be the understatement of the century. Before Covid very few people worked remotely, in a hybrid manner, or with alternate work-days, whether at Lone Star or anywhere else. One of Lone Star’s selling points to prospective staff employees was that, although salary was going to be substantially lower than for one of the big oil, banking, or health care companies, at least you didn’t have to drive all the way to Downtown, or the Galleria, or the Medical Center to spend your 40 hours a week. Now, most of those companies are continuing on with some sort of flexible work option. Lone Star offering a lower salary with no schedule flexibility loses its appeal as a possible employer.

It is not surprising that many (most, actually) of our full-time staff are pressing for flexible work options. What is, perhaps, surprising is that few of them want to take that all the way to a complete remote online work presence. The past resistance at Lone Star to a flexible work option was largely based on the narrative that everyone just wants to stay home – a narrative which turns out to be inaccurate. Our survey indicates that full-time staff are looking for other options. Respondents could choose up to 4 options, so percentages add up to well over 100%.



We have shared this data with Chancellor Castillo, and he has a task force working on flexible work options. Some preliminary plans may be available very soon. We are grateful that the administration is working quickly to adjust our work policies to reflect new realities. The tricky reality, of course, is that some jobs may be easier to adopt to a flexible scenario than others. We anticipate a decision-making process that will be clear and fair, even though not everyone, likely, will get an equal offer. Next year, if all comes together, flexible work may be a reality for Lone Star College staff, and we will see real improvements for many.

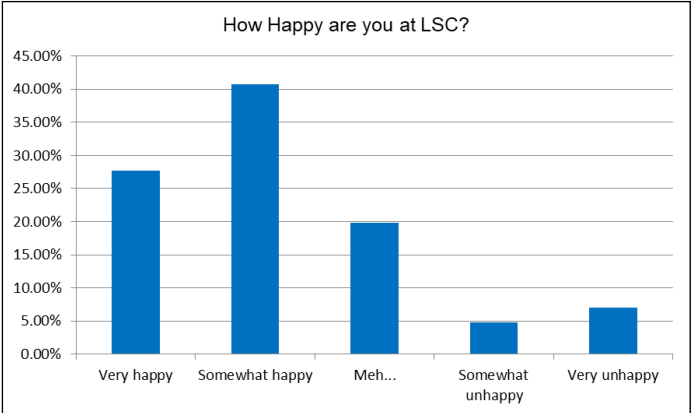
As we did for faculty, we asked full-time staff, “If more money were to flow to employees, which method of payment would benefit you personally?” (Employees could choose two.) Here, too, as we saw with both full-time and adjunct faculty, the clear winner is longevity pay, rewarding employees for years of service.





Other options got a good response as well including merit pay. Although, in general, we as a union are not positive about merit pay, “work outputs” probably are simpler to report and compare for staff compared to faculty. If staff employees want that option, hopefully a fair and objective selection process could come into place.

This brings us to the same final question we asked full-time and adjunct faculty: “How happy are you at Lone Star College?”



You will see that, while good, these results are less impressive than for faculty. However, real changes have been made or are in the process of being made and we hope for real improvement.

## 2023 Employee Survey- Part-Time Staff Speak!

Next up are Part-Time Staff.

Like all of the other employee groups we’ve looked at so far, part-time staff value assurances that their concerns will be taken seriously and without retaliation, an open door policy in communication with their supervisors, and transparency in policies and decision making. There is an unmistakable theme across all employee groups here. Flexible work options and opportunities for advancement are also very important.

Part-time staff largely feel that they and their colleagues are treated well, especially by their immediate supervisors. Almost 90% report that they are very or somewhat happy here at Lone Star College.

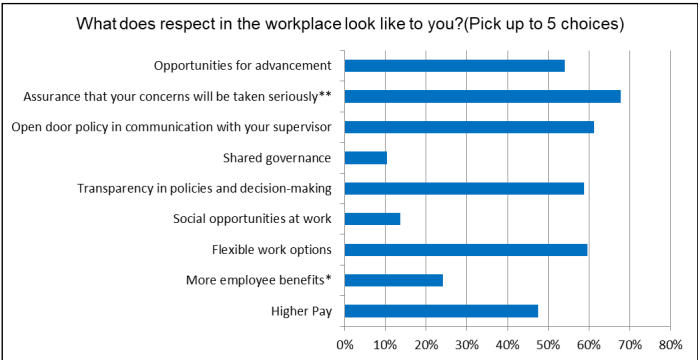
Inability to make a living wage ranks as the highest area of concern for part-time staff although not to the same

degree as full-time staff. It would be interesting to explore why this is, especially since financial issues were also of greater concern to adjunct faculty. Perhaps a smaller percentage of part-time staff rely solely on their income from Lone Star for their survival?

Flexible work options are important to part-time staff with a hybrid work option being the most popular. Interestingly, a higher percentage of part-time staff prefer either 100% in person work or 100% remote work than was the case for full-time staff.

Longevity pay would be of interest to part-time staff. They are also more interested in pay for extra duties and merit pay than full-time staff.

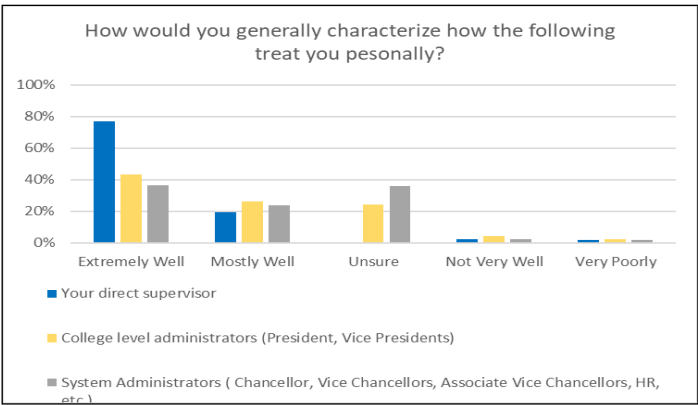
As it was for our other employee groups, our first question to part-time staff was “What does respect in the workplace look like to you?” The following chart shows the percentage of part-time staff who chose a given option. Staff employees could choose up to five options, so the sum of the percentages is well over 100%.

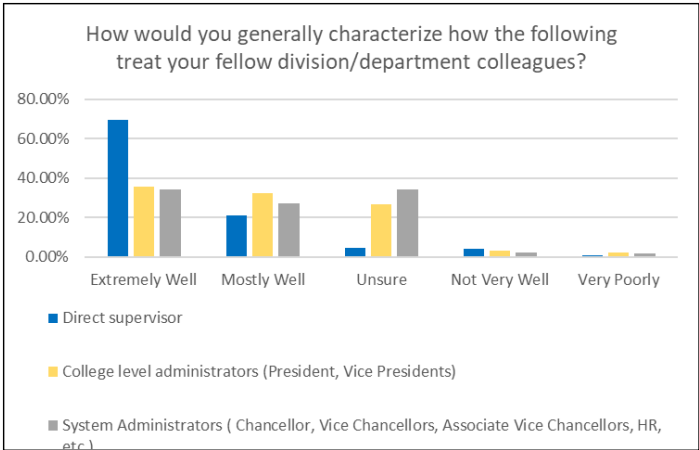


\* other than health care

\*\* and without reprisal

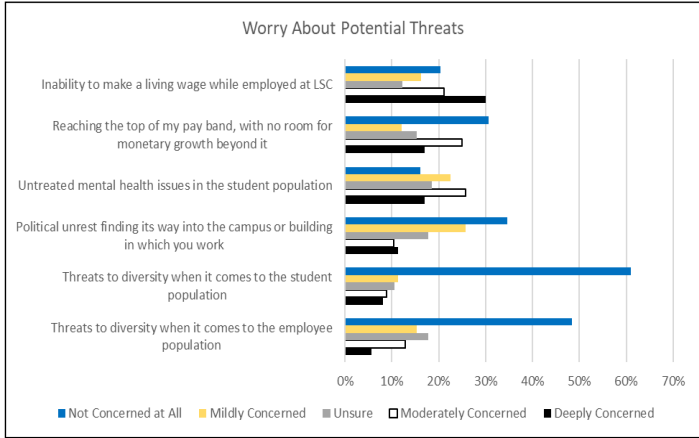
Our next two questions relate to treatment by authority figures either of the staff employee personally or of his/her colleagues.





Although there are obviously some isolated exceptions that should be taken seriously, it is clear that the vast majority of part-time staff feel that they and their colleagues are treated well, especially by their immediate supervisors. Like for adjunct-faculty this is a credit to our entry level supervisory employees. Like other employee categories we’ve seen, system administrators get a lot of “unsure” responses, probably because most part-time staff have little direct interaction with system administrators.

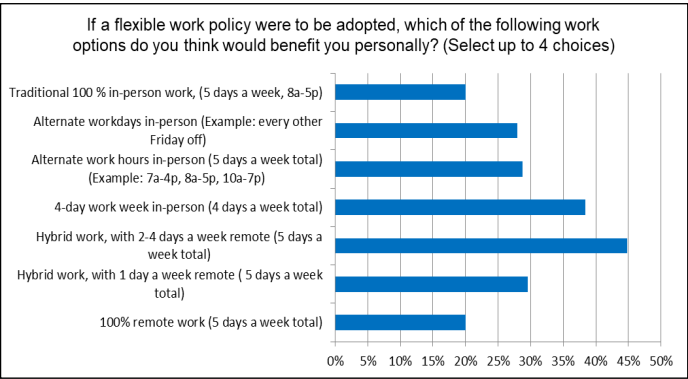
Our next question asks “To what degree do the following potential threats worry you most?” Although similar, the options we suggested for staff (full-time and part-time) vary a bit from those we suggested for faculty, anticipating some differences in life experiences.



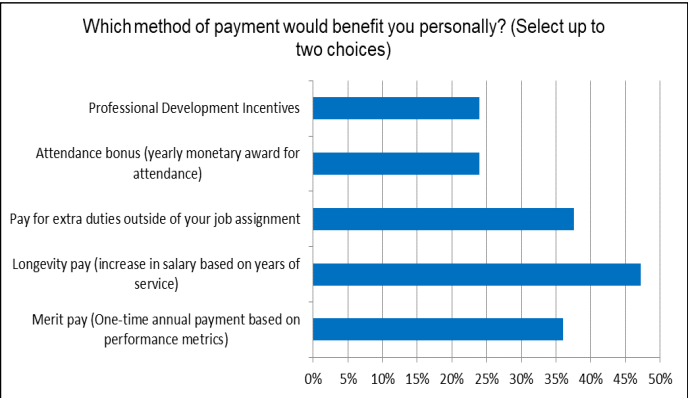
As noted above, the percentage of part-time staff worried about the inability to make a living wage is lower than the corresponding percentage for full-time staff. Even so, this is the concern that got the most responses. Although to a smaller degree than for full time and adjunct faculty, concerns about untreated mental health issues in the student population register as an

area of concern. Part-time staff are not worried about possible threats to diversity either among students or employees.

Like our other employee groups, we asked part time staff “If a flexible work policy were to be adopted, which of the following work options do you think would benefit you personally?” Respondents could select up to four choices so total percentages exceed 100%. Like among full-time staff, there is a significant interest in a hybrid work model although less than 50%. More part-time staff than full-time staff are interested in either maintaining a traditional 40 hour per week on campus presence or in working completely remotely.

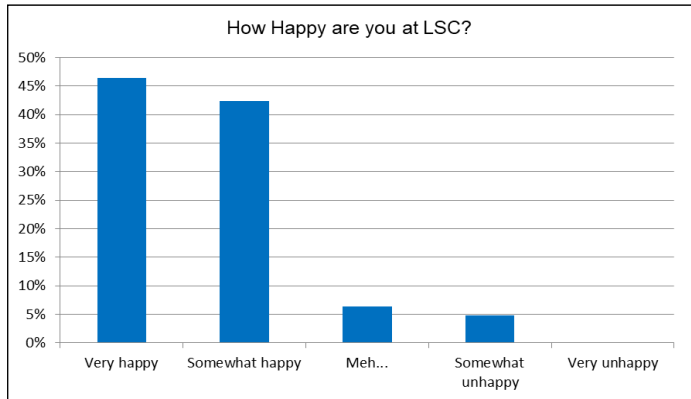


We also asked part-time staff, “If more money were to flow to employees, which method of payment would benefit you personally?” (Employees could choose two.) Here, too, as we saw with the other employee groups, the clear winner is longevity pay, rewarding employees for years of service. Merit pay and pay for extra duties also draw attention from approximately one third of part-time staff each.





This brings us to the same final question we are asking everyone: “How happy are you at Lone Star College?”



With nearly 90% of part-time staff reporting that they are either very or somewhat happy at Lone Star College, these numbers are excellent although we do not want to discount the experiences of the 10% or so who say otherwise.

**2023 Employee Survey-Administrators Speak!**

Since all of us who work at Lone Star College are working towards the same goal of teaching our students, it was important to us to give all employee groups a chance to speak. This includes our administrators. We are very pleased that 62 administrators responded to our survey. It is time to bring them to the podium to listen to what they have to say.

We asked our administrators essentially the same questions we asked faculty and staff although we added a few extra about which we thought they might have special insights based on being able to look at the college from more of a 30,000 foot level. In doing so, we realized that we should have asked one of those questions to everyone.

As you will see in the charts below, the number one indicator of respect in the workplace for administrators was transparency in policies and decision making followed closely by flexible work options and assurance that your concerns will be taken seriously and without reprisal. NEWS FLASH: There is far more that we have in common than what divides us.

Right at three quarters of administrators feel that their direct supervisors treat them either extremely or mostly well. 84% believe that college administrators treat them either extremely or mostly well making administrators

the only category of employees who feel more positively about college administrators than their own supervisors. Both numbers are very good and there may be some overlap as some of their direct supervisors may actually be college administrators. Of all employee groups, administrators have the most contact with system office and system administrators got good marks with over two thirds of administrators indicating that system administrators treat them either very or mostly well.

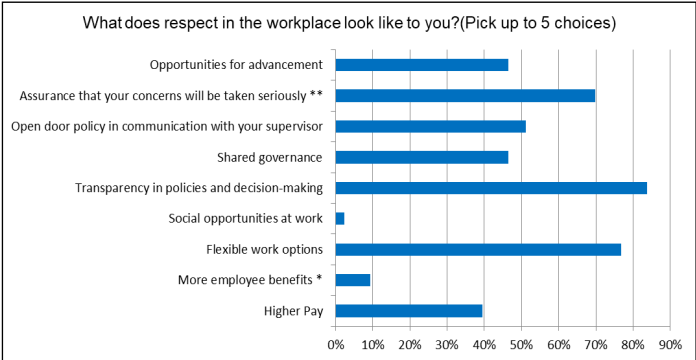
Like faculty, the greatest threat that worries administrators is untreated mental health issues among students. However, also (and this is the question we wish we had asked everyone) administrators are worried to the EXACT same degree about untreated mental health issues among EMPLOYEES.

We asked administrators, from their perspective, whether they saw a division between faculty and staff which came up as a significant issue in last year’s survey. They were split on that question.

Administrators value longevity pay (extra pay for employees based on years of survey) making a clean sweep across all categories of employees. Finally, about 79% of administrators report that they are either very or mostly happy at Lone Star College. This is another very good number. It is neither the highest nor the lowest among all employee groups.

Let us look at all of the questions we asked administrators more carefully.

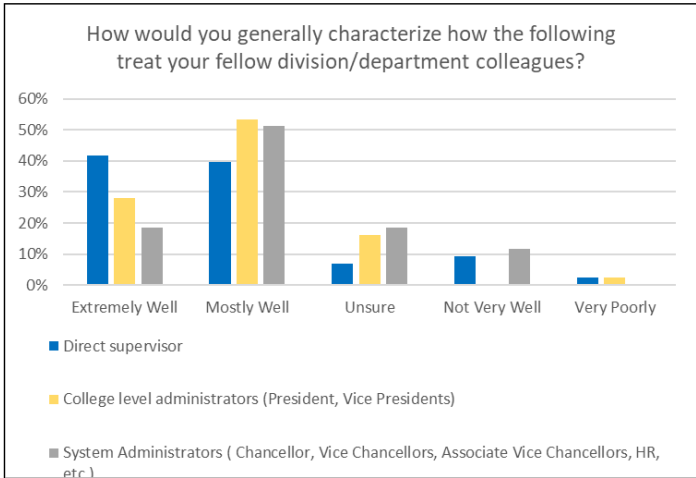
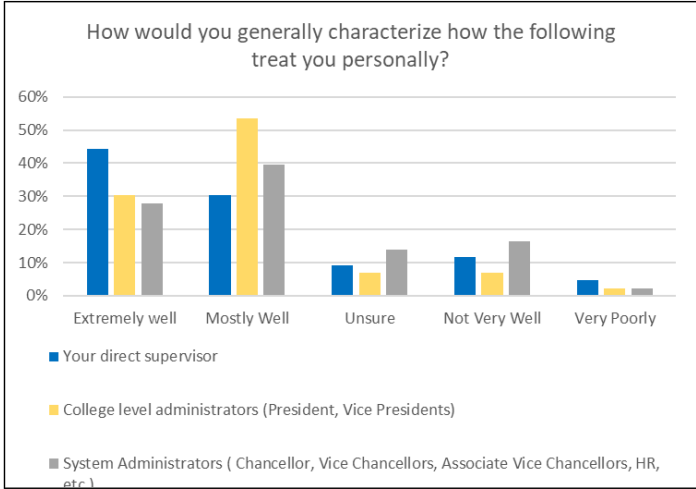
Like for everyone else, our first question was “What does respect in the workplace look like to you?” The following chart shows the percentage of administrators who chose a given option. Administrators could choose up to five options, so the sum of the percentages is well over 100%.



\* other than health care  
\*\* and without reprisal

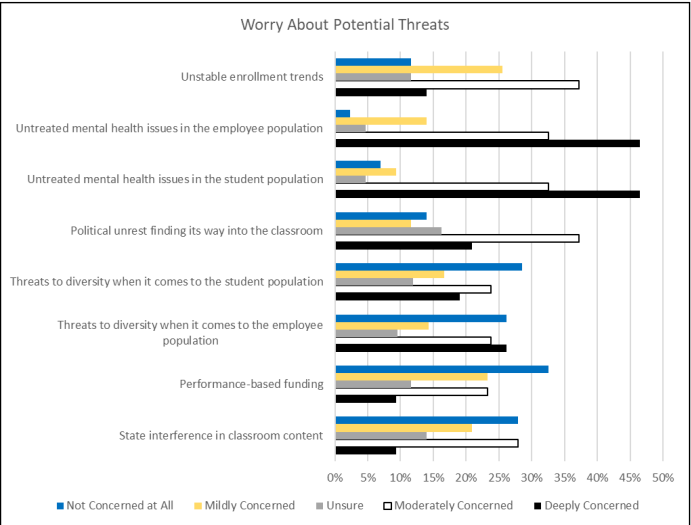


Our next two questions relate to treatment by authority figures either of the administrator personally or of his/her colleagues. It is encouraging that the category of employees who would have the greatest interaction with system administrators respond positively to how they are treated by them.

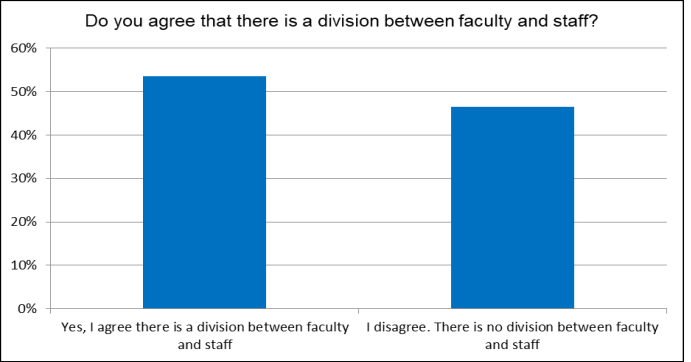


Our next question asks “To what degree do the following potential threats worry you most?” As noted above, untreated mental health issues in both the student population and the employee population top the list by a significant amount. Wishing we had asked about employee well-being of everyone, we delved into the comments posted about this question both among administrators and other employees. One very common theme noted is that employees are overworked, often because many open positions are unfilled, and employees are having to pick up the slack. Employees are burning out. This especially affects staff in general and full time staff in particular, and almost certainly impacts the reality that full-time staff report the lowest level of happiness working at

Lone Star. So, the need to adequately staff all offices of the college comes to the forefront as an important step towards improving employee well-being.



Besides mental health issues, unstable enrollment trends and political unrest finding its way on campus are noted as concerns. The chart shows other areas we asked about. In our 2022 survey we asked “In recent years, have you become aware of faculty and staff feeling divided when it comes to equitable treatment?” That survey showed us that, indeed, there was a significant division. That division came to the forefront when, as Covid began to wind down, staff were required to return to work fully face to face while faculty were given an extra semester to teach fully online. We wanted to know, a year later, whether that division was still there or whether it was improving. We thought our administrators, as the third party in the college, might be able to give us a good perspective on this. So we asked whether or not they agree, at this point, that a division exists.



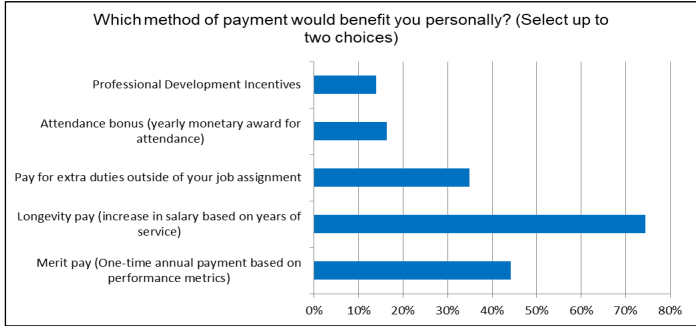
As you can see, administrators were divided on this question, but the majority believe a division still exists. It may take some time to see this problem resolve but clearly patterns of respectful and equitable treatment of





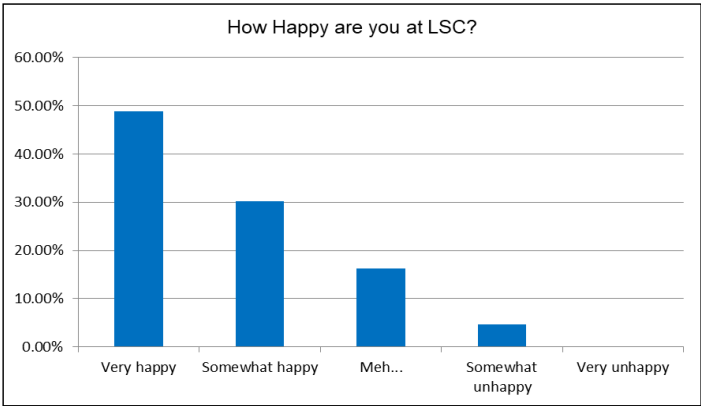
all employees must persist over an extended period of time to eliminate this gap.

Next, we asked “If more money were to flow to employees, which method of payment would benefit you personally?” Respondents could pick up to two choices explaining why the total percentages exceed 100%.



We once again see unanimity across all categories of employees. Like full time and part time faculty and staff, administrators most favor a pay system that rewards employees for years of service.

Our final question to administrators, like it had been for all other employees was, simply, “How happy are you at Lone Star College?”

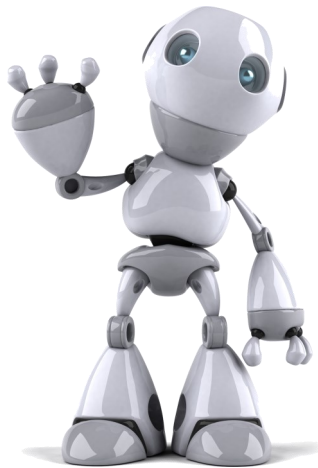


49% of administrators report that they are very happy. 30% report that they are somewhat happy. None reported that they were very unhappy. These are very good numbers but, in our efforts to move the needle for other categories of employees, we need to remember administrators as well. That may sound like an odd thing for a union to say but, as we have pointed out, we are ALL teachers and we share a common mission. For any of us to thrive, we ALL have to thrive. We believe that the priorities AFT advocates for benefit everyone at Lone Star College from the top to the bottom. We hope this survey will play a role in achieving that goal for everyone.

2023 Employee Survey-  
The Robot Speaks!

What???? Let me explain.

In addition to all the questions represented by the graphs in the six articles you have read so far, we left lots of room for employees to share any comments of their own that they would like to make. There are literally many thousands of them. All of them are important and valuable, but how will we ever accurately identify common themes and concerns across all Lone Star employees?



One of AFT Lone Star College’s organizers, Ide Uwagbale, had an idea. Let’s let AI help us out. Few things make today’s college professors’ hair turn gray faster than figuring out what to do with artificial intelligence in the classroom. This, however, is an ideal situation for using AI to our advantage. AI is great at sifting quickly through enormous piles of data to find common themes. It is also not distracted by isolated colorful comments over which a human reader might obsess.

So, we turned to ChatGPT and asked it to prepare an executive summary of all the comments we received that we could share in an elevator speech to the Chancellor or Board of Trustees. It turns out that ChatGPT is not necessarily the Tool of Satan. Of course, AI does not excuse us from thinking through the responses we got and deciding on issues of concern we need to try to solve, but, for preparing a cohesive summary, it did an amazing job.

So, here is what the robot says:

Based on the survey results from the "2023-2024 AFT LONE STAR Workplace Climate Survey," here is a consolidated summary highlighting the key points for the Lone Star College board of executives/chancellor:

Key Themes and Concerns Management and Leadership:





**Supportive and Fair Management:**

Faculty and staff seek respectful treatment, less micromanagement, and equitable treatment across all levels.

**Leadership and Decision-Making:**

There's frustration with decision-making processes at higher administrative levels, a disconnect between system administrators and campus realities, and a perception that employee opinions are undervalued.

**Communication and Transparency:**

A strong emphasis on transparent communication, especially in decisions and policies, with a need for open-door policies and serious consideration of concerns. Issues in communication and growing divide between employees and administration, with calls for more transparent and supportive interactions.

**Professional Development and Recognition:**

Desire for opportunities in professional development, recognition of achievements, and involvement in setting goals and policies.

**Work-Life Balance and Compensation:**

The need for better work-life balance, flexible work options, reasonable workload, and fair compensation is highlighted. A large number of respondents (67.58%) prefer longevity pay, valuing recognition for long-term commitment.

**Equity and Inclusivity:**

Calls for equitable treatment, including salary and workload, and culturally sensitive management practices. Issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are raised, with concerns about their focus and implementation.

**Workplace Environment and Morale:**

Concerns about morale, fear of repercussions, and feelings of being undervalued or unfairly treated. Respondents note disparities in treatment by direct supervisors and deans, favoritism, and inequitable treatment.

**External Influences and Challenges:**

Concerns over state interference in teaching content, performance-based funding, threats to faculty and student diversity, political unrest in the classroom, untreated mental health issues, and unstable enrollment trends.

**Teaching Preferences and Policies:**

A significant interest in online teaching and flexible teaching options, such as hybrid classes and manageable class sizes, indicating a desire for greater autonomy and control over teaching environments.

**Overall Job Satisfaction:**

A majority report being happy in their current roles, with 40.18% "Very Happy" and 37.90% "Somewhat Happy." However, there's a notable number of respondents who chose not to express their views on this matter.

**Educators' Perspectives on a Good Workday:**

Autonomy, positive student interaction, a professional and collegial work environment, effective time management, workplace respect and recognition, work-life balance, and functional infrastructure are key to a satisfying and productive workday.

**Recommendations for Improvement:**

1. Implement policies and practices that enhance communication, transparency, and respect.
2. Prioritize professional development opportunities and equitable treatment.
3. Recognize and reward long-term commitment and additional responsibilities.
4. Foster an inclusive and supportive work environment.
5. Adapt to modern teaching methods and technologies.
6. Address concerns related to workload, class sizes, and compensation.

**This summary encapsulates the various facets of the workplace climate at Lone Star College, reflecting the diverse opinions and concerns of the faculty and staff. The focus is on improving communication, governance, respect, support, and modernizing policies and facilities to enhance the educational quality and work environment.**





## Dispatches from the Front #9 Traveling Man

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

On a recent Friday, hundreds of Lone Star employees gathered at the Marriott in The Woodlands for our annual Awards Ceremony. The Chancellor was right to stress how cool it was to commune over some good food (the veggies were excellent!) in a posh hotel in the middle of a work day. I was gratified to be recognized with many of my fellows for service to the college, but let me devote this column to a way in which the college has served me. In my years here, I have managed to travel across this country and abroad to places I couldn't have imagined seeing when I was a kid of limited horizons growing up in Houston's Second Ward. And not only have I traveled, I have also taken students with me on numerous occasions, contributing in that way to their schooling and growth as human beings. I'll write here of some recent examples.

Last May, my colleague Chris Davis (history professor and Faculty Senate president at LSC Online) and I, took a group of fourteen Lone Star students on a May term study abroad to Spain and Portugal. That was one of the most gratifying and exhausting things I have done in my career at this institution. The roots of the trip came in a sabbatical semester I took in Spring 2017. I spent nearly four months of that time abroad, including an entire month in Lisbon where I worked hard to put together an itinerary for a proposed student trip to Portugal. Prospects looked good until Harvey ruined the Kingwood campus. I called Associate Vice Chancellor Katie Caruso, who directs international education, and asked for a "hurricane check" in regard to promoting that trip for Summer 2018 due to the massive distraction of shifting all our work online and being forced off our campus for the next year. Chris and I then got back on task and actually had a group of students fully paid and ready to go to Portugal and Spain (we had sweetened the trip's appeal by adding a second country) for May 2020. Then came COVID. You may remember that Spain

was one of the countries initially slammed by the virus. We were pretty sure even before leaving for Spring Break that that trip wasn't going to happen. I began to wonder if it ever would.

Long story short, it finally came together last May. I remember pinching myself when we boarded the initial flight that would ultimately (after two connections!) get us to Seville about twenty hours later. No turning back now on the plans that had been gestating for years. I was so proud of our students, of how much they learned, of the way they represented our college. All of them were young people of color, ten being Hispanic, two African American, and one each from Egypt and Trinidad. Our Latino students, all of whom were fluent in Spanish, were especially thrilled to be in Spain and to encounter the country that was the source of their surnames, language, and religion in most cases. I remember walking

with the group along the Guadalquivir in Seville and reflecting upon that river's role in launching Magellan around the world and Cabeza de Vaca to the Texas Gulf Coast a half millennium ago. We did day trips to Córdoba by train and to Ronda by bus, learning about Islam in medieval Spain and about Hemingway in the Spanish Civil War in those respective cities.

Then on to Portugal by bus at ridiculously affordable prices. Students really loved Lisbon. They told Chris and me how comfortable they felt

in the midst of that city's incredible diversity, evidence of the global empire Portugal constructed beginning in the late 1400s. To hear our group tell it, everyone in Spain had blond hair (not at all so) while the generality of Portuguese on the streets were darker. The students felt more at home among the latter given their own complexions. I was stunned at how easily they engaged with the locals and how well they navigated the city using the public transport passes that covered our entire stay. Chris and I treated them like adults whom we could trust to do the right thing in their free time. They lived up to all our expectations. The worst thing that happened was one student getting stuck in the Metro without being able to exit. By the time I arrived to help, he had already had a cop open the gate for him and returned to the ho-





tel. Another lost his wallet, but got a call a little later from someone who returned it with all his cash and credit cards still within.

I have no doubt that this was a life-changing experience for many of the students who went. Last December, Chris and I got word that our proposal to take a group back in May 2025 had been approved. This time we intend to cross the Strait of Gibraltar by ferry and take Lone Star students into Africa during a day visit to Tangier. Won't that be a trip! It will be at minimum, the making of another Advocate column.

As for my own travels, let me give some recent highlights. In January, just before inservice, I flew to San Francisco for the annual meeting of the American Historical Association. Chris joined me and my wife, Sandy, there. One magical evening, we all ate at a Chinatown dive. Sandy lived in the Bay Area for thirty years and knows downtown. After our meal, she led us in about ten minutes to North Beach and the iconic City Lights Bookstore, a Beat poets haven since its opening in 1953 and still perhaps the best bookstore I've ever seen. The Uber back to the hotel cost about ten bucks and I had fun chatting with the Brazilian driver in Portuguese. On another night, Chris and I watched the Texans secure a playoff berth at the hotel bar, then walked over to a plenary session where Rachel Maddow spoke from her bestselling book about the fascist threat in the U.S. in the Depression era, in the process making the academics with her on the panel look like a bunch of amateurs. The convention sessions, many of them teaching rather than research themed, were great and so were the book exhibits. Sandy went to Goodwill and bought a cheap suitcase that I could use to bring my haul of new books home, volumes acquired for free or cheaply for myself and colleagues.

I did this trip on my own dime, but in late March, I fly to Chicago to the meeting of the Pop Culture Association on a visit fully funded by the college. I'll participate there on a Beatles panel, presenting on the legendary San Antonio band of the British Invasion era, the Sir Douglas Quintet. Every time I attend a professional conference, I return to the classroom intellectually stimulated in a way beneficial to all. At that same conference last Spring in San Antonio, I lined up a visit of leading Beatles scholar, Kenneth Womack, who will speak on his latest book at LSC-Kingwood on April 10.

Here is this narration's major takeaway---travel is enormously beneficial to LSC employees and students. The System should continue to do all it can to financially support it as an investment in our community's educational infrastructure. I think often these days of something Mark Twain wrote as a result of a steamboat cruise to the Holy Land he made in 1867: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and **many of our people need it sorely on these accounts.**" I added the emphasis given the timeliness of Twain's observation in the context of the developing political crisis. We are at an unbearably dangerous moment. To mix metaphors, the elephant in the room is in this instance an unhinged orange gorilla. Travel education is more an antidote to our national angst than ever, a means of moving beyond the mean, vulgar, and parochial to a celebration of the wider, beautiful world beyond us. Let's do all we can to universalize the opportunity.

A couple of weeks ago, my dean, Jared Miller, gave a great talk on campus about his own travel to exotic locations. During the Q&A, a student asked where he was going next. I was very jealous as I wanted to answer! So, I'll do so now. After my last class on the Thursday before Spring Break, I'm heading to IAH to once more fly to Lisbon. I'll go alone this time; my wife will stay home and take care of the cats. I'm going to observe Portugal's parliamentary election on March 10 and with some luck, I'll have a follow-up meeting at Nova Universidade (the initial sit-down occurred just before Christmas) to explore further a partnership between our institutions. All of this should make for another good travel-based column, don't you think? Stay tuned.





## A Different Approach

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

We are all now aware of the state legislature's shifting community college funding to place greater emphasis on student success. While some of us may believe this is long overdue, we should not feel ourselves in the Promised Land just yet.

We live now with the consequences of several acts of government intended to improve results in schools, such as "No Child Left Behind" in 2001 and "Race to the Top" in 2009. It is not going out on a limb to assert that the consequences of these interventions have been controversial. One such consequence is the quality of the preparation for college that our high school students now receive; you can judge that for yourself in your own classrooms—especially if you were teaching prior to these changes. Another such consequence is the effect these changes have had on the teaching profession; specifically, they helped create the conditions under which teachers are leaving the profession in droves, and the problem isn't getting any better.

No one can reasonably claim Americans are not trying to improve their schools—but our efforts recall the Churchill quote that one "can always count on Americans to do the right thing—after they've tried everything else."

One concern is that the changes to community colleges may run a similar course to those that occurred in K-12. Specifically, administrators, perhaps after a few ineffective changes are made, will begin to intervene in classrooms—as they have overwhelmingly done in K-12, to the point now that in some charter schools, at least, "teachers" do little more than follow scripts given them by their Higher Ups. The emergence of this sort of practice in education makes manifest the logical conclusion of the de-professionalization of teachers taking place over years: their transformation into little more than

clerks, little more than "customer service representatives."

This process can take place only when policy makers rigidly ignore what has been shown to have the greatest influence on a student's success in school: their socio-economic background. Poverty, near-poverty, and the stresses associated with living in the United States without enough income take their toll on those trying to get an education. But at least partly because educational leadership can do little or nothing that will have an immediate impact to relieve those conditions, they focus their attention on what they can: their workforce. Thus poor student success rates, heavily influenced by multiple social factors that never originate in a classroom, become the teacher's fault.

*"This refusal to acknowledge and resolve the root cause of educational disparities permits the continued de-professionalization of teachers, which, in turn, leads to more student struggles."*

In short, since political leadership is unwilling to correct the endemic social and economic inequalities that research has repeatedly proven to be the most accurate predictor of educational success, that leadership has, with the help of school administrators, chosen to blame teachers for students' struggles. This refusal to acknowledge and resolve the root cause of educational disparities permits the continued de-professionalization of teachers, which, in turn, leads to more student struggles.

Leadership may, as well, buy into whatever latest academic innovation becomes prominent in administrative circles across colleges. Their representatives will arrive to sell a better way of doing things, complete with very persuasive presentations that undoubtedly plot a successful way forward—until, somehow, they don't, at which time another consultant for a different fad will show up. And so on.

Perhaps it's time to take a different approach. After all, before they were LSC employees, LSC faculty were biologists, mathematicians, nurses, compositionists, historians, political scientists, and so on. Many of them had completed doctorates, which means that for a time, we lived and breathed the fundamental process of the



academy: *seeking truth through learning and argument*. That makes academics thorough skeptics; they became experts because their audience—for example, those to whom they presented their dissertation defense—certainly were. So it is also with lawyers and medical doctors: one must prove that one has learned enough to belong to the discipline. And it's true of workforce instructors, who perhaps more than any of us, have to prove hour by classroom hour that they know their stuff.

Part of the status normally given to professionals who have provided such proof is the understanding that they are the best managers of their own disciplinary affairs—including the teaching of those disciplines. Medical doctors have the American Medical Association, lawyers the American Bar Association. When the power to shape the teaching of a discipline is separated from those best suited to teach it, bad things happen. Priorities become skewed. And holders of graduate degrees or other proofs of learning eventually begin to wonder why they were required to have those credentials in the first place. We are trained to be skeptical; we are trained to question claims; we are trained to seek out the best answers to any disciplinary question. Give us a problem related to our fields, and we'll dive right in.

We are not trained to blindly follow orders. And we become incredibly frustrated when our questions about particular conventions and actions go unanswered, seemingly dismissed out of hand. That's not the world we wanted to join when we got our advanced degrees. And many of us are perplexed, to say the least, when it seems nevertheless to be where we are.

LSC has all the expertise it needs *now* to improve student success rates: faculty with expert credentials in and a passion for their disciplines, both of which inform their desire to teach well—and no teacher's success can be separated from that of their students. We just need someone to listen to us: someone who will not dismiss our requests for lower workloads or class caps as arguments for sloth; someone who will act when we point out that we need advising that truly treats students as young (or not) people needing guidance to find the best path for *them, as individuals*, not as customers buying a retail product; someone who recognizes

that the most frequent causes of dropping out are *non-academic* and try, as best we can, to address those non-academic needs on campus; someone who will take seriously what we tell them about the academic problems of current students based on our day-to-day interactions with them, and act on our suggestions to address them. But this will require institutional transformation. Are we up to it?

<sup>1</sup><https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-will-teacher-shortages-look-like-in-2024-and-beyond-a-researcher-weighs-in/2023/12#:~:text=Over%20the%20last%20two%20years,That%27s%20a%20substantial%20increase.>

<sup>1</sup>Among the many professional organizations for our disciplines: the National Council of Mathematics, the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges, the National Association of Biology Teachers, The Conference on College Composition and Communication, the Modern Language Association, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, and so on.

## AFT Resolution: Calling for a Bilateral Cease-Fire in Gaza and Promoting a Two-State Solution and an End to the Weaponization of Hate

Adopted by the American Federation of Teachers, January 30, 2024, Washington, D.C.

The war in Gaza must end, and diplomacy that creates two states for two peoples must start. Far too many Palestinians and Israelis have perished, and far too many Palestinians and Israelis have had their lives shattered and destroyed. As educators, healthcare professionals and public service professionals, we are sick at heart over the toll this war has taken on thousands of innocent people, particularly innocent children.

We have long recognized the right of Israel to protect its citizens against crimes of war and aggression. The horrific slaughter of Israeli civilians perpetrated by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others on Oct. 7 was the largest mass murder of Jews since the Holocaust. To this day, Israeli civilians taken as hostages on Oct. 7 are still in captivity in Gaza.

The ongoing war in Gaza—its terrible toll of tens of thousands of civilian Palestinian deaths and its widespread destruction—has created a humanitarian tragedy that must end.

Further shedding of blood in Gaza and the infliction of



more pain and anguish will not bring peace and security to either Palestinians or Israelis. Cycles of violence and retribution in Israel and the Palestinian territories for the better part of a century cannot be broken with more of the same. Moreover, there is real danger of the expansion of the current war in Gaza to other nations in the Middle East and beyond.

For all these reasons and more, the American Federation of Teachers supports a negotiated bilateral cease-fire, agreed to by both sides in this war and guaranteed by the international community. A cease-fire agreement must include humanitarian aid for the immediate provision of desperately needed food, water, medical care, clothing and emergency shelter to Palestinians and the release of all hostages taken on Oct. 7.

The AFT reaffirms its support for a two-state solution, with true self-determination for the people of Israel and the people of Palestine. Both peoples have deep roots in that land and the right to live there in peace and with freedom. A bilateral cease-fire is necessary to start the process of negotiating a lasting agreement that ends the decades of conflict and bloodshed by recognizing the rights of both peoples and providing each with its own government—two states for two peoples.

The Palestinian people of Gaza have suffered under the dictatorial rule of Hamas, which has brutally repressed and eliminated its Palestinian opponents. Hamas declares its intent to destroy the state of Israel and has a massive terrorist infrastructure. Hamas is not a partner for peace, security or a two-state solution; that is why the peace initiative organized by Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states does not include Hamas in its proposals for the future governance of Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government are a major obstacle to achieving lasting peace, freedom and security. He has opposed a two-state solution while enabling numerous illegal settlements on the occupied West Bank. Netanyahu's government has stood idle in the face of violence and land theft that extremist settlers have waged against Palestinians in these territories. Netanyahu has an interest in prolonging the war to escape the public scrutiny of his colossal failure to protect Israeli citizens, and to escape his ongoing trials. Despite the Israeli Supreme Court's ruling against his effort to override that very

court, he continues to undermine Israel's democracy. It is time for another election in Israel so that Israelis can elect leaders who truly believe in democracy, security and a peace process.

We support those forces in Israel and in Palestine that seek a different future for themselves—a democratic future where Israelis and Palestinians both can live in dignity and with self-determination and security for all.

Meanwhile, the war has also unleashed a wave of hate and incitement to violence in the United States, with appalling demonstrations of antisemitism and Islamophobia. The AFT reiterates our long-standing and uncompromising opposition to antisemitism, Islamophobia and all forms of hate and incitement to violence. We reaffirm our commitment to ensuring our work and teaching environments are safe and welcoming for the people we represent and those we serve, and to promoting a democratic education that builds understanding and mutual acceptance across different religions, races and ethnic groups. Whatever one's view of the war and the issues raised by it, there is no justification for using it to spread hate and intolerance.

The weaponization of incidents of antisemitism and Islamophobia in campaigns to censor dissenting views of the war and the underlying conflict between Israel and Palestine is also deeply disturbing. These campaigns are particularly troubling in education, where they strike at the heart of the freedom to have unfettered, intellectually honest and respectful discussion and to freely debate ideas, even controversial ideas. That is the hallmark of both American education and American democracy. We will defend the rights of educators and their students to participate in intellectually honest discussions, to articulate and rally around their views, including the underlying conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Moreover, we will not tolerate the weaponization of academic discourse to be used in political attacks on American colleges and universities, and as a pretext for attacks on efforts to increase diversity, promote equity and advance inclusion.

Our campuses must be places of dialogue for the furtherance of understanding in a pluralistic society. Teachers and students must be free to express differ-





ent views on the burning issues of the day, without fear of loss of position and retaliation, and without intimidation and threats of violence.

As a union deeply committed to teaching, to healthcare and to defending democracy, we pledge to continue our advocacy for democracy at home and abroad, as we support the principles of dignity and freedom for all.



## Ethical Standards

# Know Your Rights



**By: John Burghdoff,  
Professor of Mathematics. LSC– CyFair  
President, AFT– Lone Star College**

The purpose of this ongoing column in The Advocate is to make sure that all of us, as employees of Lone Star College, know that we have rights under law and college policy designed to protect us from mistreatment and to afford us opportunities to seek relief from any mistreatment aimed at us.

This installment of Know Your Rights has two sides to it. Yes, it outlines for us more of our rights as employees but, also, it reminds us that we have solemn responsibilities as well for which we are every bit as accountable as our supervisors or anyone else in the college system.

I want to share with you a unique segment of the Lone Star College Policy Manual on Ethical Standards. This section has been in the policy manual essentially unchanged for many years. It is basically a litany of expectations of all employees. I'm going to share it with you in its entirety. You will notice that it bounces around to lots of particulars. (English professors: Don't expect this to be flowing prose.) Many of the particulars you will read and say to yourself, "This is obvious! Of course any ethical person will behave this way!" However, you may find some surprises.

I am presenting this section of the policy manual very much for your protection. As the saying goes, ignorance of the law is no excuse, and you don't want to violate a standard you did not know about. Many of these standards are lifted directly out of Texas law so violating them can, potentially, get you in legal trouble above and beyond being in trouble with the college.

After the actual policy, I'm going to offer some additional reflections on some parts.

### IV.F.6.3. Ethical Standards

All employees must:

- (a) Protect all confidential information to which they have access. Employees must refuse to engage in any employment, sales, or commercial activity that might reasonably be expected to require or induce the disclosure of confidential information.
- (b) Refuse to accept any significant gift, favor, or service that might reasonably tend to, or appear to, influence the discharge of official duties or official conduct. This is especially important for employees who exercise discretion in connection with contracts, purchases, payments, claims, and other College pecuniary transactions; such employees may not solicit, accept, or agree to accept any benefit from any person the employee knows is interested in or likely to become interested in any contract, purchase, payment, claim, or transaction involving the employee's discretion. Except for cash or negotiable instruments, this prohibition does not apply to items with a fair market value under \$50. An employee who receives an unsolicited gift or benefit that he or she may not accept under this policy may donate the gift or benefit to the Lone Star College Foundation.



Notwithstanding this prohibition, an employee may attend a vendor-provided or -sponsored seminar or training program under the conditions specified in the Board Policy section on Reporting and Investigating Dishonesty and Fraud.

(c) Avoid any personal business arrangements that might impair independent judgment in the performance of official duties.

(d) Avoid personal investments that could reasonably be expected to create a conflict of interest.

(e) Perform all official duties and exercise all official powers in an impartial manner, free from any solicitation, acceptance, or agreement to accept or give any personal benefit, including a benefit for or to one's family.

(f) Contribute to creating a positive and constructive environment, which is essential for the success and effectiveness of the workplace and the teaching/learning process, including the responsibility for each employee to:

(1) Subscribe to the judicious use of power vested in his or her position and exercise particular care in relationships of unequal authority, such as that of a supervisor/subordinate or a faculty/student, in which he or she has responsibility for evaluation and decision-making.

(2) Ensure that each employee/student under his or her direction has the opportunity to work/learn in an environment that reflects concern for each individual and respect for each person and is free from harassment or discrimination.

(3) Refuse to permit a family member to enroll in a class or other instructional activity for which the employee has responsibility to evaluate performance.

(4) Take reasonable actions to ensure that appropriate rules regarding plagiarism and/or cheating are in place and are impartially enforced to protect academic integrity.

(5) Treat others with dignity and respect.

(g) Keep accurate and reliable records of all matters for which he or she has responsibility, and maintain all records and funds in an accurate and straightforward manner consistent with the law and the College's ac-

counting processes.

(h) Provide full and accurate information, and true records of all required documentation, including employee applications, employment verification documents, transcripts, certifications and credentials, criminal history, information regarding prior employment, and any other information which materially relates to the employee's employment or application for employment with the College.

(i) Sexually intimate or physical relationships between an instructor and a student enrolled in the instructor's course are prohibited.

Violating this policy may result in employee discipline—including termination.

**Thus ends the quotation from the policy manual.**

And thus begins some reflections I would like to make related to some of the subsections of this policy:

### **Subsections (a) through (e). Conflicts of Interest and Preservation of Confidentiality.**

One of the most grumble-inducing forms we have at Lone Star is the Outside Employment Form we have to fill out every semester if we are working outside Lone Star for pay. We may ask "What right does the College have to tell us what to do or not do outside of the hours for which the College pays us?" In fact, the College doesn't own us outside of work hours so there needs to be a real conversation about that form. I even know of at least one incident where a supervisor has implied that he or she might withhold approval to get an employee to conform to a certain agenda.

On the other hand, this policy (and underlying state law) makes it clear that the College has, in certain cases, a legitimate interest in our outside activities including but not limited to employment. As stated more thoroughly in the policy itself, employees are expected to steer clear of outside employment, gifts, business arrangements, personal investments, and other benefits to ourselves OR our families that could influence our decisions as Lone Star employees in favor of an



outside entity. We even must avoid arrangements that might reasonably appear to POTENTIALLY influence our decisions. Much of this falls under the category of conflict of interest.

Looking at policy manuals of other colleges and universities, you will virtually always see a statement that employees are expected to at least report any outside involvement that could pose a conflict of interest. The remedy, generally, is to insulate the employee from decisions that could come under the influence of that conflict.

Getting into hypotheticals is dangerous and every case needs to be handled on its own merits, therefore the following must NOT be construed to be legal advice. However, here are some possible examples of tricky scenarios with potential ideas on how to navigate around them. For any actual situation you may find yourself in, consult with your supervisor. The Office of General Counsel can be immensely helpful with this and, from personal experience, I can tell you that they will be glad to provide sound advice.

1) Faculty members make decisions about adopting textbooks and other course materials. A publisher's representative offers you a pen with their logo. It is extremely unlikely your decisions would be influenced by a pen and the pen is likely to be worth well under \$50. You can accept the pen. A \$200 gift certificate is a different matter. The \$50 limit is a matter of Texas law. You can't take the gift certificate. If it arrives in your mailbox unsolicited and you can't figure out how to send it back, it can be donated to the Foundation and used for scholarships. The policy clearly states that it is perfectly all right to attend a vendor-provided conference. However, if your department is about to make a textbook decision and that publisher has a book in the running, it might be wise to stay off that committee.

2) Staff members often are involved in one way or another with decisions about contracts. Suppose you are married to an executive of a company that is placing a bid for a contract with the College. Clearly the College has no right to tell you who you can marry, but you

would want to inform your supervisor. You might help process some paperwork, but the decision about the contract would most likely need to be handed off to someone else.

3) Any of us could be on a hiring committee. Suppose your brother applies for the position your committee is trying to fill. Many Lone Star employees have brothers, sisters, parents, children, etc. that work in the system and there is nothing inherently wrong with that as long as one relative is not supervising the other. Getting the job, however, could be viewed as securing a benefit for a family member. Your relationship should definitely be shared with your supervisor and the best course of action might be to let someone else serve on the committee.


**"If anyone, including a part time employer, ever asks you to share confidential Lone Star information, run away as fast as you can. For your own protection, it is probably best to report that someone asked you and that you refused."**

Again, these examples are not legal advice but are designed to get you thinking about scenarios that could present a conflict of interest. It is always best to get advice in any such situation. When in doubt, ask. If you are a member of the union, we can help. We can't and won't give legal advice ourselves, but we can consult our attorney and we can get you in touch with the right folks at the college.

Protection of confidential information is much less open to nuance. If anyone, including a part time employer, ever asks you to share confidential Lone Star information, run away as fast as you can. For your own protection, it is probably best to report that someone asked you and that you refused.

### **Subsection (f). Creating a Positive Work Environment**

Subsection (f) asserts that ALL employees have an obligation to contribute to creating a positive and constructive work environment. Rightly, this subsection recognizes that the work environment for employees is the learning environment for students. To whatever degree workplace culture is dysfunctional or toxic, students suffer.

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<p>How can this be? There are tell-tale signs that give evidence of a toxic work environment. These include high turnover, high rates of absenteeism, and difficulty filling open positions. All of these issues directly impact an office's ability to meet the needs of students. In a toxic work environment, workers' energy is shunted off into survival, leaving less energy to devote to the needs of students.</p> <p>Issues with workforce environment drive the perceptions that employees have of the entire college and show up dramatically in the surveys that AFT conducts. Culture and environment are so important that Chancellor Castillo is devoting one of his five strategic goals for 2023-2024 (number 3) to implementing benchmarks for employees' attitudes and culture on a business-unit-level-by-business-unit-level basis.</p> <p>Among all the workforce issues that we, the AFT, get involved with that have anything to do with ethical standards, the largest number intersect subsection (f) on creating a positive work environment. This plays out in two ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Employees looking for relief from a negative environment created by a supervisor</li><li>2) Employees facing discipline issues for being the ones creating a negative environment</li></ol> <p>Yes, a negative work environment can be created by ANYONE in the department, not just supervisors. Consequently, creating a positive work environment requires the commitment of EVERYONE in the department.</p> <p>I'm going to focus on lines (1), (2) and (5) in subsection (f).</p> <p>Line (1) focuses on the judicious use of power. We want to believe that all people in an office or a classroom are equal, but if one person evaluates or makes decisions for the others, there is a disparity of power. Disparity of power exists between a supervisor and an</p>		<p>employee but also between employees (faculty and staff) and students. The existence of disparity of power, in itself, is not necessarily good or bad. It is simply a reality. What can cause problems is whether that disparity is used to mentor and nurture, or to control and manipulate.</p> <p>Disparity of power has the potential of creating many negative issues in any relationship and the person in the power position is, of necessity, the one with the moral obligation to make sure that power is not abused. In fact, it is the person in power who needs to go out of the way to assure the others that they are valued and welcomed, and that their interests, views, needs, and goals are important to the entire group. With a proactive approach, disparity can be a catalyst for collaboration and community and won't be abusive. This takes conscious effort.</p> <p>Line (2) elaborates on line (1) stating that the person in the power position has an obligation to ensure that everyone under their supervision, whether they are employees or students, can operate in an environment that reflects concern and respect for the individual, free from harassment or discrimination. That harassment or discrimination, by the way, could come from the person in power OR from peers. If one employee discriminates against another, or one student harasses another, it becomes the obligation of the person in power (the supervisor, the faculty member, the club advisor, the counselor, etc.) to take action to stop it.</p> <p>As a corollary, just because an employee (or student) is not in a power position does not free them from the obligation to welcome and nurture others and the obligation not to harass or discriminate. This corollary transitions us smoothly to line (5).</p> <p>Line (5) calls on all employees to treat one another with dignity and respect. This line applies to EVERYBODY. Yes, it applies to supervisors treating employees with dignity and respect. When that doesn't happen, the employee has a right to a grievance and, if the em-</p>

**“ Yes, a negative work environment can be created by ANYONE in the department, not just supervisors. Consequently, creating a positive work environment requires the commitment of EVERYONE in the department.”**



ployee is a member, the union will represent them.

It also applies to employees treating each other with dignity and respect, and to employees treating supervisors with dignity and respect. Yes, this is an ethical standard that applies in every direction. I, personally, have been asked to represent employees in grievances where I have asked to stop the proceeding so that I could meet with the employee privately to tell them that they needed to go back into the room and apologize for their behavior. My predecessor as president of the union, Alan Hall, has told me that he has done the same thing.

At the beginning of this article I stated that I would be talking about both rights and responsibilities we all have under this policy. Nowhere is this more true than in the basic moral and human obligation to treat one another with dignity and respect, with kindness and acceptance, with tolerance and inclusion, with the desire to build up and not to tear down. This applies to everybody. And actually, if we all do that, all of the other details of this policy pretty much fall into place.

“Nowhere is this more true than in the basic moral and human obligation to treat one another with dignity and respect, with kindness and acceptance, with tolerance and inclusion, with the desire to build up and not to tear down. This applies to everybody.”

There are a few additional details in this policy on ethical standards that I did not elaborate on but that pretty much need no further explanation. The line about plagiarism and cheating probably needs an article all of its own. Oh, and if you have sex with one of your students and come to the union for help, assuming the allegation is true, about all we can do for you is find you some boxes so you can pack up your office.



# Breaking News

Stay tuned for the announcement  
(Date/Time/Location) of our

## Spring Celebration

coming up in April!

All LSC employees are invited  
for free food, beverage and  
fun!

# DO YOU HAVE STUDENT DEBT?

## LOWER MONTHLY PAYMENTS

**Enroll in income-driven repayment (IDR):** IDR is a free federal program where repayment plans are based on your personal income. Summer helps find the best IDR plan to lower your monthly payments (with possible forgiveness as well).

## LOAN FORGIVENESS

**Certify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF):** You may qualify for Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), a program that will forgive ALL of your remaining loan balance after ten years. In order to enroll in PSLF, you must also be enrolled in an IDR

This is a **FREE** benefit  
for **AFT Members!**  
[Join today!](#)

## Summer

- My Plan
- My Student Loans
- Tools ^
- Income-Driven Repayment
- Public Service Loan Forgiveness
- Forgiveness Finder
- Refinancing
- Extra Payments
- Resource Center
- Support





## Joining AFT-Lone Star is the best thing you can do to ensure that you have a voice on work-related issues that matter to you!

Whether you have been at LSC for a long time or are just beginning your career, joining AFT-Lone Star is the best way to ensure your voice at work on issues that matter to you.

Our Union has a solid history of going to bat for our members when they need help and speaking up on issues that concern our members system-wide.

- ☐ If you believe faculty and staff should have a voice in educational issues, you should join.
- ☐ If you believe employees should have a voice in the political process, you should join.
- ☐ If you believe in the value of employees advocating for each other, you should join.
- ☐ If you believe employees should be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect, you should join.

Your dues help support these values.

Membership should not be thought of as only for "protection," but if you need help in a conflict, we will be there for you.

Don't join because you think you might get into trouble; join because you embrace the values we embrace.

**Join AFT-Lone Star**

**Click here to Join  
AFT Lone Star  
TODAY!**

<https://bit.ly/AFTLONESTAR-JOIN>

# Join Today!



*A Union of Professionals*

## AFT-Lone Star College

*A union of Professionals*

- \$8 million in professional occupational liability insurance (in case you get sued)
- Local staff and leaders ready to assist you when you need help and information
- Legal defense funds (in case you need an attorney)
- \$ 36,250 Accidental Death and Dismemberment policy
- Strong leaders and lobbyists advocating for your rights at the local, state, and national levels
- \$5,000 free term life insurance for your 1st year of membership
- AFT PLUS savings and discounts for you and your family
- Educational resources and publications
- No conflict of interest– Administrators cannot join
- Strong. Active. Vocal. When you join AFT-Lone Star, you join the best!
- Pay your dues via bank draft or credit card by signing up online! <https://bit.ly/AFTLONESTAR-JOIN>  
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**PHONE:** 281-889-1009

**E-MAIL:** [aftlonestar@yahoo.com](mailto:aftlonestar@yahoo.com)





# AFT-Lone Star College

AFT Local Union # 4518

## GOALS

- To promote academic excellence
- To protect academic freedom in higher education
- To preserve and protect the integrity and unique identity of each of the institutions of higher education in Texas
- To protect the dignity and rights of faculty against discrimination
- To ensure that faculty have an effective voice on all matters pertaining to their welfare
- To secure for all members the rights to which they are entitled
- To raise the standards of the profession by establishing professional working conditions
- To encourage democratization of higher education
- To promote the welfare of the citizens of Texas by providing better educational opportunities for all
- To initiate and support state legislation which will benefit the students and faculty of Texas
- To promote and assist the formation and growth of Texas AFT locals throughout Texas

**Membership provides  
professional career  
protection  
and a united voice at work.**

## BENEFITS

- \$8,000,000 Occupational Liability Insurance provides
  - security while teaching
  - protection against litigation
  - malpractice protection
- \$36,250 Accidental Death Insurance
- Legal Assistance
  - Free consultation and representation on grievances and job related problems
  - Services of leading labor attorneys
  - Legal Defense Fund protection
- Political Power
  - Texas AFT lobbyists in Austin
  - AFT lobbyists in Washington
  - Representation at the Coordinating Board
  - Support for local electoral work
- Affiliations
  - Affiliated with the Texas AFL-CIO
  - Affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and Texas AFT
- Staff Services
  - Professional representatives to assist and advise in processing grievances

### 23-24 Monthly AFT Dues

Full-time Faculty	\$46.02
Full-time Professional Staff	\$29.62
Full-time Support Staff	\$29.62
Adjunct Faculty	\$18.28
Part-time Staff	\$18.28

### Membership Eligibility

Membership in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is open to full-time and part-time faculty and staff up through the dean level. If you would like to join or find out more information about membership, please contact any of the officers listed on the back of this newsletter, or check out our online information and application at:

[www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org)



[www.texasaft.org](http://www.texasaft.org)

American Federation of Teachers  
Texas AFT  
AFL-CIO



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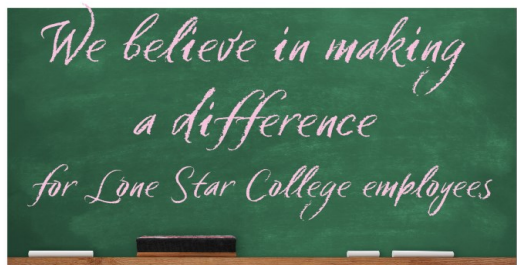


# JOIN AFT - LONE STAR TODAY!



## [www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org)

### We are here for YOU!



If you are interested in membership, benefits, or would like to discuss a work-related issue, our AFT Faculty and Staff Vice-Presidents are here to assist.

Please reach out to them!

See back page of this publication for a list of our officers.

**Offset your membership dues by using your AFT PLUS BENEFITS to save money!**

**Union membership gives you discounts on things you need every day.**

Our members enjoy savings on an array of goods and services with our **Union PLUS** benefits and discounts!

#### AFT SHOPPING DISCOUNTS:

- ◆ Computers and retail merchandise
- ◆ Dining, movies and entertainment
- ◆ Electronics
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- ◆ Save on Southwest Airlines
- ◆ 15% off AT&T
- ◆ Plus much more!



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- ◆ Life, auto, home, and pet insurance
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- ◆ Scholarships for members and their family members
- ◆ Trauma coverage
- ◆ Plus much more!



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**New mailing address:**

AFT- Lone Star College  
PO Box 310404  
Houston, Texas 77231

**We're on the Web!**

[www.aftlonestar.org](http://www.aftlonestar.org)

**Call for Articles**

We invite all employees to send us their opinions, news, questions, and so forth. *The Advocate* is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your ideas. Send your articles to **John Burghduff** via e-mail: [aftlonestar@yahoo.com](mailto:aftlonestar@yahoo.com), or submit to any of the following officers.

First Name	Last Name	Officer title	Campus
John	Burghduff	President	Cy-Fair
Alan	Hall	Secretary	At-Large
Donna	Kroll	Treasurer	Houston North
Leah	Kirrell	North Harris Faculty Vice President	North Harris
Britney	Hall	North Harris Staff Vice President	North Harris
Pat	Chandler	Kingwood Staff Vice President	Kingwood
Cliff	Hudder	Montgomery Faculty Vice President	Montgomery
Martha	Neely	Montgomery Staff Vice President	Montgomery
Adrienne	Patton	Cyfair Faculty Vice President	Cy Fair
Cindy	Hoffart-Watson	Cyfair Staff Vice President	Cy Fair
Van	Piercy	Tomball Faculty Vice President	Tomball
Stephen	Washington	Houston North Faculty Vice President	Houston North
Cathleen	Quayle	System Office, Staff Vice President	System Office
Cassandra	Khatr	University Park Faculty Vice President	University Park

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.

