



The Advocate



Welcome to the Holiday Edition of The Advocate, November-December 2024. Sniff your computer carefully to catch a whiff of the pumpkin spice pixels we used to create this issue.

As we approach Final Exam week and the prospect of time off with friends and family to follow, we hope you will enjoy this edition of our union newsletter between grading final exams, advising students registering for the spring, hiring new employees to fill the gaps, or whatever else you may be doing.

In introducing this issue and looking forward to our return in the spring, I'd like to challenge all of us, whether we are currently members of AFT Lone Star College or not, to reconsider and reimagine what we think of when we think about *union*. At our annual Fall Festival a few weeks ago at Swanny's, which drew about a hundred people, I remarked that they were going to begin to hear me talk about *union* in terms of *community*.

It is easy to come to think about our union, or any other union, the way we think of Allstate, or Farmers, or State Farm. It is easy to think of union membership as an insurance policy. Personally, I have no sense of community with my insurance company. I pay them a fee and expect them to help me out if something goes wrong but I have no emotional, meta-physical, or social bond with my insurance

company nor do I feel any commitment to be personally involved with either the employees of my insurance company or the other customers of that company.

Does the union promise to all of our dues paying members that we will provide support and guidance if they get in trouble at work? Absolutely we do. We support dozens of members with issues at work every year. However, if you're in the union for the "insurance" alone – or if you're not in the union because you're sure you'll never be in any trouble – you are not fully realizing what *union* can mean.

For one thing, unlike an insurance company, the union does not have an army of employees to spring into action when a need arises. In fact, the only employees of AFT Lone Star College are our wonderful part time organizers Dee Williams and Daler Wade. The rest of us do what we do for the union as volunteers above and beyond our jobs with the college.

To bring about sustained improvements, whether in the lives of individual employees who feel powerless in their jobs, or in the culture of Lone Star as a whole, or within higher education in Texas, or within society at large, we need people, as many as we can find, who want to form a *community* to support each other and to bring about change.

How do we do this? It's a conversation we

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must have over a period of time, but we have a few ideas to start with right here in the pages of this edition.

Professor Steve Davis, in his latest installment of his column Dispatches from the Front writes about the spirit of community that can exist between employees and students and between employees and other employees when we slow down, focus on what really matters, simplify, and connect with one another.

Retired Professor Steve King, in another one of his fine guest articles, speaks about academia as community and the collective impact faculty in particular can have in impacting the College and the lives of our students.

In my column, Know Your Rights, I write about how employees (faculty and staff) can claim agency for themselves, and support one another as coworkers, to solve problems at work before they reach the point that formal representation is needed and the “insurance company” has to be called.

We’re also going to explore several developments in the political world upon which all of us can have an impact if we see ourselves as community. I know we’re all tired of politics – sick of it even. The voting is done. The people in charge have been (mostly!) chosen. However, if we want them to govern in ways consistent with our values, we will have to influence them to do so in numbers sufficient for them to take note. Importantly, we will also have to be there for each other and for our students if and when the people in charge let us down.

Finally, if you look at the back page of The Advocate you will find a list of officers of the AFT Lone Star College Executive Board. These are folks who have volunteered to represent employees at their campus, to be the eyes and ears of the union to identify the concerns of employees in general, and to be the face of the union to college leadership at their location. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate all of the folks who are making this personal sacrifice to help their fellow employees. You will notice, however, that we have some vacancies. Those vacancies reflect areas of the College where the union is inadequately informed of the needs of employees and limited in our ability to help. We need volunteers willing to step into the breach to hold the walls strong in those areas. If you are open to even considering taking on the task of joining our Executive Board and want to know more, call or email me and we can talk.

Over the next months, watch and listen for more from AFT Lone Star about *union as community*. In the meantime, feel free to reach out to me or any member of our Executive Board to explore how you can personally be more a part of this community. Perhaps a good way to end this introduction is by paraphrasing a quote from John F. Kennedy: “Ask not what your union can do for you, but what you can do for your union.”

I hope you will enjoy this issue of The Advocate and I wish you all the best for safe, happy, and wonderful holidays.



**“Once More Unto the Breach,
Dear Friends!”
Political Concerns that Still Need
our Attention**

Our September-October issue focused largely on the November election. I think it is safe to say that, no matter where you stand on the political spectrum and no matter what you think about the changes that are likely to come, we are all at least grateful that the election is over. However, as much as we’d like to step away from the political world around us and just focus on our students and our families, there are important issues that will affect us and our students that will demand our ongoing collective attention. We need all of us!



As Shakespeare has Henry V say, “Once more unto the breach, dear friends!”

Board of Trustees Run-Off

First, AFT Lone Star College congratulates Mr. Daniel (Danny) Meza on his election to Board of Trustees District 2 and Mr. Mike Sullivan on his unopposed reelection to Board of Trustees District 8. We also thank outgoing Trustee in District 2 Ms. Ernestine Pierce for her six years of service on the board and her dedication to accountability within the college.

In District 1, however, there will be a runoff. So, yes, if you live in the vicinity of the CyFair campus you need to go out to the polls AGAIN. “Once more unto the breach, dear friends.”

Incumbent trustee Mr. Michael (Mike) Stoma got the largest number of votes in the November election for this seat but did not reach the 50% threshold to avoid a runoff. He and second place finisher, Dr. Shashanka Ashli, will be in a special runoff election on Saturday, December 14 with early voting running from December 2 – 10.

If you are not sure whether or not you live in District 1, please visit this website for a map and list of voting precincts:

<https://www.lonestar.edu/departments/webservices/LSC-Trustees-District1.pdf>

For information on times and locations for both early voting and voting on election day, since this district lies entirely within Harris County, please visit:

www.harrisvotes.com.

If you would like a refresher on who these candidates are and what they stand for, please revisit the election guide we included in our September/October issue of The Advocate beginning on page 15.

<https://aftlonestar.tx.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2024/2024%20The%20Advocate%20%20SEPT-OCT.pdf>

Finally, if you are interested in knowing which candidate has been endorsed by the Texas Gulf Coast Area Labor

Federation (AFL-CIO) of which AFT Lone Star College is a member union, please visit the following website, select Harris County and look at the very bottom of the list.

<https://www.gcaflcio.org/endorsements>

The election for LSC Board of Trustees will be the ONLY RACE on the December ballot which means:

- a) You’ll probably be in and out of the polling place in under five minutes, and
- b) Turnout is likely to be unbelievably low, so your vote and the votes of any neighbors and family members you can coax into going with you will have a HUGE impact.

We are one of the very few workplaces in this country where we get to elect our bosses.

So, if you live in District 1 and/or have friends and family in that district, please urge them to take five minutes out of their holiday preparations to duck into a polling place and cast a ballot for LSC Board of Trustees.

Upcoming Political Issues at the State Level

As reported in the September – October issue of The Advocate, Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick has a number of action items on his wish list for the 2025 Texas Legislature that impact education. These include:

- 1) A vague goal to regulate the activities of faculty senates and similar groups on college and university campuses. It is unclear what limitations he specifically wants, and which other groups are considered “similar”, but the concept of shared governance will be under scrutiny.
- 2) An effort to regulate the content of college courses that somehow relate to the topics of “diversity, equity, and inclusion” including a threat of termination for professors who teach topics judged to be related to these areas.
- 3) Affecting parents of school age children, continued efforts to divert public funds to private schools via vouchers, and debates about funding for public schools including salary increases for public school teachers.

There are many other issues that will come to the forefront of the Texas Legislature’s attention in 2025 – some related to education – others related to other issues.



Different ones of us will likely have different opinions about what the right answers are but, whatever our opinions are, legislators need to know about them in order to make informed decisions.

What can we do? The voting is over. There is nothing further to be done regarding getting the people we want in place. Right? We can still make our voices heard. "Once more unto the breach, dear friends!"

One way to make your voice heard about state issues in education is to sign on to the Educator's Bill of Rights. The full text can be found in the September/October issue of The Advocate beginning on page 20:

<https://aftlonestar.tx.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2024/2024%20The%20Advocate%20%20SEPT-OCT.pdf>

Sponsored by Texas AFT, the Educator's Bill of Rights will be the cornerstone agenda of our efforts to influence the Texas Legislature starting in January. To find out more and to sign on, please click this link:

<https://bit.ly/EdBillOfRights>

Besides signing the Educator's Bill of Rights, there will be additional opportunities for you to have a voice on these issues. Texas AFT will be sponsoring opportunities to write to and even speak before committees of the Legislature on the issues in the Educator's Bill of Rights. Included in these activities will be a massive Lobby Day on the first Monday of Spring Break where we hope hundreds of faculty and staff from all levels of public education across Texas will meet at the Capitol in Austin to visit with legislators about issues important to us and our students. Watch these pages in our next issue for more details.

Upcoming Political Issues at the Federal Level

In this segment, I'm going to focus on possible issues coming up in 2025 but there is an important piece of legislation before Congress right now. Please see the separate article in this issue of The Advocate about Eliminating the Windfall Elimination Provision.

It is not clear yet to what degree that the incoming administration will embrace the tenets of Project 2025. Again, the votes are counted, and the new officials will soon be in place, but the American people can still make their voices heard. The degree to which we do so as a community will impact how seriously those voices are heard. We will certainly do so through writing or calling our congress members, or administrative heads. Perhaps we will participate in peaceful (NEVER violent!) protests. Sometimes we will all be on the same side of an issue; sometimes we will be on different sides, but acting as a community we don't have to wait for another election to have a voice. "Once more unto the breach, dear friends."

"One way to make your voice heard about state issues in education is to sign on to the Educator's Bill of Rights. "

IF the tenets of Project 2025 are put into action, some of the changes we may see include:

- 1) Eliminating the public service student loan forgiveness program
- 2) Closing the Department of Education which currently oversees the important Pell Grant program for college students
- 3) Rolling back Title IX protections for LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff
- 4) Prosecuting colleges and universities that maintain affirmative action or diversity, equity, and inclusion programs
- 5) Phasing out Title I funding for economically disadvantaged K-12 school children over the next 10 years.

Finally, if tariffs on foreign goods are actually put into place, the expected outcome will be to reignite a surge in inflation that will impact the wellbeing of students and employees alike. We will watch to see how far (if anywhere) any of this goes and we will keep you informed and share with you actions we can be take together to help.

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends."



Eliminating the Windfall Elimination Provision

The U.S. House of Representatives, in a bipartisan move, has voted 327-60 to eliminate the Windfall Elimination Provision from Social Security Code.

The Windfall Elimination Provision, together with the Government Pension Offset, affects anyone employed by a public entity that offers its own pension program and does not participate in Social Security. The Windfall Elimination Provision in particular applies to all employees of Lone Star College as well as any employee of a public community college, K-12 school district, or state university accumulating retirement benefits from the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) or Optional Retirement Program (ORP).

Under this provision, any Social Security benefits an employee would be eligible to receive upon retirement due to additional or previous employment with an employer that DOES participate in Social Security are subject to a reduction to prevent the employee from receiving a “windfall” of retirement income – since we all get paid such enormous salaries!

For employees like me who have spent virtually our entire careers in Texas public education, the impact of the Windfall Elimination Program is minimal. (I believe I would be entitled to \$2 in social security benefits per month when I retire based on the job I had as a janitor in college, but I don’t have enough total months in the system to be eligible even for that.)

However, if you have had a second job while working for Lone Star, or a previous career outside public education before you came to work for Lone Star, **the Social Security benefits you accrued due to your other employment could be reduced by several hundred dollars per month because of this provision.**

It has been estimated that 15% of retirees impacted by the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset (which applies specifically to employees of federal, state, or local governments) live in Texas. Texas AFT, other organizations representing public employ-

ees in Texas and elsewhere, and other groups representing retirees have been arguing for the repeal of these provisions since they were first enacted in the 1980s.

Currently, at least 60 U.S. Senators have indicated their willingness to vote for repeal if the House Bill is taken up by the Senate. The bill is not yet on the calendar to be voted on in that body. Senator John Cornyn has expressed skepticism about the bill without other changes to assure the solvency of the Social Security System. As of the date of this writing, Senator Ted Cruz has not specifically commented.



If the bill is not put on the Senate calendar for a vote before the end of the year, it will have to be resubmitted in both houses in 2025.

If you have an opinion or concern about the elimination of the Windfall Elimination Provision, please feel free to contact your senators at the contact information below.

- Senator John Cornyn: <https://www.cornyn.senate.gov/share-opinion/>
- Senator Ted Cruz: <https://www.cruz.senate.gov/contact/write-ted>

A community of voices could finally push this change through after decades of trying.





Dispatches from the Front #12 “Henry and Daniel”

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

I love this time of year when the season has finally begun to change, and we are in the short rows of the semester. One regular November pleasure is that I get to teach **Walden**, Henry David Thoreau’s masterful homage to nature and simple living, published in 1854 and still captivating readers.

At the beginning of the book, Thoreau tells us it is especially addressed to “poor students.” And what a great hook that is for class discussion, as I then ask my own audience, “Are **you** a poor student and if so, in what sense?” We all understand the most obvious meaning. I tell my class that I was a poor student for many years in that I lived on the economic margins while I completed my schooling. I remember the relief I felt when I got my first professional position at the new Kingwood campus in 1984 and could finally go to the dentist. Thank goodness I still had teeth to be salvaged! No more need then to live in grungy garage apartments and drive marginal cars that might at any time break down and leave me stranded. I know our own students can relate, that they struggle with money. But there’s a more problematic sense of being a poor student—one who struggles to make even passing grades let alone work up to their full potential. Henry (yes, first-name basis) speaks to this as well. In many cases, the problem there is misplaced priorities, that working insane hours and taking too many classes entirely sabotages the prospect of having time to learn and study.

I often remember an example many years ago from my tenure as club baseball coach. I had a ballplayer who was also my student, one who struggled. One day, he was so excited to tell me he was going to pick up his new truck. I could only think, “Oh, Lord.” I wanted to be honest and tell him that while those girls he was chasing would love the new wheels, he was going to have to now do even more outside work to cover the monthly note, pay the exorbitant insurance, and fuel the gas-guzzling monster. This is where I could have used Henry to tell him to defer gratification, reduce spending for superfluous things, and simplify life so as to “keep your accounts on your thumb nail.” In other words, focus on your clas-

ses, make good grades, and then chances are you will one day have a decent job that will enable all the material blessings. I guess that’s what I should have told the kid. I guess I didn’t have the heart.

My students love discussing Thoreau even though his style and vocabulary stretches them. We often need to stand on our tiptoes to “get” him, but our minds are better for the effort. Students certainly pretty quickly get Henry’s skepticism about new technologies that people loved in his day just as now. Thoreau, for example, wickedly observes that while a telegraph now stretches from Maine to Texas, “Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate.” The 2024 translation is to turn off the cell phones and disconnect from social media. Then, actually talk to your classmates, read some good books, and learn something. Cultivate your minds so as to have something meaningful to say.

One shortcoming of teaching is that we don’t often see the so-called fruits of our labor, but then, out of the blue, comes a message of the sort I got the other day. Kaleena Steakle, a student from a decade ago, wrote to share the following:

“I moved to Boston over the summer and couldn’t be enjoying it more. But something else really exciting happened this week and you were tied to it! I am thrilled to report that I got engaged on Wednesday... that my fiancé proposed to me at Walden Pond! My goodness, is that place just as magical as I’d hoped...I loved Thoreau once you taught me about him, and in fact, *On Walden* is the only book that I have downloaded on my phone so that I always have it on me to read or flip through when I need some grounding. Having the happiest day of my life occur at one of the most special places on earth was something truly out of a movie.”

What professor wouldn’t die for a letter like that? (Maybe I’ll need to reconsider though the things I said above about the malevolence of cell phones.) The email was accompanied by a beautiful photo of a young man on one knee offering a ring to an elated young woman with the glorious backdrop of New England’s autumn leaves reflected in the semi-sacred waters of Walden Pond. I look forward to catching up with Kaleena over coffee when she visits just before Thanksgiving.



Now let me talk about another dear friend, this one named Daniel. In 2008, I returned from a summer seminar in Concord, Massachusetts sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, where among other things, I studied Thoreau and the Transcendentalists. I returned home fired up to teach a topics course that would use *Walden* as its core text. I knew that my colleague, Daniel Coleman, who was a professor of philosophy, had taught a Thoreau class in the summer of 1997. He collaborated with Math professor, Chris Martin. Into early July, they read and discussed Thoreau with twenty-five students, while also building a replica of Thoreau's cabin a few feet from their classroom. I remember walking by them as they worked that horridly hot summer wondering how anyone could be that devoted! My recollection is that they cheated just a little by using power tools in some of the construction, tools that Henry never could have imagined when he built the original cabin in 1845.

In *Walden*, Thoreau provides an itemized list of the expenses involved in the construction. It comes to a total of \$28.12 ½. Daniel and Chris were able to do it for just

under \$1500 with the help of donated materials and the essential aid of unpaid (i.e. student) labor. What a learning experience that must have been! Daniel reassured in the syllabus “no one need have any construction skills. We’ll learn those by doing...” How Thoreauvian a statement. Henry, a Harvard grad, was very handy as was Daniel, who was a Rice Ph.D. The cabin they built that summer was a landmark on our campus until Hurricane Harvey in 2017 ruined it. Back in 1997, they had finished enough of the construction for a barbecue celebration on July 4. And while Henry was a vegetarian, I’m sure had he been there that he would have enjoyed the potato salad.



(Daniel is on the far left observing the cabin's construction)

To return to my plan of teaching Thoreau and Concord, I knew that I could handle the historical foundations but that I needed Daniel for the philosophical parts. So, he and I co-taught a course based on *Walden* in 2009. It was one of the highlights of my career. Daniel was a treasure for thirty years on the Kingwood campus. He was learned and wise and a paragon of kindness. We shared a love of music, and he often left me news articles or turned me on to rock and roll documentaries I hadn't yet discovered. I was jealous that Daniel had played guitar in a garage band as a teenager in Baton Rouge. Once I was practicing in the hallway outside my office the chords for the 1967 Electric Prunes hit, “I Had Too Much to Dream Last Night.” Daniel walked by and told me his group used to play the song and that he still remembered the key! In recent years, he took up bass and kept me informed of his progress. But what sticks in my mind most about Daniel was something that happened when he interviewed in 1994 for a full-time posi-



tion. The screening committee was conversing with him about dealing with students in the kind of back-and-forth teachers engage in constantly. Back in those days, we weren't so required by HR edicts to stick to a set list of questions. Daniel nailed it when he told us how important it was sometimes to have mercy. I can't say how many times I have remembered that wisdom over the years especially when mulling over final grades. I know that many times I erred on the side of mercy and gave a student a break just because of Daniel.

Daniel Coleman passed in the early morning hours of July 3, 2024, almost exactly 179 years to the day that Henry Thoreau moved into his cabin on the shores of Walden Pond to commence his famous experiment. I didn't get to say farewell so these words from a favorite song will have to suffice. They always make me think of him:

**Daniel is traveling tonight on a plane
I can see the red tail lights heading for Spain
And I can see Daniel waving goodbye
Oh God, it looks like Daniel, must be the clouds
in my eyes**

Henry David Thoreau and Daniel Irvin Coleman had much in common. They were inspiring teachers and principled men---gentle, bearded warriors to forever remember. This earth is so much better for their efforts.



Editor's Note:

I, too, had the honor and privilege of knowing Daniel Coleman and considering him my friend. I knew him when I taught for LSC-Kingwood in the 1990s.

When I moved to LSC-CyFair in 2003 I held the rather surprising title of Chair of the Department of Mathematics, Philosophy, and Religion. Daniel's expertise as a philosopher included a very extensive background in Biblical studies and I asked him to teach Old Testament Survey and New Testament Survey as an overload on our campus. For several years he drove from Kingwood all the way to CyFair twice a week to teach those classes.

Daniel was one of the rare breed of academicians who could teach Bible as a truly scholarly endeavor – passionately and respectfully but with critical analysis and rigor.

Daniel was one of the kindest, gentlest, and most genuine humans I have ever known. He and I bonded over being fellow Episcopalians although we belonged to different parishes. During his later years, he devoted much of his efforts to supporting a declining parish in the East End that had once been one of the most important churches in the Diocese of Texas but had shrunk to barely a dozen parishioners. His support was a testimony to his compassion for those who struggle.

Well done, good and faithful servant. You are greatly missed.

John Burghduff



In Praise of the Academy

Stephen King,
Professor of English, Retired, LSC-North Harris

In Dictionary.com, you'll find the following as the fourth definition for *academy*: *a group of authorities and leaders in a field of scholarship, art, etc., who are often permitted to dictate standards, prescribe methods, and criticize new ideas.*

The definition nicely summarizes the traditional role of faculty at a college or university. While the state may provide similarity from one college to another through prescribed Student Learning Outcomes, college and university faculty determine the standards students must meet and the methods by which faculty will help them achieve those outcomes. It's understood, taken as a given, that administration will not interfere. The President of the University of Houston, or Harvard for that matter, would never scrutinize a professor's class standards or their teaching methods, except in very extreme cases. (Harvard was not happy when Timothy Leary encouraged his students to try LSD.) Presumably, college faculty are hired for their expertise in their disciplines, an expertise that college administrators do not always have. It is common sense, therefore, to leave such matters to faculty.

The third part of the definition is as important as the other two: faculty are allowed to criticize new ideas—both within their disciplines and regarding their colleges or universities. Regarding administrative decisions at their institutions, Faculty Senates provide a forum where such criticism can take place—criticism supported by the principle of shared governance.

These three components—faculty determining disciplinary standards, faculty determining their teaching methods, and faculty being enabled to publicly express their viewpoints on administrative actions without fear of termination—are all traditional and conventional at colleges and universities. Together, they probably demonstrate the most striking difference between American K

through 12 education and higher learning. In our grade schools and high schools, teachers are given less and less latitude to determine how to do their jobs. Administrators, parents and even state and local government dictate both limits and requirements regarding what goes on in classrooms. K through 12 instructors are perceived not so much as disciplinary experts as public employees who are given no choice but to obey instructions from above—even when such instructions contradict what they believe is best for their students. They have no choice partly because the conventions applied to the working conditions of K through 12 teachers are quite different from those applied to college faculty.

This should be a matter of concern for LSC faculty, especially as more and more of our policies and procedures are adaptations of corporate ones—such as our use of

Maxient for some student/instructor conflicts and the degradation of shared governance, which diminished it in the direction of giving complete control of the most significant administrative decisions to System Office.

In brief, these changes took the power for faculty to *matter* when it came to those decisions. The situation recalls the old academic joke about the administrator who

asked a faculty member for their input on a decision that had already been made—without that input. Consulting faculty becomes a box-checking exercise, an empty practice done to maintain appearances.

(It should be noted that another significant difference between university faculty and us—their having tenure while we don't—is relevant here. When push comes to shove, we are all well aware that we serve at the pleasure of the Higher Ups. Without tenure (and without the protections a union contract would provide, something we're prevented *by law* from having), faculty's willingness to give frank and honest feedback to our supervisors is compromised.)

Of course, a Chancellor who respects faculty will solicit feedback and give it serious consideration. When push comes to shove, however, faculty and staff have no veto power over a Chancellor's final word. Thus, we are al-

“The third part of the definition is as important as the other two: faculty are allowed to criticize new ideas—both within their disciplines and regarding their colleges or universities.”



ways dependent on the Chancellor. This is not the optimal situation for faculty or staff to “prescribe methods and criticize new ideas.”

Faculty evaluations are relevant here. A Dean may lead several academic departments and cannot be expected to have expertise in all of them; in fact, they may not have expertise in any of them. How, then, are Deans supposed to evaluate faculty teaching? Remember that the definition given states that faculty (a “group of authorities”) should be able to “dictate standards [and] prescribe methods.” But as LSC is run more and more from a corporate model, students are regarded more and more like customers and faculty as customer service representatives, not authorities. This may put Deans in a bind. Unacquainted with the professional standards a particular discipline applies to students, they may fall back on data usually used in business. What is the faculty member’s success rate? How many complaints are made about them? How much tech do they use in the course? How *pleasant* was the student’s experience? Did the instructor accommodate all the student’s needs? Please rate your experience of the instructor on a scale of 1 to 10 . . . etc.

All of the latter approaches represent a thorough misconception of an instructor’s role in the classroom and even of the purpose of instruction, which is not to provide a pleasant experience but to guide willing learners through learning—and that sort of experience, by definition, is not at all always pleasant. And not all of our students are all that willing, nor do they all understand what’s required of them in a college classroom. In fact, it often seems that in our high schools today, where teachers (and whole districts) have been threatened if enough of their students don’t meet standardized testing benchmarks, students expect to be given every chance—second chances, third chances, fourth chances and so on—until they somehow produce a number that can give someone an excuse to claim learning has occurred. This applies not only to their schoolwork, but also to their behavior. Behavior that degrades the learning environment but doesn’t reach a certain level of disruption must be tolerated by teachers. And so we continue to get many, many students both testing below college level and expecting again to be coddled in their college courses.

If we satisfy those expectations and they glide through

enough courses to graduate or transfer, we will have provided, ultimately, a hollow credential. We may produce success numbers administrators can boast about, but those “successful” students will flounder in the workplace or college where, for the first time for them, real standards are applied. (Too bad for them. We win with better enrollment and questionable “success” numbers; they lose the preparation for further academic study and/or preparation for real jobs that is the community college’s purpose for existing. Supposedly.)

Giving faculty a more meaningful role in college governance requires true respect for our experience and expertise. Unfortunately, that respect is not always given. In fact, resentment comes naturally to any nine-to-five worker who sees faculty come and go throughout the day, restricting their time on campus to classes and office hours. From such a standpoint, it is easy to regard faculty as overpaid and underworked, especially when one’s own work tasks don’t truly require eight hours a day five days a week on campus.

Likewise, it is easy to see faculty as obstacles standing between students and their degrees. Faculty are the ones who give bad grades, reject work, enforce rules regarding attendance, lateness, deadlines, classroom behavior and more—and all this in classes such as developmental or freshman English or math that many students don’t even want to take.

Finally, community college faculty can face derision because most of us teach only at freshman and sophomore levels. So, this way of thinking goes, we don’t really teach the *hard* stuff. The content we teach is easy, and so the teaching of it is easy, too. Thus, a community college instructor’s work is simply not all that serious, especially if you regard financial bottom-line thinking as the primary measures of a college’s success. Indeed, faculty hurt *those* measures in at least two ways: first, through our relatively high salaries and second through the standards to which we hold students, contributing to students’ dropping out. Really, what other industry pays employees to *discourage customers*?

I won’t belabor all the ways this way of thinking about faculty hurts both them and their students (and the institution they’re associated with). I will, however, take a moment to call attention to a part of an instruc-



tor's workload—at least that of the best of us—that isn't captured on a workload form or, for that matter, seen in an instructor's day-to-day comings and goings on campus: *emotional labor*, which constitutes very much of the best of our work: caring about students, including caring about how much they're learning and what might be encouraging or hindering that. It also includes dealing with, well, emotional students who are pleading for another extension long past a deadline; another "extra credit assignment" that will allow their average to creep over 69 (or 89); demanding to be allowed to retake a test; or expressing outrage at being held to the same requirements as everyone else; or, on the other hand, hearing from students about how their homelessness (or threatened homelessness), or their inability to get to class regularly because of a broken-down car or a difficult home situation, or their clinical depression or constant anxiety that all conflict with their ability to get work done. I'll add the apathy we see on their faces as they go through the motions of being a student (showing up, not being disruptive, perhaps occasionally turning something in) while not really convinced that anything that happens in a classroom really matters. (This is happening.) All of this takes a toll on an instructor's mental (and often physical) well-being; little of it is experienced with students by those whose job descriptions don't require much contact with them. Not being experienced, such labor might be thought not to exist or at least dismissed or belittled. But, again, for the best of us, it makes up a very large part of what we do.

The opportunity to guide and witness *real* learning take place within our disciplines; to see *real* change take place among students who weren't sure they belonged at college but then gradually understand what's so interesting about biology or math or literature or philosophy and so on, or that they have a real aptitude for music or art or design and so on: *that* opportunity is why so many of us became teachers. It's what makes our work meaningful—but less meaningful when standards are degraded or other actions are taken that harm the conditions under which we work.

As corporate, bureaucratic, "bottom-line" thinking takes over American education, faculty are the canaries in the coal mines, their frustrations and unhappiness (and increasingly, their leaving the profession) signs that something is very wrong with the way the slighting

of faculty affects American education. LSC should meaningfully resist this—including rolling back present practices and policies that contribute to it.

Note: I have recently retired—but (obviously) I'm still interested in what's happening in American education in general and LSC in particular. I would very much appreciate any feedback you might provide regarding this article. Tell me where I'm wrong! I will keep any such feedback confidential. You can reach me at daviddad1@mac.com

Sojourners in our Midst

John Burghduff, Professor of Mathematics, LSC-CyFair

There is a specific major point of the incoming president's promised agenda that is already taking a toll on the emotional well-being of Lone Star College students and employees: the threat of mass deportation of undocumented residents.

The best estimate is that there are approximately 11 million human beings currently living in the United States without proper documentation of their right to be here. This includes people brought here as small children who know no other home than the U.S. For context, 11 million is the approximate total population of the State of Ohio. The logistics and the economic impact of deporting a population equal to the entire population of Ohio are staggering – to the point that I'd like to think a deportation of this magnitude is just an empty campaign promise.

Our country has tried this before, however. During the Great Depression, under the premise that Mexican immigrants were taking American jobs, somewhere between 300,000 and 2,000,000 persons of Mexican descent, many of them legal residents and U.S. citizens who had never been to Mexico and spoke little to no Spanish, were deported. The "repatriation", as it was called, was chaotic. The Mexican economy could not handle the influx of newcomers. After a number of years, labor shortages, especially in agriculture, became so severe in parts of the United States that the program was dropped, and the immigrants were quietly allowed to return.



These events are detailed in the book *Decade of Betrayal, Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, by Francisco Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez. I recommend this book to anyone inclined to learn from the mistakes of the past. In addition to facts and figures, *Decade of Betrayal* is full of interviews of people who experienced these events firsthand. Professor Balderrama spoke about his research in a presentation at LSC – CyFair several years ago that was cosponsored by the union and the LSC Office of General Counsel.

I know that among all the employees of Lone Star College, there will be considerable divergence of opinion about what to do about undocumented workers. Putting all of those differences aside for a moment, please keep in mind another statistic I heard recently. Approximately 1 out of 15 people living in the United States have at least one member of their close family who are here without proper documentation. Since we are closer to the Southern Border, that statistic may even be higher in the Greater Houston Area.

Taking that number at face value, 1 out of every 15 students sitting in your class, or stopping at your desk for assistance, is currently terrified about what may happen to someone they love next year. 1 out of every 15 of your coworkers at the college are also terrified about the same thing.

Regardless of where you stand on immigration policy, regardless of whatever actions you may be inclined to take either in support of or in opposition to this policy, here is where we can truly be community for one another and our students. As fellow human beings on this planet, the sojourners in our midst and those who love them need our support, our comfort, our sympathy, our tolerance if they don't keep up with their lessons or if they make mistakes on their forms, a hug, a shoulder to cry on, our referrals to mental health professionals, our prayers, and our advocacy to whatever degree we are able to provide it.



This is beyond politics. This is community. This is being human.

Employee Scholarships

AFT Lone Star College wishes to acknowledge and recognize all those in the Lone Star College administration who were able to make whole those employees who were promised support in the now discontinued Employee Scholarship Program.

As Chancellor Castillo covered in his October What's Word on the Streets (WWOTS), auxiliary funds set aside to fund a scholarship program for employees seeking higher degrees had declined and the College was going to discontinue the program. The union acknowledges that the College administration needs to maintain fiscal responsibility and further acknowledges that providing scholarships for employees is not part of the core business of the College and that the College has no obligation to provide such scholarships.

A concern we had as a union, and that we shared privately with the Administration through appropriate channels, is that, as a three year program, recipients awarded scholarships in the last two years had made three-year financial commitments based on a written promise that they would be funded at a certain rate and that the phase out program was going to reduce that rate substantially.

We are grateful that the College was able to adjust funds so that those already in the program can be funded at the rates they had been promised. We are also grateful that the College had gone well above and beyond the call of duty to offer these scholarships to employees in the first place. If the program can be resurrected at some point in the future, perhaps in a modified form, that will be wonderful, but, if it cannot, we are grateful that it was around to help those who have benefited so far.

We will be remiss in failing to thank some of those who worked hard to resolve this concern, but we know for certain that thanks are due to Chancellor Castillo and to Chief Financial Officer Kristy Vienne and her team.



Before the issue was resolved, there was apparently some talk about possible litigation against the College



over these scholarships. I want to hasten to assure you that the AFT had nothing to do with and did not participate in or even know about such conversations. In this case and all others, the union always seeks resolutions to concerns and problems at the lowest possible level and in the most amicable way possible. Litigation does not achieve that goal and is something we would only turn to if every other avenue failed. We are grateful that the Administration feels the same way and works with us in positive and constructive ways to the benefit of LSC employees. Any threat of legal action came from a source other than the union.

Helping Yourself/ Helping Your Friends

Know Your Rights



**By: Dr. John Burghduff,
Professor of Mathematics. LSC– CyFair**

Much of what I write about in this column centers on the rights employees have and the processes they can appeal to in LSC policy and procedure if they are in a bad situation at work. A very important part of what we do as a union is to provide representation and advice to employees once that situation has become unbearable.

Consider this article to be preventative maintenance. Just like it is easier and cheaper to check your transmission fluid regularly than to have to replace your transmission, there are things you can (sometimes!) do to solve problems at work while they are minor before they blow up into something major. These are things you can do yourself and things you can do in community with your coworkers and, yes, even your boss.

This article is going to be based on a simple premise that I believe to be true. I believe it to be true for an incredibly high percentage of both workers and managers. I

don't know the percent. I'm not even sure how you would run a study to calculate the percent. My personal belief is that the percent is well above 90%.

The premise is that people come to work with the full intention of doing their job in the very best way they are capable of doing it. This is true of workers. This is true of management.

Now, I already can hear voices coming through the wires to my computer saying "Ha! You don't know my employee X." or "Ha! You don't know my boss Y," or even "Ha! You don't know my coworker Z." And you COULD be right. The possibility exists that X, Y, or Z is a complete and irredeemable scoundrel. (Substitute R-rated term for scoundrel as needed.) The possibility also exists that X, Y, or Z could literally hate you as much as you think they do. Those are the tough cases. These are the cases that may absolutely be impossible to solve without the assistance of the union, the Office of Governance, Accountability, and Compliance (OGAC), higher level College administrators, Voodoo practitioners, etc.

What is far more likely, however, is that you and X, Y, or Z haven't figured out how to communicate with each other, that you and X, Y, or Z don't "get" one another, or that you and X, Y, or Z are afraid of each other. (Yes, bosses can be afraid of their own workers.) In these cases, there may be simple and practical steps that you can take yourself, and that hopefully X, Y or Z is willing to take with you, that can begin to heal the relationship.

The first step has to be . . .

STEP 1: Believe the premise

Try to entertain the thought that the other person truly wants to do their job to the best of their abilities no matter how much they look to you like a total screw-up. (Substitute R-rated term for screw-up as needed.) They may eventually prove to you that you were right all along but start by giving them the benefit of the doubt. Know that intending to do one's best does not make one infallible and that even a bad decision can be made with good intentions.

STEP 2: Fill in gaps in communication with writing

So, these steps are not necessarily to be followed in order, nor do they all apply to every situation. Step 1 really does have to be Step 1. I am putting this suggestion near



the top of the list because it is the NUMBER 1 suggestion I make to employees who are cross-wise with supervisors or other employees because of communication.

Lots of people in all walks of life are not incredibly effective about communicating in writing. Doing so is not always even necessary. Communicating verbally feels more genuine. However, when communication is verbal, what one person thinks they have said, and what another person thinks they have heard can get jumbled up. One person acts on what they believe was agreed upon and the other gets mad because that wasn't at all what THEY thought was agreed upon.

If that is something that is happening to you in relation to a supervisor, an employee, or coworker, particularly if it happens more than once, consider following up a verbal conversation with a written summary. What does that look like? Try this:

"Hi X. It was great to visit with you earlier. Just to follow up and make sure I understood exactly what you need from me on this project, I believe we agreed that I would do the following three things by the end of today (or this week, or this month, etc.) Please let me know if I have correctly captured what we spoke about or if I missed anything."

The other person can then confirm or get back to you if they intended something else and you both have something in writing to refer back to. If the other person does not respond to your email you can at least say that you took their non-response as implicit approval.

Be nice. Be polite. Be professional. Do not go overboard. This should only be for important stuff. Don't do this:

"re: Conversation at 8:34 AM Tuesday. You wished me a good morning. By this I interpreted that you meant good in relation to job satisfaction, task accomplishment, and overall mental and physical health. Please provide specific action items to accompany each of these areas. What key performance indicators shall we use to measure whether or not I had a good morning?"

STEP 3: Ask why (politely)

It can be frustrating and demoralizing if someone feels that decisions made about them are arbitrary and capricious. It is OK to politely ask for an explanation. This can

be done either verbally or in writing depending on how distressed you feel about the decision. If you have been asked to do or not do something specific that makes you feel uncomfortable, don't lead with a refusal (which could be insubordinate), lead with a request to understand. A request to understand is NOT insubordination and you should feel entitled to ask – because you are. Try something like this:

"Hi X. I saw your email that we should all use green paper from now on. I will be happy to use green paper, but I wanted to share with you that I'm finding the green paper to be hard to read. Could you share with me some insights about why we're being asked to use green paper?"

Often, knowing that there is a reason behind a decision is more than enough to help us feel OK about that decision. Asking can also open up a problem-solving dialog if the decision is causing you a problem.

STEP 4: Explain why (politely)

This is the flip side to STEP 3 and probably applies to a greater degree to managers. People generally feel better about decisions if they know there is a rational reason behind it – even if they don't fully agree with the reason. If you take the time to explain why, not only do they feel more satisfied that the decision is not capricious, they also feel valued because you took the time to explain. Try this:

"Hi everyone. I need us to make a change in our department. We need to all start using green paper. The department down the hall is responsible for organizing all the communication from this building and they have indicated that it would help them keep reports organized for the upcoming audit if each department used their own specific color of paper. We're going to be green. Please let me know if this change poses a problem for you and we'll figure out how to solve it."

STEP 5: Keep a work journal

I have kept a journal for 30+ years but I don't do it the way you're supposed to. I almost never write about my feelings. I just keep a record of what I did that day. My journal includes what I did at work, what I did with my family, what I did at church, etc. so, if I need to remember something later, I can look back through my journal and find it. I still find the kinesthetic experience of



writing by hand on paper to be more helpful in organizing my thoughts but electronic may be better for you.

If you don't want to keep a general journal, consider at least keeping a work journal of things you did, conversations you had, and anything that happened that seemed noteworthy. If you have a vague uncomfortable feeling about your work experience, a work journal can help you become aware of patterns either in what you are doing or what someone else is doing. This can help you decide if there is a problem you need to ask about.

STEP 6: Say "Thank you" and "I'm sorry"

A number of years ago someone asked me what my philosophy of leadership was. The question took me by surprise because I hadn't really thought about it. Leaders are supposed to be rich. Union officers don't earn a penny so how was I a leader? Also, I hadn't read any of the books you're supposed to read. I couldn't tell a TQM from a 6 Sigma if it bit me. So, since I couldn't give the "right" answer I just said what I actually believed.

My answer was that I believed in saying "Thank you" as often as I possibly could and "I'm sorry" whenever I ought to.

First, it is absolutely the case that the people we work with deserve to be thanked for all they do. They may not expect a thank-you, but it can be very validating to get one. Say thank-you, assuming it is a sincere thank-you, and you can quickly see walls between people come tumbling down.

Perhaps even more powerful is an "I'm sorry". One of the greatest myths around is that admitting you were wrong makes you look weak. This is dead wrong. Nothing makes you look stronger than a sincere admission that you made a mistake. Saying you were wrong makes you very vulnerable, but that vulnerability can open up possibilities for dialog and understanding that might have seemed impossible before.

Note: "I'm sorry" has to be about what YOU did, not what the other person did. Never say, "I'm sorry that you were mad about what I said." Say, "I'm sorry that I said that to you. It was unkind and wrong."

STEP 7: Ask a friend: "Is it me?"

The theme of this entire issue of the Advocate has been community. This is where community can come into play with Helping Yourself and Helping Your Friends. If you have a trusted friend at work and you are finding yourself in a point of conflict with a coworker, supervisor, or employee, consider asking that friend for feedback. Be open if they tell you that maybe the problem is more about you than it is the other person. Listen to see if they have thoughts about how to get around the problem.

Even more powerfully, if you feel you have a relationship of trust with someone at work and you see that they are in a conflict, consider going to them privately and sharing with them what you think would help. This takes courage and vulnerability on both sides, but it can be healing. I have been blessed with a few friends that have been willing to do this with me.

The most common advice I've needed to hear is, "You've made your point. You have made it coherently and tactfully. It is a good point. Now you need to let this go." That might not at all be the advice you need to hear. I can be a stubborn son of a gun. (Substitute R-rated term for son of a gun as needed.)

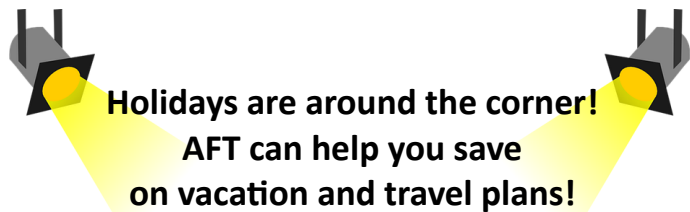
These seven steps are not exhaustive – and they don't all apply in every situation – and there is no particular order to the steps. What I hope these suggestions do is give you, as psychologists will say, a sense of agency – a sense that you have the power to make a difference in your own experience at work. You may be surprised by the results.

These steps may help you think of other steps – other things you can do as preventative maintenance before the metaphorical car metaphorically blows up. If you think of something let me know. Write me at aftlonestar@yahoo.com. If I get some good ones, I'll write a follow up article!

And, guess what? If you try these and other steps and they don't help you build a better relationship with X, Y, or Z, you have all the rights and processes that I have outlined in other issues of this column at your disposal to use. If you are a member of AFT Lone Star, I and the other members of our Executive Board can help you. Let us know!



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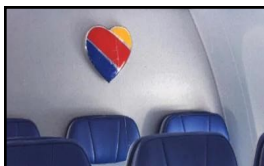
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- To promote academic excellence
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- To protect the dignity and rights of faculty against discrimination
- To ensure that faculty have an effective voice on all matters pertaining to their welfare
- To secure for all members the rights to which they are entitled
- To raise the standards of the profession by establishing professional working conditions
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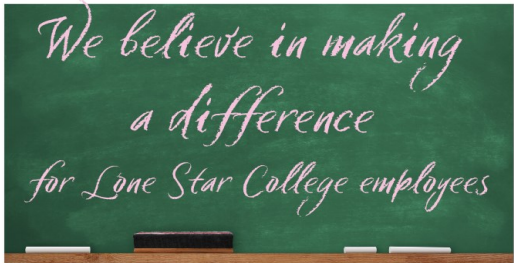


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Katie	Truax	University Park Faculty Vice President	University Park



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.

