



# THE ADVOCATE

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Employee Federation of NHMCCD

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*Education for  
Democracy—  
Democracy for  
Education*

## The Good, the Bad, and The Ugly

### The Good

If you've read The Advocate recently, you know that the AFT has been representing some of our members in problems related to classification. In September of 2000, we had two members adversely affected by reclassification by HR. In one case, a math lab coordinator in the NHC Learning Center was reclassified up three levels and received a significant raise. Our member, the writing lab coordinator in the same location, was not moved. At the same time, a support staff member was not moved to Division Coordinator when other staff doing the same job were reclassified at that level. The AFT has argued steadfastly that these inequities created by HR must be addressed by paying our members the same salary and providing them the same classification as those employees doing the same job. We also argued that they were entitled to back pay to the date the inequities were created. After a year and a half, we are pleased to report that HR ultimately has agreed with our argument. The conflict has been resolved to the full satisfaction of the affected AFT members, including retroactive pay.

### The Bad

We regret that the administration is unmovable at this point on the Dawn Baxley case. You will recall that the district office posted and advertised the position of Associate Dean of Extended Learning at Montgomery College as a C-19 with a salary of \$61,000 to 68,000. Dawn applied, interviewed, and was offered the job at C-19 with a salary of \$62,200. She accepted, but after she had been at Montgomery for a few weeks, she was told that district would not honor the salary offered because paperwork had not been completed properly to make the position a C-19 (the position at Montgomery had previously been called Director of Extended Learning Center, with a classification of C-16, and a starting salary of \$46,974 to \$52,846). After many conversations back and forth and mountains of paperwork, ultimately, HR officially classified the position as C-17 with an annual salary of 52,705, a salary \$7,495 less than the salary Dawn was offered. For full details, please refer to the September/October 2001 issue of The Advocate. We have heard that, when asked how the district could post and offer a salary yet not honor it, at least one administrator has responded, "You can't believe everything you read". Curious. If you don't believe us, ask Dawn Baxley. The AFT is still actively pursuing Dawn's case. This one could go from bad to ugly.

Staff

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#### Upcoming Events

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For Upcoming Events...



#### AFT Eligibility

Full and part-time faculty, professional staff, and support staff are eligible to join the union. All employees up through the associate dean/director level are eligible.

## The Learning College

When I first heard that Terry O'Banion was slated to speak at NHC's Spring 2002 in-service, my initial reaction was to groan, "Something wicked this way comes." We would have to endure yet another consultant who hadn't taught in years, or, worse, wasn't credentialed to teach in a community college, coming here to tell faculty that we are doing things incorrectly and how to do things the right way. In short, another snake oil salesman pandering the latest educational fad. To test my fear, first I checked his background. The back cover of his book, *The Learning College for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, includes the following information:

*Terry O'Banion, Ph.D., is president and CEO of the League for Innovation in the Community College, an international consortium of leading community colleges in the United States and Canada dedicated to experimentation and innovation [...].*

*During a 36-year tenure in community college education, he served as dean of students at two Florida community colleges and as professor of community college education at the University of Illinois in Urbana. Dr. O'Banion has written more than 100 articles on community college issues and has been a consultant to over 500 community colleges and universities in 45 states and Canada. He earned a doctorate in administration in higher education from Florida State University and holds a master's degree in guidance and counseling from the University of Florida.*

I can't find any record that he has actually taught an academic subject

as a regular professor at any community college.

My angst regarding the newest fad proved interesting. I was both right and wrong. He did use the latest buzz words in higher education that are currently all the rave, but the ideas didn't seem particularly new. In fact, much of what he said appeared to be re-packaged Peter Senge and Peter Drucker.

In many ways, such presentations are harmless enough. However, they deserve closer scrutiny when a college commits to a "paradigm shift" (the language of O'Banion, et al, not mine) to a "learning college." NHC's president, Dr. David Sam, has made such a commitment, and Cy-Fair College is constructing its programs, courses, and buildings around being a "learning college."

I certainly wouldn't dismiss all that Dr. O'Banion had to say. In fact, I liked several things he said. I attended a small group meeting with him in which he offered some practical advice on being "learning centered." He recommended the use of the one-minute paper at the end of class in which students identify the main thing they learned in class that day and what remains unclear. This is a useful technique, but not one that is entirely new. Several of the faculty at that meeting have used that idea for years. He also said that to become a "learning centered college," which is "student-centered," college-wide systems like registration and the computer system must be improved. A fascinating recommendation that he made was that the college should eliminate late registration during the first week of classes. Calling it "an abomination

to a learning centered environment," he said that it sends a message to students that the first week of learning isn't important. He claimed, correctly I think, that the college has created a culture promoting this attitude in students by allowing registration to drag on through the first week of classes. He argued that we can change that culture by having late registration end the week before the first day of class, and we won't lose students, which is, of course, a revenue issue that the administration touts in favor of the current late registration. Most faculty in our district have agreed with this thinking for a long time. Faculty are often the focus of speakers like Dr. O'Banion and are made to feel that we are the only ones who need to change. It was great fun to sit in the room and watch him turn to administrators and challenge them to take this bold step regarding late registration as a sign of their commitment to the "learning college." The look on their faces reflected their resistance to his idea, suggesting that they might be thinking, "Do you mean you want to move my cheese? Move someone else's!"

In the next *Advocate*, I'll focus more on change as it relates to the classroom and faculty. Interestingly, Dr. O'Banion seems to see faculty as relatively resistant to change and, in particular, suggests that teacher unions offer "mobilized resistance to change" (*A Learning College*, 30). We'll see.

Alan Hall

## Contracting Out Food Services

Sometimes it seems that the college district works hard not to learn from experience. Twice our district has tried contracting out food service, once at Kingwood and once at Montgomery. In both instances, the results were unsatisfactory, and the campuses returned to using college employees to run the cafeterias. At its January 22, 2002 meeting, the Board of Trustees approved a contract with a professional food service consulting firm, H. David Porter Associates, Inc., at a cost of \$57,260 to conduct a feasibility study regarding contracting out food service in the entire district. In describing their understanding of their charge, Porter writes, "The District is seeking a professional food service consulting firm to produce an unbiased, external assessment/analysis of NHMCCD's current food service operations, local competitive market, and projected future food service operational needs." The study is characterized as just that—a study looking at current operations and their future. However, I've been in this business long enough to smell a hidden agenda, and there appears to be one. Porter goes on to write, "The District is preparing to seek a vendor to perform the retail food service, catering and vending on the campuses and in the District office. The District's strategy is to first evaluate the current program and then define for the interested vendors the program the District wants delivered." Call me suspicious, but it sounds as though a decision has already been made. It certainly

wouldn't be the first time that a committee met or a study was conducted when the outcome was predetermined. The evaluation task force and a few hiring committees come to mind.

What seems to be driving this action is the administration's concern that the food service operation is losing money, certainly a concern that bears review. However, we must remember that our employees are providing a service, and the expenses are part of the cost of doing business at the college.

You might wonder why any of this matters. It is important because we have a number of college employees who work in food services, many with long term service. Were the district to contract out these jobs, there would be an effort to place them in other positions, but that would depend on their having the skills to go into those jobs. There are no guarantees. In fact, some of them have been told that they may lose their jobs, leaving them without benefits. I have found these employees to be efficient, cheerful, hardworking, and eager to please. Standing in line, I have heard students engaged in conversation with the cafeteria staff. Obviously, they know one another and have a good relationship. We have no real student union on any campus. The cafeterias provide our students with a warm, friendly place to gather. As a matter of fact, I have heard no complaints about this area. It seems a shame to put them out on the street, especially when there are

other operations in the district that are cash cows that can offset food service losses.

Contracting out food services did not work well in the past. Rather than go down that path again, the wiser move would be to use Porter to help the district figure out how to improve food services now offered and how to reduce losses. Such a move would also be far more employee friendly. Frankly, I am deeply troubled that the district is ostensibly conducting a feasibility study, when, in fact, the powers that be seem to have made up their minds already. It is time to stop such behavior.

Alan Hall



Welcome  
New  
Members

## Excuse Me, Uh, Professor?

It was the first day of class and I stood before 20 students at Tomball College who were enrolled in *Introduction to Mass Communications*.

"My name is Dave McKinney and I am your instructor," I said. That took care of five seconds of the three-hour class period. Now what?

So began my second career as a college instructor three years ago. Although my learning curve in transitioning to the classroom is approaching equilibrium, I still have a way to go before I trade in my Dockers and polo shirt for the obligatory corduroy patched-elbow sports coat, trimmed beard and pipe.

I teach in the evening—usually on Wednesdays or Thursdays. By day I manage public affairs activities for Shell's Deer Park refinery/chemical plant complex along the Houston Ship Channel. I used to refer to my position at Shell as my "real" job and teaching as my "other" job. Not any longer. Facing inquisitive and outspoken students every week is as "real" as it gets.

The inspiration for my venture into higher education was a professor in graduate school at Southern Illinois University in the early 1980s. He effectively combined academia with real-world experience, which made his lectures and classroom discussions come alive with relevance to current events.

My professor often commented that if any of his students had the opportunity to someday return to the classroom in a teaching role we should take it. In 1999, with nearly 25 years experience as a newspaper reporter and corporate communicator, it was my turn to give back. An e-mail reply from my

former professor, 13 years after I completed graduate school, welcomed me to this honorable profession and acknowledged, "You were paying attention, after all!"

During the first class period of my first semester, shortly after I introduced myself, a student pointed to a sign on the wall that stated eating and drinking in the classroom were not permitted. I set down my soft drink, cleared my throat and proceeded to outline the course to the snickering students.

A week later, a student was struggling with what to call me, even though I had written my name on the blackboard the first day. After stuttering a bit, the student finally settled on "professor." I thought to myself, now there's a bright young man. A woman in the front row quickly burst the bubble by asking if I actually was *just* an instructor. Busted! Obviously she was more astute than her classmate.

Week in and week out, teaching a college class requires a lot of work. There are lectures, exams, projects, grading, and many administrative tasks. On a per hour basis over the 16-week semester, the financial compensation is, well, let's say that I do not do this for the money. Nevertheless, an extra paycheck every two weeks comes in handy for those items that fall under the category of "don't really need, but nice to have."

Walking the halls of Tomball College, chatting with current and former students, nodding at fellow instructors, collecting mail from my faculty mail box and parking in the "staff only" section on campus give me a sense of belonging to this vibrant, expanding institution. Of course, the reason I am

there is to interact with my students, to expose them to the world of mass communications. I am pleased to verify that the educational process can be, indeed, a two-way street: my students and I learn from each other.

I often remind my new students that they no longer are in high school. I tell them they are young adults and it is their choice whether or not to attend class or read the textbook. One time my speech went over so well that half of the students did not return from a brief class break. I later adjusted the grading system to include a five percent discretionary evaluation tied to attendance and participation in class discussions. This stemmed the tide of early departures. Now, if I could just get them to arrive on time...

As rewarding as teaching is, it does offer a few sobering moments. Like the time I led a lively dialogue on the role of advertising. We talked about the effectiveness of various television commercials. When the discussion was over, I asked if anyone had additional questions or comments. One student raised his hand and inquired. "When is the last day you can drop a class?"

Any budding sense of overconfidence that I had mastered the teaching gig was diffused by that question. Perhaps I'll never master this profession, and that probably is a good thing. The ongoing challenge is what keeps me coming back.

Incidentally, the student who asked about dropping the class stuck it out and earned a solid B. Yes!!

David McKinney

## First-class teachers, second-class citizens

The Hollywood image of the professor is perhaps best personified by John Houseman's portrayal of Professor Kingsfield in "The Paper Chase," a well-established, well-paid, full-time, tenured faculty member with the freedom to teach his class as he chooses.

If only life were like the movies. Today, 43 percent of the nation's faculty are part-timers, and the ratio of part-time to full-time grows larger every year. While many of these instructors are excellent teachers, and expect to be treated accordingly, the truth is somewhat different. Most part-time professors are not permitted to have office hours, advise students, conduct research or participate in campus life in the same manner as their full-time colleagues. What is more, only 17 percent of part-timers receive health insurance, and just 20 percent have a subsidized retirement plan. And, of course, wages for these workers are outrageously low.

In California, for example, where the annual average compensation for full-time community college faculty is \$45,700, the compensation package for a faculty adjunct with a full-time workload is just \$19,245. Graduate teaching assistants make even less, generally around \$11,000, and often have to purchase their own health insurance. Moreover, many of these graduate employees are international students barred by visa restrictions from seeking other types of work.

The terms "part-time faculty" and "adjunct professor" don't adequately describe the work life of these instructors. A significant number are "freeway flyers" who cobble together

a full-time workload by teaching a few courses at three or four different campuses.

No matter what they're called – part-timers, adjunct professors, or teaching assistants– they often lack basic workplace protections. Two years ago, Richard P. Chait, a professor of higher education at Harvard University, analyzed 250 college faculty handbooks and found that only 10 had academic policies that explicitly mentioned part-timers. In other words, nearly half the undergraduate teaching force lacks workplace protection and academic freedom. Unprotected by tenure, part-timers are arbitrarily fired– or simply fail to have their contracts renewed.

Consider, for example, a recent case in Kentucky involving an adjunct professor who was removed from teaching a course on communications because he used offensive and oppressive words– in a lesson about offensive and oppressive words. Others have been fired or been denied a new contract because they organized unions or refused to make grade changes.

Part-timers are routinely left in limbo regarding course assignments, and few are placed on tracks that lead to full-time employment. Furthermore, because of their lack of job security, part-timers are more vulnerable to intimidation and harassment by administrators.

But the news is not all bad for part-timers. A new report from the American Federation of Teachers, *Marching Toward Equity*, notes that many campuses and many states are making slow, but steady, improvements in the treatment of part-time faculty. For example, in October 1999, California Gov. Gray Davis signed a law that provides matching

funds for community college districts that offer health insurance and paid office hours for part-timers who teach at least 40 percent of a full-time load. Other states, most notably Washington, have passed similar legislation. One important aspect of the California law is that it required a compensation study of the state's 30,000 part-time faculty members. As the *Sacramento Bee* noted, "The first step in addressing the part-timer problem is to determine how much of a problem it is, how much it hurts students and how unfairly it treats the part-time faculty members themselves."

But part-timers aren't sitting quietly by waiting for a knight in shining armor to come to the rescue. Thousands are joining unions and negotiating contracts that provide increased wages, benefits, job security and protections for academic freedom. And during the week of Oct. 28-Nov. 3, from coast to coast, part-timers held "Campus Equity Week," a series of events to raise the profile of part-time faculty issues. The American Federation of Teachers, which represents 45,000 part-time instructors, worked with a long list of other faculty unions and higher education. In the fictional world of "The Paper Chase," Professor Kingsfield required his students to defend their opinions with legal precedents and rigorous logic. In the real world of college campuses with part-time faculty, the case for better pay is airtight: We entrust them with the education of millions of students; we should compensate them with fair pay and fair treatment.

Sandra Feldman  
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## Reflections

Why should I join the AFT? For years, I have received an application every year in my mailbox and did nothing with it. When I started working at North Harris College in 1993, I was so full of life and enthusiasm that every single opportunity to promote the great educational values of NHMCCD became almost an obsession. College night events, apartment visits, business establishment visits, and mall fairs were sought-after opportunities for me to promote the academic wonders of NHC. Registration activities, troubleshooting student problems, and inspiring prospects were all part of my ongoing fun-filled agenda because I believe in the college district value statements. Bearing witness to these statements has become my daily mantra to energize myself and the individuals working with and around me. A witness is defined by the depth of his belief in the good tidings he is proclaiming. Years have gone by and I have never wavered in my belief in the goodness of our college district values. In fact, every single one of my annual job performance reviews speaks well of my remarkable personal and professional contributions to the college. This, I thought, would give me an opportunity to grow because our college district believes: "The most important resources of the North Harris Montgomery Community College District are the individual faculty and staff members, who are entitled to a supportive collegial work environment which rewards excellence, provides opportunities for professional development, encourages meaningful involvement in the decision-making process, and provides excellent compensation."

However, despite the many good

years I have contributed to this great organization, I have remained in my current position. In fact, after several years, I found out that I had admittedly been classified too low by mistake. I kept wondering how long it would take to rectify a classification error since years had already gone by, and yet it is now still in progress. But, I believe in the college district value statements, and I believe in the goodness of people. This has not deterred me from moving forward with my best intentions in serving the students in their quest for educational excellence and lifelong learning.

Through it all, I've been a quiet observer. Certain individuals have inspired me: Alan Hall, Dawn Baxley, Debbie Ellington, Pat Gray, Velma Trammell, Carol Lucas, and many more. They are exemplary. I see their dedication in what they do. They remind me of my personal belief in the holistic approach to helping people. Unwavering in their commitment to students, they are also constantly in support of their colleagues in promoting the spirit of camaraderie, fairness, access and equity. They are the reasons why I finally joined AFT. It is the collegial spirit that brings me to this group. Little did I know that my participation would open up more opportunities for my family and me. AFT has lots of benefits that include family members too. This is what they are about. This is what *we* are about. The question is not "Why should I join AFT?" but rather "What took me so long?"

Severo M. Balason, Jr.

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## AFT Presents ...

Programs that reflect our ongoing commitment to offer topics of interest for faculty and staff. The following programs will be offered for the current semester:

Christopher Tritico, AFT's local attorney, in a forum addressing legal concerns of faculty and staff.

The Texas Federation of Teachers presenting the most current information regarding retirement benefits and Social Security.

Representative Gene Green discussing HR 2638, a bill that would affect Social Security and retirement options.

### Tomball

Tritico TBA

TFT 3/26

### Kingwood

Tritico 2/12

TFT 2/26

### North Harris

Tritico 4/4

TFT 2/28

Rep. Green TBA

### Montgomery

Tritico 3/26

TFT TBA

Rep. Green TBA

### District Office

TFT 2/28

*Watch for e-mail announcements for time and room location.*


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We invite you to send us your opinions, your news, your questions and so forth. The Advocate is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your articles to Dawn Baxley, Editor, MC, or e-mail: dawnb@nhmccd.edu, or submit to any of the following officers:

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