



THE ADVOCATE

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Employee Federation of NHMCCD

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*Education for
Democracy—
Democracy for
Education*

Reflections on a Tainted Pool

On April 3rd the Communications and Humanities faculty at NHC received the following e-mail from our Associate Dean, Dr. Jennie Harrison:

“The new evaluation model requires that each faculty member ask two of his classes each semester to evaluate him or her. This evaluation should take place by drop date, which is April 8. I know this is late notice, but please try to come as close as you can to the deadline. Everyone is insecure about the new system and I think we’ll be allowed some room for error.”

In a subsequent e-mail from Judy McCann, the division’s Administrative Assistant, we were informed that the deadline had been extended to April 12th and that paper evaluation forms were no longer available. Students had to be directed to the Learning Center or a computer classroom to complete an online version of the form. Moreover, the NHC website did not have this form. Students needed to go to the Montgomery College website to find it.

I was already a bit annoyed by the fact that I would have to take more valuable class time than usual for the evaluation process by relocating the students to a room with computers. I also fundamentally disagree with evaluations being completed any time sooner than the last week of classes. My Introduction to Philosophy course, for example, is structured so that we come full circle. I show how the social and ethical issues that Socrates addressed still plague modern society. How can a student properly evaluate the course until this connection has been made? It’s like writing a book review for a

book that you haven’t finished.

Philosophical objections aside, the new online evaluations have more significant flaws. After my students completed the forms, they returned to our regular classroom where I was waiting for them. I can only describe their demeanor as livid. They explained to me that the online form retains a drop-down menu with the social security number of every student who has filled out an evaluation on that computer. What’s more, you can simply click on a social security number and the evaluation database will give you the student’s personal information and course schedule. One of my students, who is a former victim of identity theft, was furious and mentioned suing the college.

Why would we utilize an evaluation system that seriously violates the personal privacy of our students and leaves the college wide open for potential lawsuits? Furthermore, a prankster can evaluate any courses that the student is enrolled in but has not yet evaluated. The prankster just needs to click on a social security number that’s already preserved on the computer and then mischievously start filling out evaluations. I certainly don’t think any of the evaluations of my classes hold any merit since people who aren’t even my students could have filled them out. Or consider this scenario. I’m a faculty member in desperate need of good student evaluations. I sit behind my office computer with the class roster that has my students’ social security numbers and start giving myself superlative evaluations. Who’s to stop me? Perhaps I’m considering the possibility that the evaluations could be traced back to my computer. I’ll just go into

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AFT Dues

Full-time Faculty: \$24.90

Full-time Professional Staff: \$21.35

Full-time Support Staff: \$17.75

Adjunct Faculty & Part-time Staff: \$14.65

Reflections on a Tainted Pool (cont'd)

the Learning Center and move from computer to computer as I give myself one stellar evaluation after another. Indeed, I deserve high praise for exploiting such a flawed evaluation system.

I raised these concerns with Matthew Heck, who originally designed the online evaluations for Montgomery College. He investigated the problems and told me that the potential for identity theft does not exist at his college because they use Macintosh computers. The Internet Explorer web browser that is used by NHC's computers has an "auto fill" feature that's keeping everyone's social security number for all the world to see. His solution was to delete the social security numbers and turn off the "auto fill" feature on every computer. A daunting task both because turning off the feature involves several steps and because there are hundreds of computers spread out between the Learning Center and computer classrooms. Nonetheless, I was willing to turn off as many as I could to stop the potential for identity theft of students. I, how-

ever, soon discovered that it was really an exercise in futility since even after the "auto fill" was turned off it could more easily be turned back on. In fact, as soon as you open Internet Explorer, it invites the next user to turn "auto fill" back on.

I then spoke to the Associate Vice Chancellor of Research and Planning, Mike Green. After I shared my concerns with him and explained the impracticality of manually turning off every single computer's "auto fill" function, he acknowledged that this was a serious, unexpected problem that needed to be immediately rectified. He was quite concerned about the possibility of identity theft. I also argued that none of the evaluations have any validity since they could be the product of pranksters. He disagreed and said, "Not all. We still have some paper evaluations being used this semester." He went on to say that the plan is to electronically scan all of the paper evaluations and dump them in the same pool as the online ones. Then he grew silent as he drew the inference for himself. Once the paper evaluations are dumped into a pool of possibly tainted online evaluations, how can

we make a distinction? As far as anyone is concerned, all of the evaluations are null and void at that point.

The next day, the online evaluation website was pulled down. But the damage had already been done. Right now we are sitting on a tainted pool of student evaluations that hold no validity and a mine of potential lawsuits. The only reasonable and ethical course of action is to toss out all of the online evaluations from this semester. This could have been easily avoided if the new online evaluation procedure was properly tested first. Instead, it appears to have been hastily implemented in a very ad hoc way. Perhaps I can comment on this when I evaluate the administrators who, without any critical reflection, made a decision with wide ranging implications for students and faculty alike. Surely, they should be subject to the same level of scrutiny as the rest of us. But I think they forgot to include that form on the website.

Nick Oweyssi
Associate Professor of Philosophy
North Harris College

Changes in the Salary Structure

The results of the AFT's survey on the proposed changes to the summer salary structure reflected mixed reviews. Perhaps the best approach to the proposal is to look at winners and losers. The clear winners are faculty who are able to live on their 9-month salary and do not teach in the summers. They will receive a 15% increase in their 9-month base salary without

changing anything, a clear win. They, rightfully, are most enthusiastic. The losers are faculty that have routinely taught both summer sessions. People who do this typically do so because they need the money. If they are held to 10.5 months and not allowed to teach the second summer session, they will earn about \$1,000 less than they would have teaching both summer sessions un-

der the old system with a 3% raise next year. Of course, they also do not have to teach the second session. Here, the issue is time versus income. For some faculty with children in college or other financial burdens facing them, they may prefer to have the income. The solution is not to prohibit faculty teaching the second summer term under the new system. If they were allowed to teach

Changes in the Salary Structure (cont'd)

a second session at the adjunct rate, they would come out ahead of the old system with a 3% raise for next year. There would be no losers.

When Dr. Pickelman first presented his proposal to the AFT, his position was that the district would discourage faculty from teaching two summer sessions in order for them to rest and renew. However, according to the handout of the final proposal presented on conference day, "Faculty will be limited to one summer session under 10.5 month contract." Faculty will be allowed to teach a second session only if the needs of the district warrant it. Thus, the district has gone from discouraging teaching two sessions to prohibiting it except under special circumstances. One supposes that the concern for our well-being is overridden in such circumstances. The AFT's position

is that, while we appreciate the administration's concern about our well-being, whether or not to teach a second summer session should be the faculty member's choice. The truth is that some faculty need to choose income over time. Prohibiting their teaching a second summer session amounts to unpaid time off, and they may be forced to seek employment elsewhere, which is often the case for public school teachers who are forced to find summer jobs. If the district is going to pay the adjunct rate for a second summer session, why do they care whether it is paid to a part-time faculty member or a full-time one? It won't cost any more money to let the full-timer teach. If the full-time faculty members who routinely have taught two summer sessions in the past are allowed to teach a second summer session if they so choose under the new system, then they, too, will come out winners. Everyone appears to win.

The union is always cautious when

such fundamental change is confronting employees. Our goal is that no one be harmed. We will monitor the application of this new salary schedule carefully. We are also mindful of the slippery slope. We do not want to see this change be the first step in breaking the summer pay system. There are no guarantees that the 10.5-month contracts will continue into the future. We can envision scenarios where the administration might argue that the 10.5-month contracts are no longer justified. We will all be watching.

In conclusion, the new proposal has many advantages for some faculty. If full-time faculty are allowed to make the choice themselves on whether or not to teach a second summer session, it appears to have advantages for all faculty. If the administration backs away from the arguably paternalistic prohibition, then the AFT fully supports the proposal.

Alan Hall

The New Salary Structure: Neither Fair nor Equitable

The news is not all good regarding the new district salary schedule. Counselors and librarians working a 12-month schedule and faculty teaching 9-month schedule will in fact see a 15% raise in their pay. However, faculty traditionally teaching

12-month schedules will receive only a 2% raise.

The table below compares 2001/2002 salaries with alternative scenarios. Row one represents the current situation for an instructor with a 9-month salary of \$44k, teach-

ing a full summer load. Row two displays the results if a 3% pay raise is put in place, with a full 12-month teaching load being retained. Row three shows what that same instructor will make under the new salary schedule, limited now to teaching only a 10.5-month schedule.

	Year	9-month salary	Summer Pay	Annual Salary	Change/%
ROW 1	2001/2002	\$44,000.00	\$13,640.00	57,640	\$7,040.00
ROW 2	3% raise	\$45,320.00	\$14,049.20	59,369	\$1729.00 3%
ROW 3	NEW	\$50,600.00	\$8,433.33	59,033	(\$336) -1%

The New Salary Structure: Neither Fair nor Equitable (cont'd)

The results show that the instructor will actually make \$336 LESS under the new salary schedule than if a 3% raise across the board were put into effect. In other words, the instructor's salary has been increased, but his/her pay has been cut.

Of course, the "upside" is that the instructor is making essentially the same income in 10.5 months as s/he would make in a 12-month schedule. **The "downside" is that the instructor who traditionally teaches year round is only receiving a 2% pay raise over his/her 2001/2002 pay, while counselors and librarians who work year round will receive a 15% pay raise.** Is this fair or equitable?

In order for an instructor who traditionally teaches a 12-month schedule to get even close to a 15% raise, the instructor must continue to teach a 12-month schedule, along with as many over-loads as possible. Even then, the best the instructor can do is an 8.1% pay raise over 2001/2002 pay. This, of course, defeats one of the stated goals of the new salary schedule: to reduce "stress" on faculty.

If the district wants to raise pay to put NHMCCD back in the top five in salaries in Texas, then just raise base pay 15%, and allow instructors to continue to teach a full summer load if they wish. Or perhaps grandfather instructors who have been teaching 12-month schedules. The Chancellor has stated on numerous occasions he would like to reward loyalty to the institution. This would be one way to do just that. New hires would be subject to the two-class summer load limit, and over time, through attrition, the four-class summer load would eventually disappear.

If the district sincerely cares about faculty burnout, there are more effective ways of handling it. Give instructors one of every seven years off like faculty at four-year schools. Reduce the teaching load for full-time faculty. Allow faculty to decide which two semesters to teach full time and which one to teach for extra pay.

Generally, instructors teaching year round don't do it for the love of the game. They do it for the money. In other words, those who teach in the summer cannot afford **not** to. As a result of this new pay schedule, if implemented as proposed, those instructors who need an income boost the most will receive the smallest pay increase.

In addition to the math, the wisdom of cutting instructional benefits at a time of adjunct and full-time teacher shortages is also highly questionable. With the summary firing of the associate deans, and the slashing of instructor benefits, you'd think NHMCCD was in some sort of financial hot water.

Instead, we're told that this 15% increase is only possible because of Cy-Fair coming on line, indicating not only that there is no shortage of funds, but rather, a one time abundance of funds. (Wasn't it just a couple of years ago that it was imperative we cut rising personnel costs by jamming classes full of students for the sake of "section management"? Is that no longer an issue now?)

Then there's the issue of who teaches which summer session. Full-time instructors, to maximize their weeks off, would be wise to teach second summer sessions, receiving nine consecutive weeks off. But enrollment is usu-

ally lower in the second session than the first. What if three instructors want to teach second session, but enrollment can only justify enough sections for two? Who decides, and by what criteria do they decide, who teaches first session, who teaches second, etc?

Additionally, summer classes with full-time instructors listed on the schedule fill faster than ones where the instructor's name is left blank. If fewer full-timers teach summer sessions, that will probably lower enrollments over time. Enough, eventually, to give the administration further justification to further reduce instructional benefits once again, a.k.a. no more 10.5 month contracts.

The reduction of the summer teaching benefits is just the first step. The Chancellor has long been on record as being opposed to having full-timers teach summer classes at full-time pay. And his reasoning for opposing it has changed over time as well. First, he believed that academic standards in the summer were more lax than in the normal school year because that was "the way things were at Galveston College" when he was chancellor there. Then the issue was, "Wouldn't you like to earn in nine months what you earn in 12?" Well, that has yet to happen. Now it's instructor burnout, or difficulty budgeting, or our rating vs. other colleges in Texas, or some other bull.

The fact of the matter is that the Chancellor thinks it makes no difference whether or not a full or part-time instructor teaches in the summer. To the district, adjuncts teaching summer classes will save them

The New Salary Structure: Neither Fair nor Equitable (cont'd)

money. They sincerely do not believe students actively decide from whom to take their classes. District thinks it can have it both ways: high summer enrollments with lower personnel costs. Only people who have never taught could believe such a

thing.

In the end, the apparent purpose of these cuts in instructional costs through the cutting of summer pay and section management mandates is to make more money available for

administrative pay raises. I do not believe this is a worthwhile reason to jam classes full of students taught (in general) by less experienced instructors. And neither should you.

Tim Howard

Downgrade.com

When I attempted to update my department's web page this past semester, I was greeted by an unpleasant surprise: it was gone. I thought that it might be a server problem. After a few phone calls, I discovered that NHC had an entirely new website. I didn't realize that the old one was obsolete since it was only about a year old. This will be our third website in the three years I have been with the college. I was interested to see how much of an improvement the new site must be to merit such a quick transition.

The first thing that struck me was the address, www.northharriscollege.com. Why did we get the business ".com" designation rather than the traditional ".edu"? Had we joined ranks with the University of Phoenix and other "for profit" degree mills? The Faculty Senate investigated this issue and received the following email response from Andre Perez, Director of External Affairs:

".edu was an extension that was created for four-year colleges and universities. NHMCCD kind of slipped in under the door. Most community colleges have to use .cc.tx.us as their extension. The reason NHC uses .com is when using the .edu we have to use the nhc.nhmccd.edu URL. The only tags we can use

with [northharriscollege](http://northharriscollege.com) (as a URL) are .com, .org, and .net. Since .com is the most recognized to people, we use this one the most. A marketing thing for recall measures."

I could see how we might want to avoid using nhc.nhmccd.edu as our URL since it is a bit cumbersome. However, I find the fact that .com was selected among the alternatives to be quite unsettling. Clearly, .org would have been a more appropriate choice. Our website does come up with the other extensions, but it's the .com address that's posted on the billboards around town. I find this to be an insidious practice in a college culture where faculty have to face students who already come in with a consumer mentality.

The other thing that troubled me about our new home on the web was the layout of the site itself. If anything, it is a downgrade from the old site. There are certain principles that guide good web design. Here are a few basic ones:

- Light colored backgrounds are best.
- Do not have a cluttered lay out.
- Avoid the need for scrolling.
- Make navigation easy and intuitive.

The color of our new site would be inconspicuous if it joined the mili-

tary. But in the world of civilians, it sticks out like a sore thumb. It is a hideous shade of dark green, while white is the color of preference for backgrounds. As far as the layout is concerned, where simplicity is the rule, it looks like a kindergarten collage gone bad. There are so many links and icons plastered every which way that I get a headache if I stare at it for more than a few seconds. I suppose the upside to all of this is that one need not scroll down because every link and its cousin have been squeezed onto a single screen. By the way, I'm not making up these principles. You can find dozens of sites on the internet that list them for you.

See, for example, <http://www.grantasticdesigns.com/5rules.html>. Better yet, just look at the websites for Kingwood, Tomball, and Montgomery colleges. They employ all of these principles. NHC is the black sheep of the district, or green sheep as the case may be.

Is the new site easy to navigate? Finding information is such a challenge that I'm considering creating a www.northharriscollege.com scavenger hunt for a future edition of [The Advocate](#). I'll give you a little teaser now, courtesy of Sandy Deabler. Try to find information on the

Downgrade.com (cont'd)

NHC Honors Program. It took a week before Sandy, director of the program, could find it. How about the trusty search engine that's provided? Surely, it must help expedite things in such a cluttered site. Well, just type in "Philosophy." It will yield twenty hits, none of which are the Philosophy Department homepage. One reason that the site is so difficult to navigate is because it has been created by an outside contractor that apparently doesn't under-

stand much about how academic institutions classify things. (Insert your own division reorganization joke here).

All in all, www.northharriscollege.com is a downgrade from its predecessor. Not a very wise purchase for a .com institution. As a taxpayer and faculty member, I think that it's a real shame. If the administration had solicited input from faculty members like myself who used the

old site, then we could have provided constructive feedback to put together a great site. Instead, we became www.northharriscollege.com overnight, without warning. Someone does keep moving the cheese, but my mother told me to never eat green cheese.

Nick Oweyssi
Associate Professor of Philosophy
North Harris College

In the Beginning

In the beginning, tax-payers created the North Harris Montgomery Community College District. And on a Thursday in March, its form was declared void. And confusion was upon the face of the employees.

And the Chancellor said, "Let there be reorganization," and there was disorganization. And the Chancellor called the disorganization "reorganization" and saw that it was good.

And the Chancellor said, "Let each college reorganize itself, each according to its own kind." And the Chancellor saw that this was good, and it was so.

And the Chancellor said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the Associate Deans. And let it separate the Associate Deans from their jobs." And it was so.

And the Chancellor said, "Let the departments be gathered together under one Dean who will teach, just like the Associate Deans did but for a lot more money and with a much more vague job description over many more departments." And it was so.

And the Chancellor said, "Let committees put forth department heads, bearing instructionally related burdens, each according to its kind (of subject)." And the Chancellor saw that this was good.

And the Chancellor said, "Let the departments bring forth swarms of business managers, with as of yet undefined job responsibilities, in another year or so." And it was so.

And the Chancellor said, unto the faculty, "You may freely teach the fall and spring semesters, but of the summer semester you shall not teach, for in the day that you teach in the summer, you shall get burned out."

And each college and each committee made recommendations, each according to its kind. And disorganization reigned over the face of the District.

After this, I saw four colleges standing at the four corners of the district, each holding back the winds of disorganization. After this, I looked, and behold a great multitude of applicants, which no man could number, from every nation, from all

tribes and peoples, stood before the hiring committees. These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their resumes in the blood of the associate deans, and they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat, unless the AC blows.

And then I saw the final reorganization plan, rising out of the sea, with ten departments and seven department chairmen with ten business managers. Then I saw another reorganization plan which rose out of the earth; it had two deans. And the employees worshiped the plan saying, "Who has a better plan, and who can fight against it?"

And the reorganization plan exercises all authority and works great signs, so that it deceives those who dwell in the district, bidding them to accept a 15% increase. Let him who has understanding reckon the number of reorganization plans, for it is an inhumane number, its number is 666.

And in the end, Max Weber wept.
Tim Howard

NHMCCD Board Elections

The college district will hold an election Saturday, May 4, for four seats on its Board of Trustees. Three of the seats are unopposed.

Position 3: Stephanie Marquard, six year term

Position 9: Priscilla Kelly, six year term

Position 6: Maria Flotte O'Neill, unexpired two years of Eugene Caldcleugh's term

One race is contested, but with a wrinkle.

Position 4: John Fox (incumbent) vs. Kenneth Thornton.

An article in the Thursday, April 18, 2002 Houston Chronicle reports that, based on "unforeseen work changes," challenger Thornton has

asked that "his candidacy be withdrawn" and "told college district officials that he would not accept the position if he is elected." The law allows the district to cancel an election if positions are uncontested, thus saving the election expense. Unfortunately, Mr. Thornton's request to withdraw came in too late to cancel the election. The cost to the district will be approximately \$80,000, a most unfortunate turn of events. However, there is the possibility of an even more unfortunate event. Mr. Thornton's name will be on the ballot, and these elections always have a low turnout. There is a possibility that Thornton might be elected, and that would be a mess.

Staff

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Food Services

In the last issue of The Advocate, we reported that NHMCCD is considering contracting out food services and has hired a consultant to make a recommendation. The AFT recognizes the district's concern about food services losing money. However, we believe these losses can be reduced by using the consultant to recommend changes in current operations. Any remaining losses should be considered part of the cost of doing business.

Contracting out means potential job losses for several longtime employees. In many contracting out scenarios, an outside vendor will offer to hire all the current employees to make the change acceptable and then lay them off a short time later, or the vendor simply brings in outside employees with meager salaries and benefits.

The AFT doesn't want to see our food services employees lose their salaries and benefits. The admini-

stration seems convinced that students want a food court similar to those in malls. The AFT is all for providing food services that students desire and will patronize. We see no reason not to provide those services with our own loyal employees. In short, we are against contracting out.

Alan Hall

The Year in Retrospect

The AFT has had a phenomenal year. We have sponsored or co-sponsored a number of programs across the district, including Social Security benefits and college retirement (at NHC, co-sponsored with Wellness), employee rights, academic freedom/freedom of speech, the psychology of learning, and grading issues. We also expanded our professional development program by co-sponsoring with the NHC Faculty Senate and Faculty/Staff Center classes in CATs (Classroom Assessment Techniques). We didn't forget the importance of social connections, so we sponsored beginning and ending semester events. All of this accompanied our taking positions and investigating issues in The Advocate, meeting and conferring with the administration, mediating and resolving conflicts, and representing employees on various issues. In short, this year we've provided the highest level of service that we

have ever offered to the district's employees. Faculty and staff have responded by providing us with better than a 35% increase in membership since August.

Special thanks go to all of our program presenters:

- John O'Sullivan, with the Texas Federation of Teachers (Social Security presentation)
- Sandra McMullan, General Counsel and Vice Chancellor, and David Thompson, Attorney at Law with Bracewell and Patterson ("Academic Freedom/Free Speech")
- Cris Tritico, Attorney at Law, AFT's local attorney ("Employee Rights")
- Don Stanley and Sandy Deabler, NHC faculty ("Psychology of Learning")
- Wei Li and Linda Maitland, NHC faculty ("Helping Stu-

- dents Read")
- Dr. David Henderson, Professor at Sam Houston State ("Writing Better Tests")
- Marian Ervin, Myrna Maurer, Claire Phillips, Pat Szmania, Masoud Shafiei-Saraodi, and Michael Harman, NHC faculty and staff (CATs)

Congratulations are due to the entire AFT Executive Committee for their hard work and wise counsel. Much of the credit for the success of these programs also goes to Cris Neuman (chair) and Velma Trammell, members of our recruiting committee, and Michael Harman, Professor of Biology, chair of our Professional Development Committee.

This has been a great year. Next year promises to be even better.

Alan Hall

CALL FOR ARTICLES

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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