



## Abuse of Power Ended

“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.” Abraham Lincoln

On October 1, I received a call from an AFT campus representative requesting that I come there to meet with some faculty and staff members to discuss a problem that they were having with a supervisor. I met with the group on October 3. I cannot discuss the details of the situation since it turned into a personnel matter, but what I heard from them astounded me. Their accounts reflected an exposure to threatening and abusive treatment no employee should have to endure. Faculty and staff told me that they had complained of the supervisor's behavior to the human resources representative and administrators on their campus who were initially unsympathetic and slow to react.

The union acts quickly in these matters, and I told the group that the union would assist them in filing formal complaints within four working days. The charges were formally lodged the following Wednesday, and the supervisor was suspended during the course of the investigation.

Curiously, this supervisor was a relatively new hire whose credentials and references appear to have been in order. This case underscores the fact that the interview process

and calling references will not always tell the college what it needs to know. Often when someone from another college calls references here at NHMCCD, that person will ask if we can provide names of two more people to call. The caller then asks each of those two people for two names and keeps calling, thereby getting a fuller background on the candidate than that provided by the listed references. Greater depth of information than that provided by listed references is critical, especially for high-level positions. One problem that the union sees is that when a hiring process gets to its final stage where the screening committee hands over a list of un-ranked finalists, the committee is then shut out of the process, and there is no further dialog with or accountability for the hiring authority. We believe this particular hire suggests that the process begs a close review.

This situation was a terrible one, but the good news is that, at the conclusion of an investigation, the supervisor was removed from our members' area. It takes a good deal of courage to stand up to an abusive administrator. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Fortunately, our members had the courage and were willing to speak up. The AFT is pleased to have helped them seek and find relief from an outrageous situation.

Alan Hall

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

### Inside this issue:

Abuse of Power Ended	1
Update on Social Security	2
Is the Student a Customer?	3
Making a Difference	4
Portrait of an Adjunct	5
Letters to the Editor	5
Liability Coverage	5



from

AFT

## Update on Social Security

Following last month's article in The Advocate on Social Security, Gary Brown, MC Professor of Political Science, sent the below email to our own District 8 Congressman Kevin Brady, who, as Gary pointed out, is another good contact person regarding the penalties in Social Security benefits that many of us will face unless changes are made at the Congressional level. Congressman Brady serves on the tax bill writing Ways and Means Committee and is on the Social Security Subcommittee within Ways and Means. He quickly responded to Gary, and his letter of response is also included below. If you would also like to contact Congressman Brady, he can be reached through email at rep.brady@mail.house.gov.

Dear Congressman Brady:

Several of my colleagues at Montgomery College and other Texas educators are facing a situation with our Social Security benefits when we all reach retirement age.

All of my working career from 1969 until 1995 I've paid into Social Security and Medicare. Sixteen of those years involved full-time employment in the publishing industry along with two other years working for the City of Raleigh, North Carolina. Add it up and I've contributed over \$28,000 into the fund, far exceeding the minimum number of years to be vested to receive benefits.

As you know, I became a full-time Political Science professor at Montgomery College in 1995. Since I am technically a full-time State of Texas educator, my employer and I do not pay Social Security payroll taxes since we're all covered by the state's ORP or TRS. However, I pay Social Security and Medicare taxes on several thousand dollars of supplementary income based on my part-time service as a MUD board director and author royalties.

I have been told that upon retirement, educators who go into the teaching profession after long careers in the private sector will have their Social Security benefits penalized and not receive the full benefit.

Out of principle, that doesn't seem right. I've fulfilled my end of the bargain and dutifully paid all of my Social Security taxes to be fully vested. Now it seems that I'm being punished for changing careers and moving from the private to public sector.

I'd be grateful if you could look into the situation on my behalf as well as for the others. Feel free to use my case history (I'll gladly supply the specifics).

Sincere personal regards,

Gary Brown  
Professor of Political Science  
Montgomery College

Dear Gary:

Thank you for contacting me regarding your concerns with Social Security and reform of the Government Pension Offset. It is always a pleasure to hear from concerned and involved constituents such as yourself. As a new member of the Social Security Subcommittee, this issue is important to me.

Two of the provisions that seem to be the most unfair to those who have paid into Social Security all their lives are the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). These provisions reduce social security benefits to many Americans. The GPO reduces benefits for individuals who receive a government pension and are eligible for spousal benefits. The WEP affects how retirement or disability benefits are figured if a work-related pension was not covered by social security. The formula used to figure this benefit amount is modified, providing a lower social security benefit.

Approximately 340,000 beneficiaries are affected and an additional 15,000 beneficiaries are being affected each year. About 80% of these beneficiaries are fully offset which means they receive no benefits. Additionally about 40 percent of the total number of affected beneficiaries are widowed individuals, and roughly 70 percent of that number are fully offset. Perhaps the most crucial fact to recognize is that approximately 240,000 affected beneficiaries are women.

## Update on Social Security (cont'd)

Realizing that there are many things wrong with the current Social Security system, February 28, 2002, the House Social Security Subcommittee held a hearing focusing on improvements for women, seniors and working Americans. Unfortunately for many seniors, Congress in the past has been reluctant to take up piecemeal reforms like the GPO and the WEP. Until September 11<sup>th</sup>, President Bush had prepared Congress to take Social Security reform up in the fall of 2001. Now, it appears that will not happen until next year.

We face a tough battle as we balance the many effects social security reform will have on this generation and generations to come. It is important to remember that our children and grandchildren will only recover a portion of the taxes that they pay in through their lifetime and we must also protect their interests as we debate social security reform.

I'm excited to tackle this, because my goal is to preserve Social Security once and for all. Once again, thank you for sharing your view. If I may be of assistance in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Kevin Brady

## Is the Student a Customer?

In business the motto is, "The customer is always right." This makes perfect sense if the goal is to increase sales by encouraging the return of happy customers. In some ways higher education is like a business. Should we treat our students as customers so they will return for more instruction? Should they be allowed to complain to the manager if the service they think they paid for is not what they expected?

I believe the student is not a customer. Our students have been labeled as customers because the organization views them as income units. The college district office allocates resources based on enrollment numbers at each college location. The colleges have been transformed from learning centers into accounting centers.

Customers pay a fee for a service or product that they take home from a store at the mall. Students pay a portion of a fee to have themselves transformed into individuals who can reason for themselves, appreciate art and music, understand the wonders of nature, heal the sick, and be tolerant of others and their views.

A customer pays full price for prod-

ucts and services in the marketplace and a college student only pays a portion of the actual cost of his/her education. About 75% of the cost of educating a community college student is borne by the taxpayers of Texas. Our students are unaware of this fact as evidenced by comments such as, "I paid my fees, I can do what I want."

Our students are also unaware that part of the learning process is behavioral. Is it okay to sleep in class? Is it okay to talk on the cell phone during the lecture? Is it okay to walk into class 20 minutes after the lecture has started without an apology for being late? Not a small part of being a teacher, along with covering the course material, is to help change behavior that is detrimental to success in or out of school.

As teachers we don't view the student as a customer but as a partner in the learning process. The learning process results in changes in student knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. We need to understand the risk in discussing ideas that the student doesn't want to hear or correcting behavior in the classroom. If the school takes the view that the student is a customer, any student com-

plaint can be viewed as bad for enrollments. From this point of view, the teacher's classroom performance becomes a popularity contest.

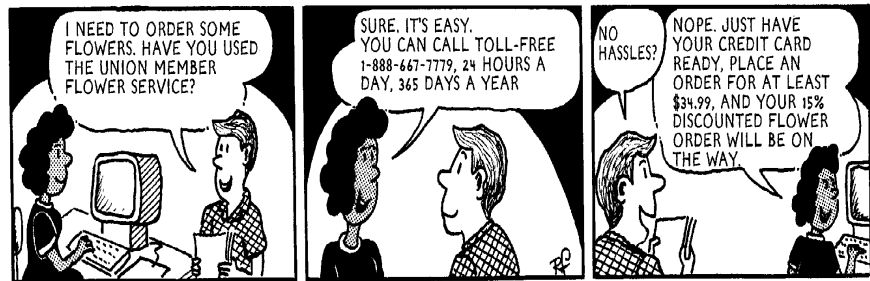
The first indication that this is happening is that for any student complaint, the student is not required to meet with the teacher first. A student who is asked to wake-up in class can go to a supervisor and complain that the teacher embarrassed him/her in class. When the supervisor confronts the teacher, the name of the student is withheld and there is no defense.

We have one of the best teaching faculties of any community college anywhere. Almost without exception, the teachers attempt to do what is in the best interest of the student. I believe it is in the best interest of the student if we do not treat them as customers. They are just beginning the learning process and need help in areas other than course content. I believe what is best for the student is for the teacher to take a proactive position on any problem that arises in the classroom. If students have concerns regarding how they are treated or how they are graded they should be required to meet with the instructor first.

## Is the Student ...(cont'd)

If these concerns are not met to the satisfaction of the student, then both instructor and student should meet with the supervisor to resolve the problem. For more serious concerns, such as sexual harassment or not following the course syllabus, the student should go directly to the supervisor.

Lee Topham  
Math Professor, KC



USE THIS CARTOON IN NOVEMBER 2002

## Making a Difference

Have you ever wondered if you're doing a good job? Do you wonder if you ever make a difference in the lives of students? Occasionally we all question our effectiveness, our contributions to the future of this country, and our choice of career.

On Friday October 18<sup>th</sup>, the North Harris College Ambassadors told their stories. Each Ambassador invited a staff or faculty member who had made a difference in his/her life. Most who spoke and most who attended shed some tears, but all walked away from this experience with a renewed feeling of validation for the job we do and for the opportunities to make a difference in the lives of those we touch. The following story, submitted by Don Stanley, NHC Psychology Professor and Ambassador co-sponsor, is just one example.

### "Diane's Story"

Before coming to North Harris I was confused about what I wanted to do. The cause of my confusion was the death of my husband. When he died, I became angry. I did not like being on my own caring for our two boys. Joshua was one, and Kenny was five.

I was scared of losing my job. Both my boys, who were extremely healthy, started having minor health problems. I was so confused.

I quit my job and stayed at home to care for my two boys. After being at

home for a while I enrolled at NHC.

My very first class was at 8:30am. English 1301 with Mrs. Patricia Thompson. The very first day I was late and sitting in the wrong room. There was a little room change notice on the door, but since this was my first class at NHC I did not notice it. When I finally got the correct room number, she was doing a power point presentation on an A, B, C, and F paper. She discussed the elements of each. The F paper looked a lot like mine.

I thought to myself, "I'm in the wrong class." I called my aunt and cried that I had made a mistake. She told me to just give it my all, and that I could not drop the course. I always listen to my aunt. She said to do it, and without complaints.

Mrs. Thompson was not at first aware of my loss. She was always encouraging. When I first enrolled for that semester, I was under the impression that English was going to be the hardest course. Since her class was my first, she really set the tone for the others. I made no excuse because I could tell she was not taking any. I did everything she asked. She made everything clear and simple, and as the semester progressed I realized it was going to be ok. Her class gave me the confidence I needed for all my classes.

At the end of the semester after I turned in my last writing assignment,

Mrs. Thompson leaned back in her chair and said, "I know your major is nursing and I am not trying to change your mind, but I really believe you have a career in politics."

She said that this campus was a good place to start. She also gave me a book entitled Nine and Counting: The Women of the Senate. I did take her advice and I am more involved, not just here at NHC, but at my son's school. Before Mrs. Thompson's class, I went to my son's football game and made a point to keep my sunglasses on. I did not mingle with other parents. I did not answer my phone unless it was my girlfriend. I did not watch the news or read a thing.

I am not doing this just because of Mrs. Thompson; I like the direction I am going in. When I told my family and friends I had changed my mind and that I am now majoring in Political Science and will be getting a law degree, they agreed. One of my girlfriends said, "Yes, that is what I can see you doing. I was a little nervous about you being a nurse."

I'm now in Biology 1408 for non-biology majors, and I know making that change was the right move for me.

I am no longer confused or scared.

Diane, NHC Ambassador

## Portrait of an Adjunct

Average age of an adjunct faculty member at a community college: **48**

Average age of an adjunct faculty member at NHMCCD: **47**

Percentage of adjuncts at community colleges who are male: **52**

Percentage of adjuncts at NHMCCD who are male: **46**

Average number of hours a community college adjunct spends in a classroom: **7**

Average number of hours an NHMCCD adjunct spends in a classroom: **7.5**

Average percentage of teaching done by adjuncts at a community college: **64**

Average percentage of teaching done by adjuncts at NHMCCD: **52**

Average percentage of full-time salary earned by a community college adjunct: **54**

Average percentage of full-time salary earned by an NHMCCD adjunct: **45**

Source for national statistics: AFT and Center for Education Statistics

Source for NHMCCD statistics: NHMCCD Department of Human Resources

## Letters to the Editor

### What Price for Safety?

A rumored plan to replace police officers with unarmed security guards appears to have its beginning at the District Office. Other locations are scheduled to replace police officers according to plan. The savings? A whopping \$3.00 to 4.00 per hour. Who said you couldn't put a price on safety?

Bill Whatley  
Police Officer, Conroe Center

### NHMCCD May Be Unique

A vice president whose annual salary is \$99,000 and qualifies for a four week vacation has 1,768 hours of actual duty time (they almost always put in many extra hours). This is an hourly rate of \$56.00.

As a professor whose salary is \$87,500 with 1,382 duty hours (I, too, work many more hours), my hourly rate is \$62.00.

Isn't it great to work for a community college district where a faculty member can have a higher rate of pay than a vice president? NHMCCD may be unique!

Joe McMillian  
Math Professor, NHC

## Liability Coverage

Remember that the AFT's professional liability insurance covers both full and part-time union members, including police officers. If someone sues you over an event related to the performance of your job duties, your union membership provides \$8 million in liability coverage with no additional costs. This benefit, alone, is worth the membership dues to you.



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NOV '02

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## Upcoming Events Sponsored by the AFT

*AFT Open House*  
*Cy-Fair College, Fairbanks Center*  
*Tuesday, December 3*  
*10a.m. - 3p.m.*  
*Room 105*

*Faculty & Staff Appreciation Lunch*  
*North Harris College*  
*Wednesday, December 11*  
*11:00a.m. - 2:00p.m.*  
*Private Dining Room*

*Faculty & Staff Reception*  
*Montgomery College*  
*Wednesday, December 11*  
*2:00p.m. - 4:00p.m.*  
*A110*



### 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 other following officers:

Alan Hall, President	North Harris College	ACAD 217-G
Velma Trammel	North Harris College	WNSP 174
Tim Howard	North Harris College	ACAD 270-G
Bob Locander	North Harris College	ACAD 270
Allen Vogt	North Harris College	ACAD 264-C
Cris Neuman	North Harris College	WNSP 120
Rich Almstedt	Kingwood College	FTC 100-G
Richard Becker	Tomball College	E-271-D
Julie Alber	Montgomery College	SSC 205-A
Heather Mitchell	Fairbanks Center	FAIR-220



**Join the AFT**  
**Call Alan Hall**

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