



The Advocate

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AFT-Lone Star College



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- If you believe employees should be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect, you should join.

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More details on membership benefits and how to join are on pages 2-3



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AFT-Lone Star College

AFT Local Union # 4518

GOALS

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

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 - AFT research facilities
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Monthly AFT Dues

Full-time Faculty	\$42.50
Full-time Professional Staff	\$31.10
Full-time Support Staff	\$28.38
Adjunct Faculty	\$16.50
Part-time Staff	\$16.50

Membership Eligibility

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

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American Federation of Teachers Lone Star College



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1. Go to <https://join.aft.org>. From the pull-down menu in the box under "FIND A LOCAL," choose "Texas." Click "search" and then scroll down to find "AFT Lone Star College, Local 4518."
2. Fill out your information in the boxes
3. You're then asked to identify your membership category: Full-time faculty, Full-time professional staff, etc.
4. You're then asked to provide your bank name, routing number and account number, check boxes authorizing the semi-monthly deductions for dues, and type your name. Then, press "SUBMIT." YOU'RE DONE! (in minutes!)

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If you are interested in membership, benefits, or would like to discuss a work-related issue, our AFT Faculty and Staff Vice-Presidents are here to assist. Please don't hesitate to contact them. See the back page of this publication for contact information.



What AFT Did on Spring Vacation - March to the Capitol

On Monday of Spring Break, about 1000 members of the AFT from locals representing colleges and school districts across Texas met in Austin for a day of lobbying at the Capitol and an exuberant rally on the South Lawn. Appointments had been made for small groups of school employees to meet with as many representatives and senators as we could to discuss issues of importance to students, teachers, and other employees at all levels of education.

Eight members of AFT-Lone Star College made the trip: John Burghduff (CyFair), Mary Jane Ferguson (CyFair), Earl Brewer (retired, Fairbanks Center), Martina Kusi-Mensah (Montgomery), Cynthia Maclin (Montgomery), Clifford Frand (North Harris), Kat Kupelian (AFT-Lone Star organizer) and Saira Rab (AFT-Lone Star organizer). We were able to spend some time visiting with two members of the House of Representatives—Armando Walle from the Aldine area, who serves on both the Public Education and Higher Education Committees, and Chris Turner from Grand Prairie, who chairs the House Higher Education Committee. Our goal was to help raise awareness of issues important to public community colleges and the students we serve.

First and foremost, we spoke to both representatives about funding for community colleges. We are all aware of the decline in state support for higher education over the past three decades. This year, the Legislature's highest priorities are improving funding for K-12 public schools and curbing increases in property taxes, both of which are issues of the utmost importance. We wanted to share our concerns that, with a finite state budget and limited local funding, other areas of the state budget should not be squeezed out--in particular funding for community colleges. Although there are certainly going to be many changes before the session ends, at the time we talked to Mr. Turner, he thought that community colleges might see a 1% increase in funding to cover expenses including employee benefits and pay. Although our ultimate goal is to see full state formula funding for community colleges restored to levels seen in the 1980s, a 1% increase is certainly better than a cut!

We also spoke with both representatives about pre-

serving the role of community colleges in providing developmental education. Recent legislative sessions limited our ability to teach students with extremely weak backgrounds in math and English. For example, Lone Star College is no longer permitted to teach Math 0306, a pre-algebra class for students entering the college with math skills at the junior high school level. House Bill 2223, passed in the 2017 session, is forcing developmental students into a co-requisite remediation model that, once fully implemented, will only allow most community college students to take developmental courses if they are co-enrolled with credit level classes. Early results at Lone Star indicate that this model does indeed work for some students, but overall success rates are concerning. Current research on learning and brain development shows that growth of neurons can only happen so fast, and it is clear that, for some students, this accelerated model is simply too much, too fast. Both representatives understand the at-risk students that we serve and the myriad of reasons they come to us with insufficient background knowledge. We were able to share with them that this one-size-fits-all model is not working for all and, in particular, is not working for our most at-risk students. Ultimately, we'd like the Legislature to consider revising HB 2223 to better meet the needs of our students.

Another topic we addressed is the overreliance among community colleges on underpaid adjunct faculty, a consequence, among other things, of long-term budget cuts from the state.

The Texas Community College Teacher's Association (TCCTA) periodically publishes data on the compensation and utilization of part time instructors in the 50 public community college systems in the state. The most recent report covering the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years shows, for example, that 60% of all classes at Lone Star College are taught by adjunct faculty¹. In spite of efforts by Lone Star to hire more full-time faculty, this percentage is actually an uptick from an earlier TCC-TA report covering 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 when the percentage was 59%². This problem is not unique to Lone Star. There are many other colleges struggling with this issue as well, but this uptick pushes Lone Star into the dubious distinction of being tied for last place among all Texas community colleges in the percentage of classes covered by full-time faculty.

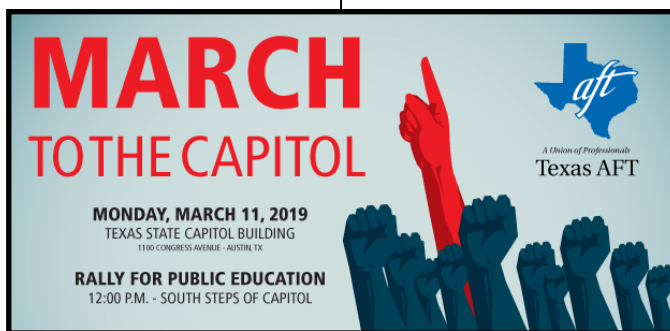


We have written in the past in *The Advocate* about compensation for adjunct faculty as well. The current Lone Star College adjunct salary of \$2004 for teaching one three-hour class equates to \$18.65 per hour if one uses the IRS guideline of 1 hour in class corresponding to 2.25 hours of actual work, including grading and preparation. In the category of adjunct compensation, according to the 2016-2018 TCCTA report, Lone Star College ranks 18th, a drop from 12th place in the 2012-2014 report. Among the nine community college systems serving the metropolitan Houston area, only Lee and Brazosport Colleges pay less. The state average is \$1888 for a three-hour class. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the nationwide median is \$2700.³ Public universities generally pay adjuncts more. For example, the adjunct pay for a three-hour class at Prairie View A&M was raised to \$4000 this year.

health and the health of their families at higher risk. Funding cuts from the 2017 legislative session need to be restored so that reimbursement rates can return to a fair and reasonable level. Representative Turner told us that he had heard about this from other groups as well since these changes impact all state employees. We hope to see some improvement in this program.

There are other topics we discussed including a number related to our K-12 colleagues. For example, retiree health insurance for K-12 teachers is administered by a different agency (TRS) than ours and their premiums have gone sky high in recent years. All together, we had a common list of issues that all of the locals were sharing with the legislators they met so that, all through the building, AFT was presenting a consistent message.

Both Representative Walle and Representative Turner seemed surprised at how high a percentage of community college classes are taught by adjunct faculty and how low adjunct pay is. We wanted them to understand the negative impact this over-reliance has on both teachers and students. For adjunct faculty, a livable salary requires teaching an enormous load across several college systems. For full-time faculty, with fewer professors to share the load, college service such as committee service, mentoring and tutoring students, sponsoring student organizations, etc. is a heavier burden. For students, although our adjunct faculty members are incredible teachers, they cannot be as available to students for outside help as full-time faculty can. Our appeal to the two representatives was to prioritize funds for additional full-time faculty and higher pay for adjunct faculty.



In the short time that we were there, there were many issues we didn't have time to discuss. Fortunately, Texas AFT has a dedicated professional staff that visits with legislators on a regular basis to advocate for a strong public school and higher education system.

Here are some other items on the Texas AFT legislative agenda for higher education:

- Limit tuition increases and increase financial aid
- Assure textbook affordability
- Maintain in-state college tuition rates under the 2001 Texas Dream Act for undocumented students who are Texas high school graduates and longtime Texas residents
- Maintain tuition set-asides to reduce college costs for low-income and middle-income students
- Oppose simplistic performance funding
- Ensure research-based, appropriate use of online instruction as a supplement to, not a substitute for, in-person teaching and learning
- Increase state funding for employee salaries
- Expand / improve health benefits for adjunct faculty
- Guarantee payroll deduction of dues for each employee's chosen professional organization
- Guarantee basic due process in personnel deci-

We also spoke with both representatives about how cuts in funding for employee health benefits through ERS have impacted faculty and staff. ERS reimbursement rates have fallen below Medicare levels, prompting many physicians, clinics and hospitals to drop out of the network. Many employees have lost access to doctors and have experienced interruptions of medical services, putting their



sions affecting all faculty and staff

- Simplify transfer of course credits from community college to university
- Restore prior law barring concealed handguns on public college campuses except in the hands of law-enforcement officers

It is said that lawmaking is like making sausage. It is hard and messy work that isn't always pretty. Professional lobbyists promote the interests of those who can afford them. Our legislators need to hear the concerns of the rest of us, particularly those of us who care about education. All of us can make our voices heard by writing or calling our senators and representatives. If you are a member of AFT-Lone Star College, your dues help to pay for your colleagues to travel to Austin to speak on your behalf and also for Texas AFT to have an ongoing presence in the Capitol.

At March to the Capitol, many of the people we met—legislators, legislative staff, tourists and even lobbyists—thanked us for coming to represent the needs of schools and the students we serve. It was a rewarding way to spend part of our vacation!

John Burgduff

Professor of Math, LSC-CyFair

Endnotes

1. TCCTA Report: Compensation and Utilization of Part-Time Instructors, Texas Public Community Junior Colleges, 2016-17 and 2017-18, <http://www.tccta.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/PT17FINAL.pdf>

2. TCCTA Report: Compensation and Utilization of Part-Time Instructors, Texas Public Community Junior Colleges, 2012-13 and 2013-14, <http://www.tccta.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/PTFINAL13-1.pdf>

3. Guerra, Tony; "The Average Adjunct pay at Community Colleges", *Houston Chronicle*, June 29, 2018

Higher Enrollment: At What Cost?

Recently, while trying to discover more about the ongoing "Qualities of Excellence" effort at LSC, I was told that it was partly born out of a visit by Faculty Senate Presidents to Valencia College in Orlando, Florida. Interested in finding out why Valencia is held in such high esteem, I discovered that, back in 2011, it had won the very first "Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, an honor bestowed on the institution mainly due to the strength of its

graduation and transfer rates, especially among minority students, as well as its employment rates among all graduates." The Aspen Institute is a prestigious organization, as demonstrated by then Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's attendance at the awards ceremony, as well as Jill Biden's. Sanford Shugart, President at Valencia, accepted the award on behalf of his institution. The following paragraph in the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* article provided Dr. Shugart's explanation for the genesis of the changes that led to Valencia's success: "For a long time, Valencia concentrated on 'volume,' just enrolling students . . . but over the years officials began to think more about how to help students succeed. Rising enrollments no longer defined success, [Shugart] said: 'Enrollment became a means to an end.'"

Take a moment and consider the implications of Dr. Shugart's statement. Prior to the changes that led to Valencia's winning the Aspen Institute's recognition, its administration put strong focus, apparently without controversy, on increasing enrollment. Shifting that focus toward improving graduation and transfer rates was considered a major change in administrative priorities.

This raises the question: What larger purpose does a mere increase in enrollment ever serve? Our purpose, presumably, is to enable students to improve their lives—specifically, in partnership with the students themselves, by providing experiences through which they earn credentials that enable them to accomplish the American Dream of economic self-sufficiency (although, of course, that is not all a college education should provide). That we often do this with the sons and daughters of people who for reasons embedded throughout American history were denied this access makes our mission all the more important. Were community colleges largely successful in this mission, as demonstrated by high graduation and transfer rates, a focus on increasing enrollment would make sense.

But we're not largely successful. Most of our students neither graduate nor transfer. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, "the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education in the U.S.," only 12 percent of our students graduate in 150% of "normal time"; only 21% transfer out. Lone Star College is certainly not alone in these rather dismal numbers; Valencia,



for example, won its award when it improved its graduation rate to a whopping 51%. Clearly, the bar for America's community colleges is set rather low.

To be clear: Every student enrolling with the intention of completing a certificate, a degree, or transfer to another institution and failing to do so represents a personal and institutional setback, and a regrettable waste of personal and social resources, including any financial aid the student took out. This waste is borne by federal taxpayers *and* the student, whose financial future may suffer for years because of his or her brief foray into higher education. And this is the actual outcome for most of our students. Under such conditions, trying to increase enrollment without directly and effectively addressing the causes of student failure-to-complete is highly questionable. That failure-to-complete is common across community colleges doesn't change that fact. Today's America is replete with practices that routinely and conventionally transfer resources of every kind from the poor, from people of color, from the working class and those middle-class families trying so hard to stay afloat to the more affluent members of our society, including the banks who profit from student loans and any others that might enjoy whatever benefits higher enrollment might bring. This is one of the ways America goes from being a country with the highest social mobility to one with the lowest, with the current generation of young adults much less likely to do better financially than their parent's generation. In short, this is simply another way—and not the only way—in which the current American way of doing things betrays Americans. We have to change that.

It is certainly true that, with regards to better completion rates, Lone Star is trying; it has several programs devoted to improving the numbers that really matter: the Student Success Institute, the Early Alert system, Brother for Brother, honor societies, and more, all attempt to help students complete their academic goals. Clearly, however, these are not enough.

My own anecdotal experience with students suggests some reasons why. Twice this semester, I've removed students from my classroom who had fallen asleep there. Both told me they had daily schedules



that had them either at work or at school (or both) from early in the morning until relatively late at night. Other students have missed multiple classes for a variety of reasons: no transportation to school, illness, the illness of a child, deaths in the family, car accidents, etc. Any long-time LSC instructor knows the list of common student reasons for missing class. For myself, I cannot dismiss these reasons because they have come too often from students who, when they *are* in class, show good evidence they are working hard to succeed. Also, I cannot help but remember the following quote from a book a faculty reading group discussed at LSC-NH several years ago:

The Working Poor, by David K. Shipler: "For practically every family . . . the ingredients of poverty are part financial and part psychological, part personal and part societal, part past and part present. Every problem magnifies the impact of the others, and all are so tightly interlocked that one reversal can produce a chain reaction with results far distant from the original cause. A run-down apartment can exacerbate a child's asthma, which

leads to a call for an ambulance, which generates a medical bill that cannot be paid, which ruins a credit record, which hikes the interest rate on an auto loan, which forces the purchase of an unreliable used car, which jeopardizes a mother's punctuality at work, which limits her promotions and earning capacity, which confines her to poor housing. If . . . any . . . impoverished working parent added up all of her individual problems the whole would be equal to more than the sum of its parts."

Consider the number of our students who live in situations similar to the one described above, with precarious daily "routines." Add to that number those who have work/school schedules that virtually *prevent* them from having sufficient time and energy to devote to the between-classes work that makes the difference between academic success and failure. Add to that number the students who are only, for one reason or another, marginally committed to college studies. From this perspective, our low graduation and transfer rates become easy to understand.

But this state of affairs does not let us off the hook. Let's return to Dr. Shugart. Discussing Valencia's efforts to improve its numbers, he said "all the fail-



ure occurs at the front door.” Dr. Shugart was referring to advising, orientation, and admission practices which apparently *increased* Valencia’s failure rate and which they therefore changed. That they improved their graduation rate to only 51% suggests they could have gone farther.

With an LSC enrollment over 90,000, it is likely that thousands of LSC students every semester fail classes and/or drop out entirely, and thousands who began one semester don’t return the next. This must happen over and over and over again. Do we care enough to commit substantial resources to finding out the reasons why and then changing our policies and practices to lower that number? Or are we so committed to maintaining or increasing enrollment that we’d rather not find out?

How many of our students had virtually no real chance to complete all their classes successfully *the minute they signed up for them*, before they ever set foot in a classroom? If that number is higher than zero, we’re doing something wrong.

It’s true that we can’t know in advance which students will run into life difficulties that prevent the successful completion of a semester. But surely we can develop indicators to identify those who are most vulnerable, and use those metrics to minimize their course commitments. The point shouldn’t be to maximize the number of credit hours we sell, but rather the number of credit hours that we have solid evidence to believe have a good chance of being completed. And we should be able to generate the numbers that tell us how well we’re achieving that goal so that we can make changes accordingly. Further, we should rejoice if this leads to higher completion rates, even if it means lower enrollment. Community colleges should never come close to facilitating sub-prime lending in the education world, enabling debt that likely has little chance to result in a successful school experience.

Unfortunately, too many current LSC practices seem to serve higher enrollment rather than higher success rates, not the least of which is the penalizing of those campuses that see enrollment drops, as if those drops somehow resulted from a lack of effort by Student Services. Surely, our enrollment

numbers are largely subject to forces beyond our control, such as the state of the local economy. Instead of penalties, how about clearly putting our focus on success, for instance by rewarding advisors for every section they sign a student up for that is successfully completed? Changes such as this would plainly demonstrate that System Office prioritizes student success over enrollment numbers.

Whenever we drive policies that promote enrollment growth at the expense of direct service to students, it carries us all in the direction of hollowing out the better meaning and purpose of all we do at an educational institution. This would include any pressure exerted on academic advisors to sign students up for as many credit hours as possible, as well as decreasing (or eliminating) the number of crisis counselors on campus to help students deal with the life problems that frequently cause their academic endeavors to fail. The all-too-

few Communities-in-Schools counselors currently contracted to provide counseling services cannot meet the need that so obviously exists, a need that expresses itself not only in missed classes and drop-outs but also in classroom disruptions that occur because college has become yet another stressor for those whose daily lives already have too many. For those students who live lives similar to those described in Shipler’s quote, access to credentialed counselors can make a significant difference and represents a tangible, perhaps crucial contribution a community college can make to its surrounding community.

With concern, I note in this regard what could be movement by LSC in the wrong direction. See the notice we received recently that faculty at LSC-Houston North may be expected to mentor “10-15 students per long semester.” While mentoring is of course a worthy activity and something faculty should consider, I hope it is not thought to substitute for actual counseling services, to be a sort of cheap counseling-lite. Faculty are not trained counselors; the skills and knowledge represented by actual counseling degrees and experience cannot be duplicated by untrained-even-if-caring faculty members. I have no idea what to tell a student who tells me she has been cutting herself; who comes to





class with a black eye or another sign of possible domestic abuse; who explodes in class because another student has touched his notebook; who writes of ongoing and deep depression; and on and on. That is, I have no idea what to tell that student *except to see a counselor*. (And to leave class, of course, if his or her behavior is disruptive.) This is true whether our conversation takes place in a hallway outside of class or in my office during a mentoring session. Further, the proposal to offer faculty a reduced teaching load in exchange for their mentoring services runs the risk of recruiting mentors who have taken the job for the wrong reason.

We are, fundamentally, a service institution, not a business. The argument that higher enrollment means higher income doesn't begin to justify practices that can corrode the situations of people whose lives we are supposed to help improve. Shifting resources away from service toward enrollment growth betrays and corrupts the institution itself. Again, our focus should not be trying to maximize the number of credit hours we sell, but rather in measurably improving the lives of the students and communities we serve.

In this regard, we should be more honest about the economic impact LSC has on its communities—an impact we now seem to count solely by looking at the number of graduates and certificate-earners who attain better jobs by means of their studies at LSC. However, a fuller account of our economic force would include the *negative* impact of student debt on all those financial-aid students who fail to get such jobs. The level of student debt in America is already recognized as a crisis, although its full impact may be underestimated. A recent study by the Roosevelt Institute, “The Student Debt Crisis, Labor Market Credentialization, and Racial Inequality,” has found that “Student debt is a burden for a growing share of young adults” and that “[t]hese trends [of greater student debt and the rise of “credentialization,” that is, employers’ requirement of college degrees or certificates for jobs that once didn’t require them] have had particularly negative impacts on Black and brown Americans Given that people of color have less individual and community wealth, students of color take on a disproportionate amount of student debt, further contributing to disparities in debt by race and exacerbating economic disadvantages.”

It is also worth wondering what effect all those unsuccessful students themselves have on future enrollment. Unsuccessful students have brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, friends and neighbors who may well think twice before enrolling, given what seem to be the long odds of achieving their educational goals.

This is more than a business matter; it is a moral one. Students who drop out are no doubt worse off after their studies end than when they began. They have wasted time and money and may have taken on a sort of debt like that of continuing to pay off a car note for a car that’s been wrecked or a mortgage payment for a house that’s burned down—and doing this in an economy in which “unskilled” workers may have to work two or three jobs to make enough just to pay rent. For these students, community college didn’t help them achieve the American dream of financial self-sufficiency, good housing, decent transportation and a stable future; on the contrary, it left them farther away from achieving such status, and likely much closer to despair at ever reaching it. Should there not be a sort of educational Hippocratic oath kept in mind by those supervising the advising of students on their loan debt and class schedules: First, do no harm?

Dr. Head has written previously of “servant leadership,” a phrase that expresses exactly what the world so desperately needs now and seems to have so little of. The question is whether the emphasis on higher enrollment is consistent with the values expressed by that term. Perhaps, like Valencia College before us, we should take care to ensure that any push for higher numbers doesn’t degrade or contradict a consistent focus on helping students improve their lives—which sometimes means minimizing their contact hours rather than maximizing them.

Steven M. King
Professor of Developmental Studies-North Harris

Endnotes

¹Gonzalez, Jennifer. “Valencia College Wins First Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 12, 2011. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Valencia-College-Wins-First/130091/#comments-anchor>

²<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=Lone+Star+College&s=all&id=227182#retgrad>. Seen on 9 March 2019. The statistics provided are for students who began their studies in fall 2014.



³Shipler, David K. *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*. Alfred A. Knopf. New York. 2004. p. 11.

⁴Gonzalez, p. 2.

⁵Morgan, Julie Margetta and Marshall Steinbaum, "The Student Debt Crisis, Labor Market Credentialization, and Racial Inequality." Roosevelt Institute. October 2018. <http://rooseveltinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Student-Debt-Crisis-and-Labor-Market-Credentialization-final-1.pdf>

When Success Spells Failure

For many years in my young adulthood, I agonized about not being successful. However successful I was, I felt that I fell short of true success. I became somewhat obsessed with my own hopes of success and fears of failure. One day, I was talking to a therapist about this during my master's program. He asked me a question that now strikes me as obvious: "What do you mean when you say 'success'?" This line of questioning led me in a direction that has helped me change my life for the better, as I approached my concept of "success" with more deliberate mindfulness.

Community colleges have long had a focus on success. As state funding has become tied to student success, the focus on "success" has sometimes become an obsessive fixation not unlike my own. As with my own obsession with success, community college teachers and administrators have assumed that we know what "success" means and that this fixation is one worth having. So, to paraphrase my former therapist, what do we mean when we say "success"? As of 2013, a tenth of state allocations for community colleges in Texas are "tied to student outcomes, including first-year course completion, degree and certificate completion, and transfers to four-year institutions." Texas is not the only state to adopt performance-based funding for higher education. The National Conference of State Legislatures' 2015 analysis found that 32 states had similar initiatives in place, with an additional five in transition to include them. The percentage of overall funding that is performance-based varies widely too, from Illinois, where it is under 1 percent, to Ohio and Tennessee, where it can run as high as 80 to 90 percent.

Dougherty et al., authors of the 2016 book *Performance Funding for Higher Education*, find that the results are a mixed bag. There is some encouraging evidence of increased efforts to change policies and programs based on institutional data. However, it's hard to quantify how much of the observed

changes were specifically consequences of performance-based funding, and even the best analyses available have failed to produce clear evidence that performance-based funding ultimately works. The unintended consequences can be severe, too, with community colleges sometimes sacrificing their broad-access policies in order to admit fewer students who are unready to succeed by the state-prescribed measures.ⁱⁱⁱ

As Texas' change in state funding has been so recent, let's take a closer look at how this is calculated and consider what unintended consequences this may yield over the life of the program. According to the Texas Association of Community Colleges, performance-based funding at community colleges is calculated on the basis of "Student Success Points" (recently renamed "Key Performance Indicators") awarded to students as they complete various tasks:

- Students who are not ready for college-level courses in math, reading, and English can earn points for completing their developmental courses: 1 point (for math), ½ point each (for reading and writing)
- Students who successfully complete their first college-level math, reading, or writing course with an A, B, or C earn 1 point (for math) or ½ point each (for reading and writing)
- Students who complete 15 semester credit hours in one fiscal year: 1 point
- Students who complete 30 semester credit hours in one fiscal year: 1 point
- Students who earn a degree or certificate: 2 points (2.25 points for degrees or certificates in what the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board determines to be a "critical field")
- Students who complete at least 15 semester hours and then are shown to transfer to a four-year institution: 2 points

Given this model, we maximize state funding by getting as many students as possible to tick off these boxes. We can do this by getting students to:

- Take a lot of credit hours each semester
- Score a C or better in their classes
- Earn a degree or certificate as quickly as possible
- Transfer to a four-year institution immediately, preferably in the same fiscal year.

On the surface, the Success Points model is appeal-



ing and forward thinking. As the Texas Association of Community College states:

The underlying premise of the model is student success at community colleges should not be defined solely by end-point events (e.g., degrees and transfer). The model includes intermediate steps—completion of developmental work, first college-level course—that mark student success at community colleges. The model also details important missing elements that should be added in the future (ABE/ESL, GED, Employment/Workforce).^{iv}

However, even if Texas stops short of undercutting its open-access model in community colleges, we are still at risk of the sorts of unintended consequences we have witnessed in the pre-collegiate public school system. These include:

- Encouraging grade inflation and instructor cheating
- Negatively affecting institutions in impoverished or otherwise disadvantaged areas
- Discouraging instructors, leading to loss of talented faculty

Let's consider how each of these issues could and/or does translate to higher education.

Encouraging Grade Inflation and Instructor Cheating

When funding is tied to students scoring a C or better, there is pressure on teachers to inflate grades. The pressure can be subtle or overt, conscious or subliminal. Grade inflation tends to push through underprepared students and reinforce the unfortunate and often outdated reputation for community college education being subpar, inadequately preparing students for university standards.

There is also pressure on instructors to try to game the system (intentionally or not). Just as public school teachers have been caught manipulating student answers in order to boost test scores, instructors can and will find ways to manipulate the system to inflate grades. On the extreme end of the spectrum, I have met at least one professor with a "Give-'em-all-As" philosophy. Others create test prep materials so exhaustive that they're all but giving away the exam answers before the students see the test. Some award extra credit so liberally as to make the final grade meaningless. Others over-

emphasize participation in their grading rubric to the point that if students are usually present, they're almost guaranteed a C or better. Some overly adjust the final data through curving assignment or final grades.

Grade inflation is real and has been increasing for decades. Most of this inflation in recent years seems to result from an increase in As rather than an increase in passing grades. While community college grade inflation seems to have leveled off recently, Stuart Rojstaczer, a former Duke University professor who has been studying grade inflation, noted that community colleges have some additional pressures that may lead to grade inflation. These include a "student-as-consumer" model and a heavy reliance on adjunct instructors who lack the job security to risk negative course reviews for rigorous grading.

As finances are increasingly tied to student performance, there is increased pressure on community colleges to get students to succeed, which can yield positive results (increased services, such as more extensive and personalized advising) and negative ones (grade inflation).

Negatively Affecting Institutions That Are in Impoverished or Otherwise Disadvantaged Areas

Within the Lone Star College system alone, success rates vary substantially among our six main campuses. These seem to correlate best with local household incomes. The LSC system is currently investing in additional resources to assist students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged on the campuses most susceptible to these issues. This seems like a potentially positive result of performance-based incentivization, though we must be cautious not to imply correlation from causation, since the LSC system has a long history of championing student success and may have made these decisions even in the absence of performance-based funding.

More broadly, though, we must remember that this funding model is only a few years old in Texas. Just as Dougherty et al. warned of the risks of community colleges moving to more restricted access models, the performance-based model also economically disincentivizes the creation of community colleges in disadvantaged communities that need



them most, because of the potential for lower success rates undermining their future funding. As student success weighs increasingly heavily in funding formulas, this problem is only likelier to occur.

Focusing on Teaching to the Test

While our current model isn't based on standardized tests, it is based on reaching certain goals. These goals encourage students to take a lot of hours, to stay focused on their degree plans with minimal investment in enrichment coursework that strays from their degree path, and to get out of community colleges and into four-year institutions quickly. While these can be good things for some students, there are also unfortunate consequences. The result of these notions of success quickly lead us to prioritize completion of core classes and degree or certificate plans, as well as the transfer to four-year universities, to the *exclusion* of all other outcomes.

Several policies have shown that this is a clear legislative priority in Texas. The 6-drop rule only allows students six withdrawals from any classes in their *entire* Texas public college or university education. The so-called 150-hour rule withdraws state funding to students who take classes outside of their degree program in excess of 30 credit hours. The ACGM (the catalogue of Texas community college academic courses that can receive state funding) has been eviscerated in the last few years, as all academic courses that do not feed directly into four-year programs have been removed. In my field (music) alone, well over a dozen courses were cut, including courses in composition/songwriting, electronic music, musical theatre, and others.

The end result is that students have less room to make mistakes, change their minds about what degrees they want to pursue, or take elective courses for enrichment. When everything is geared toward transfer or certification, the community college becomes little more than a series of hoops for students to jump through *en route* to four-year education or their careers.

Discouraging Instructors, Leading to Loss of Talented Faculty

Increasingly, community college instructors are finding it hard to offer students diverse coursework, to be innovative in the classes and opportuni-

ties we're offering, and to encourage students to take some time to explore coursework before settling in on a field of study. Those of us who are passionate about learning and education can find this immensely frustrating, as many of the most engaging and interesting courses are stripped away and every decision we make is in deference to the practices at four-year universities. We celebrate innovation in the abstract, but in actual practice, our focus is on creating programs that duplicate as closely as possible the practices at the universities. This gives all the agency to university faculty and administrators and none to community colleges. As the courses we can offer disappear and every idea we have has to pass the are-the-four-years-doing-it test, it is increasingly difficult for community college faculty to retain their love of early undergraduate education for a singularly diverse population of students. The risk is that students lose educational and enrichment opportunities and faculty feel so limited by the system, they are likely to consider seeking opportunities in other states or in the university system, where the performance-based funding model has not yet been instituted in Texas.

When Successes Are Failures

Here are some samples of the sort of students we frequently see in community colleges. These are students whom most would consider successful, but who reduce our funding by not quickly accruing key performance indicators. In other words, these students are failures in the student success game in Texas:

- A working parent who takes one or two classes a semester, gradually finishing his/her degree over the course of a decade
- A retiree who takes a college course or two each semester out of interest, but never working toward or completing a degree
- A student who gets a year or so into a degree only to discover his/her true passion and switches to that degree plan, delaying his or her graduation and accruing too many hours outside of their degree plan
- A student who completes an associate degree, takes a few years off to work and save for college, only then to continue his/her education at a university
- A student who completes the majority of his/her degree and transfers to a university without actually earning his/her associate degree



Where to Now?

There are, perhaps, no perfect solutions to these issues. The problems that performance-based funding tries to address are important and real. The term “two-year college” has become a hopelessly outdated misnomer, as “only 33 percent of entering students actually transfer to a four-year institution within six years.” While we know what tends to help students at community college succeed (personalized and deeply involved advisors, for example), most schools don’t have the money or infrastructure to invest sufficiently in these solutions. Free market competition is often viewed as a magic bullet, especially in conservative-leaning states, and getting colleges to compete for resources is in line with this thinking. However, the recent history of public secondary education suggests that solutions like these often create more problems than they solve, and the research to date on performance-based funding provides little evidence in its favor.

The principal goal of transferability and degree or certificate completion strikes me as valid. The majority of students I have encountered are using community college as a stepping stone to careers or university education. However, one of the great strengths of community college education is how many different purposes and people it can serve. These diverse populations that we can and should serve, and have historically served, include students who want to take courses just for enrichment, students who aren’t entirely college ready, nontraditional students (veterans, the elderly, immigrants, working parents, etc.), high level students who want affordable but comparable education for their first two years, and students who need to figure out if undergraduate education is right for them without the crushing burden of the costs of attending university.

When we define success for these students as “transfer with an associate degree” instead of supporting their own notions of success, when we tie funding to global markers that don’t adjust to different types of students, and when we devalue and reduce opportunities for enrichment and exploration of different fields, we take the diverse ecosystem that community colleges naturally cultivate and reduce it to a forced monoculture. Our students deserve educational diversity—community colleges that embrace diverse student populations and diverse student wants and needs. In that very

real sense, in our zeal for “success,” we fail them.

Aaron Alon
Professor of Music, LSC-University Park

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Editor’s note. LSC-North Harris folk, if you frequent the Learning Center in A200, you can’t miss the simple but smart new effort of our Communities in Schools team. Stop by the “Giving Table,” have a look, and if possible, sign up to contribute.

Hi everybody,

The LSC-NH Communities In Schools (CIS) team assessed the North Harris campus and found that there is a large food insecurity that students face on a day to day basis.



CIS addresses this issue in several ways.

In the fall, CIS hosts an annual “Harvest Food Fair” in partnership with the Houston Food Bank. This is a community outreach and campus-wide event.



Additionally, students are referred to local food pantries and given information on how to apply for food stamps.

The newest project CIS has started is the CIS “Giving Table.” CIS wants to reach students who are already on campus and in need of an emergency lunch to get through the day or a snack in-between classes to help fuel the focus on studies.

The “Giving Table” is simple: it consists of a table full of essential ingredients of a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich and is located in front of the CIS offices (ACAD 200A & 200B) in the Learning Center on the second floor of the Academic building.

We are seeking help: if any faculty or staff would like to support the “Giving Table,” email Michele Larsen at (Michele.Larsen@lonestar.edu) or Titania Jackson at (Titania.Jackson@lonestar.edu) to get more information.

Thanks kindly,

Michele Larsen, LCSW - Supervisor
Communities In Schools of Houston, Inc.
Program Manager for LSC-North Harris
281.618.5516

Tales from the Unionside

How could \$143,676 AFT union dollars square with \$1,000,000 Lone Star College dollars? For the past two years, I have heard from several former and current college trustees that the AFT has cost the LSC system “over seven figures” in legal expenditures over the last four years. The source of the one million dollar claim appears to be the Chancellor, who I hope is just doing his best impersonation of President Trump. Taking this claim at face value, I decided to investigate the amount our union has spent in defending its members for the years 2015-2018.

Since 2000, Lone Star-AFT has retained the Houston law firm of Tritico-Rainey to handle our legal work. I have personally assisted both Chris Tritico and Ron Rainey in members’ cases in the past and found the two to be first-rate lawyers. It is hard to find attorneys who are experts in Texas education law and faculty-staff rights who will represent em-

ployees of educational institutions. The reason for this is simple economics as the power of money is on the side of administrators and trustee boards. The “deep pockets” of taxpayers fund all the necessary and unnecessary hiring and firing *choices of the upper administration.*

For the LSC brass, the personal financial cost is “zero,” as the taxpayers pick up the legal tab, whether administrators wield their powers soberly—or not. For the AFT, the money comes out of our pockets, not community taxes. We contribute to a legal fund dedicated to helping our union brothers and sisters who need legal advice and professional representation in personnel issues. As we know in life, it is always easier to spend the next person’s money than our own. Our chancellor and trustees have the power to choose what they spend our money on and what they don’t.

Back in the “good old days” of the North Harris Montgomery Community College District, the AFT legal fund spending each year was next to nothing. With the coming of Richard Carpenter, the “new” Lone Star College, and a corporate culture, everything has changed today, and much for the worse. LSC now has a towering bureaucracy. We’ve privatized our food and most of our custodial services and maintenance work; we have unchecked building programs, extravagant misadventures with foreign government education partnerships, gross mismanagement of college funds, and exploited adjunct professors and staff. What a world Carpenter built!

Although many administrators and trustees would disagree with my view of the way things are at LSC, my position is based on 40 years of involvement on the ground—not just a few years of generating ideas up in the clouds. As Houstonians, we now know of the absolute need for flood insurance to protect ourselves. As Lone Star employees, we need to be aware of the realities of our work and the importance of legal representation. To get legal insurance, one can start a personal savings plan, marry an attorney—or simply join the American Federation of Teachers. This last suggestion was the right path for 16 faculty and staff members who benefitted from the legal representation that union membership provides. Not one of the 16 employees helped by Tritico-Rainey from 2015-2018 ever expected to be in need of an attorney to handle matters involving bullying, discrimination in several forms, harassment,



pay inequity, or job termination. Through the advice and intervention of union lawyers, problems were solved and jobs were saved. I am proud of our record in righting wrongs, for without the AFT standing up for employees, all might be lost in the current Lone Star world of disposable faculty and staff.

It was not always so.

What has brought on the situation that has cost the union \$143 K and the college “one mill” is a corporate mentality. When AFT attorney Chris Tritico heard about the “million LSC dollars” spent on our cases, Chris laughed and said, “Perhaps I need to raise my legal rates.” The LSC record of handling taxpayer dollars will win no awards anytime soon. The recent episode of Lone Star losing \$13.8 million because it handed out grants and loans from 2012-2016 to ineligible students has made LSC notorious, not praise-worthy. While Bernie talks of free college tuition, LSC does him one better by dishing out free cash—approved by administrators who ought to have known better. This financial disaster cost LSC one-third of its reserve funds—no administrative heads rolled after this disaster.

During the years of Carpenter and beyond, most AFT criticisms about college policies and practices have been dismissed as the union leaders being the “enemy” of the administration. With this in mind, it was both sad and reaffirming to read a letter written by Ken Feld, a long-time administrator of our college that appeared in the October 25, 2017 issue of *The Woodlands Villager*. Feld’s piece was printed in the “Letters” section and addressed to the Board of Trustees. Here is part of what he wrote: “I worked at LSC for over 20 years and have seen my share of gross mismanagement. LSCS is one of the wealthiest community college districts in the entire state of Texas. Yet, in order to justify your ‘need’ for state reimbursement, you continue to pile on artificial/unjustifiable debt to create an illusion of need.” While the former administrator’s critique was directed at board members, the real power and decision making has been in the hands of men with the last names of Thorne, Airola, Pickelman, Carpenter, and Head.

“As Lone Star employees, we need to be aware of the realities of our work and the importance of legal representation.”

According to Feld’s view, the Board has “diluted the ratio of full-time faculty to part-time faculty to the detriment of the student. You continued to build more and more facilities—that require maintenance—yet go unfilled during the year with students. You continue to build empires—for yourselves. It is sad to see how such a potentially good instrument for the community can be abused.

You’ve made an art of that practice.” He ends his letter with the sentence, “You can’t [be trusted to] be responsible for watching our tax dollars or taking care of our students.”

This stinging critique appeared in print *before* the \$13.8 million fiasco, and was one former administrator’s view. This

view has been shared by others who chose to go quietly into the retirement sunset or to slip off silently to another college for employment instead of fighting to solve the problem. Fear can be the great silencer at LSC, as I witnessed before in the days of W.W. Thorne and Richard Carpenter. What I hate to see is fear of administration raising its head in many parts of the Lone Star System.

Bob Locander
Professor of Political Science, LSC-North Harris

Editor’s Note: Locander is a regular political columnist for The Advocate.





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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.

—Alan Hall





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