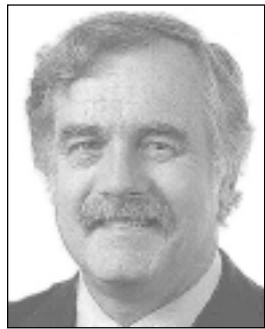


President's Message

Parting Thoughts



Philip Mahler,
MCCC President

As I write my last column as your President, I offer some parting thoughts. They are disconnected, but that makes it easy to skip one or more. Here goes ...

Our union, as well as our profession, is changing. Most community colleges were founded in the sixties - a large national movement at that time - and our most senior members were here for that. But they are leaving in large numbers. Junior faculty tend to not be connected to our institutions in the same way as the founding mothers and fathers. It's not as visceral - can't be. The same is true for the MCCC membership. Although many of its founders are still around, most have moved on. And our newer MCCC members don't feel the same connection with the MCCC as many of us do. I don't know what is popular in music today, and I don't know where our newer members will take this union. I just hope they become active and take it somewhere!

I just came back from the Teaching & Learning Conference at Holyoke CC, of which the MCCC is a sponsor. I attended some great sessions. At one, I heard some professional staff relating how they have been working with faculty in the classroom - an intervention strategy to promote retention, and I applauded the effort. But my point here is that they all said they have discovered how hard it is to be a faculty member. Poor attendance, life's crises with our students, lack of motivation, homework not done... faculty work hard to overcome these obstacles and educate our students. One of the professional staff found themselves saying they wondered that we retain as many as we do! And by the way our retention rates, at least in remedial courses with which I am familiar, seem to be at the top of the national norms. I'm glad this recognition of what faculty do occurred. And I'll add that faculty need to recognize the work that our professional staff colleagues do, too. We are all community college educators.

Our union is not a miracle worker. Statewide events will drive what happens to us. The MCCC works to color what happens, turn it in the right direction when

possible, seize opportunities, and oppose negative forces. In this current, about to expire contract, we seized the opportunity of job dignity in our full-time paychecks, by accepting something noted by the legislature in print in 1993 - the community college faculty are underpaid but if they want to be paid at national norms they must move towards the 15 hour national workload norm. And our union is US. Whatever it is, it is US. You are better off with a union than without one, but you maximize the benefit if you are active - at least attend chapter meetings and pay attention! And of course this extends to being an occasional political activist.

We recognize that many of our part-time colleagues are in need of health insurance and a retirement plan - like so many Americans, unfortunately. We continue to work on the issues of health insurance and retirement as it applies to these part timers. This is not an easy problem to solve but the MTA-filed bills this year have had longer legs than many expected. I'm sure the MCCC will persist in its efforts on these bills.

Some things haven't happened as fast as we'd like. Classifying the unclassified members and the appeals process are the most notable. The euphoria of very good pay increases is past, though we continue to reap that benefit. Now we must settle in and try to ensure that the classification system does not fall apart, and that we fight to stay at that 75th percentile - if not even improve it a bit. With all of that, the vast majority of our members are much better off than they were 18 months ago. We have a paycheck that represents a career. We are working harder, at the national norm. Indeed, every professional American is working harder than they used to. Much of the economic progress made in the golden last decade came from increased productivity - we work longer and harder, and sometimes smarter.

Anyway, I will close by saying that being your President has been a rewarding and challenging experience. Sometimes it's simply hell, and other times it's a pleasure. It's a big responsibility to represent people's careers and economic welfare - I have thought of that often. I step back because I have other professional commitments, not because I don't want to do this job. And you can bet that President-to-be Rick Doud, and Vice-President-to-be Joe LeBlanc, will have my fullest support as they continue with the hard work of maintaining dignity in the workplace. ■

Editorial Comment

Schmoozing with the Solons *by Peter Flynn*

During April 9th's "Community College Day" visit to Beacon Hill, I joined others in speaking with several legislators about the predicament that the community colleges were in with the latest budget. And I did some listening. I've been writing and talking about the evolving role of community colleges in workforce development and retraining and noting that community college students are averaging about age 29 for several years. I'd convinced myself that most people in the decision making chain were savvy to the critical role of community colleges in local economies. Unfortunately, I was impressed that most of the legislators I listened to seemed off point in their perceptions of our community colleges' role in higher education, and in the current fiscal crisis.

There seemed to be a presumption that community colleges could share in the belt tightening affecting all state programs and agencies. This presumption betrays ignorance of the relatively barebones, low fat constitution of the

community colleges' budgets even during the best times.

There was also some implicit suggestion that the community colleges were not as important as the University of Massachusetts and state colleges. The perception they were "junior colleges" or colleges of last resort lingered.

The persistence of these misperceptions is particularly irksome in that they fly in the face of years of research and planning and promotion by the Commonwealth's own agents. The Office for Community Colleges (Jan Motta), the McCormack Institute (UMass think tank) and the Board of Higher Education (a.k.a. HECC, Board of Regional Community Colleges) have each stressed the role of community colleges in workforce development and retraining in local economies for decades.

After schmoozing with the solons my assessment is, wishful thinking aside, reality dictates that education of our elective leaders to the role and significance of community colleges remains an incomplete task. ■

DCE NEWS



DCE Grievance Committee - Front Row: MTA Consultant Michelle Gallagher, Marcia Blanchette STCC, Nancy Morello, MBCC, Judy Kahalas RCC, DCE Grievance Coordinator Joe Rizzo, Robert Browning HCC - Back row: Carol Mathiesen STCC, Don Williams NSCC, Ana Gailat GCC, Thomas Trainor CCCC, Doug Sherman MBCC.

DCE Report, Spring 2002

Extracted from DCE Grievance Coordinator Joe Rizzo's Spring report

DCE Grievance Committee

This is the report of Division of Continuing Education Grievance Committee, a standing committee of the MCCC, for the period of April 2001 to the present. During that time, the Committee met in July 2001, November 2001, and April 2002. Each meeting was approximately four to five hours in duration with 10-12 members in attendance.

The Committee served the purposes outlined in its charge. Thirty cases were considered for mediation or arbitration over the past year. Cases are carefully examined and thoughtfully discussed during deliberations. The Committee has lived up to its promise by alleviating the workload of the Executive Committee and has served to enhance the knowledge and expertise of chapter grievance representatives. The Committee has broadened the participation of members in the MCCC, it has provided grievants with the opportunity to meet with their colleagues to discuss their case, and has contributed to the cultivation and skill enhancement of talented and committed individuals.

Activity of Grievances, Labor Relations Commission Cases, and Unemployment Claims Appeals

The frequency of disputes is on the rise after years of decline. The number of cases filed last year rivals that which occurred in the first year that the DCE unit existed under the terms of a collective bargaining agreement. It is expectable that there will be greater labor acrimony when an employment environment is first unionized. It is less common that grievances would spike after 12 years. This is especially odd since this is the mid

point of the third collective bargaining agreement. Grievance activity generally increases after a new contract as new language is tested, or at the end of a contract when the parties may be posturing as a new contract is under negotiation.

It is worth noting that the first DCE contract was in effect more than five years, the second contract was in effect for four years, and the current agreement has only been in effect for 18 months. In this light, the current state of grievance activity is a particular cause for concern. Given that there are more than 20 new cases filed in the first quarter of 2002, the total number for this year may even exceed the 65 cases filed in 2001. Despite a noticeable similarity in overall grievance activity from a system-wide perspective comparing 1991 with 2001, there are fundamental differences that are noteworthy. The nature and the source of the disputes are now different.

Although Northern Essex and Bunker Hill have disproportionately more grievances, most colleges have experienced a significant decrease with the exception of Roxbury C.C. Roxbury accounts for 1/3 of all grievances in the community college system under the current agreement. All current agreement grievances at Bunker Hill emanate from one supervisor. The most dramatic decrease of grievance activity is at Massasoit.

The majority of cases reached a conclusion at the lower steps of the grievance process. Of the cases that reached mediation, 54% were resolved at that stage of the procedure. Though many cases are unresolved after mediation, most are still resolved prior to arbitration. Only one case has gone to arbitration in the last year and that case was

Continued on Page 4

Know Your Day Contract

May 2002

- March 31 Department chair vacancies announced (p.55)
- May 1 President's tenure recommendations and sabbatical decisions due
- May 4 MCCC Delegate Assembly 2001
- May 15 Faculty submit college service and student advisement form
- May 17-18 MTA Annual Meeting, Boston
- May 20 Tenure decisions due
- May 30 Professional staff College service and student advisement forms due
- May 27 Memorial Day celebrated

June 2002

- June 1 Applications for sabbaticals for spring 2002
- June 1 Professional Staff summary evaluations due
- June 15 Sabbatical requests to committee
- June 15 Student evaluation data tabulation reported
- June 30 Last day for Professional staff pre-evaluation conferences
- June 30 Evaluation of Part-time faculty in third appointment

N.B. Dates may vary depending on the first day of classes. Most of these dates are "last date" standards. In many instances the action can be accomplished before the date indicated. ■