

WCCFT

NEWS

Monthly Newsletter of The Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers

February 2004

President's Message

Vision 2004

By Anne D'Orazio



Everyone's doing strategic planning these days. The College has just finished a five-year strategic plan; SUNY issued a "Statewide Plan for Higher Education" on December 23, 2003; the American Federation of Teachers' Higher Education Program and Policy Council (AFT PPC) has recently submitted a strategic plan to cover the next two years; and the Executive Board of the Suffolk Community College teachers' union is about to go on retreat to draft a strategic plan.

The pattern seems pretty consistent: categories of ranked priorities with action programs and timetables for each priority. Even some of the priorities are the same: academic quality, advocacy for increased funding, the need for continued planning mechanisms.

What distinguishes a quality strategic plan from an exercise in bureau-

cratic posturing is a vision, a carefully considered set of common values underlying the goals and deadlines, a formulation of principles that transcends the charts and graphs and data. In the end, a strategic plan is an outline of tactics to fulfill a mission which is a statement of goals to achieve a vision.

We are at a natural juncture in the life cycle of a union, the end of a round of collective bargaining negotiations. Within a couple of months we will be starting the process again. What better time to reflect on who we are, what we want to be and how to get where we want to go consistent with our image of ourselves.

The first step is to discuss in small groups, maybe based on departments, for what a faculty union should stand. We need to think about the role we should play in decision-making on campus, in advancing change in state and federal educational policy, and in advocating for labor everywhere. Westchester Community College will undergo significant transformation in

the next decade. All community colleges are facing trends that may or may not be in the best interest of faculty: the adoption of a business model for education, the push for assessment, technology-driven delivery of course material, the decline of shared governance and a shift in the balance of power away from faculty, increasing demands on faculty time and the threat to health benefits.

How can the union help shape the direction we take as an institution of higher learning? Where do we want the union to be at the end of the next transformative decade?

If we are to embark on any kind of strategic goal-setting, if we are to inspire the union membership and address their needs meaningfully, we must start with a shared expression of core values. The means to get to an end — that is, tactics — are always expendable. It's the *end*, based on a democratically determined vision, that must be deliberately and steadfastly maintained.



Following ratification by the faculty in a packed-session on January 21, the collective bargaining agreement was forwarded to the WCC Board of Trustees which voted in favor of the contract. The contract will now go to the Board of Legislators for final approval.


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A Monthly Newsletter of

 Local 2431 American Federation of Teachers (AFL-CIO)
 Affiliated with New York State United Teachers

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Calendar of Events
Monthly Meetings:
First Wednesday, 12:00, SCI102
Feb. 4, 2004

Welcome Back Luncheon - Benefits Fair

Mar. 3, 2004

Forum on Bargaining

Apr. 7, 2004

Union Election

May 5, 2004

 Health and Safety Seminar and
 Committee Meetings

Upcoming Events:
March 5-7, 2004
*AFT Higher
 Education
 Conference*

Department Chair and Union Member: Conflicting Interests?

By Frank Madden



Most of the administrative responsibilities of a department chair are routine, generally without conflict, and obvious to most members of a department. We observe classes, write recommendations, assign schedules, run meetings, and handle a host of other predictable tasks. But if we are doing our jobs with professional discretion, most faculty members are unaware of one our most important but disagreeable responsibilities—handling student complaints about instructors.

Let me add quickly that such complaints are relatively rare. The overwhelming number of comments that I hear about instructors are quite positive—and inspiring. Let me add, too, that more often than not these complaints result from a misunderstanding, and they are usually resolved when students are sent back to share their concerns with the instructor. In those unusual cases, however, where the complaint is unresolved, seems justified, and fits a pattern of previously unresolved complaints—and the instructor is unwilling to address the problem—it is the responsibility of the department chair to call for a disciplinary hearing. Here the messiness begins.

At a disciplinary hearing, it is the role of the department chair to bring the complaint. It is the role of the WCCFT reps (usually the union President and/or Vice-President) to represent the instructor. Both the department

chair (as faculty member) and the instructor, however, are members of the union. Some might claim that as members of the same bargaining unit it is inappropriate that a department chair bring a complaint against an instructor and fellow union member. Is this a conflict of interest?

I don't believe that it is. Yes, it is awkward and uncomfortable to confront a fellow faculty member "for the record" in an official hearing—and the acrimonious debate that sometimes occurs during these hearings can be very unpleasant. But I am reminded of what a union officer told me some years ago after a particularly "spirited" confrontation: "Don't take it personally; we each have a role to play."

I try to remember, that however strongly I feel about the validity of the complaints at a hearing, the union has the responsibility to uphold and to defend the rights of the "accused" instructor. I request the rare disciplinary hearing, not as an individual, but in my role as department chair—and as part of my responsibility to the students, my department, and the college. From my own experience, I am confident, too, that the union represents individual faculty members with the same good intentions, sense of responsibility, and skill. Best of all, despite the seeming adversarial nature of the system, I believe that it results in the fairest possible outcome in any given case. This makes me doubly pleased to be both a department chair and a member of the WCCFT.

Visit our new website

www.wccft.org

- Contract Details
- Committee Info
- Links to related sites
- Search engines
- Communication Forms

Don't forget to contribute to the Food Bank.
 Call Noelle Bucci at ext. 6994 for more information.

Let's plan ahead. Together.

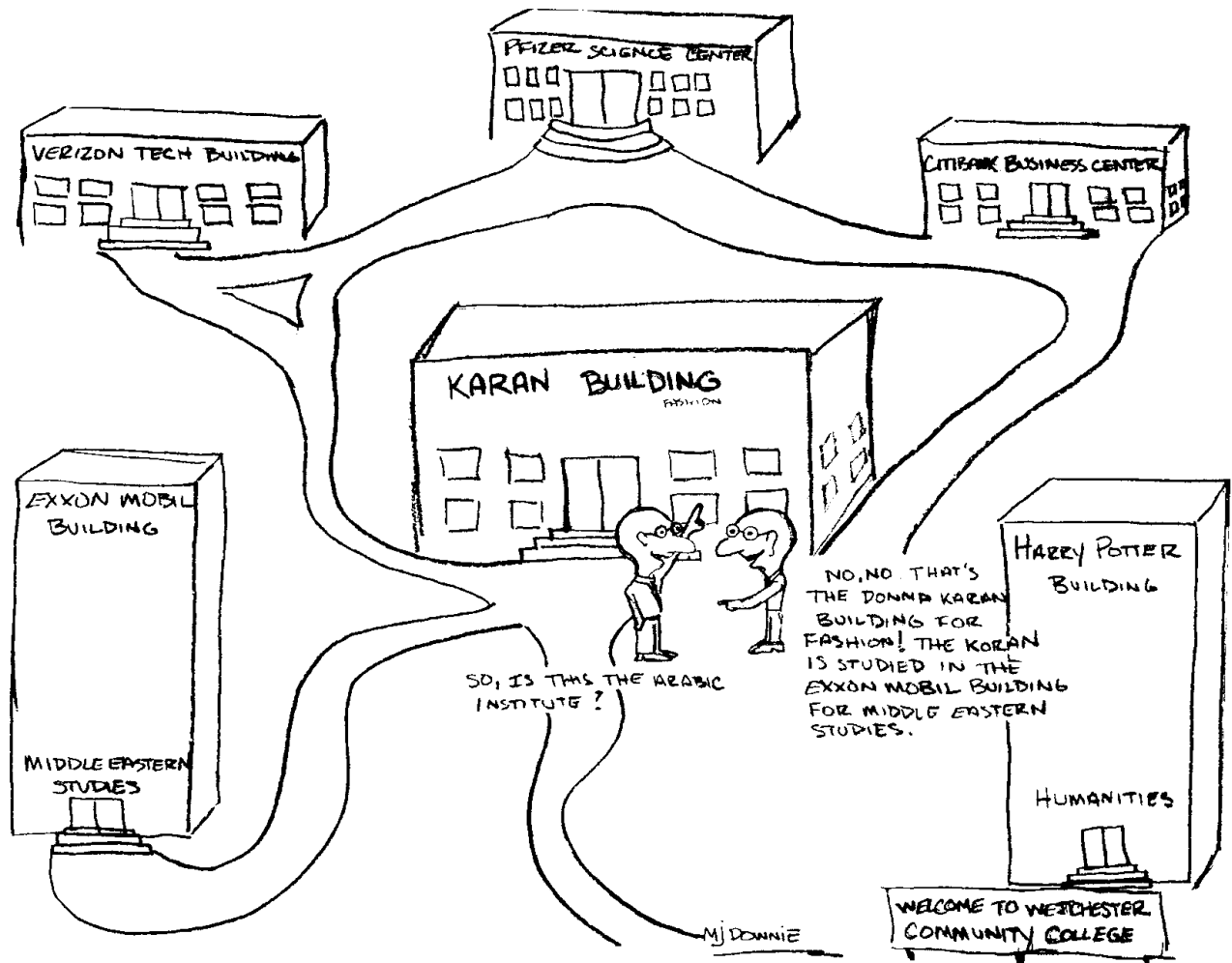
As happy as we can be about the settling of the contract, we have very little time to get drunk celebrating. Victory is nothing more than a threshold for renewed effort. This round of negotiations will be an open, transparent process, involving faculty at all stages from small group meetings to draft the proposals to regular progress reports and bulletins throughout collective bargaining with the College administration. We need to continue to improve working conditions and must hold firm on health benefits.

This means we need to research provisions of other contracts, talk to negotiators at SUNY and CUNY, work up options. To get back on track, we should start negotiations this spring. According to the attached plan, we would take about seven weeks to do background research, another four weeks to hammer out proposals and aim for a May 3 first exchange with the Administration. All of this is subject to discussion and debate. Please let us hear from you. You are a critical part of the process.



Negotiating Plan for 2004

Stage	Parties	Goal(s)	Start	Finish
Training on Collective Bargaining Agreement	WCCFT Executive Committee Plus representatives of departments of buildings	Become familiar with present contract provisions Research provisions of other contracts, especially in re: health benefits (welfare funds, options)	26 January	12 March
Small group meetings	Entire faculty by department of building	Come up with lists of negotiations proposals from each unit	22 March	1 April
Negotiating Team Review	Executive Committee	Make one composite list of proposals	2 April	7 April
General Membership Meeting	Entire faculty	Review list; make revisions	7 April	7 April
Summary of proposals	Executive Committee	Final revisions	14 April	14 April
Submit proposals to College	Lead Negotiating Team	Exchange proposals with College Schedule negotiating sessions	3 May	3 May
Report to General Membership	Entire faculty	Discuss ground rules and procedures for negotiations with faculty	5 May	5 May
Regular meetings of Lead Negotiating Team	Lead Negotiating Team and Executive Committee	Complete negotiations on time Update faculty through bulletins	31 May	31 August



Is This Our Future?

Does corporate America have a vision for education that includes creating Educational Maintenance Organizations (EMO's) that are modeled on HMO's? Why is Lehman Brothers sending around brochures to its clients saying, "Look, we've taken over the health system, we've taken over the prison system; the next big target is the educational system. Let's privatize the educational system and make a lot of money out of it?"



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