

AAUP NEWSLETTER

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Montgomery College Chapter

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President's Corner

Rose Sachs—President

The Learning College...

As is the case with many of us, I suspect, I have had a bit of a struggle trying to get a handle on the *Learning College*, for the initiative, not so much in terms of the rhetoric, but rather in terms of the substance below the rhetoric and the manner in which this particular vision and this particular mission differ from the various visions and missions that have theoretically guided our operations thus far. The pillars seem pretty straightforward: first-year experience, service learning, learning communities, student achievement and retention, and assessment and accountability. These *strategies* are all worthy and have, after all, been in place to a lesser or greater degree and with shifts in emphasis and prevailing methodology for many years.

In the publication, albeit somewhat sophomoric and a bit irritating, distributed by the College, Terry O'Banion states that the purpose and guiding principle of the *Learning Revolution*, which gives rise to the *Learning College*, is *to place learning first in every policy, program, and practice*. It is this concept, the one that appears to be the very underpinning of the *Learning College*, that I find most elusive, and yet at the same time, most compelling. Sanford Shugart, President of Valencia Community College, concretizes the essential requirements of a Learning College in a college-wide memo. He writes that colleges can only realize true improvements in student learning *by redesigning*

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Weingarten Rights

Tim Kirkner—Grievance Officer

"Know Your Rights" (The Clash)

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRB) gives you specific rights to seek union representation during investigatory interviews. These rights are called Weingarten rights after the company that fought the NLRB all the way to the Supreme Court in 1975.

Unlike Miranda rights, where you have to be told that you have the right to have representation during questioning, under Weingarten employers have no obligation to inform you of your rights to union representation. You must ask for it.

An example of an investigatory interview would be when management questions you for information and you *believe* that discipline or some other consequence may result from what is said. These conversations may be related to absenteeism, poor work performance, lateness, drugs, etc. Not all interactions with management are investigatory interviews. For instance, if you are called in and told that you are being given a warning about being late, you cannot invoke your Weingarten rights. If, however, you then are asked questions related to the subject matter of the disciplinary action (why were you late?), then this becomes an investigatory interview and thus you do have rights under Weingarten.

Your Rights:

1. You can request union representation **before** or **during** the interview. If you do, the employer must:
 - A. Grant the request and delay questioning until the union representative arrives.
 - B. Deny the request and end the interview immediately.
 - C. Give the employee a choice of:

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our organization to eliminate habits, structures, and procedures that defeat good teaching and learning and creating new structures that support them. In the learning college movement, these things have come to be called the “deep architecture” of our institutions. Thus, it would seem, a shift needs to be made from architecture that has been often built on economic values rather than learning values (Shugart) to an architecture in which planning and operational decisions must be made with consideration to their potential impact on student learning (Boggs).

It would appear, then, critical to distinguish between pillars of learning and deep architecture. The true value in the Learning College movement is not the above-ground architecture of initiatives and outcomes; rather, it is located below the surface: that which is holding up the pillars. Without this deep architecture of faculty and administrative support, teaching and learning resources, and institutional infrastructures, the most pivotal being collaborative decision-making and shared governance, over time, our pillars, regardless of their merit or strength, will inevitably come crashing down.

Clearly, countless hours have been spent and a huge outlay of personpower engaged to construct goals and objectives; to rework, reword, and reconstruct goals and objectives; and to define the minutia of difference between goals and objectives. Clearly, countless hours have been spent and a huge outlay of personpower engaged to ferret out the standards by which the goals will be measured. The goals themselves, in fact, take the better part of an evening to wrap one’s mind around; I still can’t figure out how one operationalizes *intentional learning*. The time and energy that continue to go into outcomes assessment boggles the mind, and someone, perhaps even someone with one of those top 200 salaries, spent some amount of time selecting the colors for the pillars. All of this is of value (maybe not the colors), but what of the deep architecture?

In an article that appears in the current issue of *Academe*, Robin Matross Helms and Tanya Price assert that *faculty participation in campus governance is declining nationwide. As higher education shifts toward market models of organization, boards and administrators increasingly apply bureaucratic modes of decision making to areas that used to be the domain of faculty members.* In a recent survey conducted by the Rockville Faculty Council, the results of which will be available to the College community upon completion, the number of faculty members who feel that faculty are excluded from the decision-making process at the College and that faculty are not valued by the administration is stunning. Granted,

this particular survey is preliminary, and statistics can be interpreted in many ways; however, it would seem prudent, that we, both administrators and faculty, give credence to the issues, even if the specific numbers are skewed. One explanation for this perception may be a function of miscommunication, and, perhaps, our perspective is included in decisions and we are valued by the College. And yet, time after time, we are faced with initiatives in which faculty has played little or no role; with inclusion only after the fact; with a lack of accurate information; with changes imposed in the operation and structure of our areas that come from administrators who have precious little knowledge of these areas; with upgrades in Banner that significantly hamper our ability to provide academic advising; and with conflicting and ambiguous responses to our queries. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to rule out the notion that the College has succumbed to the implementation of this model of bureaucratic, top-down decision making.

The role of the faculty in governance is an imperative in the Learning College; it is, moreover, *critical to the culture and vitality of higher education* (NEA Policy Statement). We, as an institution, then, must go beyond the rhetoric and sincerely examine our deep architecture: the process employed to make decisions and establish policy and practices and the interests that guide the decisions by which we, faculty, administrators, staff, and most importantly our students, live. Shugart states that *a learning college needs decision making structures that honor the fact that the faculty and staff who mediate student learning know things about the students and about the organization that the rest of us cannot know and that faculty must have a powerful voice in decision making.* The analysis of the Rockville Faculty Survey is not complete, and Faculty Councils at Germantown and Takoma Park/Silver Spring plan to administer surveys as well. At the very least, however, we need to acknowledge that many, if not the majority of, faculty members believe that, not only is our collective voice far less than powerful in the decision-making process at the College, but that our input is largely unsolicited and our perspectives ill-attended.

George Boggs, the President of the American Association of Community Colleges, asserts that the efforts of faculty are *essential in the transformation*

of colleges and universities to become more learning centered. We must be influential players in the governance of our institution to help ensure that planning and operational decisions are made to impact student learning positively (Boggs). If the College is truly invested in embracing the principles of a Learning College, the requirement of inclusion cannot be ignored. It is, in fact, *the collaborative decision making that characterizes a learning organization* (Shugart). For our part, we cannot afford to be complacent when decisions are made in isolation that revise the vision and mission of the College, alter the structure and operations of our areas and departments, and affect the lives and learning of our students.

That the administration is sincere in its desire to develop the academic side of the College and enrich the experience of our students is not in question. However, without an examination of and appropriate changes to our current structure of governance, the Learning College Initiative may very well become mere wrapping paper. To ensure that each and every individual employed at the College is responsible for learning is not to dilute the importance of teaching or minimize the role of faculty. Emphasizing learning does not de-emphasize teaching; learning and teaching are not mutually exclusive, but rather, they are inseparable. The purpose of a Learning Institution is not to diminish the importance of faculty in the classrooms and in academic advising and counseling; in fact, as the literature suggests, the role and importance of faculty in a Learning College go well beyond the classrooms and advising. Kay McClenney, Vice President of the Education Commission of the States, provides a tool with which to judge the evolution of the learning environment: *...every choice, every decision – about staffing, resource allocation, everything – gets subjected to a simple screen: How does this improve learning?* We, all of us, faculty and staff, as well as administrators, must continue to ask that question and must be prepared to provide an answer.

- *Having the interview without representation (bad move on your part).
- *Ending the interview (good choice if union officer is not available).

If you suspect that a meeting is about to take place that will in fact become investigatory, you should read this statement to management BEFORE the meeting starts!

If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request that my union representative, officer, or grievance office be present at this meeting. Without representation present, then...

I choose not to participate in this discussion.

Keep in mind that if you are ALREADY in a meeting and it turns investigatory, you have the right to invoke your Weingarten rights, after which management must respond by granting option A, B, or C.

These are **your** rights in case you find yourself in an investigatory interview situation. Remember, management will not tell you to seek representation; you must invoke the right to do so.

New 457(b) Retirement Plans Available

Bill Talbot—AAUP Treasurer

If you are in TIAA-CREF, VALIC, AETNA, or the Equitable retirement plan, you have another way to set money aside for retirement. The money set aside in the 457(b) plan reduces your tax liability and grows tax deferred.

A 457(b) plan works very much like other retirement plans such as the 403(b) and 401(k). You can contribute to this plan in addition to the 403(b) plan that you are already contributing to at Montgomery College. Your contributions and earnings grow tax-deferred and reduce your taxable income.

For 2005, workers are able to contribute up to \$14,000 or up to 100% of includable compensation. In other words if you make \$12,000 for the year, you can only contribute up to \$12,000. The majority of MC employees could contribute up to the maximum of \$14,000

Who's Who in 2005

President	Rose Sachs - (R)	279-5077
Secretary	Pat Feeney - (R)	251-7484
Treasurer	Bill Talbot - (R)	279-5014
VP – G	Tammy Peery - (G)	353-7768
VP – R	Judith Prask - (R)	279-5126
VP – TP	Tracy Smith-Bryant - (TP)	650-1369
Past President	Harry Zarin - (G)	353-7767
Governance Liaison	Jim O'Brien - (R)	279-5233
Grievance Officers	Don Day - (R)	279-5235
	Tim Kirkner - (R)	279-5049
At-large Member	Abby Spero - (G)	353-7753
At-large Member	Trudy Cohen - (TP)	650-1412
At-large Member	Ken Weiner - (R)	279-5203

If you are age 50 or older in year 2006, you may contribute an additional \$5,000 above the 2006 elective deferral limit of \$15,000 for a total of \$20,000. This catch-up option is available to Montgomery College 457(b) plans.

You also can take advantage of the portability—the 403(b) plan money can be moved into a new employer's 457(b), 403(b), or 401(k) if the plan accepts such transfers, or into an IRA. By contributing now, you can reduce your taxable income for the current year.

All of our existing vendors at Montgomery College have 457(b) products available. For more information, please talk to your TIAA-CREF, VALIC, AETNA, or Equitable representative and ask about the 457(b) plan.



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