



# The Spark

## HARPER FACULTY NEWSLETTER

Number 11 - Spring 2015 - Cook County College Teachers Union - American Federation of Teachers Local

### Harper Faculty Senate Executive

#### President:

Tom Dowd  
847.925.6695  
tdowd@harpercollege.edu

#### Vice President:

Bobby Summers  
847.925.6746  
bsummers@harpercollege.edu

#### Secretary:

Jeannine Lombardi  
847.925.6572  
jlombard@harpercollege.edu

#### Treasurer:

Andy Kidwell  
847.925.6704  
akidwell@harpercollege.edu

#### Grievance Officer:

James Gramlich  
847.925.6279  
jgramlic@harpercollege.edu

### CONTENTS:

Dual Credit(able)? <i>Andrew Wilson</i> .....	Cover
Pathways to Perdition <i>Brett Fulkerson-Smith</i> .....	Cover
Speaking with One Voice: the Role of Teachers' Unions in Shaping Students' Lives <i>John Garcia</i> .....	2
One Step Forward <i>Sean Noonan</i> .....	8
Five Questions <i>Bobby Summers</i> .....	9
The Myth of the Jobs/Skills Mismatch <i>Sean Noonan</i> .....	10
Comments.....	11



### Dual Credit(able)?

*Andrew Wilson*  
English Department

*"Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see."*

- Neil Postman

Chicagoland's *Daily Herald* readers might recall a February, 2015 piece on the expansion of Dual-Credit opportunities for high-school students in Illinois District 214, an important neighbor of William Rainey Harper College. That piece -- "Power of 15 Brings College to Suburban High Schools" (still fully viewable on the *Herald's* website) -- was altogether celebratory, hailing Dual Credit as an innovative way to buttress a young person's trek toward a baccalaureate degree -- and

*Continued on page 3*

### Pathways to Perdition

*Brett Fulkerson-Smith*  
Philosophy Department

In early March of this year, I attended Harper's Strategic Planning Conference. Three "strategic directions" emerged from the highly choreographed event, which included a series of keynote presentations and breakout sessions for the nearly one hundred conferees (comprised primarily of Harper faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as local political and business leaders): Inclusion, Engagement, and Achievement. The guided pathways model was singled out for special consideration as the best means to the attainment of each of these three worthy goals.

But is it? An answer to this question requires an understanding of the model, both in itself and as it has been

*Continued on page 6*

# Speaking with One Voice: the Role of Teachers' Unions in Shaping Students' Lives

John Garcia

Philosophy Department

A few years ago, when I was talking with Dave Richmond, he mentioned to me that he comes from a long line of union workers. I was reluctant to tell him in turn how different my own experience continues to be. My father has always been decidedly anti-union. Many of you likely know at least someone like this: the person who knows you, knows you are a teacher, and will tell you, "I have nothing but respect for teachers; teachers are great. It's the teachers' unions that are the problem."

This view, of course, has many problems. It perceives the rank and file members of a union such as ours as a bunch of non-thinking folks who have been duped by union leadership into forfeiting our own best interests in order to line the pockets of those at the top. It presumes that when the union speaks, it does not speak on our behalf, and that we are either ignorant of this or coerced into ignoring it. It is, of course, insulting.

There is also another prevalent, and only slightly less cynical, view about unions. (Though this second view is directly opposed to the first, it often seems that many anti-union people hold both at once.) This latter view suggests that teachers' unions have one purpose and one purpose only: to look out for the interests of teachers, and that this will inevitably mean not looking out for educational quality or the best interests of students. Even if this were true, I am not sure it is something for which we should apologize. Yet, what I would like to suggest is that the most important role a union plays is not just compatible with looking out for the interests of students but is essential to it.

A union such as ours, and the shared-governance system that works hand in hand with it, provides one essential service to students: it makes possible a unified voice in the shaping of educational practices that shape their lives.

I have honest respect for our current administration. I believe they are well-meaning people who believe their vision for the future of education will lead to better outcomes for our students. But, they are well-intentioned people who no doubt have blind spots in their view of education. This may be true at the national level as well. "Educational reformers" may genuinely have the best interests of students at heart, but they have a view that has largely been formed in an echo

chamber, with everyone in the room convincing everyone else that the next national trend will be the thing that finally fixes education.

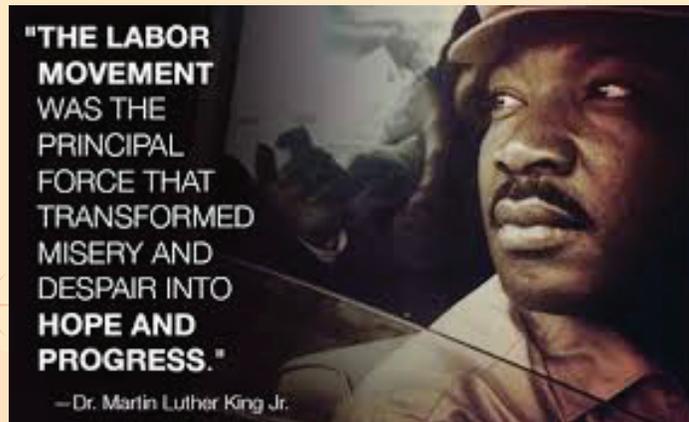
The fact that a view is formed in an echo chamber does not, of course, mean that it is wrong. However, what it does mean is that the view has been shaped by only a few, and it risks being blind to the input of others who may see things a different way. Many educators disagree with the emerging educational policies engendered, in recent years, by national (but, again, often one-sided) "conversations"; I am sure many of us have issues with specific initiatives at Harper. Yet, so long as we are simply a collection of individuals, we can never push back, never be a collaborative partner with those who are setting the agenda. We would only be a number of voices -- never a unified voice. This is the purpose of teachers' unions at their finest: to be a part of the conversation about the future of education. And our voice

is an essential one, as we are the ones who see how policies and practices affect individual students' lives every day.

Rather than being obstructionists for the sake of obstructionism, or as a means to privilege the interests of teachers or of union leadership above all else, when we as a union offer resistance to initiatives, we do so because we have good reason to worry that

these initiatives will have troubling consequences. Our job is to help to ensure that the consequences of initiatives on students' lives that may otherwise be unforeseen get recognized and given their due consideration. It is by testing and challenging views, both our own and others, that we become more likely to arrive at better solutions. Collaboration in forming an educational vision is key to ensuring its thoughtfulness, and it is my hope that this collaborative spirit will remain alive here at Harper.

One thing is for sure -- to the degree that we will have a voice, it will only be possible because we have a *unified* voice, and this is only possible because we have a *union*.



## Dual Credit(able)? (continued from cover page)

Andrew Wilson

then a career. In that new and much-enlarged vision, hundreds of Northwest-Suburban high-school students would complete several credit hours of college coursework -- courses in Art, English, and Math, for instance -- without ever leaving the actual walls of their District-214 high schools: John Hersey High, Rolling Meadows High, and more. They would accomplish that coursework, for the most part, in their junior and senior years. The teachers for those Dual-Credit courses would, in every instance, be employed by District 214; that is, they would be neither paid nor employed by Harper, though the Dual-Credit courses under their charge would feature Harper's imprint.

And notably, those teachers would at no point have been vetted by the same process used to interview and hire part- or full-time professors who teach on the college's main campus in Palatine, Illinois.

That Harper, a two-year institution, has an increasingly healthy relationship with its area high schools is certainly good. However, that by itself cannot mean that Dual Credit is also good -- or good in all instances, at least. My concerns about Dual Credit are at once local and national, having to do with the direction of Harper College, where I have spent the last 19 years as a full-timer in English, and also with a larger phenomenon in higher ed., where Dual Credit and a hurry-up philosophy have been on the rise for the last couple decades.

To begin, there is the unhappy fact -- and it is a fact -- that the decision to implement a much-enlarged Dual-Credit relationship with District 214 was made without any notable input from Harper faculty members, notwithstanding the college's pronounced allegiance to the spirit of collaboration. Harper did, on February 6, 2015, host a Dual-Credit summit in the college's Wojcik Dining Hall; several Harper faculty and administrators and just as many teachers and administrators from District 214 were in attendance, and we were indeed invited to debate the pros and cons of Dual Credit. What we were really doing on 2/6/15, however, was debating a matter that had been settled before our arrival: that summit took place after the *Herald* piece mentioned above; certainly it occurred as the plan to offer several Dual-Credit Harper courses in District-214 was already underway.

As well, and more painfully, faculty concern about Dual Credit has been mischaracterized by some as disrespect for the folks who teach at the high-school level. Yes, many have voiced skepticism (not to be confused with cynicism or resistance to innovation) regarding the viability of Dual Credit. And yes, Harper faculty have worried that their college-level courses will be taught in the protective space of the American high school, and taught by folks who were never asked to undergo Harper's typical hiring process, a process that differs, we believe, from the hiring process employed at the high-school level.

But such fears do not reflect distrust in high-school educators. In fact, and on the contrary, Harper faculty are humbled by the task with which the American high school is charged: to receive a 13- or 14-year-old on the cusp of adolescence, with all that this entails, and somehow, in some way, battle myriad distractions and coax into being the beginnings of an adult sensibility and a sense of democratic citizenry in him or her, and to educate him/her all the while. Magnify that exponentially, accounting for sheer enrollment and wildly divergent stages of student preparedness, and once again we are impressed by the skill with which so many high-school teachers accomplish their work, evidenced in my own experience by the sometimes-fabulous traditional-age freshmen I continually see, each and every fall, in my English 101 classes at Harper.

Some of us used to be high-school teachers. Others of us, myself included, are the children of former high-school teachers, counselors, coaches -- memories are bone-deep and as wide as our parents' tired six-p.m. smiles. With confidence, I can say that our concern about Dual Credit is not born from prejudice or a lack of trust in our colleagues who teach in District 214.

Let us turn to a dream I have: therein, I would lead a graduate-level seminar on William Faulkner, America's greatest writer (in my view). Imagine, briefly, that that dream is suddenly made possible through a kind of Dual-Credit relationship between Harper and nearby DePaul University, a much-favored transfer institution for our students. Let us say, too, that DePaul's administrators have initiated that program without meaningful input from their faculty stakeholders. Students will read *The Sound and the Fury* and *Light in August* with me, and they will write essays for me, and I will provide feedback on these essays and grade them, essentially deeming the students prepared (or not) for further graduate study in English, perhaps at the doctoral level. With me, the students will debate Faulkner's presentations of gender, of race and class, North and South -- and his faith that man is not predetermined, that now and then, despite a damnable birth, someone among the lowly masses can wrest control of his or her present and future. But that graduate course will at last be listed on a DePaul transcript, a *graduate* transcript, though I remain employed and/or paid by Harper, and though I meet my Faulkner students on the campus of Harper.

Now, should my colleagues in academia at DePaul express concern about that, how could I reasonably fault them? It is true that I have the requisite degree to teach a course like that just described, but the members of DePaul's English faculty never hired me. They never perceived me as a proper match for their students, their program, and their culture. Would I not, in teaching the above-described course, be bypassing their vetting process? DePaul's English faculty cannot be certain that my long experience with the culture of Harper College, however noble, is a perfect match for their own milieu of the university: the culture of expectations built across decades of graduate-level literature seminars in Chicago's Lincoln Park.

I do not believe that those DePaul faculty members, in voicing those and other concerns, would be manifesting distrust in me or my teaching. Further, I would agree with their argument that if I'd like to teach a graduate Faulkner seminar at DePaul, I should do so on the campus of DePaul, after attempting and passing the institution's tried/true selection procedures for faculty, either part or full time.

Some of my Harper colleagues point to certain academic findings, hopefully conducted in frigid nonpartisanship, which conclude that Dual-Credit experiments like that developing between Harper and District 214 have produced little or no meaningful educational value. Justifiably, other Harper colleagues underscore the labor question: Dual Credit, in essence, amounts to outsourcing. Still other colleagues worry very much about the question of control: not the wicked kind but the other kind, the good kind: *quality control*. (My colleague in Harper's Fire Science Technology Department, Sam Giordano, has spoken beautifully in that regard, pointing out that a Harper course, when it leaves the Harper umbrella and moves to an area high-school, potentially stands to lose a lot: suddenly, Sam has noted, a Harper chair's ability to insure consistency in one of his/her department's own offerings becomes a murkier matter.)

I do not dispute those points at all. My concerns have something to do with research, something to do with labor, plenty to do with quality control; however, my deepest concern has more to do, ultimately, with the students who will be affected by Dual Credit, or with the aforementioned matter of culture, or with a potentially worrisome conflation of equally viable cultures, high school and college. I argue that those cultures bespeak and even demand differing minds and, yes, differing stages of maturity – an amorphous concept, I concede. Supporters of Dual Credit will rebut: boundary lines are fluid. One such supporter recently asked me to place, in my mind, a high-school senior beside a traditional-age college freshman. He asked: can we really locate a notable difference with respect to maturity, psychological or emotional? What separates the two, he argued, is a mere matter of months.

What I am saying is that months alone are not all that lies between one's high-school senior year and this same young person's autumn enrollment in college coursework on a college campus. I am not persuaded that a high-schooler, even a brilliant one, profits overmuch from taking English 101 (for ex.) in the cultural space of high school. Actually, a crucial aim of a college English course is to nudge a student toward a more critical view of the many systems around him or her; as high school itself is a primary instance of those systems, one wonders if that student is better equipped to render a substantive critique of it somewhat after graduation, and from a space (literally and figuratively) removed: a place without bells, without hall monitors, without parental oversight, without ultra-familiar characters and interior layouts stamped in the student's semi-consciousness. So even if a Dual-Credit English 101 course is taught very well, by an excellent high-school English teacher, I seriously wonder if the all of the course's aims can be achieved.

And by the way, in the spirit of fluid boundary lines, let us remember that Harper, since its inception, has welcomed the area's exceptional high-schoolers on *the college's Algonquin-Road campus*; I myself have had numerous and sometimes outstanding 16- and 17-year-olds in my English and Literature classes at Harper, especially through my years-long involvement with our Honors Program.

Finally, the Dual-Credit project looks to me frighteningly like yet another attempt to obliterate the American child, to view education primarily as a fast-track toward a degree, then a career, then the material comforts of the middle class -- as if acceleration and enrichment are one and the same, and the one is bound to produce the other. There is nothing wrong with a degree, a career, a sense of financial and material security, of course. I chased those things once upon a time and want them for my own two children, who are still very small. But there is a problem -- perhaps a pathology? -- in the haste implicit in Dual Credit. We should consider what might be lost in the blithe pursuit of it. Are all colleges and universities inclined to recognize coursework completed through Dual Credit, for instance? (The University of Chicago has shown reluctance in that regard.) Too, might some Dual-Credit Art instructors, concerned that 16- and 17-year-olds (and/or their parents) are unready for Mapplethorpe and others of his temper, shy away from bringing provocative images before their District-214 students?

Too, what long-standing high-school courses will Harper's Dual-Credit courses replace? When a Hersey senior takes Dual-Credit English 101, will he or she necessarily forego a Poetry-Writing or Drawing elective, exactly the kind of course our society sometimes tragically perceives to be divorced from job training and success in most careers? Supporters of Dual Credit will say that they have not pursued it blithely, but I worry that they have, given that the questions offered just above, and so many additional ones, remain unanswered – and, until lately, pretty much unasked.

This letter, I am sure, is vulnerable to evisceration. If I have over-, under-, or simply mis-represented the facts, I sincerely beg my reader's pardon. And I should add in fairness that some Harper faculty members support Dual Credit (which hints that it might make sense for some disciplines but not for others); the college's administrative team, comprised of thoughtful persons, seems nearly unanimously to support it. The folks I've met from Illinois District 214, teachers and administrators, view it as an exciting development for them and their students. And the latter and their families are thrilled, I am told, that Dual Credit will provide serious monetary savings (high-school students will pay nothing for Dual-Credit courses); that it will mean serious progress toward their undergraduate degrees; that it will, more generally, and in the first place, pique their interest in higher education: all of that and more *before* their senior years come to a close. Even Illinois lawmakers have blessed Dual Credit, albeit with caveats: the courses themselves must pass muster with respect to quality and rigor, and the students in these courses must be truly qualified enrollees.

Thus is Dual Credit moving forward in Chicago's Northwest Suburbs, despite substantial unease of varying degrees among Harper faculty members. With these paragraphs, I plead mainly and simply that we give the matter deeper consideration than was offered in the above-referenced *Herald* piece. I wish we could more clearly see who or what is driving it, and I wish we could challenge the notion that Dual Credit amounts to an ethical imperative, as one very influential gentleman from Harper announced (surprisingly, to my ears) at the above-mentioned summit held on our campus. It is no secret: educational initiatives receiving aggressive support from well-connected administrators, and even regional and national politicians, are cast prettily -- even while these same initiatives leave teachers disquieted, with many more questions than answers. Dual Credit has thus far been projected to the public as almost sweepingly advantageous -- as no cause for anxiety. But I am skeptical, and I am not alone, that it is such a good thing, a truly good thing, to usher students hurriedly along the path toward adulthood with without a deeper sense of why, or whether, this will serve them well upon arrival.

Mr. Postman (see the epigraph) offers a familiar metaphor: children as "living messages" that we transmit to the future, and we imagine this future as an improvement upon the present. But what occurs when we chip away at childhood itself, trimming it by semesters, a year here and there, thereby trading it for the sheen of acceleration: a luminescence which dies upon inspection and which looks in the end like fool's gold? And what if we do that, incredibly, in the supposed best interest of the child? "High Schools to Offer Plan to Graduate 2 Years Early," reads one headline; "Harlem STAR Student Nearly Halfway to Her College Degree," reads another. It is not for science fiction alone to ask what a society increasingly bereft of the very idea of childhood -- and built upon its disappearance -- is likely to yield.



## Pathways to Perdition (continued from cover page)

Brett Fulkerson-Smith

implemented and scaled at Harper, an analysis of the evidence for the guided pathways approach, and consideration of how *degree and program maps* are created. In what follows, I briefly address each of these issues in turn before offering my answer.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges, guided pathways offer students “a highly structured, coherent educational experience that is built around and through an area of study.” As this definition highlights, there are two key components of the guided pathways approach. What is referred to as the “educational experience built around an area of study” amounts to an integrated suite of high-impact practices. A report published by the Center for Community College Student Engagement’s (CCCSE) identifies thirteen high-impact practices that have been shown to contribute to student achievement. The guided pathways approach makes student engagement with these practices inescapable.

The guided pathways approach also has implications for the areas of studies available to students. “By their very nature, pathways reduce the number of choices students have to make, particularly when they first enter college” (Center for Community College Student Engagement). This is accomplished through the use of degree or program maps, which uses default templates to simplify course selection and scheduling for students.

At the most general level, degree and program maps are hardly distinguishable from the list of degree or program requirements currently available to students at many (community) colleges, including Harper. Both identify what is necessary in order for a student to complete a degree or a program. Nevertheless, when it comes to the number and kinds of courses available to students in pursuit of this or that degree or program certificate, there is a significant difference. On the guided pathways model, students are able to choose from *significantly* fewer course and scheduling options.

To illustrate this point, consider the AA degree map at Davidson County Community College ([Table 1](#)), whose guided pathways model was featured at Harper’s Strategic Planning Conference in a session titled “What Excellent Community Colleges Do.” During the first semester, students are required to take Student Success Strategies (ACA), Writing and Inquiry (ENG), and Quantitative Literacy (MAT). In addition, students must choose one Humanities or Fine Arts course from among three options: Art Appreciation (ART), Music Appreciation (MUS), and Introduction to Ethics (PHI). During the second semester, students are also required to choose one Humanities or Fine Arts course from among the same three options, although in later semesters students are asked to select an English class from among four options and two Foreign Language courses from among six, sequenced options.

At Davidson County Community College, then, my educational journey from high-school credential to AA

will likely<sup>1</sup> never take me through Critical Thinking or Religions of the World or Social and Political Philosophy, to name just three foundational courses in Philosophy that are conspicuously absent from the degree map under consideration. Since this is what “excellent community colleges” do, it is unlikely that Harper’s degree or academic maps would be any different; otherwise, Harper would not be “excellent,” which is a non-starter. But why do academic and program maps so severely limit student choice?

The answer to this question is found in current brain science research. Both CCCSE and Davis Jenkins, Senior Research Associate at the Community College Research Center, specifically cite research from behavioral psychology regarding the relationship between anxiety, the number of choices available to a person, and the quality of the resulting decision(s). CCCSE summarizes a *Newsweek* article by Sharon Begley, who at the time the article was published was Science Editor and Science Columnist, as follows: “Current brain science research shows that people experience anxiety and frustration when they face too many choices and, as a result, are more likely either to make poor decisions or to retreat from the situation altogether.” Jenkins contextualizes this point within higher education when he writes:

Too many complex choices can lead to the sorts of behaviors that are often associated with students who fail to make steady progress: indecision, procrastination, self-doubt, and paralysis. In contrast, a simplified set of options that includes clear information on each option’s costs and benefits, of the provision of a ‘default option’ designed by experts, can help people make more optimal decision when confronted with lots of choices.<sup>2</sup>

Although both CCCSE and Jenkins caution against providing too many choices to students, neither quantifies just how many choices are too many. Rob Johnstone, who is not only a social psychologist by training, but also Founder and President of the National Center for Inquiry & Improvement, does. In a blog series addressing questions about guided pathways, Johnstone points out that “the research on all of us—including students—suggests that we can rationally make decisions between about 5 and 7 options—anything above 7, and we tend to get paralyzed in our choice process.”

Ensuring that students confront between five and seven choices for any decision—not to mention reducing the total number of decisions students have to make at Harper to between five and seven—requires drastic measures on the part of faculty, staff, and administrators. Consider, once again, Davidson County Community College. In developing their “transfer degree maps,” faculty, staff, and administrators dramatically “reduced course offerings for AA/AS degrees from [approximately] 170 to [approximately] 45.” Overall, course offerings for Gen Ed were reduced “by 50% (mostly in humanities and social sciences)” (Davidson County Community College).

Which courses would be cut? An easy answer to this question, given that the endgame of the AA or AS degree map is transfer to a four-year college or university, is to cut all non-IAI courses. In this case, the Philosophy Department at Harper would lose seven courses, which amounts to 44%

of the total number of PHI courses available to students. It is reasonable to believe that roughly the same percentage of Humanities and Social Science courses, if not others across campus, would be cut.

Another question, more difficult to answer, is which of the remaining courses will be included in the default degree and program maps? As mentioned above, Davidson County Community College identifies three Humanities or Fine Arts courses available to AA students: Art Appreciation, Music Appreciation, and Introduction to Ethics. Why these three courses? Why not offer Logic instead of Introduction to Ethics? Or offer Religions of the World or Social and Political Philosophy? Apparently, which courses earn “marquee status”—and which are relegated to the status of a mere “transfer elective”—is determined by the lobbying efforts of faculty, staff, and administrators. The stakes seem to portend an unpleasant confrontation among otherwise collegial colleagues at Harper as degree and program maps are finalized.

According to CCCSE, “today’s community college students must choose from dozens of majors and hundreds of course options.” While it is difficult to determine whether CCCSE is claiming that students face this many course options every time they register, which is doubtful given the personal and institutional parameters that affect the number of options available to students at any given time, I am willing to grant and even suggest that much work can be done at Harper to make more efficient the educational experience of our students, especially at the level of course selection and scheduling.

However, rather than implement and scale degree and program maps, I suggest that Harper follow a relatively more conservative course for now. First and foremost, Harper should hire more counselors and allow them to help and empower students. As Jenkins points out, “colleges and universities that have implemented guided pathways have also hired more advisors<sup>3</sup> ....” Both the guided pathways approach and the more conservative approach I recommend require more counselors and advisors. But, this conservative approach promises a higher return on the investment. More counselors will work with more students not merely to “pick four,” as it were, but also to explore with students the full range of options that will determine their (near) future, helping them to develop the skills and confidence to make good decisions now *and* in the future.

With respect to the options available to students, perhaps the time has come to replace the already-archaic grid listing core-curriculum group, hours required, and the courses (arranged alphabetically by course prefix, and then numerically) that fulfill them. There are a number of innovative strategies by which to present naturally complex information more simply and clearly without sacrificing content. This simple step should make it easier for advisors and counselors to communicate this information to students.

If not, then it may be necessary to examine the courses available to students individually in order to remove those that have outlived their usefulness. Doing so allows courses that are unpopular or outdated to be cut, while preserving

those that are valued by students, despite being non-IAI or otherwise non-transferable. This approach to simplifying course options for students is markedly different than the one required by the implementation of degree or program maps; the latter approach can best be described as a wholesale gutting of course offerings.

If it becomes clear that these relatively conservative efforts are ineffective, then it seems reasonable to steer a more radical course. In the final analysis, it must be underscored that the means by which Harper ultimately attains the worthy goals of more inclusion, engagement, and achievement cannot contradict the purpose of higher education. Elaine Tuttle Hansen, who served as President of Bates College from 2002 until 2011 and is now Executive Director of the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University, boldly expresses it thus: “the purpose of education is the emancipation of students from the shackles of a consumerist society” (68). Such an emancipated student is a “liberated consumer,” someone “who does not think she is free from the necessity of consuming...but does not want to succumb to the pressure to consume mindlessly and ubiquitously” (Hansen 68).

Given this purpose, critical thinking should be a student learning outcome not just of every class, but of a student’s entire education experience. To the extent that any campus-wide policy or practice contradicts this purpose, it should always be rejected. And, to my mind, degree and program maps do just this. Hence, degree and program maps should always be rejected. They are too radical; they are pathways to perdition.

## Works Cited

- [American Association of Community Colleges](#). “Empowering Community Colleges to Build the Nation’s Future: An Implementation Guide.” Web. 10 Apr. 2015.
- [Center for Community College Student Engagement](#). *A Matter of Degrees: Practices to Pathways (High-Impact Practices for Community College Student Success)*. Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, Program in Higher Education. Web. 10 Apr. 2015.
- [Davidson County Community College](#). “Completion by Design.” PowerPoint Presentation at the Harper College Strategic Planning Conference, Eaglewood Resort, Itasca, IL, Mar. 4 - 6, 2015.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. “Liberated Consumers and the Liberal Arts College.” *What is College For? The Public Purpose of Higher Education*. Eds. Ellen Condliffe Lagemann and Harry Lewis. New York: Teachers College Press, 2012. 63-85.
- [Jenkins, Davis](#). “Redesigning Community Colleges for Student Success: Overview of the Guided Pathways Approach.” Web. 10 Apr. 2015.
- [Johnstone, Rob](#). *Questions about Guided Pathways II: The Two Towers*. 9 Feb. 2015. Web. 2 April 2015.

<sup>1</sup> The AA degree map does allow for students to select three general “transfer electives” and one “Natural Science Transfer Elective,” so it is logically possible to register for any or all of these courses. But, these courses will compete with any number of other courses, since there does not seem to be distribution requirements for the general transfer electives. What is more, as Jenkins points out, students can opt-out of default degree and program maps. But, this seems highly unlikely, given that very few people opt for fresh fruit instead of the value meal’s default of french-fries.

<sup>2</sup> Jenkins is summarizing from Richard H. Thaler’s and Cass Sunstein’s *Nudge: Improving Decisions About health, Wealth, and Happiness*, which includes a chapter on “Improving School Choices”, and *The Shapeless River: Does a Lack of Structure Inhibit Students’ Progress at Community Colleges?*, by Judith Scott-Clayton. The latter text was recommended in the pre-reading materials distributed to those participating in Harper’s Strategic Planning Conference.

<sup>3</sup> Based on his article, it seems that Jenkins means by this term both academic advisors and counselors, which Harper distinguishes, though he does not.

## One Step Forward

Sean Noonan

Sociology Department

Last November's state-wide election ballot had an advisory referendum question that read "Shall the minimum wage in Illinois for adults over the age of 18 be raised to \$10 per hour by January 1, 2015?" Over two-thirds of voters in Illinois and 87% of voters in Chicago supported raising the minimum wage. Then, on December 2nd, the City Council of Chicago voted to raise the minimum wage in the city. The run-up to the Chicago city Council vote saw Illinois House Speaker Madigan, then Governor-elect Rauner, and Chicago Mayor Emanuel all engaged in a bizarre dance, with each politician saying they were for raising the minimum but differing strongly over which and how many strings to attach to a bill that would in fact raise it. Since Emanuel would go before voters sooner than the other pols, he jumped first and ushered a minimum-wage ordinance through city council.

In the City of Chicago, the minimum wage will go up to \$10 an hour in July. By 2017 the minimum wage in Chicago will be \$11, and in 2019 the minimum wage will reach \$13 an hour. After that, increases in the minimum wage will be pegged to inflation. The ordinance also raises the tipped minimum wage (for food service workers) in Chicago by \$1 over two years from the current state minimum of \$4.95 to \$5.45 as of July 1, 2015 and \$5.95 as of July 1, 2016 -- and this, too, will be indexed to inflation every July 1 going forward. According to the Mayor's office, the minimum-wage ordinance will increase the earnings for approximately 410,000 Chicago workers, inject \$860 million into the local economy, and lift 70,000 workers out of poverty.

Mayor Emanuel took credit for raising the minimum wage and made it a key plank in his recent re-election campaign. However, Emanuel was responding to pressure from the grass-roots labor activists in the "Fight for 15" movement. The "Fight for \$15 and a union contract" coalition has dared to struggle. The coalition took off in 2012 and has been building a strong social movement for economic justice and workers' rights. "Fight for 15" uses the tools of the organizing campaign, the one-day strike, and protests on the streets. After a series of high-profile and popular campaigns like the Black-Friday protests and the Strike-Fast-Food campaign, popular support for raising the minimum wage has gone national and even crossed traditional party lines. Twenty states including a number of conservative "Red" (majority Republican) states like Arizona, Arkansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska and West Virginia have raised (or will raise) the minimum wage in 2015. Additionally, it is worth noting that Emanuel and the city council felt compelled to respond to the level of the demand for \$15. Though the minimum wage won't hit \$13 an hour until 2019, the staggered rise of the minimum wage to \$13 remains a significant gain for the working class.

Under pressure from the "Fight for \$15" campaign, McDonalds and retailers Target and Walmart are raising their minimum wage to \$9 an hour. Importantly, these raises are still not enough to insure that workers who work full time will not qualify for poverty-reducing (and tax-payer-funded) programs like food stamps, housing vouchers, Medicaid, and free school lunches for kids. For example, in order to insure that no Walmart employee qualifies for public assistance, Walmart wages would need to reach \$15 an hour. Last year the (already billionaire) Walton family saw their wealth increase by \$21 billion. For \$10 billion (1/2 of the Walmart family profit from 2014), Walmart could afford to pay all of its 1.3 million employees a full (family sustaining and public-assistance avoiding) \$15 an hour.

The choice for this society is clear. Either we have a society where billionaires capture obscene profits, or we have a society where working-class people who perform the useful labor that makes this society function are paid a living wage (and thus don't qualify for public assistance). Instead of facing up to this political choice, the superficial thought of "\$15 an hour for flipping burgers" makes older, whiter, and more affluent conservatives apoplectic. And yet, the demand for \$15 an hour and a union contract equally energizes those other folks who are most likely to benefit from the campaign. This was seen on April 15th, 2015, when low-wage workers across the country and their allies (including Local 1600) held mass demonstrations and marches across the country and called for economic justice and union representation in all low-wage jobs. There is a valuable political lesson in the "Fight for 15" campaign. Making a demand worth fighting for is often more effective than watering demands down in order to attract the least sympathetic and the least energetic to the cause. Making strong demands also puts upward pressure on the final policy outcome. If the "Fight for 15" movement had asked for only "\$10 and a union contract" they likely would have only won a minimum wage of \$8.60 an hour in cities like Chicago and Seattle. If we make demands that are a bit further out toward the distant horizon of real social justice, and then aim a bit higher to account for the trajectory necessary to reach that horizon of real social justice, we can make real gains for the people who do the useful work in this society. Despite the weakening of the labor movement over the past thirty plus years, we don't always have to settle for the smaller gain or the lesser evil. Daring to struggle and aiming high can bring about real victories.

## Five Questions

Bobby Summers

Political Science Department

I would like to begin by thanking all of you for the opportunity to serve as your Vice President of the Faculty Senate. Over the course of the past year, I have given a great deal of thought as to how I can remain a faithful steward of the trust that you have placed in me and, most of all, how I can use this position to help my faculty colleagues.

For many years, I've understood that I am a member of a community. The efforts of one another and those of the union as a collective allow me to do my job effectively. Our strength and our ability to educate our students are based on our shared responsibilities to one another. In light of that, I try below to offer answers to five important questions regarding how I can best serve my faculty colleagues. What follows is not only about what I can do but, too, about what all of us -- perhaps especially those of us who have reached or surpassed our "mid-career" years at the college -- can do to support one another.

### How can I help a colleague get tenure?

Hiring a new faculty member comes with the responsibility to guide this person in his or her efforts to attain tenure. You should never select a new faculty member that you cannot work with for, ideally, decades. Make sure that your new colleagues know the process and are doing the things necessary to accomplish tenure. Be an engaged mentor. Ask them about their efforts often and look for opportunities for them to participate and excel. Follow up with them. New faculty often hesitate to ask for help or guidance. Offer it instead.

### How can I help a colleague get promoted?

We should be guiding new faculty from their first days. Explain the process to them in detail. Explain the point system. If you don't understand the process, find someone who does and have them teach you. Take the mystery out of the process. If you have recently gone through the promotion process, you would be a great resource. Use the rubric from the Institutional Promotion Committee as a guide. Find out what successful candidates have done to earn points in each category, and help hopeful candidates to achieve similar success. Harper, as we know, is filled with great teachers who do a profound amount of varied, amazing work. Our newer colleagues should get promoted, and it is our shared responsibility to help each other achieve this milestone.

### How can I make certain that a colleague is enjoying the best possible benefits and working conditions?

We all love what we do. None of us became teachers to get rich. But we should be able to enjoy reasonable pay and benefits and a work environment that is conducive to teaching, learning, collaboration, and academic freedom. Be mindful of the possible ramifications of our choices. Sometimes what may be better for one of us in the short term may be negative for faculty as a whole in the long term. Don't believe society's anti-union rhetoric, which sometimes boldly announces that teachers do not deserve their health-care packages, their maternity-leave policies and graduated pay increases, etc.; don't believe that another faculty member (i.e., your colleague) does not deserve those things as much as much as you do.

### How can I help a colleague be a better teacher?

We all strive to be the best teacher possible. Help each other out. Share what you know. Share what you do. Ask others to share with you. Our collective knowledge is not something that we should hide in a dark closet. Come out of the closet. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Let's build on our strengths and use each other to minimize our weaknesses.

### How can I help a colleague be a better participant in the union?

The union belongs to all of us. The union is not the Senate Exec. or even the larger Faculty Senate. We all have to participate in the union and take ownership of our shared destiny. Nobody can sit back and let others speak for him or her. Stand up, join the fight, and be the union. Each of us will not always agree with one another, but together we will find the best path for the faculty as a whole. If you have a problem with another faculty member, be the bigger person and find a reasonable solution. Argue it out. That is fine. But keep it in house. We don't want to ask administrators to decide things for us. Together, we, as a union, can settle any differences. Ask another faculty member to be a mediator. In fact, we have professionally trained mediators in our faculty ranks at Harper. If necessary, contact Local 1600 for mediation.

These five questions, and my always-evolving considerations of them, have helped me on numerous occasions to do the right thing. I hope to continue to use them, and I hope that you may find them useful as well. I am strengthened by the number of faculty I see helping each other on a daily basis. But I hope to see this in each of us.

Thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you.

## The Myth of the Jobs/Skills Mismatch

Sean Noonan

Sociology Department

Page 8 of the Harper College strategic planning conference pre-reading materials claims “a mismatch between the training students are receiving and the jobs available. We need to align programs with industry needs and provide transitions to employment.”

However, that sentence has been widely debunked. Even the Wall Street Journal has rejected the stance that a widespread jobs/skills mismatch explains the persistence of unemployment or the slow growth of wages in the current economy. (See <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2015/01/09/is-the-skills-gap-real/>.)

The claim of a jobs/skills mismatch is wildly overblown, is not showing up in rising wages for the fields with the putative gaps, is mostly a consequence of firms getting pickier in who they will hire, and is a consequence of a manufacturing industry-funded survey that was more PR than sound social science. The quickest and easiest way to find a job/skill mismatch is to find the types of jobs that have wages rising faster than wages across the wider economy. If there are jobs going unfilled because of the lack of skilled labor to do the job, then that job should see its wages swelling more rapidly than other jobs. When there is a demand that isn't being met by supply, prices tend to rise. If employers have jobs that need filling, but not enough people have the skills to do the jobs, the price of labor to do these jobs should rise. Additionally, by the same logic those jobs should also see a rise in the hours worked per worker. The introduction to a report by Marc Levine and especially pages 10-27 of Levine's piece cover the myth of jobs-skills mismatch and provide ample citations for the research unpacking and explaining the myth. (See [http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/skillsgap\\_2013-2.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/ced/publications/skillsgap_2013-2.pdf).)

A similar piece, this one authored by R. Jason Faberman and Bhashkar Mazumder, is a bit older (from 2012) but features data specific to Illinois. (See [http://www.chicagofed.org/digital\\_assets/publications/chicago\\_fed\\_letter/2012/cfjuly2012\\_300.pdf](http://www.chicagofed.org/digital_assets/publications/chicago_fed_letter/2012/cfjuly2012_300.pdf).)

Finally, Peter Capelli unpacks the jobs-skills myth and offers an alternate explanation. Recruiting intensity has risen since the crisis of 2008 (employers are getting pickier because they can, as unemployment is high and wages have stagnated). In addition to recruiting intensity, age discrimination against older workers and antipathy to workers with union histories are also playing roles. (See <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20382>.)

I'm not suggesting that a job/skill mismatch never happens in any sector, but it is a niche phenomenon in this economy -- not a broad trend that can explain the low labor force participation rates, the high U6 unemployment numbers, or the paltry growth in real wages. The broad trend these days is the opposite of labor being under-qualified for the jobs available. As a general explanation,

the jobs/skills mismatch narrative is ideological camouflage distracting from other forces at work in the economy: forces that are driving the soft-labor market. It is notable that when defenders of capitalism admit that supply and demand can in fact get out of whack with each other, it is to serve as an alibi for a shitty labor market. In this worldview, markets are perfect allocators of resources, except when they aren't, and then it is the workers' own fault they don't have what the market wants.

Page 8 of Harper's strategic planning conference pre-reading materials also says, “while the economy seems to be making a recovery and unemployment is down, the number of discouraged adult workers requires attention.”

Indeed. The low labor force participation rate and the U6 unemployment rate is a disaster that is in the early stages of having generational effects. The US economy is systematically under-utilizing its most essential factor of production, labor. Worse, an economic crisis caused by the revanchism of billionaires has been scapegoated onto the backs of workers themselves and the teachers and professors who do the useful work of educating the workers. Stop blaming the workers, the teachers and professors for a crisis of capital accumulation.



**Harper Works  
Because  
We Work Together**



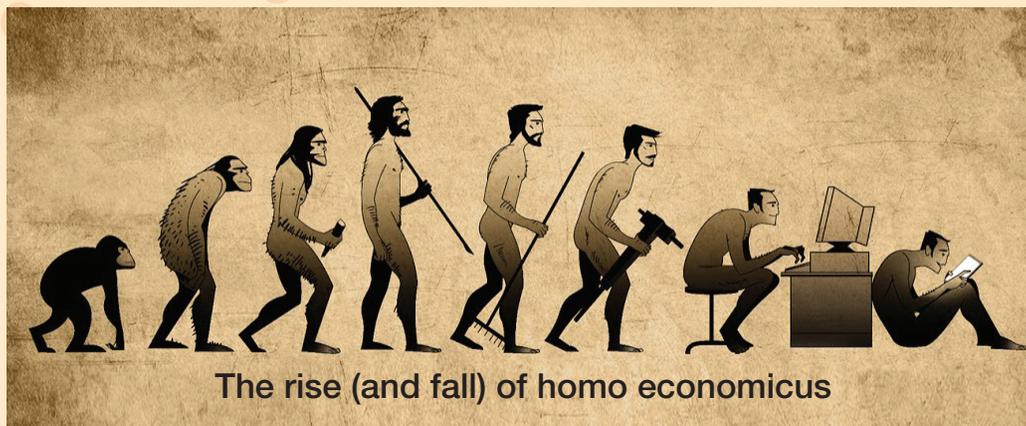
American Federation of Teachers  
Local 1600

## Comments . . .

### Until Humanism Returns to Harper . . .

Harper's best future should be one that is based in its past. Harper College has always been regarded as an outstanding transfer institution. This academic reputation has been denigrated by an administration that looks at education as a numerical task rather than an experience of scholarship and enrichment. This cold approach is then presented to us as if it all is a new idea that is on the "cutting edge" of contemporary higher education. In fact, ideas such as outcomes-based-education are old failures of the 1980s and 90s presented to us with new terminology. Until humanism returns to the center of Harper's educational core, the institution will flounder away a half-century of excellence.

- **Tom DePalma**, History Department



### Problems with Pathways . . .

As Honors co-coordinator, I am concerned that narrowing options will make it impossible for students to transfer in the ways many of our students currently do. At Harper, a student's ability to design an individual plan and take advanced coursework from expert faculty in the student's field of expertise makes it possible to transfer into a more specialized program. Even at the U of I/Urbana-Champaign, students often must apply to participate in certain majors, and they cannot do so without showing that they have already mastered a particular level of expertise. Most of our Honors students attending the U of I apply to special programs and are accepted based on work they have already done in that major, not just completed general-education classes. If we become a school of established "pathways," we might still be a viable option for somebody who wants to major in business or get a certificate, but we will cease to be a resource for impressive, independent thinkers, the students who make successful, powerful alumni. We are often told that the best jobs of the next decade have yet to be defined. Why would we limit the opportunities for our students to seek out those innovations and become the leaders of tomorrow?

- **Alicia Tomasian**, English Department

### Save the Whales, Save Special Electives . . .

The college seems to be basing much of its emerging antipathy toward our Special-Electives courses on anecdotal evidence. Anecdotally, or supposedly, great quantities of students have found them a hindrance to graduation.

So let's grant that a future engineer sometimes prefers to avoid Special-Electives. Do we honor him or her by honoring that preference? Future musicians, philosophers, and poets aren't always excited by the prospect of taking Bio. or Chem., but does this mean that they should be permitted to bypass the sciences? Interestingly, I think many in favor of dissolving Harper's Special-Electives requirement would say yes to the former question and no to the latter. I would say no to both.

We cannot do away with our Special-Electives requirement for degree seekers while, at the same time, hiding behind disingenuous concepts of change, "disruption," and/or 21st-Century agility. Entrusted with the charge of developing mind and spirit, we cannot defer to the fast-food model: the customer scans the menu and orders; we smile and deliver. If it is true that our degree-seeking students are annoyed by Harper's Special-Electives

requirement -- and I've not seen meaningful evidence that they are indeed -- this cannot be perceived as gospel, especially if we want our students to a) earn a degree, and b) trek farther along, even if only modestly, on the path toward becoming complete human beings. Some will read that last line and roll their eyes at the impracticality of it all. But that eye-rolling is cynicism and rooted at last in a profound misunderstanding of what education means.

No one (yet) seems willing to admit that the hope to eliminate the Special-Electives requirement is an attack on a certain type of class, the class that bespeaks expression, that develops creativity (either on paper or in the art studio or music room), that demands exposure to a different culture in the form of a foreign language. Actually, I don't doubt that some students have expressed an aversion to such experiences; of course they have, since the culture infamously relegates expression, creativity, and sometimes even multi-cultural exposure in a battery of depressing ways. But it remains our duty, in my view, to embrace Special Electives and to educate the whole person -- not to create express lines and ultra-smooth pathways that lead to generation homo economicus.

- **Andrew Wilson**, English Department

## Problems with Pathways, Redux . . .

Within this proposed strategic plan, I see a lot of self-blame, on Harper College's part, for students' lack of persistence, their inadequate engagement, and their learning gaps. The faculty at Harper are committed, passionate teachers, though, and I am wondering when students' own failures, their own disinterest in persisting and engaging, will be considered as sources for those learning gaps. External pressures on Harper seem to be driving this culture of self-blame, creating the feeling that we aren't doing enough. I believe we are doing a great deal to help our students. Of course there is room for improvement -- maybe we could do more in terms of student guidance, for example -- but I don't believe that we need new Pathways. Pathways already exist at the college: A.A., A.S., A.A.S. (in many fields), and certificate programs. These are working for a great many students. A greater investment in Student Development faculty would help make the existing pathways clearer and more efficient.

As well, a lot of this plan clearly is directed toward micro-managing the student experience toward a homogenous, "common" first year that squeezes enrollees into narrow "default curricula" in given areas, and I am completely against this. And really, such default curricula already exist in our degree programs: the requirements of our programs are well defined in the Harper catalog. The new strategic plan seems to try to reinvent the college's wheels or, more likely, to eliminate spokes from each one, giving students fewer choices and shrinking the diversity of our course offerings. I am not in favor of Pathways that involve default curricula; again, this limits the student experience, the amount of exposure students have to different academic areas, and the well-roundedness that should come from the first two years of college, especially for transfer students.

This homogeneity is further evident in the phrase "the Harper Way." Calling what we do "the Harper Way" is a complete turn-off. It is a total cliché, used by organizations to change their culture and reinvent themselves. Consider the phrase "the Cubs way," which this sports organization has boldly adopted as if it is something new. Are we so lacking in imagination? Are we this awful, like a perennial last-place team, that we have to "change the culture?" Once more, some aspects of the current "Harper way" could be improved upon, but not in the ways espoused by the new strategic plan. The "Harper Way" is one that stems from the institution's undeserved low sense of itself, in response to external pressures and data that tell us we are not doing enough, when as an institution we are and always have been doing plenty.

- **Kris Piepenburg**, English Department



### Looking forward to an exciting day at the races, literally?

Join Cook County College Teachers Union for an afternoon at the Arlington Park Race Track on Saturday, June 13, 2015.

**When:** Saturday, June 13, noon to 5 p.m.

**Where:** Arlington Racetrack, 2200 West Euclid Ave.  
Arlington Heights, IL, 60006

**How much:** Just \$15/person!

Attendees will receive a \$15 gift card for drinks and/or placing bets. For tickets, please provide the information below:

- Name
- Home Address
- Personal Email
- # of ADULTS (up to 3 per member)
- # of CHILDREN (up to 3 per member)
- Make check payable to CCCTU
- Write "Day at the Races" in the Memo line
- Mail check and the above info to:  
Cook County College Teachers Union  
208 W. Kinzie Street, Chicago, IL, 60654
- Your entry ticket(s) will be mailed to you after payment is received.

***Tickets are limited, so please act quickly, and thank you!***

## A poem for you . . .

### The Thing You Must Remember

The thing you must remember is how, as a child, you worked hours in the art room, the teacher's hands over yours, molding the little clay dog. You must remember how nothing mattered but the imagined dog's fur, the shape of his ears and his paws. The gray clay felt dangerous, your small hands were pressing what you couldn't say with your limited words. When the dog's back stiffened, then cracked to white shards in the kiln, you learned how the beautiful suffers from too much attention, how clumsy a single vision can grow, and fragile with trying too hard. The thing you must remember is the art teacher's capable hands: large, rough, and grainy, over yours, holding on.

- *by Maggie Anderson*