



# WCCFT *Union* NEWS

Special May Bulletin

Monthly Newsletter of The Westchester Community College Federation of Teachers May 2004

## WCC Faculty Takes Action on Academic Freedom

At its May general membership meeting attended by almost 100 faculty members (close to 50% of the total faculty), the WCCFT passed a resolution calling upon the administration of WCC to assert its commitment to an inclusive definition of academic freedom giving faculty broad discretion in matters of teaching and grading students.

The discussion on academic freedom opened with a brief review of guidelines set up by the American Association of University Professors and federal case law by Union president, Anne D'Orazio. Richard Rosell, Vice-President and head of the Grievance Committee, then outlined the steps and hearings that led up to the decision of the Tripartite Committee on the issue of a student's grade in the Nursing Curriculum.

Following his presentation, Eileen Karlik, Chair, and Lynette DeBellis and Judy Lowin, nursing faculty, com-

mented on the practices of the department in regard to crafting and grading multiple choice questions on exams. Together, they explained first that it was their goal to create questions which drew on the entire body of knowledge acquired in the nursing program and which required the kind of critical thinking essential to real life problems in health care. Secondly, they acknowledged that occasionally a question had to be eliminated because of ambiguity. And finally, they listed the years of teaching and clinical experience as well as degree credentials they brought to their jobs.

Richard Putnam, a member of the WCCFT Executive Committee, introduced a resolution drafted by the Union leadership. The debate lasted half an hour and covered many aspects of the resolution. Some members present expressed concern about being locked into the AAUP definition without researching alternate college policies,



while others spoke in favor of the definition and the need to support academic freedom and grading rights of faculty. A motion to table was defeated.

In the end, the members present passed the resolution

by an overwhelming margin with a minor change in wording and also urged the restructuring of the Tripartite Committee to clarify its procedures and standards of review.



**Photos (top to bottom):**  
Michael Priano Makes a point as professors Alex Zemcov (left) and Bob Mancell(right) look on; Richard Rosell outlines steps and hearings that led to the decision of the Tripartite Committee; Members of nursing faculty enjoy a light moment. (back row l-r) Gloria Coshigano, Katherine Dowdle, Barbara Thomas, (front row l-r) Kathy De Luca, Lynette DeBellis & Judy Lowin.

President's Message

# Cinco de Mayo, 2004

By Anne D'Orazio



**W**hat happened at the general membership meeting of the Union on May 5 was significant. It was the first time that the Union has passed a resolution on academic freedom, which is a mandatory issue of collective bargaining. The resolution, which asks the Administration to validate the words of the Contract and to acknowledge the widely-accepted norms established by the American Association of University Professors, is a clear statement designed to translate principle into practice.

The Executive Committee of the Union gave a great deal of time to the issue of academic freedom. It questioned the Tripartite Committee's decision to recommend that Dr. Hankin give a student credit for an exam answer which the faculty giving the exam had graded as wrong. Not only were there hours of interviews with the faculty, long sessions with the Tripartite Committee and several meetings with the Administration, but the Executive Committee

devoted a large part of three consecutive monthly meetings to reviewing the situation and debating the merits of the case.

The Union did not move precipitously in calling on the general membership to address the problem. A number of requests were made to encourage the Administration to decide the matter based on acceptance of the academic judgment of well-respected faculty members. Union representatives labored to reveal the flaws in the Tripartite process. They pointed out the lack of objective criteria for determining the validity of a faculty member's making and grading of an exam and offered a list of acceptable standards of review. They reviewed legal decisions and AAUP guidelines to persuade the Administration that there was broad-based agreement on what constituted academic freedom in matters of assessment. Only when nothing was forthcoming, did the Union feel obliged to represent the interests of its members publicly and call for clarification of the Administration's commitment to faculty rights in teaching, assessing and grad-

ing students.

There are still outstanding questions: What role did the State SUNY Board of Trustees play? How did individual members of the Board feel competent to pass judgment on the WCC Nursing Department on the basis of *ex parte* hearsay evidence by students without consulting the nursing faculty? Why did a member of the Board call a student at home with the results of the Tripartite decision before faculty was even informed?

It's the end of the school year. Everyone is happy to be free of school-related problems for a few months. Unfortunately, we still don't have a decision. The nurses are still being vilified and harassed by disgruntled students. And the Administration is still considering substituting its judgment for that of the faculty.

We urge the Administration to put an end to this matter by taking a firm stand in support of the honorable faculty on whose merit the fine reputation of WCC is based.

**Whereas** the collective bargaining agreement between the WCCFT and the County of Westchester provides for "...full freedom, within the law, of inquiry, teaching and research"; and

**Whereas**, the AAUP, in its 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure states, "A faculty right that flows from a "teacher's freedom in the classroom" is the assessment of student academic performance, including the assignment of particular grades; and

**Whereas**, the 1940 AAUP statement on the principles of academic freedom in higher education is the recognized standard-bearer; and

**Whereas**, the language on academic freedom of the Collective bargaining agreement between the County and the WCCFT is modeled on the 1940 AAUP statement; and...

**Whereas**, educational research has consistently established grading as a teaching method; and...

**Be it resolved**, the members of the WCCFT call upon the administration of the college to affirm its commitment to the sections of the collective bargaining agreement which guarantee faculty full freedom of inquiry, teaching and research ; and

**Be it resolved**, the membership of the WCCFT calls upon the college administration to assert its commitment to the widely accepted standards of the AAUP that confer on faculty maximum discretion in teaching, assessing and grading students.

Full text of the resolution is available on our website at <http://www.wccft.org>.