

## CURRENT ISSUES

### YOUR CITRUS STORY?

*Stages of Grief*  
 by Mark Wessel

You've just been told that your class won't be offered in the fall. You are part of the growing cadre of part-time instructors who suddenly face a giant hole in their lives. How do you feel about that?

**Denial:** *How do I feel about what? I feel fine. This is some kind of mistake. Sure, I understand that state budget cuts are a reality casting an enormous shadow over every school district in California. But I'm sure my luck will hold and mine is not one of the classes slated for the chopping block. This couldn't possibly be happening to me. I'm too good at this. I'm too valuable to my department. Everyone knows how committed I am to my students and how effective I've been at presenting them with a quality learning experience. I am confident the mistake will be realized soon and I'll discover that my name and the class I've faithfully taught for the last ten years will still be found listed in the course schedule. No worries.*

**Anger:** *Really?! Are you serious?! How the hell are my students going to get the credits they need for their AA degree? How are they going to be prepared for the next step in their lives? How are they going to be a viable part of our future economy? And what about me? How am I going to come up with rent in three months, let alone put anything toward retirement? How am I going to pay that health care premium that's more than*

### CCAFF Executive Board

- President  
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- Vice-President  
 Anne Battle / Abattle922@yahoo.com
- Secretary  
 Mark Wessel / mwessel1999@gmail.com
- Treasurer  
 Monica Lee / mplee@earthlink.net
- Representation Officer  
 Linda Chan / linda.chan42@gmail.com
- CFT Field Representative  
 K C Curtis / kcurtis840@aol.com

### Mission Statement

Citrus College Adjunct Faculty Federation, (CCAFF), is dedicated to serving its membership by working to:

- Assure a level of professional respect from the District reflected in its policies and practices consistent with the achievement, dedication and professionalism of its adjunct employees.
- Through contract negotiations, maximize members ability to earn a fair wage consistent with education industry standards.
- Work to provide working conditions for adjunct faculty that maximize their effective interactions with students and co-workers.

*doubled in the last five years? How do I put anything toward the kid's college fund? I have three friggin' university degrees and I'm still making payments on the loans. What do I do about that? (Sure glad I chose education as a career.) Who recommended that to me? - oh yeah, now I remember, that son-of-a... Why me? If I hear one more*

*report about administrators who've gotten a raise this year or a full-timer taking three overload classes, I may just take my final paycheck and by a shotgun! It's not fair.*

**Bargaining:** *I'll do anything. Okay, so I didn't volunteer to serve on the academic senate for free. I'll do it now. Need volunteers for the Steering Committee? Me, Me, Me! I'll do it. Yeah, I know I won't be paid a dime for it. But please, please don't take my class! I can change - give me a chance. What if I put together an adult education class? (Oh, I'll earn about half what I'm currently making? Maybe I can't do that.) Just tell me. What can I do to be a better person? I'll do it, I swear!*

**Depression:** *Twenty applications sent out last week alone and not one positive response. I've spent twenty years in teaching and there are no jobs. What can I do? So I slept until 11:00, so what? What's the point of getting out of bed anyway? I feel like crap. No - I don't want to talk about it. Just go away. No, I don't feel like breakfast. Not even waffles. I forgot to pick the kid up from soccer practice? Oh, sorry. He's missing? Maybe his abductor will be able to pay for his piano lessons. The Mayan calendar predicts the end of the world anyway.*

**Acceptance:** *It's going to be okay. The Unemployment checks will keep coming for a while. We'll move into the garage at Mom and Dad's for a few months. I'll fix it up real nice. Flipping burgers isn't so bad. Maybe they're still looking for help down at Carl's Junior. In the meantime I'll do what I can to help get the governor's tax initiative on the ballot.*



# Pursuing the Full-time Job

## *Processing the Process*

by Mark Wessel

You've been at this for a while. In fact, for close to twenty years you've been teaching your subject. You've done it at high schools, community colleges and universities. You've split your time between campuses, driving the freeways that connect your various part-time assignments. Each school has slightly different protocols you try to stay on top of. There's a mind numbing number of passwords and codes, keys and policies you try to keep straight. The priorities you find emphasized at one school seem non-existent at another. Schedules differ between the districts you're employed by, so you rarely see an overlap of spring breaks affording you little opportunity to refresh yourself with new experiences as you hear reported by your full-time colleagues. The pay you receive is significantly less than if you were employed on a full time basis, so you probably wouldn't be able to afford a trip anyway. Even if you feel fairly confident that the job you do is recognized for its quality and passion, you have no guarantee of being offered an assignment from one semester to the next. You are "contract labor", awash in the insecurity of state budget deficits - knowing that if classes are cut they will be from the ranks of you and your fellow adjuncts. You wonder whether or not you'll be able to pay to keep that ten year old car running for another year. You wonder if you'll ever be able to afford a house or even keep paying rent at the current level you write your checks for each month. You wonder why the cost of food and housing isn't part of the equation used to measure inflation.

You keep at it for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the passion you bring to the classroom, the relationship you have with your students, the joy you take from watching the light of their awareness brighten through your teaching. You made a commitment to yourself years before. You loved your subject and you wanted to pass it along to others. And so you dedicated yourself to learning how to do it as effectively as possible. You got good at it. You take pride in it. You keep getting better. All you want is the opportunity to keep doing it and to play a part in making the department and school you're a part of as good as they can be. And you want to be able to stop wondering if after all this time, all this preparation, after such demonstration of commitment - you'll stop receiving offers of employment.

So you continue applying for full-time positions when they become

available, (which isn't frequent). After spending days crafting your resume' and filling out applications specific to the institutions offering the openings, you wait to hear back with an offer to interview. More often than not you receive a polite form letter thanking you for your application, but apologetically informing you that the competition was deep and talented and unfortunately you were not selected as one of the finalists. On those rare occasions that you are asked to meet with the members of hiring committees you try to contain your excitement. But its hard to keep hope from spilling across the threshold of the reality of the interview process. And so you are hopeful - that you'll be asked to become a permanent part of a community - hopeful that the dedication you bring to the job will be obvious and finally recognized. You prepare for that interview. You anticipate questions that may be asked and commit the answers to your consciousness so that they'll trip off your tongue confidently and comprehensively. You practice your teaching demonstration. You think about how to use twelve minutes to adequately introduce total strangers to the effectiveness of your method.

The day arrives and you travel to the campus in question. You may or may not know the members of the committee. If you don't - you've done your research. You know the names of the people in the department you hope to join. You've looked at their work. You've studied their biographies and that of the president of the college. You're nervous, but you're prepared. You step into the interview room and are introduced to your potential colleagues. They explain the format for the interview and tell you how long you'll have to respond to their questions - (two minutes for most of them.) Someone keeps time and cuts you off if you take too long. You answer their questions. They don't surprise you and you're comfortable that your responses prove your knowledge of your subject, your enthusiasm, your integrity and your general competence. When forty five minutes have passed the interview is ended. You're thanked for your time and told that if you're selected as a finalist you'll be called and brought in to meet with the president in the next level of interviews. But as you're leaving something felt wrong. There was an undercurrent to the process that felt incomplete. There wasn't enough time for you to fully make your case or to connect on any but the most superficial of levels. And they seemed to be uninterested in making that connection. It almost felt like a decision had already been made and that your presence in that room was little more than a nod to protocol. You don't think you made mistakes. You may, in retrospect have not included some of the things you'd like to have added to your responses, but overall you think you did a pretty good job under highly artificial circumstances. So what was it? Should you have dressed differently? Should you have smiled more?

Should you have told a joke? (No, you didn't have time to tell a joke.) There was something - but what?

Your worst fears are realized. You're not selected as a finalist. The dean of the department leaves a message on your answering service, thanking you for your time and telling you the committee enjoyed meeting you and enjoyed your presentation, but that the competition was severe and that little else could be said due to rules of confidentiality. You're not surprised. But of course you are disappointed. Your confidence is compromised. Your self-worth is questioned. If you interviewed at the college you've been working at as a part-timer, you're faced with carrying on, working side by side with the same people who for years have reviewed your teaching well, but rejected you as someone to work with as their equal. The hopes you had for participating fully, of making the fullest possible contribution to your department and college are put on hold once again. And now you have to find a place deep in you that allows you to continue working with these same people such that the hurt you feel doesn't affect your performance.

But worst of all you have no idea of what to do differently or better. If you go through the process again you won't know how to improve your chances. In an education environment no one is teaching you how to be a better candidate. In our classes we are expected to establish specific criteria for student learning. We are expected to praise their progress and show them how to improve when progress is not being made. We evaluate and suggest possibilities. We train critical thinking in our disciplines. Our students know when they fall short and why and what steps to take forward.

The hiring process is not one that affords unsuccessful candidates the same opportunity. It is demoralizing. There is no learning. There are only platitudes and rejection.

## UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Part-time faculty who lose some or all of their assignments may be eligible to collect unemployment benefits. You can apply online at [www.edd.ca.gov](http://www.edd.ca.gov) or by phone at (800) 300-5616. Go to: [www.ccaff.com](http://www.ccaff.com) for complete advise on the application process.

## AFFILIATIONS

Citrus College Adjunct Faculty Federation (CCAFF) maintains an affiliation with:

- The American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- The California Federation of Teachers (CFT)
- AFL-CIO
- The California Labor Federation
- The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor