

Johnnie Terry  
NEA Higher Ed Conference  
Dallas, TX  
3/17-19, 2017

The NEA Higher Education Conference was an excellent and enriching experience for me. The primary reason for selecting that conference was because Angie Coughlin, a Sierra College Videography Professor, an Intern and a Community Participant and I were presenting on Sierra College's LGBT Oral History Project. Our presentation was simultaneously disappointing and exciting. It was disappointing because we were placed on the fourth floor, tucked into an off-of-the-beaten-path location in the Saturday afternoon time slot when, I imagine, many attendees were seeing the highlights of Dallas: we had four attendees. Nevertheless, Brad, CCA Vice-president, and Cathy were in attendance as well as a College English Professor who had had a transgender female student write an essay describing her suicide fantasies. We presented about our project and then showed our 40 minute film containing clips from each of the interviewees. After we concluded, Brad and Cathy came forward with many strong comments in support of our project. The discussion with Brad and Cathy told us that we do indeed have a powerful and worthwhile project. Additionally, the English Faculty Member spoke up and was outraged that only four attendees showed up. As CCA had an LGBT themed breakout session during the winter conference and only four people showed up, I didn't take this personally. Rather, I think the challenge is to find a way to tell people who are unaware that there is something that they don't know but that they should know that they should attend the LGBT sessions.

The best and most useful break out session I attended was focused on Academic Freedom. At Sierra College, my local had just tentatively completed negotiations on our Academic Freedom article and we had achieved each our desired substantive changes. This presentation provided me with model language from other universities that I emailed to our chief negotiator asking to integrate into our Academic Freedom article; she was as excited by the language as I was. The language we will seek to integrate into our contract is as follows:

Faculty members will observe the stated policies and procedures of the District, provided those policies and procedures do not contravene academic freedom; however, they maintain their right to express differences of opinion and seek revision.

A faculty member may receive a notice of non-reappointment from the College indicating he or she will no longer be considered for future assignments. A faculty member who receives such notice may file a grievance claiming that such action has violated the Anti-Discrimination Article or Academic Freedom Article.

The outcome of any investigation into any student grievance or complaint will not be considered during an evaluation pursuant to Article X of this Agreement or for disciplinary purposes, or be placed in the personnel file unless and until the District follows the procedures set forth in the Education Code.

The Administration of the College shall not take adverse action against any unit member on the basis of anonymous complaints, including complaints where the complaining individual does not want this or her identity disclosed, whether such complaints are made orally or in writing, unless the unit member agrees to the action; no record of any action so taken shall be placed in the unit member's personnel file or used in connection with the making of any decision under the parties' collective bargaining agreement.

Talithia Williams, a Mathematics Instructor at Harvey Mudd College, spoke at one of the General Sessions on being inclusive and working toward equity. A powerful part of her presentation was the description of how seeing a woman of color who was a celebrated mathematician broadened her horizons and enabled her to dream about being a Mathematician herself. As a Professor of Mathematics at Harvey Mudd College, she has created a program that brings young women of color, and now young men too, from local high schools to Harvey Mudd College for a mathematics camp and the effect that this has had on their dreams and ambitions. She noted that her students from Harvey Mudd learn a valuable social justice lesson as they realize that the difference between them, as official students of Harvey Mudd College, an expensive private university, and the students who attend the camp from the various high schools who will not be able to attend Harvey Mudd is the zip code in which they live, i.e. socioeconomic background can either bring dreams to fruition or close doors for students. This was a powerful presentation.