



## Social Security Reform – We Can Win This One

Gerald Concannon

Over 200 public employees met at Springfield Technical Community College on November 20 to learn how current social security regulations work to the detriment of Massachusetts state workers and to chart a plan to advocate for the repeal of these damaging provisions. The meeting was organized by **Carol Mathison**, President of the STCC Professional Association, and **Carole Dupont**, SAC regional coordinator. The meeting featured statements by STCC employees and retirees who had been adversely affected by current rules. Congressman **Richard Neal** (D-MA) outlined his support for reforms, and promised to “try to steer the Social Security Fairness Act of 2001 to the floor for a vote.”

MSCA representatives attended the meeting and will work closely with other state employee unions in the campaign for more fair regulations. The MSCA has been active in this issue. Professor **Len Paolillo** (MCLA) and **Margaret Kane**, a member of the Medford Teachers' Association, have been appointed by MTA President **Catherine Boudreau** as members of the NEA's task force on this issue.

The two damaging social security provisions are called the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).

The Government Pension Offset (GPO) prohibits “dual entitlement” – the receipt of earned benefits plus full survivor benefits. The GPO treats pension benefits for public employees as if they were Social Security benefits, and as a result, spousal benefits are

offset. Private pension plans are exempt from this law and there is no offset against Social Security benefits. The 1982 law offset benefits dollar for dollar. In 1983, Congress amended the law and reduced the dollar for dollar provision to a two-thirds offset. The GPO does not apply to survivor beneficiaries who are not government retirees. It also doesn't apply to certain federal employees, military reserve retirees, and certain other groups of pensioners. It does apply to everyone else and falls especially hard on women. For example:

A retired educator earns \$600 a month from a state retirement plan. Her husband, who has worked under Social Security all his life, dies. In this instance, she would normally be entitled to a Social Security retirement benefit of \$850. However, she works in a state where public employees do not pay into Social Security. Massachusetts is one of those states. This widow is subject to the Government Pension Offset. Her survivor benefits will be cut 2/3s of her \$600 state retirement payment, or \$400. Her new Social Security survivor benefit is now \$450 a month.

This is outrageously unfair to public sector workers. The benefit was earned and should be paid in full.

The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) can affect any employee who works for a government agency that does not withhold Social Security taxes.

If that employee qualifies for Social Security benefits, he/she may discover that he/she is subject to a reduced social security payment. The modified formula applies to you if you reach age 62 after 1985 and first become eligible for a pension based in whole or in part on work where Social Security taxes were not paid. Your Social Security will be reduced beginning with the first month that you get both a Social Security benefit and a pension check. You are not affected as long as you keep working and draw your salary. Many faculty members continue to collect the full Social Security benefit and their salaries. The offset kicks in only upon retirement.

The offset works by reducing the 90% factor to 40% for those who reach the age of 62 beginning in 1990. The 90% factor is used in figuring a full entitlement for workers who are not subject to any offset. The WEP does not apply to persons eligible to retire before Jan. 1, 1986, or persons who have more than 30 years of “substantial” earnings under Social Security. The “substantial earnings” numbers are available at your local Social Security office or on the web at [www.ssa.gov/pubs/10045.html](http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10045.html).

The GPO and the WEP are intrinsically unfair. They deny earned benefits to public employees simply because these employees have worked for federal, state, or local governments that do not pay Social Security taxes. These regulations should be repealed and they can be if we support Congressional efforts

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## Nominations Open for 2003 NEA Representative Assembly

The 2003 Representative Assembly of the National Education Association will be held July 1 - 6 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

All MSCA members who are in good standing on January 15, 2003, and who pay their dues to the NEA through the appropriate MSCA Chapter, may seek election as MSCA local association delegates to the NEA-RA. Stipends may be available to assist with travel expenses.

However, only members who pay their dues to NEA through the appropriate MSCA Chapter will be entitled to vote in the election for MSCA delegates to the NEA-RA. Members teaching in DCGE who pay dues to NEA through another MTA local association (e.g., MCCC, APA, or a K-12 local) may seek election as a local association delegate only through that association and will be entitled to vote only in that association's election.

Individuals who join NEA through MSCA or another local association after January 15, 2003,

will not be eligible to seek election as a delegate to the 2003 NEA-RA.

The specific number of delegates allocated to the MSCA will be established after January 15, 2003. The specific number of seats will be sent to all candidates and will appear on the ballot, if a run-off election is necessary. The election timetable follows:

- Nomination deadline: February 24, 5:00 p.m., regardless of postmark or indicated fax time.
- Ballots mailed: week of March 15.
- Ballots return deadline: April 1, 5:00 p.m.

Questions should be directed to:

**Gerald Concannon**, MSCA Secretary  
Mass. Maritime Academy  
101 Academy Drive  
Buzzards Bay, MA 02532  
(508) 830-5000 x2272  
(508) 830-5090 FAX  
[Gconcannon@MMA.edu](mailto:Gconcannon@MMA.edu)

### NEA NOMINATION FORM: DEADLINE - FEBRUARY 24, 2003

Name of Candidate (Please Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Institution Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to place my name in nomination as a candidate for MSCA delegate to the 2003 NEA Representative Assembly.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach a biography statement (not to exceed 50 words)

**Send completed form to:**  
**Gerald Concannon**  
MSCA Secretary  
Mass. Maritime Academy  
101 Academy Drive  
Buzzards Bay, MA 02532

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Salem State College  
Salem, MA 01970



## In the Association

### Stipends Available for NCHE Conference in Washington

Every year, the National Council on Higher Education, the higher education caucus within the National Education Association, sponsors a national conference on higher education. This year, the 2003 National Education Association Higher Education Conference will be held February 28 to March 2 at the Omni-Shoreham Hotel in Washington, DC. The theme for this year's conference is "Prologue and Present: Assessing a 20-year Journey."

At its meeting of December 7th, the MSCA Board of Directors voted to grant \$500 stipends to up to six MSCA members to participate in this year's conference. In order to be eligible to receive a stipend, you must be a member in good standing of both MSCA and NCHE. Proof of on-site registration must be provided in order to receive a stipend from MSCA.

The deadline to apply for a stipend is February 15, 2003. If fewer than six members are eligible to attend, the pool of money (\$3000) will be divided equitably to cover actual expenses among those eligible. If more than six members are eligible, the pool of money will be divided equally among those eligible.

If you are interested in applying for a stipend to attend the 2003 NCHE conference, please send your name and chapter affiliation to the MSCA President's Office no later than 5:00 pm on February 15, 2003. The mailing address is c/o Sullivan Building 202B, Salem State College, Salem, MA 01970. The fax number is 978-542-7284. Email can be sent to <pmarkunas@aol.com> or <jfiste@salemstate.edu>. Questions and requests for further information can be sent to the MSCA President or to NCHE c/o NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, NW, Washington DC 20036-3290. Conference information is also available on the NEA website <www.nea.org/he>.

### MSCA Perspective

A publication of the Massachusetts State College Association, the faculty and librarian union for the nine state colleges in Massachusetts. Write to us at: [MSCAperspective@salemstate.edu](mailto:MSCAperspective@salemstate.edu)

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Massachusetts Teachers Association:  
[www.massteacher.org](http://www.massteacher.org)

Massachusetts State Colleges Council of  
Presidents: [www.mass-state-col.org](http://www.mass-state-col.org)

Massachusetts Community College Council:  
[www.mccc-union.org](http://www.mccc-union.org)

### MSCA Ad Hoc Committee on Librarian Concerns Established

Nancy George

The Ad Hoc Committee on Librarian Concerns met on December 2, 2002, at Framingham State College. Librarians from Bridgewater, Framingham, the Massachusetts College of Art, Salem, Westfield, and Worcester attended the meeting. Nancy George, a librarian from Salem, was elected chair and Linda Blowers, also from Salem, was elected secretary.

During the meeting a representative from each institution discussed librarians' work environments at the campuses. The reports were varied. Most of the libraries represented have:

- No Library Program Area, even when eligible, giving library directors total authority over librarians.
- No peer evaluation for reappointment — evaluations are conducted by library directors and VPs of Academic Affairs.
- Little direction or focus as exemplified by missing mission statements and poor collection development practices.
- A lack of professional development funding support.
- Problems with severe budget cuts that adversely affect the collections librarians have worked hard at building.
- Rigid leave policies.
- Poor physical environments in which to work.
- Problems of understaffing, exacerbated by difficulties encountered in searches because of low salary offerings.

In addition, some very poor library director/librarian relationships have created appalling work environments. In these libraries, librarians are treated as hourly employees, not MSCA professionals.

During the second part of the meeting, librarians discussed what could be done to improve their work environments. The librarians were urged to form Library Program Areas and Library Policies Committees, both of which are supported by the current contract; to utilize the contract when encountering difficulties with administrators and colleagues; and to employ the grievance process when necessary. Regarding retirement plan inflexibility (currently MSCA librarians may enroll only in the state retirement plan, not TIAA-CREF), the MSCA Legislation Committee needs librarian representation.

Before adjourning, those attending the meeting agreed it was important that librarians become more active, visible, and vocal in the MSCA. In addition, the committee will:

- Examine the current contract for language that is unclear or does not address librarians' needs and submit language changes as a group to the MSCA Bargaining Committee.
- Examine the ranks/educational requirements and/or nine versus twelve month work year differential between librarians and professors, compare with other Massachusetts public higher education contracts, and submit language changes as a group to the MSCA Bargaining Committee to eliminate some of the inequality between MSCA teaching faculty and librarians.

— Nancy George is the Electronic Resources Librarian at Salem State College.

### Social Security Reform – We Can Win This One

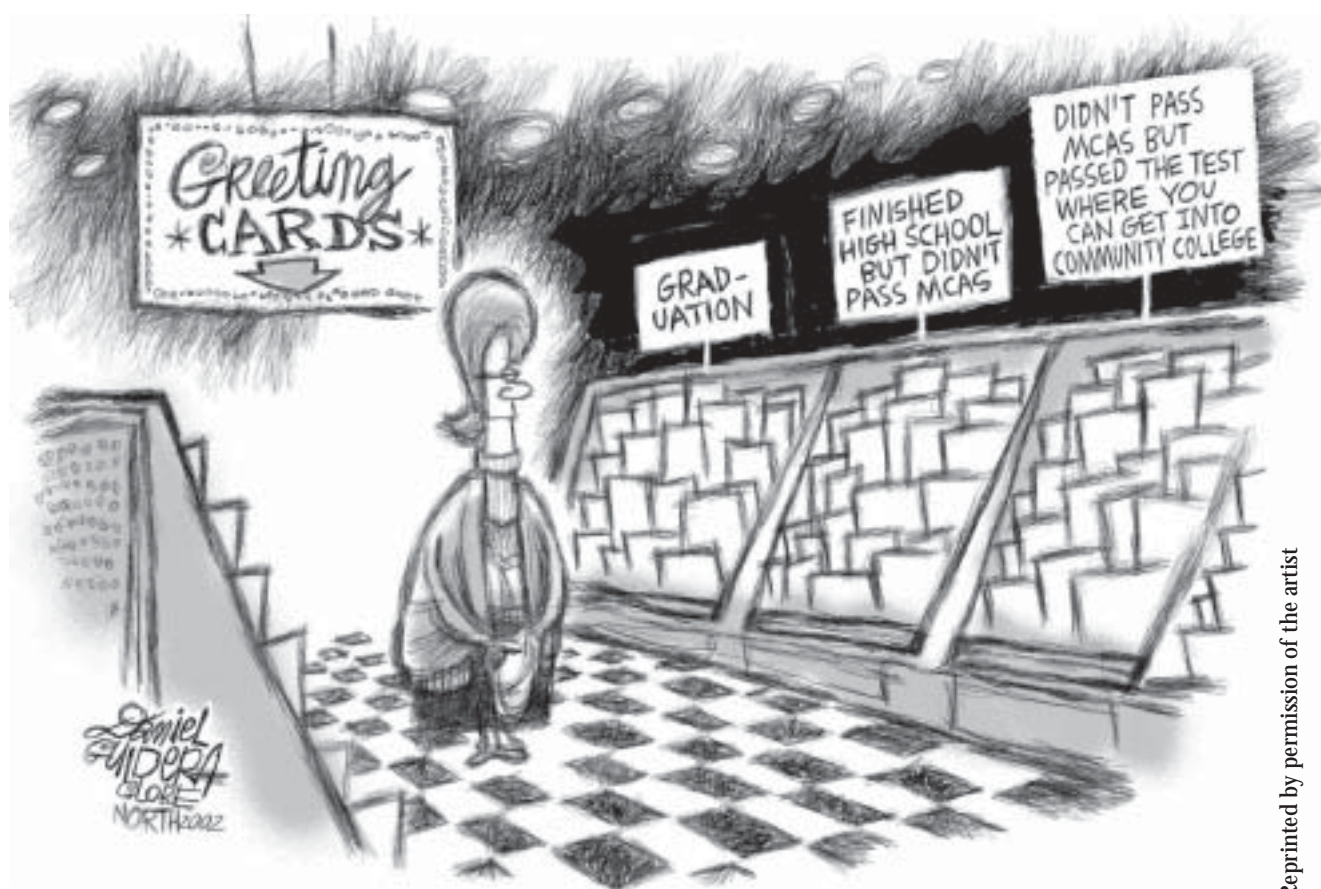
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for repeal. MSCA and NEA support the bills introduced in the 107th Congress by Representatives Howard McKeon (R-CA) and Howard Berman (D-CA). The House bill (H.R. 2638) would repeal both the GPO and the WEP. Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA) has introduced the same bill in the Senate (S. 1523). These bills have broad bi-partisan support.

At the Springfield meeting, Congressman Neal told the packed auditorium that the repeal legislation will pass if it reaches the House floor. Congressman Neal has a very personal stake in this issue. He was raised by a widowed mother who depended mightily on her survivor benefits. He is working hard on be-

half of this legislation. Let's help him and ourselves. Send your congressional representatives an e-mail, or call or write their offices and ask for their support for H.R. 2638 and S. 1523. What we have now is an injustice that needs correction. What we need now is pressure in Congress for change. If we ignore this issue, we could wind up at a Social Security office hearing bad news about a benefit that we are counting on. Nothing will happen unless we express our concern. Act now.

— Gerald Concannon is Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy and Secretary of the MSCA.





## “Merit” Pay: Round Two

### Guest Editorial

Jean Stonehouse

“Merit” pay comes out of a finite “pool” of money, the size of which is determined by calculations based on the number of MSCA members and the aggregate amount of the payroll — first state-wide and then campus-by-campus. At 4:30 pm on November 6th, the BHE Human Resources Director released the BHE version of the “pool” numbers to MSCA President Pat Markunas. She, C. J. O’Donnell, and other MSCA officials checked the calculations so that we could be certain that every penny due to our members was included in the BHE “pool.” The amount of individual merit bonus payments was decided by campus administrators and included in the December 20 paycheck.

As soon as possible after Bridgewater State College President Mohler-Faria, as he was required to do, provided me as chapter president with the information as to who received what amount and for what reason, those data were made available to all Bridgewater Chapter members. I hesitated over this, as I did last year, but I think making the information public keeps rumors in check and allows each of us to judge the appropriateness of the awards for ourselves.

Last year I wrote to the Bridgewater membership that I sincerely hoped that this information would not result in divisiveness or hurt. I know now that it did precisely that; I saw injustices done to some very fine teacher-scholars, individuals whose dedication to the college and its students should have been seen as clear examples of exemplary meritorious service.

I’ll repeat what I said last year about “merit.”

The MSCA bargaining team accepted merit pay with great reluctance. Our salaries were already far behind where they belonged, and we argued that everyone should be brought to an appropriate level before merit should be considered. We also argued, and we believe, that “fairness” in merit awards is impossible. In part, this belief was based on unhappy experience. Several senior professors working on our campuses right now can attest to the unfairness of the system of merit pay used at the colleges years ago. They feel its impact on their salaries to this day.

When it became clear that we would not be able to settle the contract without a merit pay provision, we worked to mitigate its impact. We decided that we, ourselves, would not participate in an inherently unfair merit process. Thus, no members of this unit, including department chairpersons, have had any voice in determining the criteria for merit, the processes for

determining merit, or the size of the merit bonuses to be awarded to our colleagues. Merit was paid as “bonuses,” not salary increases. The amounts would not be added to base salaries. The “rollover” money from the merit increases was used to fund our rank adjustments.

If, when the list is seen, you find yourself among those receiving the largest bonus, congratulations! We are happy for you, and we urge you to enjoy both the recognition and the money. You deserve it. If you find yourself among those receiving the smaller bonuses or no bonus at all, please, don’t take it to heart. It does not represent the judgment of your MSCA peers. You deserve better, and we know it.

Whether you find yourself on the top or the bottom of the merit list, I hope that you will remember that we are colleagues. We are a team of faculty and librarians who work together for our profession, our college, our students, our disciplines, and the communities of our region. We are connected one-to-another in an academic community, as well as in our union, and we succeed or fail, in part, to the extent that we support one another.

— *Jean Stonehouse is President of the Bridgewater Chapter/MSCA and Professor of History at Bridgewater State College.*

## Merit Bonuses Awarded by Campus: Frequency Distribution, Percentage of Members Awarded and Average Award September 29, 2002

Campus	Frequency Distribution	Percent Awarded	Average Award	Comments/Reasons
BRIDGEWATER	\$ 1,496.87 – 88 \$ 1,000 – 129 \$ 0 – 42	84%	\$1,201.50	Individual, professional reasons were given for each recipient.
FITCHBURG	\$ 2,500 – 37 \$ 1,182.83 – 87 \$ 0 – 69.77 FTE	64% FTE	\$1,575.86	“For meritorious service” was the sole reason given for all recipients.
FRAMINGHAM	\$ 1,303.20 – 129 \$ 0 – 38	77%	\$ 1,303.20	Three general categories (distinction as a teacher or librarian; accomplishments as an artist or scholar; or contributions to the College’s mission and goals) were used; recipients were eligible in more than one category.
MASS. COLLEGE OF ART	\$ 1,244 – 32 \$ 1,000 – 30 \$ 800 – 12 \$ 750 – 2 PT \$ 625 – 1 PT \$ 600 – 1 PT \$ 500 – 15 PT \$ 400 – 2 PT \$ 328.61 – 1 PT \$ 250 – 2 PT \$ 0 – 5 FTE	95% FTE	\$ 1,073 FT	Amounts were based on full-time or FTE salary. Recipients earning less than the median salary for their rank received \$1,000; those earning more than the median salary for their rank received \$800. Program Coordinators and all librarians received \$1,244. Part-time faculty received pro-rated amounts according to the same scenario. In every case, the award was for meritorious service.
MASS. COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS	\$ 1,406.61 – 12 \$ 1,203.34 – 17 \$ 1,000 – 44 \$ 0 – 8	90%	\$ 1,114.19	Newly hired members received \$0; assistant professors received the top amount; associate professors received the middle amount; and (full) professors received the smallest amount. \$203 was not spent.
MASS. MARITIME ACADEMY	\$ 1,780.20 – 20 \$ 1,186.80 – 12 \$ 593.39 – 11 \$ 0 – 13	77%	\$1,311	Three general categories (distinguished service, meritorious service, and commendable service) corresponded to the three \$ amounts.
SALEM	\$ 1,840.54 – 98 \$ 1,200.01 – 96 \$ 749.87 – 55 \$ 0 – 39	86%	\$ 1,164.33	Three categories (distinction in teaching/librarianship or approved professional activity; distinction in teaching/librarianship, scholarship and departmental service/approved professional activity; and distinction in teaching/ librarianship, scholarship, departmental service and college/community contribution/approved professional activity) corresponded to the three \$ amounts awarded.
WESTFIELD	\$ 1,250 – 25 \$ 1,096.33 – 123 \$ 0 – 17	90%	\$ 1,122.29	Recipients showed “meritorious service” (\$1,250) or “commendable service” (\$1,096.33) in teaching, scholarship, performance, program development or research, or to the College
WORCESTER	\$ 1,500 – 68 \$ 1,024 – 68 \$ 1,513.20 – 1 \$ 0 – 35	80%	\$1,263.83	Merit bonus awards were made for meritorious services to the college as members of its faculty in enhancing the college mission through a variety of activities in teaching, scholarship, and other contributions to the students and the community.

For those interested, the results of merit pay awarded last year were published in the April issue of the *MSCA Perspective*, which is available through the MSCA Website.

## Faculty/Librarian Spotlight

Send your suggestions for colleagues to spotlight to the contributing editor on your campus, or to me directly at <patricia.johnston@salemstate.edu>.

This article by J.D. Scrimgeour first appeared as a "Point of View" article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, December 6, 2002 (Volume 49, No. 15), and is reprinted here by permission. He is also the author of Spin Moves, a basketball memoir (San Antonio: Pecan Grove Press, 2000). Scrimgeour is an Associate Professor of English and Coordinator of the Creative Writing Program at Salem State College. The essay is part of a series that Scrimgeour is writing on education and class, rooted in personal experience. He characterizes this essay as "a defense of public higher education in Massachusetts" that pays "tribute to the working-class students of Salem State who struggle for an education despite often difficult circumstances." Scrimgeour's essay opens up a conversation among MSCA members about our goals, strategies, work conditions, and effectiveness as educators. Faculty and librarians who wish to respond to the essay may email us at MSCAperspective@salemstate.edu. We may post discussions on the MSCA web page or publish them.

## People on the River: Acclimating at Salem State College

J.D. Scrimgeour



Kim Munnough

*If you come down to the river,  
Bet you gonna find some people who live  
You don't have to worry, 'cause you have no money,  
People on the river are happy to give.*

—"Proud Mary," Creedence Clearwater Revival

Only in winter, through a tangle of leafless branches, can I see from my office window the two smokestacks of the coal-burning power plant that rise over the city of Salem. Light beige, with soot smearing the upper parts, they seem the tallest structures north of Boston. A white light blinks atop the highest chimney every second or so, like a heartbeat. The city's air quality is bad, and the plant is a major polluter. It is one of Massachusetts' "filthy five," plants that, because of their age, were exempted from recent rules regulating pollution levels.

When I accepted a job to teach at Salem State College, my family and I moved to this city, and both my son Aidan and I developed asthma. That first winter and spring, Aidan, just 1 year old, had to have a machine—a nebulizer—pump an airy spray of albuterol four times daily into his lungs, including once in the middle of the night, to ensure that his airways stayed open. At first Aidan resisted, and we, not wanting to aggravate him and exacerbate his breathing problems, simply held the mask near his face, hoping he'd breathe in some of the vapors. Eventually, we had to pin him down despite his screams. Thankfully, he grew to like the treatment, found it soothing.

Once, before I knew that I had asthma, I let my class out early and had my wife pick me up at the campus and take me to the doctor. I could hardly breathe. In class, I had been coughing my way through a poem, wheezing at every line break. Granted, it could have been anything that made me suddenly asthmatic, at age 30, but whenever I look at the stained smokestacks, or notice the layer of black grime on cars and windows, I blame the power plant.

During my first semester at the College, one of my students told me about an uncle who had been a serial killer and buried his victims' bones in his yard. "They

wrote a book about him," she said. That surprised me, even shocked me then. I suspected that she was putting me on. Now, having taught here for six years, such information would barely register. "Really?" I might say. "Huh." This past year, I had five students with bi-polar disorder and one who was married to a gay man for 15 years.

The serial killer story was unusual, though, because it had been recorded in a book. It was more sensational than the unrecorded miseries of many of my students—struggles with abusive boyfriends, poverty, addictions of friends and family members, and, of course, car accidents (it must be a graduation requirement at Salem State: car demolition—3 credits). It is as if the foul air from the looming power plant, slowly choking the city's children, has seeped into the students, making their lives—but not their souls—hard, bitter, and unhealthy.

If only their suffering weren't so anonymous, and their accomplishments were recognized. Every year, for example, Salem State graduates dozens of students who have children. A few years ago, an unmarried Harvard student with a child got involved in a custody battle, and *The Boston Globe* ran a series of stories on her ordeal. No paper spotlights the unwed parents at Salem State, and they rarely have anyone fighting to take care of their kids. When their children wake up sick and can't go to school, they bring them to my classes, where they can hear a discussion of Langston Hughes's "Little Lyric (of Great Importance)": "I wish the rent/was heaven sent."

How much I owe these students, how much I have learned. For they know the score; they know they are losing by a lot before the game even begins, and they shrug, as if to say, "What am I supposed to do, cry?"

Salem State students don't perform as well on standardized tests as Harvard students do. So what? They can tell you where to go, or where not to go, to get your car fixed. I asked a student whose stepfather was a mechanic. "Be honest. Do they rip you off?"

"Yeah," he replied, "sort of. They just tell you that you should replace lots of things that don't really need

replacing. They make you buy things you don't need."

Make you buy things you don't need. Like a diploma from a private university. Make you want to be something you're not. He knew the score.

*If you go down to the river . . . You don't have to worry.* I leave my car unlocked. It's a piece of trash—a 13-year-old station wagon that qualifies as a compact car in this age of SUV's. It's got an old tape player, and I leave a bunch of tapes—most without cases—in plain view. No one's ever tried anything. *You don't have to worry 'cause you have no money.*

In class, I pass out a page from a William Carlos Williams' lecture on poetry. "I was going to copy the whole essay," I say, "but we can't afford it—budget cuts." I shrug. "Call your legislator."

At a recent meeting with a committee of outside evaluators of the college, a Salem State faculty member described our students as heroic. I knew what she meant. If you're looking for heroes, look at the faces under the rented mortarboards at this year's graduation. A degree from Salem State means something;

***A degree from Salem State means something; it often means one has endured. If, in most circles, it means less than a degree from Harvard, it also should mean something more.***

it often means one has endured. If, in most circles, it means less than a degree from Harvard, it also should mean something more.

But I shouldn't romanticize. The successes are sweet, but the day-to-day realities often overwhelm: the students who disappear, the ones who probably will, all the missed classes. I work with troubled students, and what makes their lives seem even more tragic is that they're smart—smart enough to know they're troubled. You would not believe me if I listed what my students have endured in the last year alone—a mother's botched brain surgery; a death of a sister (a mother of two) and the subsequent alcohol binge of the father; car accidents (several); a sister's overdose; a mother jailed for dealing; bouts with anorexia, depression, drugs. Then there are the "non-traditional" students—adults who have already made it through cancer, divorces, foster-home childhoods, homelessness, madness. Misery upon misery.

Unavoidably, their struggles seep into my own life. Sometimes, I wish they didn't. One semester I got several harassing phone calls from—I found out later—a student's jealous ex-boyfriend. I could never quite get used to the haunting Police song, "Don't Stand So Close to Me" droning through my phone, or, when I refused to pick-up, being recorded on my answering machine at 12:30 at night.

Out my office window, the drab window shades of Meier Hall stare back at me, some off-white, some cream (but curdled). Beyond them, Salem State's own smokestack, which three years ago malfunctioned and spewed ash all over the neighborhood, rises out of the administration building. And, just past that, the Sullivan Building, more than 100 years old, squats as if it knows something heavy, something true. Or perhaps it's just hunkering down, the pressure squeezing the bricks off the facade.

My son, Aidan, and I, six years older, are both much better. I take a puff from my inhaler before playing basketball at the Salem Y; he hardly ever needs one. We've acclimated. Our lungs have come to accept what floats between us, around us. We'll both probably die early because of it, the grit of this world.

I wonder if, in the years to come, I will still get teary at Salem State's graduations. The ceremony is plain. In the hockey arena, traces of sweat from the last season mingle with spring's scents drifting through the open doors. The Deans, having practiced, pronounce the names—Tuttle, Corcoran, Brodeur, Carney—almost correctly, though they fail to drop the r's. The ice is long gone, silly banners draped around, and many of our graduates are absent, too busy to show up, going about their lives amid the sting of the unclean, yet human, air of this historic city.