

Overview

By Mark F. Smith

Mark F. Smith is a senior policy analyst-higher education for the National Education Association (NEA). He previously served as an NEA organizational specialist in higher education. He advocates the policy goals of the association and its affiliates on behalf of college and university faculty and staff. Smith holds a B.A. in history and political science from the University of Wisconsin, and an M.A. in government from Johns Hopkins University. Prior to joining NEA, he was director of government relations at the American Association of University Professors. He is a member of the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association.

In the early 1570s, the statesman and sailor Sir Humphrey Gilbert proposed a new academy to the Elizabethan court. “Men study only school learnings” at existing universities, he argued. But in his academy “they shall study matters of action meet for present practice.”¹ Gilbert’s proposal foreshadowed the stance of governors such as Rick Scott of Florida and Rick Perry of Texas. Like Gilbert, both governors believe they know better than educators what a college or university should teach. Their beliefs give policymakers and entrepreneurs opportunities to effect undesirable transformations to our colleges and universities. The essays in the *NEA 2013 Almanac of Higher Education* show how faculty and staff members can ensure academic quality despite a decrease in financial support and a transformational environment.

Suzanne B. Clery details the salary discrepancy between tenured and contingent faculty in “Faculty Salaries: 2011–2012.” She finds

a “relatively small 1.4 percent increase since 2010–11” for full-time faculty members (to \$76,565). But faculty purchasing power continued to decline, and that decline is much worse for contingents. Salary discrepancies also persist among types of institutions, disciplines, and gender.

Proposals to increase college affordability and program completion demonstrate the commitment of the Obama Administration to increasing the vitality of higher education. Despite these proposals, William Zumeta argues in “Higher Education Enters a New Era,” the state of the economy presents substantial barriers to achieving these goals. Neither federal nor state funding seems likely to increase, and the shift in financing to students and their families may have reached a limit. Major changes, Zumeta concludes, will be needed, given these barriers.

The Obama Administration has focused on strengthening community colleges, where the

majority of postsecondary students now enroll. In “Community College Financing: Equity, Efficiency, and Accountability,” Alicia C. Dowd and Linda Taing Shieh show how these institutions began as democratizing gateways to higher education, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds. Examining current funding patterns and trends in student aid, the authors conclude that financial pressures now limit the ability of community colleges to protect social equity, educational opportunity, and academic quality.

In “Bargaining Student Learning, Quality, and Assessment,” Kristine Anderson Dougherty, Gary Rhoades, and I look at student learning outcomes (SLOs), an assessment measure imposed on faculty by accrediting agencies and governments. The article shows how SLOs directly affect the quality of education, and lists the steps faculty have taken, or can take, to protect their rights in contracts and policies.

Sir Humphrey Gilbert would approve of the recent growth of the for-profit sector of higher education. Henry Lee Allen, in “Faculty Workload and Productivity in For-Profit Institutions: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly,” acknowledges some positive impact on access at particular institutions. But increased access to low-quality education, he concludes, raises more problems than it solves. Allen details the unfavorable workload, benefits, and compensation policies at these schools, and criticizes the total lack of faculty autonomy, governance, and academic freedom.

In “Academic Salaries and Contracts: Global Trends and American Realities” Philip G. Altbach, Liz Reisberg, and Iván F. Pacheco compare the status and salaries of faculty in the United States to working conditions in 28 countries. Faculty pay, they observe, looks higher in the United States, but that finding

needs qualification. Their data looks at full-time tenured faculty, mostly in the four-year sector. It does not address the increasing number of contingent faculty, nor does it include benefits such as health care costs.

Valerie Martin Conley surveys the continuing turmoil affecting employee benefits in “Benefits for the Public Good.” Concerned about increasing costs, employers are placing the traditional social contract with employees at risk. Proposed legislative changes, she adds, increase that risk. It is too early to assess the impact of the Affordable Care Act, but some institutions have already taken disturbing actions to deprive its benefits to contingent faculty.

In “ESP Employment Status: A Nineteen-Year Survey,” Vicki Rosser examines the composition of the educational support professional workforce by institutional control, gender, race and ethnicity, and occupation. Comparing current and historical data, she highlights changes in employment by position classification. The constantly changing levels of hiring, concludes Rosser, reflects changes in state and local government financial support.

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NOTE

¹ Gilbert, 2004, 1.

REFERENCE

Gilbert, Humphrey, “The Erection of an Academy in London.” Quoted in Eric Ash, *Power, Knowledge, and Expertise in Elizabethan England*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.