

Overview

by Mary Ellen Flannery

“**T**he scenario is by now familiar. Enrollment projections are ominous, budgets squeezed, academic programs threatened, decision-making authority wrenched from faculty...”

Indeed, it *is* a familiar scenario, which resonates with many NEA Higher Ed readers who observe the retreat of public funds from their public institutions, the elimination of academic programs on their campuses, and a growing battle over shared governance. But that line, written by Roxanne Bradshaw, a former Pike’s Peak Community College instructor who also served as secretary-treasurer of NEA, was first published by *Thought & Action* in 1985. “Reality is made up of circles, but we see straight lines,” says MIT scientist Peter Senge.

Of course, we have new and evolved threats to public higher education and unions today. We have billionaires dumping their spare change into public universities where their donations buy faculty seats, curriculum control, and a few generations of political bias. We see a growing number of adjunct or non-tenure-track faculty who are shackled by penury and muzzled by job insecurity. And we see new, corporate-funded attacks on the rights of faculty and staff to collectively bargain. Most of all, we see the diminishment of public higher education as a critical piece of the American Dream.

Welcome to the last issue of *Thought & Action*, NEA’s peer-reviewed journal of higher education since 1984. After 34 years, many dozens of issues, and the profound involvement of hundreds of NEA Higher Ed members who have served and supported their peers as critical readers and reviewers, the journal will cease publication with these pages. The 2018-2020 NEA budget, approved this July by the NEA Representative Assembly (RA), focuses the union’s resources on the battles ahead: The essential fight for public education and for working families.

Our opponents are wealthy and organized. Their efforts in the *Janus* case, which elicited a historic anti-union judgment from the Supreme Court this June, aim to weaken your voice as educators and workers. In these pages, CUNY's Edward Volchok explains what's at stake: your pay and benefits, of course, but also your tenure and academic freedom, your institution's state and federal funding, and your students' ability to pursue truth in your classrooms. "We must act. We are not helpless. We have a duty to resist," he writes.

Organized resistance, led by faculty union members, standing alongside students and community members, also is prescribed and demonstrated in Susan Hegeman and Paul Ortiz' excellent article, which describes the response to racist visitors at the University of Florida last year. "The union's role here is simple: to stand up for its members and their values," they write.

This issue also includes a short "best of" section, which includes articles published by the journal in recent years, that resonate today, such as Jeff Lustig's award-winning "University Besieged," which serves as a haunting love letter to the academy from a dying man, and Dave Iasevoli's "A World of White and Snowy Scents: Teaching Whiteness," an unfortunately still-relevant look at race and racism. Accompanying each article is introductory text by a member of the journal's review panel.

The work ahead will be hard. Often it will be discouraging. But what you do, in colleges and universities across America, is so fundamental to democracy, to humanity, to truth, that we must persist. Said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García, quoting Luke Skywalker(!) at this year's RA: "You don't win by destroying what you hate. You win by saving what you love."

Stand together. Save what you love.