Creative Thinking

Can a union change your life? (The answer is...yes!)

NEA Policy: On digital learning in higher ed

Faculty in St. Louis are waiting for your email

Would you rather work at Walmart? (Free poster!)
NEA Policy: Digital learning for the 21st century

TECHNOLOGY HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY since the dial-up Internet days of 2000—but until recently NEA’s formal recommendations around digital learning were rooted in the 1990s. That changed in July when the NEA Representative Assembly approved an updated policy statement on digital learning. Last revised in 2000, the new statement (see here: www.nea.org/grants/55975.htm) embraces technology’s great potential in improving student learning, while also making clear that educators must be properly trained to use those technologies, and most importantly, that decisions around digital learning must be made by the people who know best—and that’s not for-profit “educational industry” vendors—it’s educators.

“The policy statement goes a long way in setting a framework for how NEA and its affiliates and members can take the lead,” said Jim Grimes, an IEA/NEA Higher Ed member who served on the task force that wrote the new policy. “They can go to their school boards or university trustees and say, ‘We want to be part of the discussion and design of digital learning plans. In many cases, we are the experts."

The policy states a preference for blended or hybrid models, which combine online learning with face-to-face instruction. It rejects the idea that students can learn effectively with zero interaction with faculty. The policy also states faculty should own the copyright to materials created in the course of their employment. In some cases, faculty unions have resolved the issue of copyright ownership, as well as online workload, at the bargaining table. For others, the new policy statement is a good jumping-off point that provides guiding principles for teacher education, assessment systems, and more. “Digital learning is the reality. We need to embrace that and help shape it,” said Grimes.

NEW resources from NEA!

THE 2013 NEA ALMANAC offers must-have answers to questions like these: What happened to state funds for higher ed last year? What’s going on with faculty salaries? Also, take a look at model contract language around program eliminations. Visit nea.org/almanac for more.

NEA HAS RELEASED for its higher-ed members Understanding Budgets and Financial Audit Analysis. Especially useful for bargaining teams and organizers, this ebook explains recent changes in how institutions report financial data—and how faculty and staff unions can use that data. Find it at nea.org/home/financial-analysis-handbook.html.
Can joining a union change your life? Make you a happier person? Or a healthier person? Would you, as a union member, even teach better? Yes, yes, yes, and yes. Just ask the faculty at Oregon’s Klamath Community College, where life can be so easily divided into BU and AU: Before Union, when over-the-top workloads and paltry pay made for sleepless nights and anxiety-filled days, and After Union, when a new collectively bargained contract provided for better service to students, a living wage, and more respect for faculty’s expertise. “When I first heard the noise about unions,” recalled Maggie Wood, a communications professor at Klamath, “I thought to myself, ‘Maybe there is hope.’”
When Kathleen Henderson, an award-winning early childhood educator who has taught for 35-plus years, drove to campus in pre-union days, she wasn’t allowed to park in the faculty lot. When she walked up to her classroom building, her keycard didn’t open the faculty door. And then, when she reached her office… wait a second, what office? Henderson was assigned to a 10-foot-square windowless closet—with 70-plus other adjunct instructors. “My office was my car. I had bags across the back seat—a separate bag for each course,” she said.

With dark humor, history professor Tom Nejely calls them “drive-by shootings”—the unexpected, random assignments that KCC administrators would routinely dump on overburdened faculty. “Before the contract, any idea that any dean had could be added to faculty’s plate—and it was,” he said. Nejely was told to develop web pages for every faculty member, even though the college lacked the infrastructure to handle those pages and no faculty member had actually asked for one. Did it matter that Nejely already was teaching five full classes with 30 students in each? No. Did it matter that he was randomly assigned to advise 50 students each semester, whose career goals might range from nursing to culinary arts? No.

Can you live anywhere in America on just $8,000 a year? Think about it. That’s about $660 a month or $20 a day. While you can get a fairly priced piece of salmon at Nibbley’s Café in downtown Klamath Falls for less than $20, that’s your entire daily allowance. What about a bed and roof? Or a car to drive? What if you need medical care? Or a new pair of shoes? But $8,000 a year is exactly how much Maggie Wood earned as a contingent professor just a few years ago.

“It was very grim,” Wood recalled. But, in those pre-union days, the issue wasn’t just money, she added. “It was just such a slap in the face. It was, ‘We just don’t value you.’ You were just another warm body in the classroom, and if you left they’d find another to replace you.”

But in September 2011, after two long years at the bargaining table and the help of OEA staff, the nascent Klamath Community College Faculty Association (KCCFA), an inclusive unit of full- and part-time faculty led by then-president Jamie Jennings, ratified its first contract with the college. For the first time, faculty members had workload limits in writing. They had processes for filing grievances. Contingent professors got email addresses! (They had previously been denied KCC.edu email addresses.) And modest salary raises were achieved.

But salary raises were never the end-all, be-all goal, said Mary Lou Wogan, then-chair of the KCCFA bargaining team. What drove her team of first-timers was the idea that they could achieve a contract that would make a difference for students. “We always kept in mind, ‘how can we serve students better?’” said Wogan, who is now KCCFA president.

Workload is not just a faculty issue, for example. When Tom Nejely was teaching 150 students, many of them...
needing individualized instruction, and formally advising another 50, plus serving on both KCC’s general education committee and the council council, plus leading the college’s assessment programs, he found it near-impossible to maintain an ambitious schedule of student assignments.

“I remember thinking, ‘I just can’t do all of this,’ and everybody who was here pre-contract will speak that same language,” he said. “We have been through the fire and the furnace here, and there remains such dedication among the faculty to do what’s good for students. When we went into negotiations, it wasn’t to feather our nests or make our jobs easier, it was to do what’s best for them.”

The systemic abuse of adjunct or contingent faculty isn’t just a faculty issue either. “Nobody walks into the classroom and says to their students, ‘I’m an adjunct. I’m not going to be around for your questions and I’m not going to have the answers when you ask them,’” said Maggie Wood, who has since won a full-time job at KCC. (Her first purchase when she hit a five-digit annual salary? A laptop. “It was like, ‘wow! A huge luxury.’”) But the fact is the conditions of contingent employment do make it difficult to provide the best education. Studies have shown students at colleges with high numbers of adjunct faculty members are less likely to graduate on time.

**AFTER UNION:** In a new health and science building, Marilyn Culp directs KCC’s certified nursing assistant (CNA) program, which trains students through a single-semester, 7-credit course, plus lab, to pass the state Board of Nursing’s exam. But at the end of a recent term, Culp heard from college administrators that her 7-credit program would suddenly become a non-credit program, which not only would dramatically change Culp’s employment status for the worse, but also seriously impact students. For one thing, a non-credit course would mean students couldn’t get financial aid—and when you add tuition, books, plus the required vaccinations, it costs about $1,700. For another, students moving on to four-year institutions for more advanced nursing degrees wouldn’t be able to transfer any of their KCC credits.

“In the old days, I would have to speak to the deans about my concerns for those students,” Culp said. “I’d be speaking as an individual, and usually they were pretty adamant about having made up their minds.”

But these aren’t the old days. Culp filed a formal grievance, using the timelines and processes established in the new contract, and she walked into the president’s office with KCFCAs Wogan, Lois Taysom, and other members of the grievance committee. She was not alone. “They helped me have a voice,” said Culp—and her students won back their much-needed credits.

**AFTER UNION:** Kathleen Henderson sits in her office—it’s not huge and it’s still shared, but she can see the sun shining through the window. **AFTER UNION:** Tom Nejely is writing the college’s strategic plan—but he agreed to do it! And the college has adjusted his teaching workload accordingly. **AFTER UNION:** Maggie Wood has a name. “It’s not just STAFF anymore,” she said. **AFTER UNION:** KCFCAs first contract expires in June 2014. And you know what? Wogan, Jennings, and others already are planning for the next.

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY
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**WHEN WE WENT INTO NEGOTIATIONS, IT WASN’T TO FEATHER OUR NESTS OR MAKE OUR JOBS EASIER, IT WAS TO DO WHAT’S BEST FOR [THE STUDENTS].**

— Tom Nejely, history professor, Klamath Community College
Thriving in Academe

REFLECTIONS ON HELPING STUDENTS LEARN

Thriving in Academe is a joint project of NEA and the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (www.podnetwork.org). For more information, contact the editor, Douglas Robertson (drobert@fiu.edu) at Florida International University or Mary Ellen Flannery (mflannery@nea.org) at NEA.

Teaching Creative Thinking and More

Have you figured out how to teach your students the most important skill of the 21st Century? Here is a new teaching-learning paradigm that goes beyond active learning.

How to Master Mentoring from the Middle

Let’s step into Professor Peabody’s Wayback Machine for a quick trip to 2010, when two important events in our lives as teachers occurred. First, our state became first in the nation to adopt the national Common Core Standards (CCS), and the General Assembly doubled down with Senate Bill 1, which, among other things, mandated that all colleges in Kentucky align their general education and teacher preparation curricula with the CCS. Second, also in 2010, IBM sent out a survey to more than a thousand CEOs of some of our country’s largest corporations asking what skills were the most important for colleges to develop in their students. As if to prove that secondary and higher education needed to respond to a changing business climate, the CEOs selected as their top choice creative thinking.

Aye, but there’s the rub. Not one of the Common Core Standards relates directly to creative thinking (even though the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy of learning, teaching and assessing in 2001 put Creating at the top). While England, Canada, and Australia have made the teaching of creativity a hallmark of their national educational policies, here in America we were not only not mentioning it, but also not figuring out if and how it could be taught.

Should it be taught and can it? The answer is: Absolutely! Read on to learn more about our new teaching-learning paradigm.
A new approach to teaching creative thinking—and any other subject

Since The Pedagogy Channel (TPC) exists only as a glimmer in some educator’s eye, and you can’t yet download its soon-to-be-most popular on-demand episode, The History of Teaching-Learning Paradigms, we’re going to provide the Wikipedia version. Those desirous of a more in-depth treatment need only see our new book, Teaching Applied Creative Thinking (2013).

In the beginning was the Sage on the Stage—a/k/a the Lecture Method—wherein a male authority divulged from a podium his “take” on a given subject to a row-and-columned classroom of students who were supposed to passively scribe the wondrous knowledge. In the late 20th century, as democratization upheaved the traditional format, the Guide on the Side—a/k/a active learning—gained power with both male and female instructors sharing authority with students who were expected to work in groups and reflect upon their work to gain the wondrous knowledge.

Both paradigms produced pronounced weaknesses. The former required nothing more than students memorize mountains of information (almost all of which they would shortly forget) to regurgitate to the sage during test times. The latter often resulted.

When we first offered our Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking course, students seemed to fall into two groups. About 75 percent were excited about creativity and found it valuable in their lives and coursework. The others felt challenged by creativity and wanted to develop their skills. It was interesting to watch the two groups interact and even more interesting to watch their final projects—where students used creative thinking to solve a real-world problem—evolve over the semester. Several of the 25 percent had an especially meaningful journey in this new course. Creative thinking encourages growth in students. I recall their first brainstorming session, when a small group of students assembled to consider concepts for their major project. Seeing them struggling, I decided to join them to discuss their progress. They were interested in promoting fitness on campus but couldn’t figure out how. After some discussion—and a few trips to the dry-erase board—I asked them to consider an equation: fitness + ________ = ? They suggested: fitness + library space = a healthier study space that promotes creativity. After a slow start, this team began to build momentum. The students ended up installing a stationary bicycle in the Noel Studio’s Greenhouse and using video cameras to record students riding it while discussing the benefits of exercise on creativity.
in the almost total abdication of instructor power and knowledge and too much dependence upon alpha students to guide the lost tribes through the wilderness of group work.

Adjusting to 21st-Century Realities

TECHNOLOGY: Recent estimates peg students transfixed by a monitor (computer, hand-held device, TV) for 8.5 hours a day. Simply put, why should students listen in class to Dr. Carpenter lecture on the history of brain—transfixed by a monitor (computer, hand-held device)? For 8.5 hours a day. Simply put, why should students listen in class to Dr. Carpenter lecture on the history of brain—transfixed by a monitor (computer, hand-held device) for 8.5 hours a day. Simply put, why should students listen in class to Dr. Carpenter lecture on the history of brain—transfixed by a monitor (computer, hand-held device)?

TRADITIONAL CLASSROOMS: After pointing out our ancestors walked 12 miles a day, John Medina in Brain Rules (2008) concludes that the worst possible educational setting is today’s student-static, rows-and-colummed classroom. In addition, research has shown the advantage of certain wall colors, natural light, and 72-degree temperatures.

BRAIN RESEARCH: Medina and others stress that students check out of lectures at the 10-minute mark. Neuroscience has also demonstrated the advantages of having both instructors and students in motion as well as the importance of both visual and multimedia approaches to aiding deep learning.

Mentoring from the Middle—The Instructor’s Roles

Probably the first movement away from the active learning approach came from Australian researcher Erica McWilliam. In her The Creative Workforce (2008), as well as other writings, she theorized on a “Meddler-in-the-Middle” approach that “positions the teacher and student as mutually involved in assembling and disassembling cultural products... Meddling is a repositioning of teacher and student as co-directors and co-editors of their social world” (88). However, McWilliam did not translate her theory into praxis, and her term “meddler” connotes more a gadfly than a positive authoritative force.

Building on McWilliam’s model, the Mentor-from-the-Middle paradigm focuses on a peripatetic instructor who both literally and figuratively positions him/herself in the middle of the classroom, assuming six distinct, but inter-related roles.

FACILITATOR: The mentor is responsible for creating the course, aligning it to proper outcomes and running all classroom sessions, managing both the big-picture learning experience as well as responding to individual student needs.

COACH: The mentor breaks skills into skill points, motivates students to develop the necessary knowledge, determines the roles of various students, and acts as damage controller when things go awry.

ARTIST: The mentor promotes risk-taking to find solutions as well as the traditional “right” answers, adapts to changing situations, shifts perspective so as to view things from other points of view (including students’), and synthesizes the ideas, processes, and products of the learning experience.

CRITICAL REFLECTOR: The mentor displays metacognition of class proceedings, exhibits fair-mindedness, and shows students how to properly evaluate arguments.

MODEL: In all that is done, the mentor acts as a model leader and learner.

SCHOLAR: Effective mentors not only know the discipline and its pedagogy, but constantly demonstrates the scholar researcher frame of mind both by keeping current in the field and by publishing in it and with students when possible. The goal is to get students to join the scholarly conversation.

Mentoring from the Middle—The Six Phases

Similar to the flipped classroom, mentoring from the middle involves at least six phases that can take more than one class period:

INFORMATION GATHERING: The mentor uses the web, print resources, and other forms of knowledge to develop both breadth and depth outside of and during class.

CRYSSTALLIZING: The mentor leads students through rigorous training and by deliberately practicing certain core abilities and skills over an extended period of time.” Harang-Smith (2006) concludes the argument with, “If all individuals have the potential to be creative and if creativity is a process that can be dissected and therefore taught, then colleges and universities can work to create curricula, pedagogies, co-curricula programming and a general institutional environment to support creative development.” And, don’t forget, applied creative thinking involves problem-solving, which, according to Smith and Smith (2010) is another teachable skill: “Students can be taught how to approach choosing creativity as part of problem solving. Not only are students prepared for the post-education world, but as Beghetto (2010) notes, other benefits accrue: “Encouraging creative thinking while learning not only enriches what is learned but can also deepen student understanding.”

BEST PRACTICES > “YES, VIRGINIA, CREATIVE THINKING CAN BE TAUGHT”

According to the Robinson Report (2000), at age 8 a child’s potential for creativity is 98 percent, but by adulthood that potential has dropped like a bad stock on Wall Street to 2 percent. Can secondary and higher education instructors keep the creative impulse firing on all cylinders? Tepper and Kuh (2011) emphatically assert: “creativity is cultivated by rigorous training and by deliberately practicing certain core abilities and skills over an extended period of time.” Harang-Smith (2006) concludes the argument with, “If all individuals have the potential to be creative and if creativity is a process that can be dissected and therefore taught, then colleges and universities can work to create curricula, pedagogies, co-curricula programming and a general institutional environment to support creative development.” And, don’t forget, applied creative thinking involves problem-solving, which, according to Smith and Smith (2010) is another teachable skill: “Students can be taught how to approach choosing creativity as part of problem solving. Not only are students prepared for the post-education world, but as Beghetto (2010) notes, other benefits accrue: “Encouraging creative thinking while learning not only enriches what is learned but can also deepen student understanding.”
in analyzing, assessing, and synthesizing information into powerful and guiding concepts.

**CREATING THE PROJECT**: The mentor leads the class in deciding what project/product can be accomplished employing these concepts.

**COMPLETING THE PROJECT**: The mentor helps students actively make something.

**SKILL-MAKING**: The mentor determines what additional activities are necessary to transform abstract vocabulary and concepts into deeply learned skills.

**EVALUATING THE LEARNING UNIT**: The mentor figures out whether the total project and class have achieved the desired outcomes.

### Mentoring Specific Skills of Creative Thinking

The mentor can aid students in thinking creatively by emphasizing nine skills:

- **SHIFTING PERCEPTION**: learning to regard a person, idea, or situation from multiple angles.
- **PIGGYBACKING**: learning to borrow old ideas from others in order to form new ideas.
- **BRAINSTORMING**: learning how to come up with many potential solutions to a problem.
- **GLIMMER-CATCHING**: learning to capture that out-of-focus idea or barely perceptible sight or sound.
- **COLLABORATING**: learning to work with others.
- **PLAYING**: learning to develop a total openness to the world around us and have fun with it.
- **RECOGNIZING PATTERN**: learning to discern the figure in carpet by weaving together separate strands into a coherent whole.
- **USING METAPHOR**: learning to use the known to help you understand the unknown.
- **GOING WITH THE FLOW**: learning how to let the creative process overwhelm you and take you with it.

### REFERENCES & RESOURCES


NEA RA 2013

MSU-APA leader wins high office at NEA

NEA Higher Ed members have a new voice at the highest levels of NEA governance. In July, the NEA RA elected Maury Koffman, second-generation union activist and five-term president of the Michigan State University Administrative Professionals Association, to the NEA Executive Committee. “One of my goals is to make sure the higher-ed voice is heard, and that the needs of our higher-ed locals are met and delivered,” said Koffman. And that’s not all: he also pledges to organize higher-ed affiliates, not just by bringing in new members but by helping current members, especially younger ones, become more active. “I want to help them find value in union membership,” said Koffman, a graduate of NEAs Emerging Leaders Academy. Higher education in the U.S. has challenges ahead, he noted. Increasing numbers of adjunct or contingent faculty must be kept engaged and informed, and all educators must fight increasing casualization of our profession, he said. With a national podium to speak from, Koffman plans to raise visibility on issues of college affordability and accessibility, academic freedom, and the immense relevancy of higher education in today’s knowledge-based economy. As MSU-APA president and chief negotiator, Koffman has another reason to celebrate: His members just ratified a contract that provides salary increases for the next four years, adds autism coverage, and ensures employer-paid, fully funded healthcare—with no premium for members.

Maury Koffman
NEA Executive Committee
MSU-APA President

Dave Lutz
SPRINFGIELD, MISSOURI

Dave Lutz, a clinical psychology professor at Missouri State University, wouldn’t disagree with Margaret Mead, the mid-century anthropologist who famously said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.” But Lutz might add that the larger the group, the more commanding the voice and the bigger the change for the better. To that end, as he considers the significant challenges ahead for public higher education in the U.S., Lutz is deeply committed to his membership in the MSU Faculty Association. “It’s hard to get things done as an individual,” he notes—and plenty needs to get done. Lutz points to declining state support for higher education as one issue. Where state funding used to account for up to 80 percent of institutional budgets, it’s down to about 25 percent (or less) on many campuses. “That decreased support has incredible implications for our economy,” he says. Meanwhile, colleges and universities increasingly rely on low-paid, contingent or adjunct faculty, whose conditions of employment make it very difficult to deliver high-quality instruction. “To me, this is the perfect time to get involved,” said Lutz. “We need to pull together, along with students and parents, across campuses, and say, ‘We’re sinking.’ We need to get across what we really do in higher education, and why it’s absolutely crucial, not just to people in classrooms, but to people in the workforce.”
Would you rather work at Walmart?

As Campus Equity Week 2013 approaches (October 28 to November 2), let’s consider again the working conditions of adjunct or contingent faculty. Sure, they’ve got our respect for teaching the majority of students in America. But apart from that, it seems their working conditions aren’t so different than, say, the woman who wields the cash-register scanner… “The rights of contingent faculty compare with the rights of employees at Walmart,” said Tom Aucter, president of the United Faculty of Florida, at the NEA Representative Assembly last year.

You might earn more if you wore a blue vest!
Retail cashiers in America - $20,410 or $9.13 an hour
Contingent faculty – $16,200 or $7.78 an hour

Less competition!
When Walmart opened a store in Pennsylvania in 2011, they received 3 applications for every available job. That same year, history faculty reported an average 87 applicants for each teaching job in their departments.

To work at your least favorite big-box store:
Must be able to lift 50 pounds. High school degree, optional.

Common job requirements for contingent faculty:
A Ph.D. or other terminal degree, preferred.

Go Union
Not a single Walmart store in this country has a union—in 2000, when meat-cutters at a Texas store unionized, the chain cut out the cutters. Meanwhile, state taxpayers feed and house their underpaid employees. Using data from Wisconsin, Mother Jones found more Walmart employees and family members in that state cost taxpayers about $9.5 million a year in Medicaid costs alone. (Not to mention subsidized public housing, food stamps, school lunches, heating assistance, and other tax credits...) But unionization is increasing among adjunct faculty—with clear benefits. About 35 percent of unionized adjunct faculty have employer-provided health benefits, compared to 14 percent of non-unionized. Also, about 60 percent of unionized adjunct faculty have retirement benefits, compared to 27.5 percent.

*Based on a full-time course load of three courses, two semesters, assuming about 60 hours of work per week. The average pay per course is $2,700, according to the recent CAW report. Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (March 2013); the Coalition on the Academic Workforce (CAW); the American Historical Association.
Building Better Relationships for Better Organizing

By Michael Gecan

Wherever I go in higher education circles, I hear a great deal of anxiety and concern about the pressures that faculty and other staff members are facing. Budget cuts keep coming, particularly for community colleges, but across the board for public institutions. The reduction of full-time positions in favor of adjunct, part-time, and contracted-out services continues. The latest “new-new thing,” Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), is being pushed and promoted by elite universities on both coasts and is funded by the Silicon Valley crowd. And the transformation of higher education from its former role as an engine of new opportunity and prosperity for people into a sinkhole of unbearable debt seems relentless and perhaps irreversible to many.

Yet, as real as these pressures are and as overwhelming as they can seem, they can be faced—and reduced or reversed—by well-organized people who know how to play a better brand of defense in the public arena, but who also develop a creative and productive offense. I say this not to diminish the reality and the difficulty of the issues in higher education, but to put that reality and those difficulties into some perspective. And I say this because I have seen many other leaders, in many other places, at times and in circumstances that seemed at least as dire, demonstrate that it could be done.

In my book, Going Public: An Organizer’s Guide to Citizen Action, I describe the four habits of power organizing that are practiced by effective leaders in communities all across the country: (1) the habit of relating, (2) the habit of organization, (3) the habit of action, and (4) the habit of reflection.

The Habit of Relating

When the IAF began describing the individual meeting as organizing’s most important and most radical tool, more than 30 years ago, we were very much in the minority. In those days, the prevailing theory was that organizing was defined by movements that mobilized, by ideological polarization, and by attention-getting tactics, not by the art of doing face-to-face, one-to-one individual meetings by the hundreds and thousands. Today, almost every major institution that does some form of organizing promotes the individual meeting. And yet, I contend that, for all this talk and attention, the individual meeting remains one of the least used tools to this day. Why the increased talk, but limited action?

The Habit of Action

By action, I don’t just mean campaign mobilizations, generally around election or legislative budget cycles. I mean the kind of action that emerges out of local issues and opportunities and that is led by local leaders, supported by skilled and experienced organizers or fellow leaders. The lack of local action, the reliance on one or two tried-and-true-types of mobilization or demonstration mean that there can be no new leadership development, no new facets to the public relationships among different factions in an institution, and no real fun or joy in this important public work.
**California**
After intense lobbying by California faculty and allies, a California senator has set aside his bill to outsource the education of thousands of state college students. The bill, SB 520, would have required public colleges and universities to grant credit for online classes provided by outside groups, including for-profit and unaccredited companies, shifting public funds away from face-to-face instruction and mentoring. The plan targeted entry-level classes particularly—a potential disaster for at-risk students. Meanwhile, a bill sponsored by the California Faculty Association, which seeks to evaluate the use of online tools in public higher education, passed the state’s Higher Education Committee this summer. “There is a lot of activity surrounding online education in our public universities. It is critical that we properly examine what is—and what is not—working on our campuses before we rush in to unproven and ill-advised methods,” said CFA president Lillian Taiz.

**Massachusetts**
In a new report with national implications for public higher education, the Massachusetts Teachers Association found that just 17 percent of the full-time students who entered one of the state’s 15 community colleges in 2003 earned a degree or certificate by 2010. “It’s an awful, absolutely horrifying completion rate,” said Joe LeBlanc, president of the Massachusetts Community College Council. But it also isn’t so surprising, considering current trends around funding and faculty hiring practices. The report, entitled “Reverse the Course,” offers recommendations to help students make the journey to certificates, degrees, and well-paid careers. The challenges include: increasing funding to public higher education and hiring more full-time faculty. Currently, full-time faculty members account for just 31 percent of the instructional workforce in Massachusetts community colleges. To read the report, visit www.massteacher.org.

**Oregon**
When is a loan not a loan? If you have to pay money back in monthly payments over 20 to 25 years, it sounds a lot like you have a debt to repay... But the Oregon legislature believes its newly approved pilot program, “Pay it Forward, Pay it Back,” is a fresh alternative to the rising burden of student loans. Instead of borrowing money, under “Pay it Forward...” students would attend state colleges tuition-free and then pay back a percentage of their income—3 percent for a BA-degree earner—over the next few decades. Their payments would go into a trust fund to pay for future generations. In other action, the state legislature also approved a measure that could send up to $20 million to Oregon community colleges this year, if the state collects an excess of corporate taxes. It’s called the “corporate kicker,” and OEA members worked hard to ensure its passage. Way to go!

**Nebraska**
Newly negotiated salary raises for Nebraska faculty members range from 2 percent at the University of Nebraska at Kearney and at state colleges to 3.5 percent for community college faculty and professional staff, as all NSEA higher-ed locals met the new bargaining timelines set forth in 2012 statutes.

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**TWO-MINUTE INTERVIEW > CARLOS DE FEO**

CARLOS DE FEO is president of CONADU, the national union of university faculty in Argentina, and leader of Education International’s Higher Education Committee in Latin America. Education International is a union of education unions, of which NEA is a founding member.

**There is at least one significant difference between higher education in the U.S. and Argentina: its cost. How much do Argentinians pay to attend your national universities?**

In 1949, the national constitution was written to say that university education is free. But we also have it in our heads, and we have as a cultural viewpoint, that higher education must be free because it’s a mechanism for people to use to reach higher levels of society, especially our immigrant sectors. This last government has created many new universities, especially in remote locations and also near people of lower incomes, so that higher education will not only be free, but it also will be accessible.

**So poor Argentinians have great opportunities to climb out of poverty, yes?**

Yes and no. After the 1990s, there were a lot of neoliberal tendencies in the universities. There are still some elitist sectors, and there are still some structural issues with very large class sizes, which impact educational quality. These students coming from lower income families or regions sometimes have not been very well prepared in their high schools. And, even though a student may get into the university, they can be expelled. In Argentina, there is the right to enter, but not the right to remain.

**Has Argentina followed the American trend toward contingent faculty?**

This is just starting, they are attempting this in Argentina. Our union, what we’d like to do is improve the working conditions of professors—because that will improve the quality of education and help retain students. These young people who leave the universities go to study at private universities of lesser quality. One of our goals is to try to transform that situation.

One of the other things our union is working on is trying to organize and fortify EI, Education International. Some of the other unions are more prepared for the everyday struggle of life, and less for the long-term strategies of higher education.
One year ago, Diana Vallera, president of the Part-time Faculty Association at Columbia College Chicago (P-fac), was scrambling to organize a petition drive to save her job at the college. Now she’s organizing a ratification vote for a new faculty contract that achieves every single thing she hoped for—from a tiered seniority system that protects class assignments (and pay) for the most experienced faculty members to the guaranteed presence of part-time faculty on Columbia’s governance and curriculum committees.

“If I put together a wish list for the very best contract I could get, it would be the contract we got!” said Vallera. And so much of it, especially the guaranteed preference for the most senior educators, isn’t just good for faculty—it’s great for students.

The tentative contract includes:

- **Assignment of classes:** Initial class assignments will be made to P-fac members with 51 or more credit hours of experience, who request two or more classes. Members with more than 200 hours of experience also will receive preference for a third class, which would amount to a full teaching load. This tiered system is based on best practices around the nation.
- **Reassignment:** P-fac members with 50-plus credit hours who have lost assigned classes will be able to “bump” faculty with less than 33 hours or administrators.
- **College governance:** P-fac is recognized as a partner in the Columbia College community. (Finally!) With that in mind, P-fac members will serve on all department curriculum committees, as well as the strategic planning committee and college-wide discussions of budget, finance, and academic affairs.
- **Salary:** All P-fac members will get a retroactive 3 percent salary raise, effective for the 2012-2013 academic year.

So what happened here? A brief timeline can’t describe the ups and downs of this story. But consider that contract negotiations began in early 2010 and then failed, over and again. In one of the first negotiating sessions, Vallera recalled, the college’s attorney told union leaders, “I’m going to make you beg for the contract you already have.”

Since then, P-fac members have suffered sudden, non-negotiable caps on the number of classes they could teach; the reassignment of classes from senior faculty (and union leaders) to rookie teachers; and arbitrary cuts in credit hours attached to specific classes, which hadn’t changed in materials, standards, or class hours. Those cuts added up to non-negotiated wage cuts or, in the case of Vallera, who lost all of her classes one semester, to termination without cause.

Meanwhile, union leaders refused to back down. They sought assistance from IEA/NEA, local union allies, student groups, and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). In March, P-fac won a significant victory from NLRB, which pointed out Columbia’s “egregious failure to bargain” and ordered the college back to the negotiating table. NLRB also ordered the college to pay thousands of dollars in back wages to those faculty members who had suffered retaliatory wage cuts or class reassignments.

But the tide really changed when Columbia’s board of trustees reached out to Vallera in late spring and said, we want to work with you. They asked her to serve on a search committee for a new president. Now, instead of an administrator who says, “You have no rights. Don’t expect to have any rights,” the president gets the very obvious point that faculty matter deeply to student achievement.

“When I speak with Dr. [Kwang-Wu] Kim, we’re speaking the same language,” said Vallera. “When we say we want experienced teachers, we both understand experienced teachers are great for students… He completely believes that faculty voices need to be part of shaping the school, and he’s completely interested in wanting to work collaboratively with the union.”

“If you could take a snapshot from a year ago and compare it to today, even people’s body language has changed. People are excited!”

How is it possible to describe the changes at Columbia College over the past year? It’s like Technicolor came to campus, but that analogy only works if you think black-and-white film processing was a repressive, abusive, and demoralizing system.
In June the Supreme Court issued its highly anticipated decision in Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin, a case that challenged the use of affirmative action programs in public institutions of higher education. In a significant victory for equal opportunity, the court did not strike down the university’s admissions policy. More importantly, it preserved the right to consider racial and ethnic diversity as a factor in admissions. However, since the Court found that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit did not properly apply the legal standard for evaluating affirmative action programs, the case was sent back to the lower court for further consideration.

Most seats in UT’s classes are filled under Texas’s Top Ten Percent Law, which automatically admits any Texas resident who graduates in the top ten percent of her class. To fill the remaining spots, the university considers a number of academic and personal factors, including demonstrated leadership qualities, work experience, extracurricular activities, and “special circumstances,” which may include socioeconomic background, family status, and race. This individualized assessment policy is modelled after a University of Michigan policy upheld by the Supreme Court in Grutter v. Bollinger (2003). It aims to matriculate a “critical mass” of minority students needed to obtain the educational benefits of a diverse student body.

The case began when Abigail Fisher, a white Texan denied admission, sued UT, arguing that she had been passed over for minority students with less impressive credentials and that she was the victim of racial discrimination. Fisher lost in the lower courts, which found that UT’s use of race as part of “a holistic, multi-factor, individualized assessment” was permitted by Grutter. But once the Supreme Court granted review, many feared Fisher would mark the end of affirmative action in public university admissions.

While the case was being considered by the Court, the National Education Association (NEA) and 27 of its state affiliates, together with People for the American Way, and a coalition of unions (including AFL-CIO, SEIU, AFT, and AFSCME) submitted an amicus brief urging the Court to uphold the UT program and reaffirm that fostering diversity in education remains a compelling governmental interest. The NEA brief highlighted the impressive body of research showing that affirmative action programs in education not only help address existing discrimination, but also plant the seed for a more just society.

The Court’s 7-to-1 opinion, written by Justice Kennedy, recognizes that “the attainment of a diverse student body . . . serves values beyond race alone” and affirmed the principle that securing diversity’s benefits in an academic setting is a permissible objective of a university’s admissions policy. The Court also noted that the lower courts were correct in granting deference to UT’s decision that a diverse student body would serve its educational goals.

The Court found, however, that the lower court that affirmed the validity of UT’s program was too deferential in concluding that UT’s program was strictly limited—or “narrowly tailored”—to achieving the “educational benefits that flow from student body diversity.” In particular, the Court said that, when the case returns to the lower court, UT must show that it gave “serious, good faith consideration of workable race-neutral alternatives” to its affirmative action plan but that no such alternatives “would produce the educational benefits of diversity.”

“This decision leaves intact the legal framework that protects affirmative action, so we are pleased,” NEA President Dennis Van Roekel said. “And while we are disappointed the Court did not completely affirm University of Texas’ modest affirmative action program, we are also heartened by its recognition that obtaining racially diverse classrooms can be a compelling government interest.”

Jason Walta is an attorney in the NEA Office of General Counsel and an adjunct faculty member at American University’s Washington College of Law.
Why I say yes to a union

MY NAME IS RICHARLENE BEECH. I am a full-time instructor of management and entrepreneurship in the Anheuser-Busch School of Business at Harris-Stowe State University, where I’ve taught for 18 years.

Last year, I joined the newly affiliated HSSU-NEA chapter. On October 1, my colleagues and I will have an opportunity to vote to designate HSSU-NEA as the exclusive bargaining agent for the full-time faculty at Harris Stowe State University. This recognition will allow me and my colleagues to work hand in hand with the administration to build Harris-Stowe State University into a stellar institution of higher learning for the students and the community in which we serve.

On Election Day, I’m voting “YES.”

My vote is an endorsement of the HSSU-NEA student-focused goals and principles, which I know we can achieve as a recognized union of professionals. So that you can understand our motivations and support our efforts, I want to share those guiding principles with readers of the NEA Higher Education Advocate.

HSSU-NEA PRINCIPLES

We the Harris-Stowe NEA are organizing to be recognized as a collective bargaining unit to obtain shared governance for the betterment of the university and the community.

• We want to improve enrollment management strategy for student recruitment and retention.
  • We want to improve student campus life.
  • We want competitive salary and benefits to attract, recruit, and retain the best possible full-time and adjunct faculty for our students.
  • We want to recruit a more diverse population.

• We want to improve faculty development including professional development, tenure and promotion, sabbaticals, and selection process.
  • We want to own the development of a curriculum that will offer students more academic choices.
  • We want to have more direct involvement in advising students.

Richarlene Beech is a full-time instructor of management and entrepreneurship in the Anheuser-Busch School of Business at Harris Stowe State University.