How to give good feedback

O, shared governance! Where have you gone?

Congress hears from NEA and its contingent faculty

Northern Twilight: Is this the end of the public university?

On the docket: Grad assistants and their unions
WHAT STINKS IN THE NATION’S CAPITAL?  
The erosion of shared governance at UDC isn’t unique.

THRIVING IN ACADEME  
How to provide better feedback—without doing it all yourself!

WHY I AM A MEMBER  

BY THE NUMBERS  
The data you need for upcoming state legislative sessions.

THOUGHT & ACTION  
“Northern Twilight...”

THE STATE OF HIGHER ED  
The story around graduate students and unions.

CASE STUDIES  
In defense of dance and the liberal arts.

U.S. House Democrats hear from contingent faculty.

THE POOR WORKING CONDITIONS of adjunct or contingent faculty, and especially their impact on student learning, have come to the attention of Congress. Last month, U.S. Rep. George Miller, the senior Democrat on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, invited contingent faculty to tell their stories on an “eForum,” which attracted hundreds of responses, including many from NEA Higher Ed members.

Check them out here: democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/eforum. Miller told reporters last month that he hadn’t much considered the issues of contingent faculty, who now constitute 75 percent of faculty in the U.S., until he heard testimony in November related to the Affordable Care Act. At that hearing, Maria Maisto, president of the New Faculty Majority, told committee members she works without health or retirement benefits, and earns less than a high-school dropout at a fast-food restaurant. (Surveys show contingent faculty members who belong to unions, like the tens of thousands of NEA Higher Ed members, are more likely to have those benefits.) Recently, the situation has worsened, as some colleges have cut adjunct faculty’s working hours—and consequently their pay—in misguided attempts to evade potential penalties of the ACA. In a written statement provided to the committee, NEA told House Reps, “ACA errors made by employers and other plan sponsors lead to exaggerated, even irresponsible, responses that hurt students, workers, and families alike. The good news is that employers who take the time to understand the facts can develop common sense, constructive, and consensual approaches to implementing the law.” At the same time, NEA continues to call on the U.S. Department of Treasury and Internal Revenue Service to ensure the regulations work for educators.

We’ll see you in St. Louis!

THE NEA HIGHER ED CONFERENCE will be held March 14-15 at the Renaissance St. Louis Grand Hotel. For information on workshops and registration, visit nea.org/he.

Heed the call...

IT’S NOT TOO LATE! Submissions for NEAs Thought & Action, including the special section, “The Business of Education,” are due March 1. For more information, visit nea.org/thoughtandaction.
Something is rotten in Washington, D.C.—and we’re not talking about Congress. Leave those hallowed halls and head northwest, past the national zoo—still not talking about Congress—to the only public institution of higher education in this city of 632,000-plus people, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). This fall, UDC officials put forward a “strategic” plan that would eliminate 20-plus academic programs, including special education, elementary education, physics, nutrition, and more. But did they hear students telling them they need those degrees for much-needed jobs? Did they hear faculty asking them to slow down and work collaboratively with students and faculty to develop a more student-centered plan? They may have heard, but they aren’t listening—and so goes the story of shared governance at campuses across the country.
Kelvin Page is just a year away from earning a bachelor’s degree in special education at the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), and already he sees the program’s power. The ability to differentiate instruction, to meet students at their individual levels, and to make gains, especially with students with autism: “I’m attaining exactly what I need to be a special education teacher,” he said.

But a proposed “Vision 2020” strategic plan from UDC administrators would put an end to Page’s aspirations—and those of other future teachers in the District of Columbia. The plan, which was written by administrators who consulted with neither student nor faculty leaders, calls for an end to the special education degree program, as well as 22 other UDC programs or majors with proven records of academic excellence, such as physics, chemistry, counseling, electrical engineering, nutrition, management information systems, and more.

Higher education in the nation’s capital should be high quality, and it should be affordable and accessible, say leaders of the UDC Faculty Association (UDCFA), who have spent the past few months rallying with students and meeting with city councilors and others. Instead of cutting instructional programs that directly benefit students, they suggest UDC consider its super-sized administrative costs.

“The Plan eliminates liberal arts programs, perpetuates disparities in higher education, continues to starve UDC of funds to carry out its mission, and hampers the University’s ability to offer a quality and affordable liberal arts education,” wrote UDCFA President Wilmer Johnson in an October letter to Elaine Crider, chair of the UDC Board of Trustees. Moreover, Johnson wrote, “This strategic work should be student-centered and faculty-led, not dictated by administration. The UDC Faculty Association calls for a plan that is inclusive and collaborative.”

What happened to shared governance?

Of course, UDC isn’t the only place where faculty feel steamrolled by unilateral changes to academic programs. The mission-oriented practice of “shared governance,” which means boards, administrators, and faculty share responsibility for the governance of an institution, is eroding faster than the polar ice caps.

At least two factors are at work: For one, contingent faculty now account for at least 75 percent of faculty in the U.S., and their working conditions often prevent them from protesting or participating in institutional governance. (In the 2010 NEA Almanac, Kezar and Sam reported just 21 percent of collective bargaining agreements provided procedures for non-tenure track faculty to participate in governance.) For another, rapidly disappearing state dollars, combined with right-wing enthusiasm for “reform,” have provided a convenient excuse—“the situation is dire and we must act”—for administrators who never wanted to share decision-making power with faculty anyway.

Consider the cautionary tale of “The New Community College at CUNY,” in the 2013 Thought & Action journal. The authors describe an “innovative” institution, opened in 2012 with no tenured faculty and no shared governance. “(It) serves as an example of the national movement toward restructuring higher education,” they write—and it’s a frightening one. At NCC, now named Guttman Community College for its deep-pocket funders, faculty has forfeited authority over curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and professional development. Without departments and chairs, or a faculty senate, the college has systematized “unfettered dominion of the provost over faculty.”

Also consider recent events at Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM), where administrators have gone “straight for the jugular,” writes Rebecca Schuman, an adjunct professor at the University of Missouri-
St. Louis, for *Slate* magazine. Among the 18 programs on the chopping block at MSUM is computer science. (And why not? It’s only the second most employable degree out there, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers.) What this is really about is getting rid of tenured faculty, writes Schuman.

“The years of faculty self-governance, that all-powerful faculty senate teeming with frothy-mouthed Trotskykites, are long past. Nowadays the power to declare large swaths of higher education unfit for human study rests solely with administrators, who are obviously not going to vote to demote or ‘reduce’ themselves,” writes Schuman.

Of course, the decline in shared governance is particularly steep at institutions where faculty don’t have unions and collective bargaining agreements that codify their rights. But it can happen anywhere faculty aren’t watchful.

**Back Inside the Beltway**

At UDC, “this is a battlefield for education,” said special education professor Arlene King-Berry, a vocal advocate for her students and their communities.

Despite her program’s recent accreditation and her students’ 98 percent passing rate on the Praxis exams—not to mention federal projections that show a 17 percent increase in demand for special educators over the next decade—UDC administrators want to shut her down. You have to wonder why. Is it that King-Berry is a strong voice for students?

They also want to kill the physics program. It’s tiny, but only because UDC administrators suspended enrollment. It also has the highest retention rate in the country. “It’s 100 hundred percent! This is unheard of in physics. Nobody drops the class,” said UDC physics professor Daryao Khatri. (Indeed, national studies have found no less than 40 percent of science and engineering majors switch to other subjects or drop out.)

It’s almost as if UDC administrators took a look at studies of the most employable college majors and slashed the ones at the top. Physics majors get jobs. Chemistry majors do too. The pressing need for math and science teachers in this nation prompted President Obama earlier last year to propose an $80 million STEM Teacher Pathway Program. Meanwhile, the District of Columbia has the highest rate of child obesity in the nation—is the answer really to cut the nutrition major?

“(These cuts) are not based on rational behavior,” said Khatri. Or maybe they are—after all, the college spends 67 cents of every tuition dollar on administrative costs, and why would administrators propose cutting their own jobs or salaries?

In any case, the fight at UDC isn’t over yet. Faculty union leaders have dug in, expanded their networks with student allies and city leaders, and reached out to local media. While the board has indicated its desire to move forward with many of the proposed cuts, they delayed a decision last month over the fate of Kelvin Page and his peers in the special education Master’s degree program.

“Not everybody is wealthy,” said Kelvin Page. “If UDC isn’t there for people like me, people who have to work and go to school, we’ll be lost.”

**BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY**

*Editor, NEA Higher Education Almanac*

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Feedback without Overload

To learn well, students need to use their learning and receive high quality feedback. But who has time to give a lot of great feedback? Explore how to super-charge the student’s learning environment with productive feedback without burning out.

Good teaching is creating good learning systems

A while ago, I examined hundreds of studies and stories about how college teachers think about their work as teachers, and I discovered a pattern. We college teachers tend to focus on what to teach, and on ourselves as the master learner. We want to know our stuff, and we want to share that knowledge, usually by telling students about it or demonstrating it.

After some time, if we continue to develop as teachers, we realize teaching is not just about disseminating content; it is most fundamentally about facilitating learning, something very different. If learning is to occur, the learners, the students, need to do it. This understanding leads to our focus on the learners and how they learn.

If we continue to develop as teachers, we realize that what we need to focus on is not just separate elements (first, the teacher; then, the students), we need to concentrate on creating learning systems of which we and the students are parts. Learning systems function to support learning whether we are there or not. Indeed, we are an important part. For one thing, we are the initial designer or creator of what becomes a dynamic learning system. But we are just a part. This perspective—focusing on learning systems—has the optimal potential to facilitate high quality learning for the most students, and I discovered that it characterizes the best teachers.
Good learning systems are rich with feedback

Let us turn to the role of feedback in learning systems. In order to learn, students need to use their new knowledge and reflect on what happens when they use it.

Different theoretical perspectives have different words for this phenomenon—contingencies, consequences, feedback—but it is all the same thing. The learner uses their knowledge, and they see what happens.

The teacher in a good learning system—a good course—develops mechanisms that have students use their new knowledge frequently and get feedback on the quality of their learning, reflect on that feedback, and get a chance to use their new understanding, all right after their initial use of the knowledge.

EXEMPLARY NIFS INVOLVE FEEDBACK FROM ANY SOURCE OTHER THAN THE TEACHER THAT STUDENTS CAN USE TO UNDERSTAND THE QUALITY OF THEIR LEARNING AND HOW TO IMPROVE IT.

The press is on to teach more in less time.

Throw into the mix a recessionary economic environment that presses for us to teach ever larger enrollment courses and more of them. A rule of thumb is that in

EARLY IN MY CAREER, I WAS COMMITTED TO REQUIRING STUDENTS TO WRITE SHORT REFLECTION PAPERS ABOUT EACH ASSIGNED READING. AS MY CLASS SIZES GREW, I REMAINED COMMITTED TO PROVIDING WRITTEN FEEDBACK MYSELF. MY LOAD BECAME SO OVERWHELMING THAT I COULD NOT COMPLETE THAT TASK EACH WEEK. AS THE WEEKS PASSED AND THE PILES OF UNPROCESSED REFLECTION PAPERS GREW, MY GUILT MOUNTED EXponentially. IT WAS NOT A GOOD SITUATION. FINALLY, I TRIED SOMETHING NEW. I BEGAN THE SEMESTER BY EXPLAINING THE VALUE OF WRITING REFLECTION PAPERS. BUT I WOULD CONFESSION THAT TIME DID NOT ALLOW FOR ME TO COMMENT ON THE PAPERS. I EXPLAINED THAT I WOULD READ ALL OF THE PAPERS CAREFULLY AND LOOK FOR PATTERNS OF RESPONSES. AT THE CLASS MEETING, WHEN THE PAPERS WERE DUE, THE STUDENTS WOULD PAIR WITH SOMEONE WHOM THEY DID NOT KNOW, AND EACH PERSON WOULD EXPLAIN AND DISCUSS THEIR REFLECTION PAPER (5 MINUTES FOR THE PAIRING). THE STUDENT RECEIVED DIRECT FEEDBACK FROM THEIR PARTNER. IN THE LARGE GROUP, THEY RECEIVED MY FEEDBACK. NOT ONLY DID THEY RECEIVE FEEDBACK FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES, BUT AN ACCOUNTABILITY DIMENSION WAS ADDED BECAUSE THEY HAD TO FACE OTHER STUDENTS AND REPRESENT THEIR WORK. ALSO, THEY MET AND INTERACTED MEANINGFULLY WITH ANOTHER STUDENT EACH WEEK AND EXPANDED THEIR PEER LEARNING NETWORK. THIS WAS NOT JUST A COMPROMISE, IT WAS BETTER. I DID NOT NEED TO DO IT ALL. I WAS SOLD.

TALES FROM REAL LIFE > YOU DON’T HAVE TO DO IT ALL.

Meet Douglas Robertson

Douglas L. Robertson is Dean of Undergraduate Education at Florida International University, a public, research university in Miami, Florida (52,000 students, 7th largest nationally). Dr. Robertson started or transformed five university teaching centers and has served as director of three. He has written or co-edited seven books on change and faculty development, most recently co-editing with Kay Gillespie, A Guide to Faculty Development, 2nd ed. He has served on editorial boards of numerous scholarly journals related to college teaching. He taught his first college course in 1971, and has received several teaching awards along the way.
order to optimize learning, students should spend as much time using their knowledge (and working with feedback) as they do acquiring it in the first place.

But how can we possibly provide that critical feedback when there are so many students and so many courses?

The answer is NIFs: Non-teacher Instructional Feedback

NIFs are information from any source other than the teacher that students can use to understand the quality of their learning and ideally how to improve its quality.

When you think of all of the possible elements in a learning system, how many of them could be a good source of learning feedback for students, or a NIF?

Students as NIFs

Students can provide useful feedback to other students in both face-to-face and electronic environments. One of Chickering’s and Gamson’s famous seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education involves promoting productive student-to-student interaction. Another focuses on encouraging active learning, and still another involves providing timely feedback. All three come together in what has become a generous collection of active learning techniques that do not necessarily require the teacher to be providing the feedback, but instead generate useful student-to-student feedback. Providing students with a little initial training in giving useful instructional feedback is a good practice. A simple Google search of “active learning” will yield a large number of examples of NIFs that use student-to-student feedback effectively.

One classic example is the Think-Pair-Share technique. The teacher poses a generative question and gives the students a specified amount of time to write their answers. Then students pair up and discuss their answers. I always require students to pair up every time with an unfamiliar person, so that they can expand their networks. At the halfway point, I announce that the partners who did not start should now explain their response.

A LARGE BODY OF ACTIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUES NOW EXISTS THAT DO NOT NECESSARILY REQUIRE THE TEACHER TO PROVIDE THE FEEDBACK BUT INSTEAD GENERATE PRODUCTIVE NIFs.

After a specified time, typically about 10 minutes, the class re-convenes and shares insights or observations that came out of the interaction.

An even shorter version is the Pause Technique, which involves simply stopping in a presentation every 15 minutes or so and having students share their notes with each other, and then moving on. The research on the efficacy of this quick student-to-student interaction is impressive.

A large cadre of small group techniques, such as Cooperative Learning and Team-Based Learning, also are excellent ways to generate productive student-to-student NIFs.

With the warp speed development of social media options, a whole new frontier of electronic tools and environments provide exciting new options for generating student-to-student feedback. Twitter, Facebook, learning management systems, wikis, and blogs are now conventional, and by the time this article is published, a new tool may already be ascendant. Students live in these environments, and teachers need to be able to go there.

Computer-based instructional programs as NIFs

Speaking of electronic environments, another NIF source comprises various computer-based instructional tools. MERLOT

![BEST PRACTICES > ACTIVE LEARNING IN LARGE GROUPS]

In the 1970s, Larry Michelson was a management professor at the University of Oklahoma when, because of budget cuts, his class sizes suddenly went from the 40s to the 140s. His colleagues told him his active learning techniques would have to go. But he knew they worked. So over the next 30-plus years, Michelson created and refined a highly effective and well-documented pedagogical system called Team Based Learning (TBL), which allows a single instructor to use active learning in large enrollment courses. TBL is backward designed and includes the careful clarification of learning objectives, learning activities supporting those learning objectives, and assessment procedures of progress toward the learning outcomes. TBL involves forming teams that function together for the entire semester, not transient small groups. Accountability (feedback) is embedded for both individuals and teams. Each major unit includes individual study, readiness assurance (individual test, team test, written appeals, and instructor feedback), and application activities. Heavy emphasis is on the application activities, or use of material. Over the decades, Larry Michelson has either thought about, or been asked about, virtually every possible issue. For example, the expected question, how do you evaluate individual performance in a team context? His responses are often data-based, and TBL is an excellent example of the scholarship of teaching and learning.
Outside experts as NIFs

I used to require students to identify successful people in their area of interest and to ask these experts a series of questions—to conduct an informational interview. I realized I was missing a good opportunity for the students to receive feedback. So I added to the assignment the requirement that students develop a short written statement on their current plan to advance in their interest area and send it to the expert in advance of their meeting for discussion at the meeting. The procedure provided excellent feedback to the student on their understanding of the professional area and how to prepare and advance in it.

Scholar databases as NIFs

Finally, scholarly research data also can provide generative feedback regarding students’ knowledge. For example, students can be asked to write a brief statement of their understanding of a topic and then assigned to go to searchable scholarly databases to see what the research shows. Does the research support their understanding or not? If so, to what extent?

What was the missing nuance in the students’ understanding? Important learning results from this feedback.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

CHALLENGING YOUR ASSUMPTIONS AND MAKING CHANGE

If I don’t provide the feedback, students may not learn anything or may learn the wrong thing.

I have four comments about this common concern. First, it is legitimate. Care must be taken to have the feedback, whatever the source, be of the highest possible quality. The teacher needs to provide instructions to the feedback sources where possible. For example, if the feedback is from peers, then provide some initial structure and direction to students by perhaps discussing the purpose of the feedback and how it can best realize that purpose. Rubrics may help.

Second, if teachers are the primary source of feedback for students, teachers who feel overwhelmed often reduce the frequency, richness, and immediacy of the feedback because they feel they simply have no choice. When teachers choose to maintain the quality of the feedback by doing it all themselves, ironically the outcome for students is often lousy feedback.

Third, when teachers know they are providing lousy feedback they can feel guilty and become defensive. In response, the students can get chippy. Off we go on negative communication spirals. As the teacher-student dynamics become increasingly dysfunctional, the quality of the learning environment declines dramatically.

Finally, when you examine the research about active learning and using feedback sources other than the teacher, you find abundant support for these practices. It appears that when done properly, students really do learn more with multiple sources of feedback. Even a practice as simple as the pause technique (stopping the teacher’s presentation every 15 minutes or so for students to pair up and compare notes) has documented statistically significant gains in learning over the conventional continuous lecture.

How do I get started? I’m used to lecturing. I don’t have a lot of time and don’t know where to begin.

Resistance to change is natural. So the fact you are ready to try something new means that you are already through the first phase—realizing you have to change. Congratulations!

The best way to proceed is to try a mini-experiment and assess the results. Try something that is fail-safe. In other words, if it does not work, the failure does not have huge consequences. Forget about fail-proof.

If you have a center for teaching and learning center on your campus, consult with these faculty development professionals to get ideas and some assistance with assessing the outcomes. At many campuses, faculty development centers exist, but somehow faculty still do not know about these wonderful resources.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Team-based learning website, http://teambasedlearning.org

NEA HIGHER EDUCATION ADVOCATE 9
CONGRATULATIONS!

NEA Higher Ed faculty working for access

NEA Higher Ed salutes this year’s “Champions of Access and Success,” those colleges and universities that “have successfully advanced strategies that increase opportunity, persistence, and degree completion for low-income, first-generation, minority, adult, veteran, disabled, and other underserved students,” according to the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP). This year’s winners of the inaugural IHEP awards include the University of Texas, El Paso, which has worked with El Paso public schools and the El Paso Community College to establish an effective pathway to college for students, reducing their time-to-degree and college costs. At every step along the way, NEA members are supporting and teaching those students. NEA Higher Ed also salutes IHEP’s “Examplar Institutions,” which include several other campuses with NEA affiliation, including Miami Dade College, Florida State University, and California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Over the past four years, CSUN has increased the relative percentage of its students with federal Pell Grants by 48 percent and first-generation students by 45 percent. Additionally, IHEP praised CSUN for its “sustained interventions and support for all students, especially underserved populations.” Meanwhile, at Florida State University, which offers a specialized Student Veterans Center, student veterans achieved a graduation rate of 88 percent between 2011 and 2013—another fantastic achievement!

It’s been five years since Texas Gov. Rick Perry and his anti-public education cronies launched their war on higher education with “seven breakthrough solutions,” which included rating professors based on student evaluations and measuring academic programs according to their revenues. “To say that Texas is hostile to higher education is an understatement. You could consider it a war on higher ed,” said Gabe Camacho, president of the El Paso Community College faculty union. “When you look at Governor Perry’s policies… they’re completely inappropriate, especially for a community college in this economy.”

Camacho understands students in El Paso, an area of high poverty near the U.S.-Mexico border, need access to a high-quality, affordable higher education in order to get jobs. But state funding cuts endanger access and quality. Since 2001, Texas funding per full-time college student has dropped 21 percent. Making matters worse, last year the state Legislature reduced financial-aid funding for students by 15 percent. Meanwhile, tuition at four-year public universities in Texas has jumped 266 percent over the past two decades.

The answer to these problems, says Camacho, is in a well-organized faculty that raises its voice on the important issues. “If you’re organized, if you have big numbers, people tend to pay attention to you,” said Camacho, who teaches philosophy. “First, it’s going to be the administration at your institution listening to you, but increasingly it’s also going to be your legislators.” In Texas, a right-to-work state, unions don’t always get a lot of respect. But Camacho, who has been a member since 2007, his first year at EPCC, tells his colleagues, “If you want to enact change, it has to be through some organized movement.”
BY THE NUMBERS

Promise vs. Reality

The authors of a new report from the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education invite faculty and staff to look behind the curtain at for-profit online education. With so much focus on the “promise” of online education, not enough attention has been paid to the fact that it is big—very, very big—business. But does it pay off for students? The report, entitled “The ‘Promises’ of Online Higher Education: Profits,” is available at FUTUREOFHIGHERED.ORG/WORKINGPAPERS.

None other than RUPERT MURDOCH has said education represents a potential investment opportunity of $500 billion — and investors are rushing to get a piece of the pie.

Rising into the Future
U.S. Venture-Capital and Growth Investments in Education

Profits are Soaring
2012 Academic Partnership profits from share of tuition at these universities:

- **$4M** Arizona State University
- **+$10M** Florida International University
- **$18M** Ohio University’s nursing program

“ASk HARD QUESTIONS ABOUT THOSE PUSHING THE INSANE RUSH TO ONLINE COURSES. WE NEED TO MAKE SURE THAT PROFITS AREN’T THE PRIORITY, BUT AN AFFORDABLE QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION IS.”

— Lillian Taiz, president of the California Faculty Association

Investment in the “EDUCATION INDUSTRY” in 2012.

Source: “Catching on at last…” The Economist, July 2013.

Watch them grow!
In 2013, about 200 non-profit institutions of higher education have partnered with for-profit service providers. In the next one to two years, that number is expected to grow to 500.


Source: GSV Advisors
Northern Twilight: SUNY and the Decline of the Public Comprehensive College

By Robert Golden

What faculty and many other professionals face today is a questioning of the role of professional judgment, a shrinking of the space formerly granted to professional autonomy. This shrinking is an assault on the very core of what it means to be a professional. Aside from advanced training in a specific field, latitude for judgment is probably the defining characteristic of a professional: professionals are people to whom society has granted a certain elevated status and autonomy because the decisions they make often involve complex matters with no one “right” or easy answer. Professionals are not the only ones who make these kinds of decisions in their jobs—farmers make them all the time, so do traffic police—but professionals are more or less defined by the social expectation that they will make such decisions and make them for the greater good...

Falling for the flimflam

So who or what is driving the agenda of putting professionals in a straitjacket? There is, of course, a managerial elite in this society that believes in the “bottom line,” in quantitative measures as a way to judge the worth of almost everything, and is not very secretly contemptuous of any other way of looking at things. But this elite, as powerful as it is, could not succeed in imposing its vision on the community if the community itself—civil society—were not in such bad shape. As community bonds have weakened and common understandings about the value of education or obligations to others have deteriorated, a narrow set of quantitative measures have rushed in to fill the void...

Practical action is needed

So what is one to do? I confess part of me is tempted to follow the advice of the protagonist’s grandfather in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man as he advised his young and naive grandson to “agree ‘em to death and destruction,”... to somehow carve out your own space to cope within the system, and wait for the zeitgeist to turn. However, this is the path of a cynical passivism, and regardless of how common it may be, it is not one to be admired or emulated. Besides, though this current obsession could eventually deflate as fast and thoroughly as an ill-fated high school romance, it will do a lot of damage in the meantime. There are practical steps to be taken now by college faculty and others:

1) Do the research and present the results to the public... Some intrepid souls, such as Diane Ravitch are doing this already. More work is needed on “professionalism” and its relevance to the economy and society at large. I believe this work should be both empirical and philosophical. It would be best if it were presented in a language bearing some resemblance to standard written English.

2) Take a careful inventory of the work we do and present this information to the public...

3) Engage local communities...and 4) Find allies in other professions... We may not be happy about threats to our professional autonomy, but we are not alone.

5) Have honest discussions with your own administration... Their interests do not always coincide with those of the faculty, but very few of them are willing to see their own institutions
California
A November hate crime on the San José State University (SJSU) campus, which led to criminal charges filed against three students, has students and faculty calling for increased access to ethnic studies courses. “At a time when SJSU is considering eliminating or reducing Ethnic Studies offerings that would prepare our students for living peacefully and justly with others, this outrageous action underscores the need for increasing and enhancing these offerings for all students,” said Cecil Canton, California Faculty Association vice president for affirmative action.

Florida
Support your colleagues at the University of Central Florida (UCF), who are trying to get a salary raise after years without even a cost-of-living increase. Faculty actually take home less money than they did in 2010, even as UCF’s enrollment and tuition have soared. Please sign their petition here: http://chn.ge/1fcYLo9

Illinois
A new Illinois state law will raid the pensions of public employees, including community college and university faculty and staff, cutting the benefits of working families by one-third or more. It’s wrong, it won’t work, and it will be challenged, said We Are One Illinois, a coalition of unions, including the Illinois Education Association, which has committed to overturning the law by seeking justice in the courts. “Senate Bill 1 is attempt-ed pension theft, and it’s illegal. Once overturned, its purported savings will evaporate, and the state’s finances and pension systems will be left in worse shape,” said the coalition unions in a prepared statement last month. Visit www.weareoneillinois.org for more information, including a calculator for Illinois public employees.

Maine
Finally! After working two and a half years without a contract, and enduring mediation, arbitration and fact-finding processes, the Associated Faculties of the Universities of Maine finally reached a tentative agreement in November. The new contract, which lasts through June 2015, provides for four years of salary raises (the past two years plus the next two) for an overall 7 percent raise. Upon ratification, the contract also will guarantee the faculty’s right to speak or write critically about the functioning of the university, and also guarantee the university’s obligation to compensate faculty for individualized instruction. (Often, when UM classes are canceled for low enrollment, faculty teach students anyway so that those students can get the courses and credits they need. Faculty should be—and will be—paid for that work.) In the battle for a new contract, AFUM members instituted a work-to-the-rule effort last year, which effectively limited their participation in some campus activities. “We persevered and stuck to our principles! Certainly we didn’t get everything we asked for, but we got a lot closer than we were last summer,” said AFUM president Ron Mosley.

Ohio
Faculty and staff unions at Youngstown State University are working with administrators to address a $6.6 million shortfall without layoffs. The cooperative task force marks the first time that unions and administrators have worked together on budget solutions.

TWO-MINUTE INTERVIEW > WES MOORE

Two boys, both raised by single mothers in Baltimore, both in trouble at school from a young age. But one WES MOORE goes on to Johns Hopkins and Oxford, while the other serves life in a Maryland prison. Moore, the author of “The Other Wes Moore,” tells us that the “others” in this world really aren’t so different.

While visiting the other Wes in prison, you ask him if we’re all products of our environment, and he tells you we’re all products of expectation. How much do the expectations of educators matter?
I think it’s one of the biggest factors of determination—the experience of the student and the teacher. I had teachers who would allow me to literally skip entire days of school and they wouldn’t ask me anything, and they thought they were doing me a favor by lowering expectations because they figured I was dealing with things that other kids didn’t have to... But they weren’t doing me any favors. And I had other teachers who said, “I don’t care what you’re dealing with, here are my expectations and you need to them.” There are huge implications and ramifications of expectation.

You describe meeting the admissions counselor at Johns Hopkins University, and how much his interest means to you. Millions of adults in colleges and schools could play that role in somebody’s life. What do you say to them?
The bottom line is this: We all do better when we have more people involved in the conclusions and outcomes of our kids.

You and the other Weses have so many similarities, and I understand you want us to consider the ways we resemble the “others” in this world, but I do see one significant difference. Your mother graduated from college, while the other Wes’ mother was forced to withdraw after changes to Pell Grant funding in the 1980s. Do you think that mattered?
Quite honestly, I can’t help but think about how different his life would have been if she had been able to finish school. It’s about this idea of social capital, expectations, and who you surround yourself with... The reason I included the Pell Grant story wasn’t just because it was a powerful story. If anybody misses the implications of that moment, they’re missing the whole point. That was a huge occasion in her life, and it should inform how we talk about policy and policy implications. This stuff matters.
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* Grocery store and gas rewards apply to the first $1,500 in combined purchases in these categories each quarter. The first $1,500 is earned in the category with the highest cash back. The second $1,500 is earned in the category with the next highest cash back. The remaining $1,500 is earned in the category with the lowest cash back. Cash back is calculated on purchases, excluding tax, cash advances, balance transfers, and transaction fees. The cash back reward is not available for balance transfers, cash advances, credit card fees, point of sale transactions, two percent rewards, and gas rewards. The cash back reward is not available for prepaid MasterCard, Visa gift cards, or bank issued gift cards. This offer is not available for the NEA Cash Rewards Visa Signature® credit card.

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Inside the trenches

The long road to unions for grad assistants

BY JASON WALTA

LAST MONTH, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY (NYU) held an election to determine whether its graduate teaching and research assistants wished to be represented by a union. The result was 620-10 in favor of unionizing. Yes, you read that correctly and, no, that’s not a typo: an astounding 98% of voters pulled the lever for the union. And yet, while the NYU election is surely a welcome victory, the plight of most of academia’s shadow workforce remains uncertain.

The NYU election was the latest twist in the long and largely dismal quest for graduate assistants at private universities to secure legally recognized union organizing rights. For decades the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) had denied those basic rights on the ground that graduate assistants should primarily be considered students, rather than employees. But, in a 2000 case involving NYU, the NLRB decided that while graduates assistants are undoubtedly students, they also are paid employees entitled to union organizing and bargaining rights when operating in that employee capacity.

Unfortunately, this more enlightened view prevailed for just four years. In 2004, the NLRB (with a new majority of Republican political appointees) performed a complete volte face and, in a case involving Brown University, overturned the 2000 NYU decision. As a result, many universities, including NYU, which had begun recognizing and negotiating with their graduates assistants’ unions, withdrew recognition and ceased bargaining.

The composition of the NLRB changed again after Obama’s election, and graduate assistant unions began plotting a course to ask the NLRB to abandon the Brown University decision and restore their bargaining rights. The leading case in that effort came from the graduate assistants at NYU. When the NYU case reached the NLRB in 2012, the board’s members requested extensive briefing on whether the Brown decision should be overruled and, if so, what the contours of the graduate assistants’ bargaining rights should be. (NEA joined a brief filed by several unions urging the NLRB to overrule the Brown decision and grant bargaining rights that extend to all aspects of the graduate assistants’ employment.) Given the new political composition of the NLRB, as well the board members’ manifest interest in revisiting the Brown decision, many were hopeful they had seized the right opportunity to turn the law back in a more productive direction.

A decision was expected sometime in 2013. But, before the NLRB could rule on the case, NYU and the union arrived at a settlement in which the university would remain neutral during an organizing drive and agree to abide by the results of a privately supervised election. That election, as I noted already, was a massive blowout, which organizers credit in part to the university’s agreement not to run an anti-union scare campaign. As a result of the settlement, however, the NLRB was forced to dismiss the case, leaving graduate assistants at other private universities with no new legal ruling to back their organizing efforts.

Thus, the NLRB will have to wait for another case before it can resolve this issue. But when that occurs, the board members should not be deceived by the tales the universities tell them. The universities’ main argument in opposing unionization by graduate assistants has always been that collective bargaining will interfere with the educational component of the graduate program and harm the relationships between faculty and graduate students. But those arguments simply do not match reality. A recent study from researchers at Rutgers University, looking at public universities, concluded “[u]nionization does not have the presumed negative effect on student outcomes, and in some cases has a positive effect.” Most significantly, union-represented graduate student employees report higher levels of personal and professional support, better pay, and similar perceptions of academic freedom as their non-union counterparts.

With the clock running out on the second term of the Obama administration, the NLRB will have to move quickly to decide another case involving this issue. And for many graduate assistants—who often slave away for minimal compensation and nonexistent benefits—that day cannot come soon enough.

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.
In defense of dance

ANYONE WHO STUDIES DANCE will, sooner or later, realize true comprehension and appreciation of dance requires a keen liberal arts study.

Colleges that promote liberal arts and sciences—including dance—base their programs on the principle that the primary goal of education is the development of the whole person through exposure to a variety of studies. Students become well-rounded individuals when they learn to think logically, write coherently, use critical thinking skills, delight in discovery, understand one’s place in history and society, and appreciate the arts. Such students learn many things; but above all, they learn how to learn.

Unfortunately, in our increasingly vocational postsecondary setting, this notion of a liberal arts education may strike readers as quaint or pathetic or dangerously subversive. It is not.

That openness to new experiences and ability to grasp new ideas creates an outstanding employee for any business owner or manager who is wise enough to appreciate the rigors of today’s liberal arts degree. Change is a fact of life and the ability to adapt and continue learning is key to survival.

It is unfortunate that some colleges have lost the essence of education, which is the development of the whole person.

There is an alternative: Philosopher Joseph Campbell was famous for saying, “Follow your bliss.” If you can find the subject that brings you joy, and follow that, you can find your way to a career that will fulfill you rather than sucking the soul out of you from 9 to 5, Monday through Friday, for the rest of your life. (Trust me. I started out as a bioengineering student.)

Some benefits of dance, as part of a liberal arts education, are obvious: Better posture, breathing, strength, flexibility, and agility, as well as opportunities for developing self-confidence and self-expression. Others are less obvious: The development of teamwork, leadership, and personal responsibility, and appreciation for diversity and cultural studies, and more.

We must advocate for dance education, not only in terms of quality of life, but also in terms of economic stimulus, public health benefits, community building, diversity training, social intervention, and academic enhancement. And advocate we must, as some state and federal lawmakers continue their attacks on arts funding, and college administrators continue to cut programs to cut budgets.

I am a dance educator—the Phi Beta Kappa motto, “Love of learning is the guide of life,” should be tattooed on the soles of my dancing feet.

Nancy Kane is an adjunct professor of dance at the State University of New York at Cortland, and a former National Endowment for the Humanities Scholar.