Stereotyping

+ Getting strict with for-profit colleges

+ Guns on campus: Taking aim at pro-gun state legislation

+ U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren talks NEA’s Degrees Not Debt

+ Check out the latest Thought & Action journal!
Headline News

NEA’s Kevin Gilbert tells HBCU faculty: We’re on your side

THE STRUGGLES facing historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) aren’t small. But the faculty who face them are strong — and NEA is behind them, said NEA Executive Committee member Kevin Gilbert. In October, Gilbert and NEA Higher Ed members from Florida A&M University, Alabama State University, and other HBCUs, attended the HBCU Faculty Development Network conference where Gilbert spoke to attendees. “HBCU faculty are fighting for the very survival of HBCUs,” he said, “and only through working together and mobilizing can we save these historic institutions, which are responsible for the success of millions of low-income and minority students. NEA stands behind HBCU faculty and students to increase opportunities for students of color and improve the working conditions of faculty, which are the learning conditions of students,” he said. Gilbert also noted that Black graduates are more likely to carry student debt, and he called on faculty and staff to work with NEA’s Degrees Not Debt campaign (nea.org/degreesnotdebt).

“We can rally for real change in Congress that will make college more affordable for students — and sustain historically black colleges and universities.”

Don’t miss it! The 2015 NEA/AFT Joint Higher Education Conference

THE 2015 NEA HIGHER ED conference, held March 13-15 at the Walt Disney Dolphin and Swan Resort Hotel in Orlando, will bring together NEA and AFT higher ed staff and faculty, and provide an opportunity to share information, develop skills, and network with colleagues. Speakers will include author Henry Giroux and NEA President Lily Eskelsen García, and sessions will focus on developing organizing and advocacy skills. To get more information, visit nea.org/higheredconference.

It’s not too late — yet. Thought & Action’s 2015 call for papers...

THE NEA THOUGHT & ACTION JOURNAL invites your submissions for a special focus section that asks, “What is the purpose of higher education?” The deadline is March 15. For more information, see nea.org/thoughtandaction.

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MISSED SOMETHING?
READ PREVIOUS ARTICLES ON OUR WEBSITE

DEGREES NOT DEBT WEEK OF ACTION
Check out this photo collection from more than 30 campus events. https://storify.com/NEAToday/degrees-not-debt-week-of-action

NOMINATE A FRIEND FOR NEA’S SOCIAL JUSTICE AWARD
Starting this year, NEA will recognize our amazing social justice activists. Applications are due March 30. www.nea.org/home/60579.htm

WHITE HOUSE TALKS COLLEGE ACCESS
NEA leaders attended the White House’s College Opportunity Day of Action. http://neatoday.org/2014/12/09/

LGBT STUDENTS PAY AN ENORMOUS PRICE
A landmark report asserts that LGBT Americans are feeling the economic pain more than others. http://neatoday.org/2014/09/30

IS ALEC AT WORK IN YOUR TOWN?
Find out how ALEC plans to silence local workers in 2015. http://educationvotes.nea.org/2014/12/03/
Consider the recent graduate who told NEA that he owed about $225,000 for his master’s degree in “entertainment business” from a for-profit college. “After I graduated, I was waiting tables at Olive Garden and facing monthly loan payments of $2,200,” he reported. “I struggle to maintain a comfortable livelihood, while saving and paying off my loans...I hope something can be done.” Well, finally, this past fall, after years of federal advocacy by NEA and its allies, “something” has been done to rein in the predatory practices of some for-profit colleges. New federal regulations, announced in October, are a “welcome first step,” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García.
Too much debt and too little income: That is the common refrain of so many students from for-profit institutions. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education has estimated that 74 percent of the for-profit programs at 7,000 colleges produce graduates who earn less, on average, than high school dropouts. Meanwhile, nearly nine out of 10 of their students borrow to pay for those degrees, which cost about $35,000 for a two-year degree, on average, compared to $8,000 from a community college, according to ProPublica.

“We need to prevent institutions that do not provide quality education from continuing to prey on students and taxpayers, particularly those that fail to prepare students for productive careers, cost more than public institutions, and leave student buried in debt that they cannot repay,” said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García.

NEA believes all students should have access to affordable higher education — it’s the cornerstone of NEA’s Degrees Not Debt campaign. (See nea.org/degreesnotdebt for more.) But the problem with for-profit colleges isn’t just about those students and their fair shot at the American Dream. It’s also about all tax-paying Americans who, even if they don’t know it, are investing money in the for-profit college industry via federal student loans and other grants. In fact, about $22 billion in federal funds are invested in for-profit colleges each year.

It’s not an investment that rewards anybody — except probably for-profit college presidents (who, on average, each earn $7.3 million a year, according to ProPublica.) Because their degrees so rarely turn into jobs, the likelihood of a for-profit student defaulting on a federal student loan is nearly four times higher than the rate of community college student default, according to The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS.)

“Our nation’s public 2- and 4-year colleges lead in providing access to quality and affordable education, and we do not need to subsidize institutions that do not meet that standard,” said Eskelsen García. “Federal student aid is intended to give students hope of a brighter future, not to saddle them with excessive debt.”

Excessive Debt

And yet, excessive debt is exactly what many for-profit college graduates are left. Kristi Ericson, a NEA member from Utah and a mother of seven children, owes more than $100,000 after getting a master’s degree in counseling — and never has been able to put it to use. “The stress is overwhelming,” she said. Or, there’s the 27-year-old who owes $180,000 for an art degree — and is now jobless and living with his parents. “I’d like to fall of the grid and never be found again,” he told The Boston Globe.

Sad stories of student debt aren’t unusual these days — more than 40 million Americans still owe something for their post-secondary studies. But, even on the crowded stage of student debt, the scary tales told by students of for-profit colleges stand out. There’s the NEA member who borrowed more than $100,000 to pay for a master’s degree in counseling — and never has been able to put it to use. “The stress is overwhelming,” she said. Or, there’s the 27-year-old who owes $180,000 for an art degree — and is now jobless and living with his parents. “I’d like to fall of the grid and never be found again,” he told The Boston Globe.

Meanwhile, Audra Norwood told NEA that she also owes more than $100,000 for an accounting degree from a for-profit university, and earns just $34,000 a year. “My credit is ruined. And, at this rate, I doubt I’ll ever be able to buy a house or have kids,” she said.

Of course, they’re not alone. Investigations by the U.S. Senate Com-
mittee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP), the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and numerous advocacy groups all have pointed to the same problems. In September, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau filed suit against one for-profit education chain, Corinthian Colleges, accusing them of preying on tens of thousands of students by giving them false and misleading information about career opportunities, and using high-pressure sales tactics to get students to borrow tens of thousands of dollars that they never could repay.

**Making The Rule**

In October, the federal government took an important step toward protecting future students at for-profit colleges. After multiple sessions of “rulemaking,” which NEA participated in, the DOE announced regulations aimed at better outcomes for students — or the loss of federal funds for institutions.

Known as “gainful employment” regulations, the rules say institutions and programs will be considered failing if their graduates have annual student loan payments that exceed 12 percent of their total earnings or 30 percent of their discretionary earnings. They will be considered in the danger zone if graduates have loan payments between 8 and 12 percent of total earnings or between 20 and 30 percent of discretionary earnings.

About 1,400 programs serving about 840,000 students would fail to meet these standards with their current performance — and 99 percent of them are for-profit colleges, said DOE Secretary Arne Duncan. But the rules don’t go into effect until July 1, 2015. And, to actually be considered ineligible for access to federal money, the schools or programs must fail two out of three years or be “in the zone” for four consecutive years.

This isn’t the first time the federal government has attempted to put up some protections for students. Its first set of gainful employment rules, issued in 2010, also included debt-to-income ratios and something else: a loan-repayment rate that required schools to have at least 35 percent of their students actively repaying their loans. In 2012, after for-profit lobbyists filed suit, a federal judge struck down the repayment measure, saying the DOE hadn’t adequately justified it. Still, the verdict was considered a vote of confidence: the judge also called the rules a “reasonable interpretation” by DOE of federal law.

Now advocates say the new rules don’t go far enough. U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, a leading voice on this issue, called them “a first step” and said, “While I commend the Administration for finalizing this rule… it does nothing to stop schools from offering, and our most at-risk students from enrolling in, programs where most students fail and default.” More action from Congress also is needed, he said.

“We would have liked the Department to go further,” agreed Mark F. Smith, NEA’s senior policy analyst for higher education, “however the rule does represent an important first step in regulating these institutions in order to provide real educational benefits to students, and protect taxpayers against waste.”

NEA will continue to support efforts to establish a strong, enforceable gainful employment rule, he said.

Of course, not everybody else will: In November, an association of well-funded for-profit colleges sued again to stop implementation of the rules, calling them “arbitrary and irrational.”
Wanted: Inclusive Teaching Practices

You value diversity, know it enriches your courses, and want to help all of your students learn—but you’re short on inclusive teaching practices. Never fear: A concept called “stereotype threat” abounds with ideas for all disciplines and students.

If you feel uncomfortable discussing stereotypes and diversity issues, this might be a great sign. Several studies suggest that those of us most committed to changing the status quo feel more uneasy with these discussions than those not overly concerned with matters of equity.

Our anxiety is also warranted. Students are more diverse than ever in practically every way: age, race, ethnicity, social class, parental level of education, country of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious background, etc. Although we recognize these differences enrich our courses, how many of us can say our graduate studies prepared us to design inclusive learning environments? Sure, some of us took semester-long courses about teaching in our discipline, while others were required to attend “diversity training” sessions—yet it’s fairly evident that none of this was enough. No one-shot intervention will do.

This is why the concept of stereotype threat is such a valuable resource. It doesn’t try to reduce the challenges of teaching diverse students to a workshop or list of best practices. Instead, it offers a comprehensive approach to identifying the stereotypes that may be sabotaging your students’ performance and a selection of verified strategies you can use in courses of all shapes and sizes.
White Men Can’t Jump

Woody Harrelson may have defied the odds in White Men Can’t Jump, but more than 20 years after that film the stereotype of African Americans’ athletic superiority persists—even for miniature golf! When social psychologists asked men to complete a minigolf task described as a test of natural athletic ability, the white men in the study performed poorly compared to black men (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999).

This was one of many studies about the phenomenon known as “stereotype threat,” a term first coined by UC Berkeley provost Claude Steele that describes what happens when we risk confirming a negative stereotype about our group. And while messing up on the golf course is innocuous enough, stereotype threat has been shown to affect performance on academic tasks and was actually first identified on a college campus. In the late 80s, Steele was invited to the University of Michigan to help develop an academic support program for minority students. As he reviewed the data and saw that black students—even those with the highest SATs—consistently earned lower grades, Steele rejected the possibility that this reflected their innate ability or intelligence.

Claude Steele that describes what happens when we risk confirming a negative stereotype about our group. And while messing up on the golf course is innocuous enough, stereotype threat has been shown to affect performance on academic tasks and was actually first identified on a college campus.

Meet Isis Artze-Vega

As associate director of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching at Florida International University, Isis Artze-Vega helps promote learning-centered teaching among faculty and graduate students, and assists the university with teaching reform initiatives. She is also assistant coordinator of the travel fellowships of the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education Diversity Committee. Before joining FIU, she taught English composition at University of Miami, where she co-authored the book Composing Inquiry. Her research interests include linguistic pluralism in the college classroom, inclusive teaching practices, and the impact of emotion and relationships in teaching. She can be reached at iartze@fiu.edu.

TALES FROM THE FIELD > DON’T ASSUME YOU KNOW IT ALL

When I first taught writing 11 years ago, I wasn’t worried about diversity. I was too busy figuring out how to teach well enough to avoid student complaints! I also equated the term “diversity” with racial and ethnic diversity, oblivious to the fact that my students were already more varied than previous cohorts in nearly every way. Also, and perhaps most naively, I figured that, as a well-educated Cuban-American woman in a largely Hispanic region, I could instinctively address the needs of my diverse students. Needless to say, being a member of an underrepresented minority group proved to be insufficient “preparation” for effectively teaching adults; students who had just arrived from China, uneasy about their English-speaking abilities and unaccustomed to the norms of U.S. college classrooms; or students who worked several jobs to support their families or to keep up with their peers’ privileged lifestyle. Thankfully, I attended workshops on working with second-language writers, enrolled in higher education classes to learn more about contemporary students and how to meet their needs, and read everything I could get my hands on. So when I interviewed for my current job and was told one of my roles would be to use federal grant money to help faculty teach in more inclusive ways, I knew it wouldn’t be easy but at least I wouldn’t be starting from scratch.
This reflected their innate ability or intelligence. When he talked with students, he heard time and again that black students didn’t feel they belonged. This feeling is likely even more widespread today: Many students—notably first-generation college students, and those from underrepresented and low socioeconomic backgrounds—Arrive in our institutions with a great deal of anxiety about whether they belong or will be able to succeed.

Steele’s intuition morphed into a multi-decade research agenda chronicled beautifully in his text Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Can Affect Us and What We Can Do (2010), popular on campuses. Faculty are finding that the stereotype threat literature is just what they were looking for: a conceptual framework supported by research that helps them understand a powerful influence on student performance, and one that offers varied, concrete ways to make their teaching more inclusive.

BECAUSE THE RESEARCH STUDIES USED SUCH CLEVER AND VARIED INTERVENTIONS, THEY ALSO REPRESENT INVALUABLE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES.

It's everywhere

Faculty are struck by the stereotype threat literature’s breadth, and its compelling data and evidence. Here are a few examples:

In 1995, Steele and NYU professor Joshua Aronson studied African American students answering difficult verbal questions. When researchers said the test measured verbal ability, they scored considerably lower than white peers. Yet when the task was framed as a problem-solving exercise that did not measure intellectual ability, that gap disappeared (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Women taking the AP Calculus test fared similarly when Educational Testing Service (ETS) asked half of test-takers to report their gender before the test (as is routinely done), and the other half to provide this information after the test. For the lucky latter group, the stereotype of males’ mathematical superiority was not primed. In fact, women outperformed men. By some calculations, if the ETS were to implement this change, nearly 4,700 female students would have earned AP calculus credit each year (Danaher & Crandall, 2008).

Turning the tide

Here’s the good news: The negative effects of stereotype threat can be reduced, sometimes even eliminated. And because the research studies used such clever and varied interventions, they also represent invaluable pedagogical strategies. The resources below provide more ideas and details, but for now, here are five additions to your inclusive teaching toolbox:

1. **Assure students the task is fair.**
   When we don’t say anything prior to important tasks (like tests), stereotype threat may negatively impact students’ performance. Stating explicitly that the test is gender- or race-fair can alleviate the threat. You could say, “I’ve used this test for many years now, and I’ve never noticed a difference in performance for any student group.” It also helps to remind students the test is being used to facilitate and evaluate learning; it cannot measure innate ability.

2. **Avoid triggering the stereotype.**
   Something as simple as writing one’s name on an exam can remind students of their gender, race, and/or ethnicity and corresponding biases, so small procedural modifications can make a big difference. Perhaps use a numerical

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**BEST PRACTICES > BRINGING IT HOME**

“I have a memory of the first time I realized I was black,” Steele (2010) writes. When he was 7 or 8, he found out he could swim in the local pool on Wednesdays only—simply because he’s black. What hurt the most was the fact that the restriction was based on something he couldn’t control.

Aronson’s (2012) examples are more lighthearted, like the times he would confirm the stereotypes that Jewish people are stingy or like to show off their money. He described it as a “stereotype trap!”

The point is that self-reflection is a great first step toward recognizing what many of our students experience every day. Whether you’re a woman in a predominantly male field, look older or younger than your peers, speak English as an additional language, etc., you’ve probably “been there.”

In fact, stereotypes about the professoriate affect us all. Yes, faculty have become increasingly diverse, but the part of the professor continues to be played by a white, gray-haired man in rumpled clothing—and those of us who don’t fit this mold may sometimes feel like imposters. In times like these, try another intervention: self-affirmation. Remind yourself of the skills and characteristics that have gotten you this far. You have a lot to affirm!
Get wise feedback. That is, give critical feedback in a way that makes it clear the criticism and suggestions reflect your high, consistent standards. This is most powerful when we assure students we have faith in their ability to attain the high standards, and reinforce this message through devoting time and effort to helping them succeed (Cohen, Steele, Ross, 1999).

4. Remind students their minds are malleable. Many students enter our classrooms with what Carol Dweck (2008) calls “fixed mindsets;” they may think they’re good at math, bad writers, etc. When we teach them their minds are like muscles—the more we use them, the better they work—it changes how they react to academic struggles. Instead of interpreting a bad grade as confirmation that they’re not “college material,” students may reflect on how much or how effectively they studied.

5. Help students feel they belong. Assure them their anxieties about belonging or ability to succeed are common and will subside, and teach them unspoken rules of college success; for instance how to navigate the environment and study effectively.

As Glenn, Taylor and Drennan (2010) remind us, “Unless we challenge our preconceived notions—stereotypes—whether positive or negative, and recognize that our students may be adversely affected by stereotype threat, whether or not we harbor the personal prejudices in question, we will fail to create an inclusive environment where all students feel valued and empowered to perform optimally” (p. 3).

REFERENCES & RESOURCES


Implicit Association Test. https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/


WHY I VOTED YES!

Dennis Pohlman
Union, Missouri

The current contract for faculty members at East Central College (ECC), a small community college about an hour southwest of St. Louis, consists of a single sheet of paper. And at the bottom are four little words that have caused big headaches: “Other duties as assigned...” Too often, those “other duties” have had nothing to do with teaching or the needs of ECC students, said Dennis Pohlman, an assistant professor of political science and history, and president of the new NEA-affiliated East Central College Faculty Association. In November, full-time faculty at ECC voted to form a union — this spring, they hope to replace that one-page contract with a comprehensive collectively bargained agreement that re-commits faculty to the learning needs of their students. “This is not about us trying to get more pay,” said Pohlman. “It’s about improving the working conditions that interfere with teaching. Ultimately, the students lose out with all of these distractions.” In recent years, those distractions have included an increasing number of administrative duties, filling out detailed office reports, serving on non-educational committees, etc. “We think it’s starting to interfere with our real work. Students have less access to us because we’re busy with these other things... And it’s also affecting our ability to retain faculty. People get here, look around and see what duties will be imposed on them, and then leave.” The bottom line is that shared governance has been misunderstood by administration, he said. But, as members of a new union, ECC faculty expect an equal say in decisions. “The union holds some promise that things around here can change!”

John Wadach
MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, NEW YORK

John Wadach, chair of engineering and science at Monroe Community College (MCC) in New York and a member of its faculty association, has been named Outstanding Community College Professor of the Year by the U.S. Professors of the Year program, a joint effort of the Carnegie Foundation and Council for Advancement and Support of Education. Wadach, who began teaching at MCC in 1984, said in his written acceptance speech that the work of community college professors is “largely invisible” beyond their own institutions — but still influential. “Our titles may not be as prestigious as those of professors from large research universities, but in many cases we are the difference between a student working for minimum wage or one who will be entering the middle class.” Wadach also praised his students who often “support themselves and pay for school without parental assistance,” he noted. “It is impossible not to be motivated to help them.” And help them he does... spending his lunch hours in the physics center, working and advising students, and also collaborating with area high schools and state universities to create seamless systems of STEM education. The awards program also names state professors of the year, and they include several NEA Higher Ed members: Beth McGinnis-Cavanaugh, professor of physics and civil engineering at Springfield (Mass.) Technical Community College; Cynthia Wade, math professor at Michigan’s St. Clair Community College; Andrea Nichols, sociology professor at St. Louis Community College at Forest Park; and Cynthia Jones, an English lecturer at Hostos Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY).
THE STATE OF HIGHER ED

CA Faculty take on salary, workload, IP and more
A new California Faculty Association contract, ratified in November, provides across-the-board salary raises, workload resources, and more. Specifically, it provides a raise of 1.6 percent this year with an additional $2 million to fix salary compression issues, and also sets aside $1.3 million to be distributed by faculty-run committees—for faculty with excessive workload. The contract also expands intellectual property (IP) rights, ensuring that the administration can’t give faculty’s IP to third-party vendors, and ensures that faculty who teach online have the same rights as those teaching face-to-face.

The Maine Problem
Thirty grievances were filed at the University of Southern Maine (USM) late last year, as administrators carried out a campaign to cut academic programs, get rid of about 50 faculty members (basically, one in every five or six faculty), and do it all without following the basic procedures required by the Associated Faculty of the Universities of Maine (AFUM) contract. The 15 targeted programs include geoscience and applied medical science, as well as New England studies and the classics. And, rather than keeping faculty on to “teach out” these programs, their jobs simply disappeared on Dec. 31, leaving students in the lurch, possibly looking for new majors or to transfer. Meanwhile, USM hasn’t made its case that these cuts really are necessary. “The underlying thesis that USM, as part of the University of Maine System, faces a crushing budget deficit, is preposterous,” said Susan Feiner, economics professor and USM faculty union president.

Join a new Missouri union: Everybody else is...
Faculty at two Missouri community colleges, East Central College in Union and Metropolitan Community College in Kansas City, both voted in November to join Missouri-NEA. “This is not about us getting more pay,” said Dennis Pohlman, president of the new East Central College Faculty Association. “It’s about improving the working conditions that interfere with teaching.” The two unions come on the heels of new faculty and staff unions at Harris-Stowe State University in St. Louis, which joined MNEA earlier in the year.

Montana grad assistants sign first contract!
Congratulations to the Graduate Employees Organization (GEO) of Montana State University Bozeman, whose members ratified their first contract in December. “It’s a huge recognition of the work we do here in both instruction and research,” said GEO President Jim Junker. “We finally have a voice in how the school treats us and how our working conditions are handled.” Previously, some graduate employees were paid below minimum wage, and many had no health benefits. The contract addresses those disparities, providing for salary raises and also in-state tuition benefits for all graduate employees. Moreover, the union, which is affiliated with MEA-MFT, provides a seat at the table: “The best part is getting some recognition—and a raise,” said GEO member Shari Samuels.

TWO-MINUTE INTERVIEW > U.S. SEN. ELIZABETH WARREN

U.S. SEN. ELIZABETH WARREN (D-Mass.) took part in a tele-town-hall with NEA President Lily Eskelsen García and NEA members during NEA’s Degrees Not Debt Week of Action in late November. Warren, who sponsored a bill last year to lower interest rates for student loan borrowers, answered the following questions from NEA members.

Theresa Montano, president of NEA’s National Council for Higher Education and CSU Northridge professor: As we fight to move your bill, we think we need to look at two critical programs, public service loan forgiveness and teacher loan forgiveness. Both are so important when we recruit young people. How can we fight to make sure they’re not only continued but expanded?
Warren: I agree. It needs to be expanded—not just protected but expanded. That’s the right way to think about it! I believe that asking borrowers to wait for years to get forgiveness is wrong. I think we should be moving to a forgive-as-you-go model so that borrowers get to forgive a portion of their loans every year that they spend in teaching or public service. Investments in our teachers are investments in the future.
Alexis Ploss, a NEA-Student member from UMass Lowell, who will graduate with $100,000 in debt: How would you suggest students get more involved in these issues?
Warren: This is all about making your voice heard. Call your senator or congresswoman or congresswoman—and then do more! Write an op-ed to a campus newspaper. Write a petition or sign and forward a petition. These are things that matter! The more students you can get involved, the more you can organize, the more your voice is magnified! Campaigns like NEA’s Degrees Not Debt are great ways to get involved. The Degrees Not Debt program creates opportunities for you to share your story and make sure your message is heard in Washington.

Lily Eskelsen García, NEA president: I appreciate Senator Warren acknowledging that NEA’s Degrees Not Debt has the potential to put this issue on the map! Go to nea.org/degreessay.org to get involved. It’s time to make people a little nervous, that we’re watching them and are expecting action! This is, as the senator said, an economic emergency.
NEA’s 2014 Thought & Action Journal is here!

There are THREE ways to get your journal this year.
1) Read the articles at www.nea.org/thoughtandaction.
2) Download an interactive PDF at www.nea.org/thoughtandaction.
3) Order a free print copy at www.subscribenea.com from a limited press run. Use the special NEA Higher Ed member code: NEAHIGHERED

Articles include a frank conversation about sexual assault on campuses by Kirsten Dierking and Laura Gray; an examination by Adrianna Kezar and Daniel Maxey of how faculty matter to student learning; and also how big-box stores are more ethical employers than public universities, how grad assistant unions should be models for faculty unions, what faculty can learn from preschool teachers, the realities of the $10,000 degree, the effects of large class sizes; and strategies for pushing back Corporate U. Also check out poetry and visual art by your NEA Higher Ed colleagues.
At these levels, student loan debt isn’t just a burden—it has become a barrier to the American Dream. If you believe every American deserves a fair shot at higher education, join NEA’s Degrees Not Debt campaign and raise your voice for college affordability.

There are solutions to the college affordability crisis. NEA’s Degrees Not Debt campaign is calling on Congress to:

1) Increase need-based federal aid, like Pell Grants;

2) Allow borrowers to refinance their loan interest rates in the same way that homeowners can refinance their mortgages;

3) Expand loan forgiveness programs, especially for people working in public service careers like education.

Did you know Americans currently owe $1,200,000,000,000 in student debt? Or that seven in 10 college seniors who graduated last year had student loan debt? With an average of $29,400 per borrower?

Join the NEA’s Degrees Not Debt campaign in calling for solutions so that every American has the opportunity for higher education, no matter their family background.

Sign NEA’s Degrees Not Debt pledge at nea.org/degreesnotdebt.
Sexual violence on campus

Solutions are possible, but complicated

BY JASON WALTA

THE ISSUE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE on campus has emerged front and center in the national debate.

In November, Rolling Stone published an explosive article on the subject, detailing the brutal rape of a student at the University of Virginia and the school’s seemingly indifferent response. Shortly after the article appeared, however, a number of questions arose about the accuracy of the victim’s story, and Rolling Stone eventually acknowledged that its investigation and reporting for the article had been faulty.

A predictable backlash followed, with anti-feminist conservatives like Christina Hoff Summers claiming that the unraveling of Rolling Stone’s article is indicative of a “false accusation culture” and “rape panic” gripping universities.

All of this adds fuel to the fire in ongoing—and often contentious—debates over the role of universities in handling campus sexual assault. As stories of universities’ ineffectual responses to victims of sexual assault have been mounting for years, students and activists have organized on campuses across the nation to pressure schools to become more proactive in establishing effective policies and internal mechanisms for reporting and responding to sexual violence.

At the same time, some have objected that schools are now going too far in responding to these concerns. For example, after Harvard University recently created a new policy on sexual harassment and assault, a group of more than two dozen Harvard law professors issued a public statement criticizing the policy. They complained that the new policy “inappropriately expanded” the definitions of sexual harassment and assault, and that it also “lack[ed] the most basic elements of fairness and due process” for those accused of violating the policy.

The stakes in this debate are high. Protecting students from sexual violence and harassment is not only a basic matter of safety and human dignity, it is crucial to ensuring that women can exercise their civil right to educational opportunity. Yet, according to statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice, as many as 80 percent of campus rapes go unreported (which certainly puts the lie to Summers’s claim of a “false accusation culture”).

At the same time, schools should be concerned about establishing policies and procedures that put students and faculty alike on notice of acceptable standards conduct, and that give those accused of violating those standards a fair and impartial hearing. Fortunately for many schools, they have faculty with a great wealth of knowledge and expertise—whether it be in law, criminal justice, or another discipline—that can be tapped to address the issue.

In other words, solutions to the problem of sexual violence on campus are attainable. But, they require acknowledgement that it is, in fact, a problem calling for an effective response.

For exactly that reason, the most regrettable part of the controversy over Rolling Stone’s failed reporting is that it has given credence to the notion that sexual violence on campus is overblown or even fictitious. All of that is an unwelcome distraction from the serious work of creating fair and effective means for protecting women’s safety and educational opportunities.
ON NOVEMBER 20 AT 12:30 A.M., shots rang out in Strozier Library at Florida State University (FSU). FSU graduate Myron May shot and wounded three people before being fatally shot by police on the library steps. Existing security measures had contained May to the lobby, and FSU and Tallahassee police arrived swiftly within five minutes of the first call.

Within days, Students for Concealed Carry at Florida State made clear its support for concealed firearms on campus. The National Rifle Association’s state lobbyist “echoed the call.” A library employee who was one of the people shot is a member of the student group; it was argued that he could have stopped the shooter if he had a weapon. The assumption is that more guns, not less, could stop school shootings. In December, Rep. Greg Steube, R-Sarasota, filed a bill to allow concealed weapons on Florida’s college campuses, and Sen. Greg Evers (R-Pensacola) filed a companion bill soon after.

They’re wrong. As FSU Police Chief David Perry said, additional firearms can lead to more chaos in a school shooting situation: “The dilemma it places our officers in is having to determine who is our aggressor, who is our assailant and who are people trying to help, so it’s not the appropriate environment for additional weapons.”

Further, guns on campus can lead to other types of tragedy. In early 2011, FSU student Ashley Cowie was attending a fraternity party when she was fatally shot by a student whose gun accidentally discharged. That same year, a similar bill filed by Evers that would have allowed weapons on campus was defeated by strong NRA supporter Sen. John Thrasher (R-Jacksonville), who now serves as FSU’s president. Thrasher has publicly stated that though he strongly supports the Second Amendment, guns have no place on college campuses and therefore he opposes Steube’s bill as well.

My colleagues and I agree: Recently, the FSU chapter of the United Faculty of Florida passed a resolution opposing the bills, suggesting that more deadly firearms on campus will not enhance the safety of our students, faculty, or staff because of the potential for accidents and collateral damage. The United Faculty of Florida is expected to take a position on the issue soon. One thing is certain: Florida’s campuses are about to be pulled into America’s ongoing gun debate.

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