Deep Learning

Organizing for equity! #AdjunctPower #UnionStrong

How to be an ally during Campus Equity Week (and beyond)

What’s ahead for the Supreme Court: Your rights

Free College — An idea whose time has come?
Unemployment Benefits for Contingent Faculty: Make it so!

WHEN CHARMIAN TASHIJIAN CLOSES HER CLASSROOM door in May, she can’t say for sure when she’ll return to campus. For the past 30-plus years, she’s had the summers off — not by choice, but because summer assignments almost always are unavailable to Tashjian, an adjunct professor of music and humanities at two Chicagoland colleges. She’ll hope to return to teach in the fall, but there are no guarantees in the working life of an adjunct. Her assignments depend on student enrollment, which has been declining for years, as well as institutional funding (also declining). And so, without the “reasonable assurance” of future employment, for the past half-dozen years each summer, Tashjian, the president of the Harper College Adjunct Faculty Association, has applied to the state of Illinois for unemployment benefits. Their denial usually is quick.

Unfortunately, this isn’t uncommon — but it is an issue that NEA seeks to remedy. Since 2013, during in-person meetings and via written correspondence, NEA has asked the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to fix the problems facing contingent faculty members in obtaining unemployment benefits. In the most recent effort, a June letter to DOL Secretary Thomas Perez, NEA President Lily Eskelsen García reminded him that they’re talking about people who earn poverty wages. “I recognize that this kind of administrative work takes time, but our contingent faculty have waited for years for some action by the Department that remedies their perilous and contingent economic status,” she wrote. “The requested updated guidance is an NEA priority. I would ask that the Department make it a priority as well so that our contingent faculty can receive the unemployment benefits to which they are clearly entitled.”

Thought & Action: New issue and new call for papers

THE THOUGHT & ACTION REVIEW PANEL invites you to check out the Summer 2015 issue, a special epublication dedicated to “The Purpose of Higher Education.” Articles explore the link between the liberal arts and employability, and the effects of performance funding. The panel also invites your submissions for “In Order to Form a More Perfect Union...,” a special focus section in Spring 2016. What does it mean to you to be a member of a union? Submissions are due January 1. Check out the new issue, and find the call for papers, at nea.org/thoughtandaction.
More than 75 percent of American faculty are working off the tenure track, and many of these contingent academic laborers have no say in their working conditions. But don’t count Ken Rothchild among the voiceless. Or Lauren Zavrel or Karen Roberts. When contingent faculty belong to unions, they get a seat at the table where decisions are made, and their collective voice can call for fair pay, job security, and the working conditions that underlay college student learning. In New York, Rothchild’s union recently won pay increases of 33 percent or more. In Oregon, Zavrel’s union negotiated for compensation for office hours. And in California, Roberts’ union negotiated a clause that ensures part-time faculty get the same raises as their full-time colleagues. Across the U.S., NEA Higher Ed faculty are organizing for equity!
The U.S. of Adjuncts

Across the U.S., NEA Higher Ed faculty are organizing for equity on their campuses. At the bargaining table, and in the halls of state legislatures, they are working together for more equitable pay and benefits, and new provisions for job security. Check out the good things that happen when all faculty get a seat at the table:

Clackamas Community College part-time faculty union president Lauren Zavrel isn’t quite satisfied — yet. But she does appreciate that her union’s contract has taken significant steps toward recognizing the critical work done by contingent faculty, both inside and outside of the classroom. Specifically, for every eight hours per week of instructional time, the contract also provides part-time faculty with two paid office hours (at a reduced rate.) And, importantly, it also requires the college to apply a 1.37 multiplier to instructional hours to better calculate the time spent by adjuncts in service to students. That multiplier helps part-time faculty to qualify for healthcare and state retirement benefits, and even public service loan forgiveness. “We are really strong at the bargaining table for two reasons,” said Zavrel, a graduate of NEA’s Emerging Leaders Academy. “The first is that we have a very strong, very committed bargaining team, who are unwavering in their advocacy for part-time faculty benefits and rights. And the second is that we have representation from the Oregon Education Association that is just incredibly outstanding in their support and advocacy for the things that are important.”

At Long Beach City College, the Certified Hourly Instructors (CHI) negotiated a 3 percent raise in June 2014, plus a valuable “me too” clause in their contract. That clause, which requires pay equity among all faculty, kicked in when full-time faculty won larger salary increases a few months later and pushed up the CHI pay raises to 5.07 percent. “We are currently back at the table bargaining for further increases and rehire rights,” reported CHI President Karen Roberts, a graduate of NEA’s Emerging Leaders Academy. “Our bargaining team knew we [adjuncts] were hanging on by a thread,” said Judy Olson, English lecturer at California State University Los Angeles. There were adjuncts on the verge of home eviction, struggling to pay for food and medications, Olson told a rapt audience at NEA’s Higher Ed conference this spring. But the bargaining team of the California Faculty Association (CFA) delivered results — not just for tenured and tenure-track faculty — but for their lowest-paid and most vulnerable colleagues. Last year, thanks to CFA negotiators, some contingent faculty members received up to 25 percent pay raises, lifting them out of poverty. That’s what union solidarity looks like, said Olson, chair of NEA’s Contingent Faculty Caucus and a graduate of NEA’s Emerging Leaders Academy.
“This is the strongest contract I’ve seen in years,” said Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC) President Joe LeBlanc about the 2014 contract negotiated for more than 5,000 part-time faculty across the state. It captured 11 percent raises over three years — that’s 3.5 percent in each of the first two years, plus 4 percent in the third — and also 4 percent in the fourth year if a new contract isn’t settled. The contract also provides pay for part-time professors to attend campus meetings and training sessions, and greater access to class assignments for veteran instructors. “We still do not have full parity for part-timers, but this contract makes a step toward that,” LeBlanc said. (And it almost didn’t happen — after reaching tentative agreement in Jan. 2014, the college presidents attempted to withdraw, saying they had miscalculated the new rate of pay for lab instruction. MCCC responded by filing a Department of Labor Relations complaint and organizing powerful campus demonstrations by professors, and the contract went forward.

#UnionPower!

Two things about the new, first-ever collectively bargained contract for part-time faculty at Manhattanville College stand out for union member Ken Rothchild: First, the vital increases in pay. In 1999, Rothchild was hired by the theater department for $2,500 a course. More than 15 years later, he was earning $2,600, while many colleagues earned even less. “By forgoing cost-of-living raises for so long, I calculated that the value of my salary had declined by about 25 percent,” Rothchild said. The new four-year contract lifts the base pay in 2015 from $2,100 per course to $2,800 — a whopping 33 percent raise — with additional steps in subsequent years, plus it provides a $300 add-on for a terminal degree and $400 for 10 terms of experience. (By 2018, an adjunct with a terminal degree and 10 terms of experience should earn no less than $3,650 per course, nearly $1,000 more than the national average.) In the Ph.D. program, starting pay was raised to $4,000 per course. But equally important to Rothchild are the aspects of the new contract that finally (finally!) recognize the professionalism of Manhattanville’s 400-plus contingent faculty members. With new provisions that ensure adjuncts can attend faculty meetings and equally access funds for professional development, the contract goes a long way to “recognizing the common interest that adjuncts share with administration — and that’s about getting the best deal for students,” said Rothchild, whose union is a joint NEA-AFT affiliate. “It’s about recognizing that we’re not invisible, we’re not cogs in the machine. It’s about recognizing that adjuncts play a valuable role here.”

Equal pay for equal work” was the rallying cry for adjunct faculty at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, who negotiated their first-ever contract in 2013. Some of the highlights include: Pay raises that ranged from 19 percent to 41 percent in the first year, with additional boosts that lift adjuncts to about $1,150 per credit in 2016; more professional job titles (“lecturer” instead of “adjunct 1”); and a new system of professional peer evaluations.

How much did an Illinois judge rule was owed to non-tenured faculty members and other Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) employees this year? A whopping $1.9 million in wages! The judgment stemmed from an aggressive Illinois Education Association charge that SIUC had engaged in unfair labor practices, wrongfully withholding pay from its members during furlough days that the employees were forced to take in 2011. “An entity, the university, cannot simply impose terms and conditions without negotiating,” Jim Wall, president of the SIUC Non-Tenure Track Faculty Association, told The Southern Illinoisan. “The university broke the law,” he added — and the union was there to make sure it was enforced!
THE UNION WAY

In states with collective bargaining rights, there are two paths through the academic workplace for faculty and staff. There is the **UNION PATH**, in which you have a say in your working conditions because your union has an equal seat at the bargaining table with management. Your voice matters. Then there’s **THE OTHER WAY**… The other way is particularly perilous for contingent or adjunct faculty, who are often powerless without the collective voice of a union.

**HOORAY!** You’ve got your first job as a part-time professor. And you are grateful to your union colleagues who have negotiated a contract that guarantees a reasonable number of students in your course, and that your work will be professionally evaluated by your peers.

**WHAT THE...!?** The course you’ve taught for years has been reassigned to a new instructor. Fortunately, because you are a bargaining unit member, you have the right to representation in a grievance. The provisions of your contract around course assignments will be upheld.

**IT’S TIME TO RENEGOTIATE!** What you want now is [a sabbatical for adjuncts, equal access to faculty training funds, or a real office with a phone line!]. Guess what? With your union at the bargaining table, you have a say in these matters.

**YOU’VE BEEN HIRED!** Two days before classes begin! But you’re getting paid $1,800 for the course. Maybe you could ask for more? Ask away, but you’re going to get what they want to give you — and it’s less than a McDonald’s worker.

**YOU’RE AN ADJUNCT PROFESSOR** who has been teaching the same courses for years, but now the chair wants to hire a friend instead. Can you complain to her? Sure, you can complain. Can you get your classes back? No, you can not.

**YOUR PAY STINKS.** Your benefits are… simply nonexistent. You’re sharing an office with 422 other adjuncts and your campus key opens the back door only. Professional development funds? That’s a joke, right? But what are you going to do about it? You are on your own, and alone you are powerless.
Q: In July, you introduced a bill that would allow adjunct faculty to be eligible for participation in the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. Who are the people you had in mind when you wrote that bill?

A: Contingent faculty members are like full-time instructors. They have advanced degrees. They teach classes and spend many hours outside the classroom preparing for class. They hold office hours, grade papers and give feedback to students. They provide advice and write letters of recommendation. Students rely on them. But these part-time college professors face low pay, few if any benefits, and minimal job security. And the vast majority of these educators hold advanced degrees — and as a result, bear the heavy burden of student loan debt. They are public servants and they deserve the same loan forgiveness benefit as their full-time colleagues.

Q: Here are a few numbers that you’re surely familiar with: $61,000 — the average owed by student loan borrowers with advanced degrees, and $2,700 — average pay per course for adjunct faculty. With adjuncts now constituting 75 percent of faculty, these figures add up to life in poverty for those who teach the majority of students, and whose work is critical to the nation’s future. Is there anything else Congress could do to invest in the profession, so that the best and most committed faculty can continue to serve students?

A: Expanding the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program to include adjunct faculty is just one piece of the puzzle. Student loan debt in this country is a ticking time bomb. Congress should pass the Bank on Students Emergency Loan Refinancing Act, which would help an estimated 25 million current borrowers who are struggling to repay their federal or private student loans refinance into lower federal interest rates — saving the average borrower $2,000 over the life of the loan. Congress should also take up my Student Loan Borrowers Bill of Rights, which would help ensure that all student loan borrowers are treated fairly by their [loan] servicers and understand the full range of repayment options and resources available to them. These pieces of legislation wouldn’t just help adjunct faculty members and other education professionals, it would help all 40 million American student loan borrowers.

Q: How can NEA Higher Ed members and our advocates help you to get the Adjunct Faculty Fairness Act enacted into law?

A: This answer will be familiar to NEA members: organize. Adjunct faculty make up the majority of staff at almost every institution of higher education in every state in America. Come together, raise your voices, and share your stories. Reach out to your Members of Congress. We all remember our favorite college courses, but I wonder how many of us remember — or ever knew — whether the teachers at the front of those classrooms had fair pay, vacation time, paid sick days, or group health-care. Raising awareness of this issue will help move this bill forward.

Helping Adjuncts with Student Debt

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin has a plan to reduce the burden on contingent faculty

Jennifer Simmers, $199,904

Jennifer Simmers dreamed of getting a Ph.D., and a job, and someday buying a home for her family. “Now I just dream of a smooth survival,” says the single mother of five, ages 9 months to 9 years. The nightmare is that Simmers owes nearly $200,000 in student loans. Now she works as a “freeway flier,” hustling between part-time teaching gigs at four different California institutions, including Riverside City College. “I will never get out from under this debt,” she says. “My children miss me and I miss them terribly, but... If there’s ever any work offered, I take it. Even if it means I don’t sleep.” Of course, any one of those four jobs could be withdrawn at any time — that is the nature of contingent labor. So Simmers worries constantly about her income, and about her debt, and about the life she is providing for her children. “I find that I have to pull over in random parking lots just to weep for a few minutes multiple times per week. I feel so hopeless. There’s no way out.”

Eric Wilson, $130,000

After finishing high school, Eric Wilson worked — up to 12-hour days in grocery store freezers. And still, he needed to borrow to pay for community college, followed by two years at a public university and then a master’s degree. Now Wilson teaches at two Chicagoland colleges, including Truman College, of the City Colleges of Chicago. “Knowing that I owe that large of an amount is always looming in thinking about my future,” says Wilson. Still, he says, “I have no regrets about the education I pursued and feel that it has made me who I am... Education is a way to liberation. Unfortunately, this path to liberation leads you into new forms of bondage, specifically debt. Hopefully, eventually future students won’t have to incur massive amounts of unpayable student loans to interact with new ideas and create new lives for themselves.”
Just and fair inclusion. An equitable society is one in which all can participate and prosper. The goals of equity must be to create conditions that allow all to reach their full potential. In short, **equity creates a path from hope to change.**

Source of definition: Anti-Racist Alliance

NEA Higher Ed is working for equity for all faculty.
Find out how you can help at www.nea.org/home/campus-equity-week.html.
How to Be an Ally

All faculty and students must work together for equity on campuses

BY JUDY OLSON AND ANNE WEIGARD

THE ALARMING INCREASE in contingent academic positions has reached crisis proportions in higher education, at 75 percent of the nation’s classroom faculty and climbing. This crisis is undermining the quality of higher education, eroding faculty members’ rights, increasing workload, and harming students and community members far more than most realize. (See “Who is ‘Professor Staff’?”: http://futureofhighered.org/policy-report-2/). The threat to union power posed by the impending Friedrichs Supreme Court decision around union fair-share fees represents another crisis. Most fee payers in academic unions are contingent faculty, partly because many members are still learning how to demonstrate solidarity. The best response to the Friedrichs threat is also best for higher education generally: an internal organizing drive to enfranchise all faculty fully and to support organizing where unions don’t exist.

New Faculty Majority (www.newfacultymajority.info), along with NEA and other unions, has done much to raise awareness of this crisis among the general public and policymakers, but we all urgently need to step up our game. For 2015, let’s commit to expanding Campus Equity Week (www.campusequityweek.org), from a biannual week of attention to the inequitable working lives of the majority of the faculty, into an ongoing, continuous campaign of awareness, mobilization, and solidarity.

Reversing the trend toward inequality will require an enormous concerted effort. It will require solidarity: focusing on what we have in common rather than on our differences. We all have to learn how to be allies.

For Contingent Faculty

DON’T resent those who make just a little more money than you. Focus on raising, not lowering, the bar for everyone.

DON’T say, “I make less than a fast-food worker or janitor.” Avoid arguing that higher education entitles you to more.

DON’T use metaphors like apartheid, slavery, abused women.

DON’T complain about teaching introductory courses. Don’t contribute to status competition among contingent faculty members.

Do give credit where credit is due.

Do channel anger into strategic action. Vent when necessary, and then move forward.

DON’T boast that you would teach for free. (Your work is worthless?) Don’t boast that you’re “not in it for the money.” (Nobody is).

Do reach out to contingent faculty colleagues who seem to be or say that they are “satisfied.” This may not be how they really feel, and there is common ground to be found.

Do take time to research what has been done and is being done in the decades-old equity movement before reinventing the wheel or doing things that may be counterproductive to what other activists have underway.

Do find allies. If someone is determined to oppose your work, find other allies. It is powerful to have even one supporter in the room. Find that person. As soon as you get any power, use that power to help others become empowered and organize.
BARGAIN WITH AN EYE to equalizing conditions among all ranks as much as possible. Keep in mind that percentage increases represent far less in dollars for people with low incomes. Don't buy into zero-sum-game thinking that says a win for one segment must come with a sacrifice for another. A united faculty makes a stronger university, higher quality education for students and better conditions among all faculty.

TRY TO REMEMBER that in many ways both large and small, contingent faculty encounter constant reminders of their secondary status, and that this damages people over time. Forgive us for having chips on our shoulder, for being slow to trust, for not believing in your own good intentions as fiercely as you do yourself. Try not to let your feelings get hurt as fiercely as you do yourself. Try to avoid imposing your particular brand of virtue (including “activism” (see “Action Will Be Taken” at www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Action.html), which can undermine worker solidarity. Let’s prioritize increasing, not decreasing, the number of workers fighting together for workers.

FOR TENURE-LINE FACULTY

TRY TO REMEMBER that in many ways both large and small, contingent faculty encounter constant reminders of their secondary status, and that this damages people over time. Forgive us for having chips on our shoulder, for being slow to trust, for not believing in your own good intentions as fiercely as you do yourself. Try not to let your feelings get hurt as fiercely as you do yourself. Try to avoid imposing your particular brand of virtue (including “activism” (see “Action Will Be Taken” at www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Action.html), which can undermine worker solidarity. Let’s prioritize increasing, not decreasing, the number of workers fighting together for workers.

AVOID “TENURESPLAINING”: attempting to “teach” contingent faculty, which usually comes across as condescending rather than helpful. Don’t assume you know more about any subject. Ask us about our work, about what we think, without automatically assuming a position of authority in the conversation. Don’t just give advice; ask for it, too.

RESIST THE TEMPTATION to regard non-tenure-track faculty as junior colleagues or teaching assistants in need of “mentoring,” especially if you are in reality less experienced than they are. Consider being mentored by such people, instead. If you once taught off the tenure track before landing your tenure-line job, don’t assume that you know what it means to be contingent for years on end.

STRIVE TO PUT experienced non-tenure-line faculty, including part-time faculty, in positions of authority and responsibility. Incorporate contingent faculty members throughout your union’s, program’s or department’s power structure, not just in positions designated for non-tenure-line faculty members.

REMEMBER THAT FIGHTING to make contingent positions as equal as possible with non-contingent positions is not an act of charity. It is in tenure-line faculty members’ best interest to strengthen the whole faculty. Degraded working conditions and status for part-time and full-time contingent faculty members result in degraded working conditions and status for the faculty as a whole. If the academic freedom of non-tenure-line faculty members is eroded, everyone’s academic freedom is eroded. Keep your eye on the big picture and the long term. Fighting for contingent faculty is an act of self-interest and crucial to the health of the institution.

FOR STUDENTS

ASK YOUR CAMPUS administration questions about faculty working conditions. Do all part-time faculty members have offices, phones, computers, access to campus resources? How much are they paid? What kind of job security do they have? You will want that favorite professor to be around later when you need a letter of recommendation.

FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

DON’T ASSUME THAT contingent colleagues who have been out of graduate school for some time are less capable. They may be unfamiliar with the most recent work in your field, but remember that this may be because they have been focused on their teaching and on

their economic survival.

DO REMEMBER THAT many contingent faculty colleagues are first-rate teachers. Ask to observe some of these colleagues in their classrooms, and ask them to observe you. Talk about what you’re learning from one another.

DON’T ASSUME THAT your contingent faculty colleagues simply weren’t good enough to secure a tenure-track-position. The reality is that after a few years of not being at the right place at the right time, one must either leave academia or settle for cobbling together enough part-time work to pay the bills, often including student loans. Don’t allow others to disparage contingent faculty in your presence.

FOR EVERYONE

REMEMBER THAT WE are all being squeezed by stressful conditions. We are all overworked and underpaid. Our hearts are all breaking as we witness the promise of higher education perverted into a cynical and ever-more-stratified worker training program for jobs that are disappearing.


DON’T BUY INTO a logic of scarce resources (including leadership positions) that separates people into the elect and the rest. Spread responsibility and recognition around.

RESIST THE PRESSURE to present a “picture of perfection” created by the status anxiety permeating academia. Show your vulnerability and allow others to do so without trying to one-up them.

REMEMBER THAT WORKING for a more just system will require many people, not just a select few who are better, more “pure,” or more “radical” than the rest. Try to avoid imposing your particular brand of virtue (including “activism” (see “Action Will Be Taken” at www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Action.html)), which can undermine worker solidarity. Let’s prioritize increasing, not decreasing, the number of workers fighting together for workers.

HELP YOUR STUDENTS understand what is happening to higher education, and the conditions under which their professors must operate. Enlist your students in any efforts to pressure the administration to improve the terms and conditions of employment of the contingent faculty at your institution.

REMEMBER THAT EVERYONE will violate most or all of these principles sometimes. Forgive.

FINALLY, LET’S ALL keep our eyes on the prize: a more just workplace community that embodies academic freedom and humanism.
Fair Play

The Court to hear case on fair-share fees

BY JASON WALTA

IF YOU’VE FOLLOWED THIS COLUMN over the past few years, you’ve undoubtedly noticed a topic I return to frequently: the Supreme Court’s steady erosion of the constitutional rights of public employees. In particular, I’ve detailed how the Court’s First Amendment decisions deprive public employees of any legal protections for airing workplace grievances or for blowing the whistle on workplace misconduct.

Yet, in a significant case the Court will hear in its upcoming session, all of that might go out the window.

Don’t get too excited. The Court isn’t preparing to broadly recognize constitutional rights for public employees. Quite the opposite. If the Court rules as some predict, it would recognize one — and only one — robust First Amendment right for public employees: the right for non-union members to free-ride on the representation provided by the union that represents them.

The case is Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association, and it is shaping up to be among the most controversial cases of the year. (In the interests of full disclosure, I am part of the legal team defending NEA and its affiliates in the case.) Friedrichs was brought by a handful of California teachers who argue that it violates the First Amendment to require them to pay an “agency fee” for the representation their union is legally obligated to provide them. They argue, in other words, that the First Amendment should operate as a constitutionally enshrined “right to work” law for the entire nation.

What stands in their way is the Court’s unanimous decision from 1977 in a case called Abood v. Detroit Board of Education, which held that the First Amendment allows public employers to require non-union members to pay fair-share fees to secure the benefits of collective bargaining with a union that represents all of the employees in the workplace.

Thus, from the beginning of the Friedrichs lawsuit, the plaintiffs have candidly acknowledged that their only path to victory is for the Supreme Court to overrule Abood. And, the reason they felt so emboldened to challenge a 40-year-old unanimous precedent like Abood is that two recent majority opinions, authored by Justice Samuel Alito on behalf of the Court’s five most conservative members, read like an engraved invitation to do just that.

In those two decisions, Knox v. SEIU Local 1000 (2012) and Harris v. Quinn (2014), the five-justice majority extolled the importance of protecting public employees’ free speech rights and regarded the terms and conditions of public employment as matters of the highest public concern. Thus, the majority called Abood an “anomaly” and “questionable” because it viewed a public employer as having the authority to require individuals to subsidize a union as part of their job duties.

There’s certainly something anomalous or questionable going on here, but it’s not Abood. As we know from all of the Court’s other cases dealing with the constitutional rights of public employees, Abood is entirely consistent with various recent decisions — all joined by the five conservative justices — that say a public employer “must accept certain limitations on his or her freedom” (Garrett v. Ceballos), and that a public employer has a paramount interest in “as an employer, in promoting the efficiency of the public services it performs through its employees” (Borough of Duryea v. Guarnieri).

It is one of the most fundamental principles of the First Amendment that the government — including the Supreme Court — may not discriminate against speech because of the viewpoint it expresses. Yet, the Court may be poised to do exactly that in Friedrichs: exalting the viewpoint of anti-union dissent by granting it special legal protection, while consigning all other public employee speech to virtually no protection at all.

The folly of such a ruling should be obvious, but we will likely have to wait until the summer before we know the result.
Teaching For Deep Learning

Would you like your students to become deep learners? Here’s a simple approach to accomplish your goal.

Do you and your trusty sidekicks, a computer and textbook, show up for class each day… because you want to help your students obtain an education that nets them high-paying jobs… because your chair likes to lurk in the hallway… because your paycheck necessitates it… or perhaps because you want to aid your institution’s administrators in their quest to obtain high retention and graduation rates?

On the other hand, if you’ve decided that the real purpose of higher education is to instill deep learning (what Fink calls “significant learning experiences” and others, life-long learning) in your students, do you really know how to reach this goal? Do you keep current with pedagogical research? Have you noticed what brain scientists have recently discovered about learning?

Times have changed quickly. The “Sage on the Stage” is on life-support, and even the “Guide” is being forced further to the side by the “Mentor from the Middle” (see our “Teaching Creative Thinking and More”). Unfortunately, while professional development, especially in pedagogy and technology, is something we all know we need, time-stressed instructors often find it difficult to obtain.

Fear not, for in the next few pages we’re going to provide a short course that will not only catch you up on the research, but make your students what you desire to see — deep learners.
The Four Rs—Receive, Retrieve, Rate, Reflect

Are you old enough to remember when your elementary education was called “grammar school”? Were the three Rs of reading, writing, and ‘rithmetic drilled into you with a hickory stick? From the Industrial Revolution through the 20th Century, the three Rs constituted the basics of a good education. But today the subject matter for an education has expanded, and research has demonstrated more scientific ways to learn. For instance, instructors once encouraged students to read and then reread as a way to be certain one learned the material, but we now know that commandment to be wrong.

IN ORDER TO PLACE INFORMATION IN THEIR LONG-TERM MEMORIES, STUDENTS MUST GO THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF RETRIEVAL.

As we point out in Achieving Excellence in Teaching: A Self-help Guide (2014), knowledge should be transferable and not mere surface learning (e.g., that which is crammed for a test): “Unlike surface

**TALES FROM REAL LIFE > THE FOUR R’S**

In a recent course, CRE 201 Creativity and Innovation, students focused on developing innovative concepts and ideas through applications of creative thinking. Their projects were largely problem-based, and the activities were focused on using creativity to develop innovative solutions. Information was often delivered visually with the expectation that students would be inspired and that class discussions and exercises would build momentum organically. My intent was not to tell students what to think but to encourage them to think. How students received content could not lend itself to the prescriptive but needed to foster innovation and invention while also challenging students to draw on their past experiences from class or life — to practice retrieval. In addition, students grounded their approaches based on information retrieved from the course text or supplemental readings and viewings. While the focus of the course was creativity, each project required students to present and rate their projects. This critical thinking encouraged students to consider what they would have done differently if they had more time or different directions for solving problems that became apparent during the process. At the end of each major project, students had the chance to reflect publicly, building off of one another’s ideas, questions, and concerns. The “Four R” approach certainly enhanced my CRE 201 students’ learning.

Meet Charlie Sweet, Hal Blythe, and Rusty Carpenter

Charlie Sweet (charlie.sweet@eku.edu) and Hal Blythe (hal.blythe@eku.edu) are co-directors of the Teaching & Learning Center at Eastern Kentucky University. Their 1,200-plus publications include 18 books, critical articles in academic journals from Pedagogy to Poe Studies, and fiction in such magazines as Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine. Rusty Carpenter (russell.carpenter@eku.edu) is the director of the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity at Eastern, where he is an associate professor of English. Recent books include Higher Education, Emerging Technologies, and Community Partnerships (2011) with Melody Bowdon, Cases on Higher Education Spaces (2012), as well as Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking (2012) and Teaching Applied Creative Thinking (2013) with Hal and Charlie.
learning, deep-learning students synthesize (rather than memorize) ideas in order to develop a conceptual understanding—i.e., the new information takes root in their basic apparatuses for apprehending the world—and to make meaning out of material under consideration” (11). Simply put, inculcating deep learning in your students can be achieved by utilizing the four Rs.

**Receive!**

Like a computer, the student mind needs to receive information to function. Many delivery systems exist from on-the-ground to online, lecture (with or without PowerPoint) to mini-lecture, and many formats can be utilized (e.g., the flipped classroom). The keys are brevity and variety: after 10 minutes of any mode of concentrated instruction (see Medina), student attention wanes. If the average person is willing to spend only 12 seconds on a website, how long does it take before students click out of their reception mode? Still, without new information to add to old knowledge, new knowledge cannot be created.

**Retrieve!**

In order to place information in their long-term memories, students must go through the practice of retrieval. As Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel point out in *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (2014), “Learning is deeper and more durable when it’s effortable” (3). But not all effort is the same. In fact, the authors stress that “Rereading text and massed practice of a skill or new knowledge are far the preferred strategies of learners of all stripes, but they’re also among the least productive” (3), as is the “popular notion that you learn better when you receive instruction in a form consistent with your preferred learning style” (4)—e.g., auditory or visual learning.

**STUDENTS MUST LEARN TO REFLECT UPON WHAT THEY LEARNED AND HOW THEY LEARNED IT.**

The authors suggest several general principles of retrieval that effective instructors need to know and pass on to their students. Think of these guidelines as learning strategies applicable for instructors and coaches:

- Even in new fields of knowledge, even before you learn how to solve, give the problem a try. Making mistakes can be valuable. Let your students try to write a sonnet before you teach them its intricacies.
- Learning is best achieved by drawing on a wide array of your experiences and resources rather than simply what you do best. If you tend to be a visual learner, try the aural approach.
- Space out practice. Rather than one long cram period, placing time between practice sessions allows the brain to consolidate or strengthen connections. Try the three-part approach where practice occurs immediately after new learning has taken place, immediately before a testing exercise, and another somewhere in between.
- Interweaving or practicing two or more subjects or skills beats massed practice. Amazingly, baseball players will learn to hit curve balls better when the pitching coach mixes in a few fastballs and changeups. Likewise, practicing French vocabulary and English grammar in the same study session is helpful.
- Vary your time and place of learning. Students should study in different places and at different times. Mom sending you to your room every night after supper probably wasn’t the best idea.

In *Learning to Think Things Through* (2005), Gerry Nosich offers another principle of retrieval. Since you tend to forget most of what you learn, focus not on all bits of information but on the most fundamental and powerful concepts. We once reduced our entire World Lit course to its essence with “Art reflects its culture.” As *Make It Stick* affirms, “People who learn to extract key ideas from new material and organize them into a mental model and connect them to prior knowledge show an advantage in learning complex mastery” (6).

**BEST PRACTICES > TWO TERRIFIC STRATEGIES**

The best tip we can offer you to facilitate deep learning is to quiz, quiz, and quiz again. Have a quiz at the beginning of class, after a mini-lecture, at the end of an online reading, and even at the end of class. Why? As *Make It Stick* says, “think of it as practicing retrieval of learning from memory rather than ‘testing’” (19). Thought of this way, quizzing becomes a tool for learning that gets more assignments read, increases attendance, provides an “easy-win” grade, forces retrieval, and offers a post-quiz time to discuss correct answers.

Remember sitting at the kitchen table with Mom turning over those old handwritten 3x5 notecards with definitions on one side and examples/resources on the other? Well, it turns out Mom got this one right since the single best way for students to learn without the instructor present is with our old friend the flashcard. And flashcards are even easier to use now. Technology has provided us with digital versions of the flashcard that, as the *Wall Street Journal* reports, “promise to make you smarter and more productive” (D1) whether you want to learn history or French. Look into flashcard programs such as Anki, Memrise, or Cerego, where “Each digital flashcard is repeated at intervals based on the degree of difficulty for the user” (D3).
In short, if students are taught to retrieve effectively—whether through testing, discussion questions, or papers—they will learn more deeply. And don’t forget to check our sidebar for the two greatest tools of teaching (quizzing) and learning (flashcards).

Rate!
A 2007 study by the Association of American Colleges and Universities claimed the number one skill desired by employers is critical thinking. As critical thinking is essentially the evaluation of argument, meaningful and immediate feedback by instructors, whether written or verbal, models such thinking. As Arum and Rotska demonstrate in Academically Adrift (2011), students learn to evaluate material most effectively by writing the 20-page paper. If you are looking for a way to supplement critical thinking, you might try using Paul and Elder’s The Thinker’s Guide to Critical & Creative Thinking (2005) or any of their writings that explain the Elements of Thought, the Intellectual Standards, and the Intellectual Traits. All information is not equal in value, and students must be equipped to judge its worth. As a simple exercise, regardless of your discipline, find relevant newspaper/online editorials and have your students apply the Paul-Elder or any other critical thinking model to them.

Reflect!
Students must learn to reflect upon what they learned and how they learned it—that is, thinking about the new knowledge and monitoring their learning process (i.e., become metacognitive) and you must stimulate both activities. Instructors can offer in-class and out-of-class assignments that ask daily, end-of-unit, or end-of-semester questions.

Reflective questions often take the form of synthesis questions:
• Does what you just learned in this course remind you of anything you picked up in another course?
• How does this new knowledge differ/conflict with your previous beliefs about the subject?

Metacognitive questions might be:
• What was the most difficult thing to grasp in class today?
• What was the easiest thing to grasp?
• Have you noticed any pattern to the things you consider difficult to learn, easy to learn?

Students can also be encouraged to keep journals or even to “pair-and-share” with other students. To paraphrase a famous saying, unexamined learning is not worth pursuing—and it certainly isn’t deep and lasting.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

OVERCOMING COMMON PROBLEMS

Is following the Four Rs the only way to ensure deep learning? Of course not. As we mentioned earlier, the more active the learning, the deeper it penetrates. And activities that promote the higher-order skills on Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy—Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating—are most effective.

What else does research reveal about student learning? More than we can cover in such a short article. For instance, molecular biologist John Medina has compiled some new studies in his book Brain Rules (2008)—e.g., “Rule #1: Exercise boosts brain power”; “Rule #6: Remember to repeat”; “Rule #7: Sleep well, think well”; “Rule #8: Stressed brains don’t learn the same way”; and “Rule #10: Vision trumps all other senses.” The implications for teaching are enormous. Don’t let any class unit last more than 12 minutes. Have your students exercise in class. Provide pictures since images are at least six times more effective than words. “The brain cannot multitask” (84). Student knowledge is “organized around core concepts or ‘big ideas’ that guide their thinking about their domains” (84).

What classroom practices do not promote deep learning? Recent studies indicate that 90 percent of all P-20 classes are taught primarily through the lecture method. Lectures, like a PowerPoint, promote passivity. But even group discussions can become passive. How can we make our discussions effective? By asking students questions that require them to engage in higher-order thinking. “The brain cannot multitask”; “Rule #2: Challenge the oddball”; and “Rule #10: Vision trumps all other senses.”

REFERENCES & RESOURCES


Free College: An idea whose time has come

A CENTURY AGO high school was becoming a necessity, not a luxury; today the same is happening to college. As several recent studies have underscored, a college degree is a pathway to a more stable life, financially and otherwise, even for students who struggled in high school. Other studies show that there is no better short-term or long-term investment for the rest of society than higher education.

These arguments, long made by activists on the left, have finally made their way into the mainstream. President Obama’s proposal for free community college, echoed by Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin’s “America’s College Promise” bill filed in July, builds off the free-college program launching in Tennessee this year. But Obama also was inspired by other state initiatives, like the 20-year-old state-funded HOPE scholarship program in Georgia.

These proposals are born out of recognition that our students are struggling. Many can’t go to college because they can’t afford it or won’t burden their families with the debt. Most who graduate do so with tens of thousands of dollars of debt, shackling them to creditors for decades and limiting their career options.

Opponents say: now is not the time. They say that until our colleges’ other problems are solved, we should cross our arms and block the schoolhouse door. But we say it’s never too early or too late to fight for one’s principles.

We can make this happen but only if we stand together with students and parents and demand that public higher education is a right for everyone, and not a privilege for the few. Then, together, we can say to the people in power: Free is not enough. It has to be free quality education. That means we need more tenure-system faculty and full-time staff, better pay, benefits, and job security for adjunct faculty, and more support services. We know the power of collective action because we have seen it here in Massachusetts where a unified group of students, faculty and staff, brought together by PHENOM (the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts), won a $100 million boost in state funding, allowing campuses to hire more faculty and staff while freezing tuition and fees.

Get your locals and Faculty Senates to endorse the idea of free public higher education. And consider joining up with other groups, such as Generation Progress, Higher Ed, Not Debt, the Campaign for the Future of Higher Education. Free higher education, and the public colleges and universities our nation deserves, is in our sights.

Max Page and Dan Clawson are professors of architecture and sociology, respectively, at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. They are co-authors of The Future of Higher Education (Routledge.).