"Teaching Naked"

Welcome to NEA! Rhode Island adjuncts vote for union

Take the pledge: Degrees not debt!

Beware of performance-based funding in higher ed

Disruptive innovations for contingent faculty
NEA files brief on behalf of contingent faculty seeking a union

WHY CAN’T FACULTY at private institutions join unions? In a 34-year-old Supreme Court decision, NLRB vs. Yeshiva University, the judges ruled that faculty were too much like managers to be eligible for union membership under the National Labor Relations Act. But a brief recently filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) by NEAs Office of General Counsel points out rightly that times have changed in the three decades since Yeshiva. As huge numbers of near-powerless contingent faculty have replaced tenured faculty, faculty’s power at many institutions has ebbed. Shared governance is almost a legend. In response to one of the current cases before NLRB, of Pacific Lutheran University contingent faculty who seek a union, NEAs Counsel asks NLRB to systematically examine whether the governance structures of an institution suggest that professional administrators, not faculty members, actually manage the university. A reformulated approach along these lines could allow more faculty to enjoy the protections of a union that they so desperately need.

Accountability for for-profit colleges

ABOUT 20 PERCENT OF FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES could eventually lose federal funds under the Obama administration’s proposed “gainful employment” standards, released in March, which consider debt-to-earnings ratios among each college’s graduates. For years, NEA has been meeting with officials from the U.S. Education Department and the White House’s Office of Management and Budget, urging them to adopt rules that would protect students and taxpayers from the predatory practices of some colleges. As the rules are finalized, NEA will continue to provide comments.
Performance funding for public colleges and universities is a bad idea on fire these days. Even as more research clearly shows the plans don’t work as intended, nearly 30 states, most recently Florida, have adopted punitive approaches to paying for higher education. “They have this one-size-fits-all vision for higher education, and they have one idea about what a model university should be,” said Tom Auxter, president of the United Faculty of Florida. “They don’t get that different universities have different missions, and different constituencies that they serve.”
The way performance-based funding typically works is a state will set aside 5 to 50 percent of their higher-ed funding, and then use those millions of dollars to reward institutions with the most graduates or course completers. Although NCSL encourages states to also “reward colleges that graduate low-income, minority and adult students to ensure that institutions keep serving these populations,” most states do not have benchmarks that acknowledge some students take longer to graduate or may need additional support along the way.

In Florida specifically, the new plan prioritizes the percentage of graduates with jobs; the average wages of graduates; the cost per degree; the six-year graduation rate; the number of STEM degrees; the percentage of students with Pell Grants, and a few other factors. The three (out of nine) universities that perform worst according to these metrics will lose probably 1 percent of their funding this year—or about $200,000 a year, under pending legislation—while the other six get more money.

All of these new plans replace traditional formulas, which financed institutions according to how many students they served, and how many faculty, staff, and other resources they needed to deliver a high-quality education. But those traditional formulas are expensive, and anyway, states haven’t fully funded higher education in a long, long time.

WHERE’S THE MONEY?

“(State legislators) are evading the question, and the question is: what does it take to adequately fund our community colleges?” said Joe LeBlanc, president of the Massachusetts Community College Council. In Massachusetts, up to 50 percent of state funding for two-year colleges now depends on graduation rates and other metrics. Meanwhile, funding for Massachusetts higher education plummeted 38 percent between 2008 and 2012. “We’re not even close to fully funded,” LeBlanc scoffed.

Not surprisingly, Florida is right there, too, with a 41 percent cut over the past four years. And they’re not even the worst. During those same years, funding to higher education was chopped by half in Arizona and New Hampshire. Making matters worse, those cuts have come on top of decades of previous cuts. As a result, public colleges in the U.S. have essentially become privatized. At the University of Oregon, for example, just 5 percent of the school’s operating costs will be covered by the state this year.

“To work, even in theory, performance-based funding depends on rewarding the most successful, so it depends on more funding,” said Mark F. Smith, NEA senior policy analyst for higher education. “But there are much better investments for that additional funding that would actually help students learn,” he pointed out. (Academic counseling, for example, has been shown to increase student persistence and graduation rates.)

AND IT DOESN’T EVEN WORK...

The big question is: Does it work? If the aim of performance-based funding is to elicit more college graduates—something the United States needs in the multi-millions to keep up with its workforce demands—then we should see increasing graduation rates in states with those plans, yes?

The answer is no, according to several studies, including one by David Tandberg of Florida State University. In a co-authored paper, “State Per-
Performance Funding for Higher Education: Silver Bullet or Red Herring?” Tandberg found that performance funding “more often than not” failed to effect degree completion.

In fact, in the few instances where it did have an effect, it was more likely to be negative—graduation rates actually declined. The authors concluded: “Our analyses revealed that performance funding is not the silver bullet some are making it out to be. Instead, it may be a red herring, distracting policymakers from dealing with more fundamental policy problems, such as inadequate state funding or student financial aid.”

Meanwhile, another study shows the effects of performance funding might be particularly harmful at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), where often students take more time to graduate because they’re also working or taking additional developmental courses. Should those schools, which include Florida A&M University (FAMU), be punished for helping students along a more complicated path to college degrees, wonders UFF’s Tom Auxter.

“This is the mentality of people who had all the advantages of life when they went through school: ‘Let’s punish FAMU! Let’s punish the urban universities, where it’s a real accomplishment when students complete their baccalaureate degree while holding down a full-time job!’”

While it’s likely not the intent of legislators to specifically punish HBCUS, the danger with any kind of performance-based plan is the unintended consequences. “Of course we want to see more students earning degrees, but we also want to make sure those degrees are meaningful,” warns NEA’s Smith.

“This shouldn’t just be a numbers game.”

The unintended consequences of outcomes-based funding plans have been made very clear in K-12 education, where big rewards for high-stakes reading and math test scores have led schools to set aside other subjects, like science and art. But unintended doesn’t mean unanticipated—in the 2011 NEA Thought & Action journal, Diane Ravitch warned higher-ed faculty and staff about the likely consequences of chasing “outcomes” for funding.

“This is the pursuit of numbers for the sake of meeting a quota, not for the sake of learning,” she said. “If numbers are our goal, we can give every student a college degree and not subject them to the trouble (and expense) of going to classes. In fact, with the rapid spread of online ‘learning,’ that seems to be the wave of the future.”

There’s also the cautionary tale of the Soviet shoes, often recounted by Richard Rothstein, of the Economic Policy Institute. To meet impossibly high Kremlin quotas for shoes, Soviet factory workers just made smaller shoes!

Unfortunately, they didn’t fit anyone.

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY
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Teaching Naked

It’s not what you think! The best place for technology is outside of the classroom, as a content and assessment delivery system that will give you more time in the classroom with prepared students.

Putting technology in its place.

Make no mistake, technology has a place. That place just happens to be the dorm room or library, where it can give students compelling reasons to engage with class materials. That place is not the lecture hall, where we too often rely on PowerPoint presentations and other passive technologies to speed through content by hour’s end.

This is not first century B.C. When Plato or Cicero wanted to pass along information to a large group of students, their most efficient technology was an amphitheater and a loud voice. But today, students don’t need a professor in the room if they’re just going to sit and listen to a lecture or watch a film.

It is clear today that what’s of value to students is student-to-faculty interaction: small group discussions, individual attention and unstructured, interactive learning. By using new technologies outside the classroom—including online content, games, course management systems, and the instant communication that students now expect—you can create more time for more learning inside the classroom.

You can’t do it all at once, but here are some easy ways to ensure students are better prepared for class, get more feedback, and learn more of the cognitive skills employers say they crave.
Email for first exposure

Social media can be a teaching tool, allowing students to connect ideas to other ideas. It is also a place where you can show your passion: students perceive your messages (as long as you don’t over do it!) as supportive and caring. You can also make connections for students. Try asking students to use your Twitter hashtag (#mycourse) and post one connection, or web link, a week. Students often don’t even look for the connections between your class and the outside world. In fact, if you don’t ever contact students outside of class, you are reinforcing the idea that college is an ivory tower and what happens there stay there. It’s not Vegas: first connect.

Email is also a way to personalize and localize content for your students. While the internet offers almost limitless online content, none of it is specific to your students. Use email to offer short motivational introductions to reading, study questions, encouragement, connections, additional thoughts, and further explanations.

Content for first exposure

Try searching for content in your courses as if you were a student—pretend it is cold outside and you have an 8 a.m. class, but your laptop is in bed with you! If you don’t know OpenYale, iTunesU, Khan Academy, CrashCourse, Utubersidad (with Spanish language academic lectures) or Merlot.org, start with those. For most subjects, the internet offers a broad range of video lectures.

TALES FROM REAL LIFE > IT’S A DIFFERENT WORLD

When I went to college, my mother gave me a bag of dimes and told me to call home on Sunday. But one Sunday, I forgot. It never occurred to me that I could call on Monday. Does the phone even work on Monday? I waited until the following Sunday and called home. “Hi Mom, It’s your son!” “A son? I have a son?” Guilt, in my home, was a dish best served with irony.

Contrast this to the student who recently got trapped in a campus elevator and instead of calling the emergency number listed, called her mother, three states away, who called the university president, who called facilities, who called the emergency number. Just think about the radically different assumptions about social proximity. If you really want to understand your students ask them about Tinder or Lulu (or download the app if you are really brave). Lulu is for girls, and has profiles for every boy on your campus with ratings from the girls who have dated (yes, that’s an euphemism) him. It sounds horrible, but they think it is normal, and they can’t imagine sitting by the phone, or going to office hours.
explanations, examples, songs, animations, games and unique ways.

If you don’t want to spend a lifetime trolling through millions of online lectures, then set up a wiki for your course and ask your students to create a community study guide using the resources they find. If you offer to make up your final exam from this wiki, you will add an extra incentive.

If you want to make your own content, then skip video capture. A podcast (or any form of presentation that allows for chapters or segments) offers you the power of redundancy. You can now explain or talk for longer than you ever could in class, but more importantly you can include all the examples you want.

**Use exams to focus**

An unwatched video is no better than an unread book, but you can encourage students to interact with the material by creating online exams before every class. Giving students several “thought” or “study” questions before each class can both guide their learning and give you feedback. It also gives students some control over their learning (itself a research-based pedagogy). Many forms of questions can be graded automatically in your learning management system (LMS) so both you and students can see the results instantly. Try making all of your quizzes due one hour before class (your LMS can ensure this “happens”) and you will then have results that may shape your use of class time.

There are, of course, other ways to reach the same goal. Ask students to post strategies for solving problems on the course website, or make their own video summary, or post on the course discussion board.

**JUST IMAGINE:** **YOU NOW FACE A ROOM FULL OF PREPARED STUDENTS. WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

**Writing to reflect**

Writing requires practice. So assign it before every class. I use index cards and ask students to write short paragraphs or arguments about the reading or video content, paraphrase the strongest argument or identify three mistakes, argue for the importance of a theme, or copy a quote and explain why it is essential for the persuasiveness of this reading.

Students then bring these index cards to class and swap with a neighbor, who reads the card and maybe turns it over to write a rebuttal, rewrites the argument from another perspective, or asks some clarifying question. Part of the point is to write, but equally important is that students will be thinking (critically) about the material before class, and trying to find multiple perspectives in what they read.

Bad content is part of the real world. Sensitizing your students to the need to question the quality of their sources is both an important part of critical thinking and an essential life skill. The world is an open book. You look for summaries, abstracts, and short-cuts online; they should too. Help them get better at evaluating sources.

**Class to challenge**

Just imagine: you now face a room full of prepared students. What will you do?! Start with all of the things you always wish you had time for: discussions, applications, problem solving, connections or challenging of student assumptions. Can you structure your class more like a lab? Read Stephen Brookfield to improve your discussions. If you are ready for more, try playing one of the sophisticated games developed by Mark Carnes, known as “Reacting to The Past.”

Your preparation will now become more about the design of an experience, and less about covering content. Remember that more content, more reading and more “exposure” does not necessarily result in more learning. Especially in introductory courses, less content and more focus on

**BEST PRACTICES > WRITING BETTER MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

While not the same thing as forcing students to create their own arguments, multiple-choice questions can help students break down problems (and of course, they save time in grading.)

Don’t worry about cheating. If you ask questions that Siri can’t answer, they will have to think. Make these online exams worth a few points so that students have an incentive to do them, but not so many points that they want to argue about every question. More testing, more often will provide more feedback for you and students, give them more practice with thinking skills, and lower their anxiety about tests.

These sorts of questions are hard to write, but Bloom levels and verbs provide a template for questions that test knowledge, comprehension, analysis, evaluation, and more. For example, “Which of the following are important theories of X?” “Which of the following develop the thesis of X further?” or “Which of the following represents the strongest argument for why…”

Your LMS will also allow you to embed immediate feedback, which can also help stimulate student thinking. These questions are mostly diagnostic so it is important that they get at crucial issues and guide student thinking. If they want to argue about the answers in class, that is fantastic. This is your window to move them from thinking about facts or opinions into the complex and important world of judgments.
how to study and apply can create more motivated learners for upper-division courses. Very little kills academic motivation more than a freshmen “survey” course that skims the surface all semester.

**Cognitive wrappers to self-regulate**

The goal of college is to help students develop more complex mental models. We are preparing the mind for the unknown. Ultimately, we want to graduate students who are able to self-regulate their own learning process. John Dewey called it “thinking about your own thinking.”

A great way to do this is to use cognitive wrappers (a generalized approach based upon Marsha Lovett’s exam wrappers). When handing back a paper, a problem set, an exam, or the audition results, also provide students with a sheet of paper that asks them to reflect on three things: (1) How did they prepare, (2) Where did they lose points, and (3) How might they prepare differently next time. (There is a free template at TeachingNaked.com.) Students will start to see that these three things might be connected.

**eCommunication to reinforce**

Social media gives you more opportunities to connect, support and interact with your students, but oddly, it also gives you a way to demonstrate the power of slow thinking. Students think that because you are smart and know lots of things, you must always know the answer. They will be shocked and surprised when you want “think about that question” or “first do more research” and then respond in an email to the entire class. The point of faculty interaction is that you are a role model. Only you can demonstrate to them that what really makes you smart is that you are open to new ideas and allow them to give you new perspective. You now have even more super-powers: you can change your mind.

**REFERENCES & RESOURCES**


Siegel, D. J. (2014) Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain. Tarcher.


**Websites:**

TeachingNaked.com

Content and Games: KhanAcademy, Merlot.org. Reacting to the Past: http://reacting.barnard.edu, CrashCourse, Exam Wrappers: http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/examwrappers/

Summary sites: sparknotes, Wikipedia, CliffsNotes, PinkMonkey, gradesaver, enotes, bibliomania.

**ISSUES TO CONSIDER**

**WHERE DO I START?**

Do I have to be on Facebook?

NO! But you should pick one social media platform and make a determined effort to learn this new perspective on life. If we claim that teaching is preparing the mind for the unknown and that critical thinking requires the ability to see problems from multiple perspectives, then this is a perspective we need. Like any new technology, learning one will also help you with the next one. If you decide LinkedIn is better, you will have some basis for comparison.

But what about reading?!?

Mindful reading is still enormously important, although the reading of long texts is certainly on the decline in most professions. If you want students to read, you need to assign shorter portions, especially in the first year, read them in more depth, practice how you read in an academic setting (in class) and then discuss and use all of what you assign (until students get better at digesting reading on their own). Tell them why they are reading (both your course content and reading in general), and help them get better at it. If reading is important for your discipline, then you need a progressive multi-course plan that teaches students how to do this. Assign more and more difficult reading each year.

I was not trained as a motivator. Shouldn’t that be the student’s job?

Indeed, motivation was not your problem. You liked school so much that you are still here. Think of what matters to your typical student; ask them (often!) if you don’t know. You don’t need to be an expert in popular culture, but you need to know what matters to your students, what they want out of life and what they value. This will help you connect with them, but also it will give you tools for motivating them (and that is most of the job really). They don’t see the usefulness of biochemistry to their life? Teach them how to make beer.

How do I make a podcast that is better than a lecture video?

Pick a difficult topic in an upcoming class. Create a new PowerPoint file with just a few slides. Click on “Insert/Audio” and talk. Then add another 10, twenty or even more examples of the same concept, but radically different types of examples: sports, fashion, transportation, cooking or local geography. Teach to the middle, not the fringe. Then next year, recycle and add even more examples (or have students create their own new analogies). Save this as a PowerPoint, do not export to YouTube; then it just becomes one long movie. GarageBand on the Mac also has a “chapter” feature that exports mp4 files.
DEGREES NOT DEBT

Why I took the NEA Degrees Not Debt pledge—and why you should, too!

“M"y biggest fear is that the student debt accumulated by me and my family will handcuff my grandchildren’s ability to reach the middle class,” says John Belleci, a leader of the new “Degrees Not Debt” campaign, and president of the Student California Teacher Association. “How can I help them through school, while my daughter and I will be paying off our loans for decades?” As a graduate student of history at California State University, Fullerton, who is researching the War on Drugs and the new Jim Crow in Los Angeles, Belleci has racked up $80,000 worth of student debt. Meanwhile, his daughter also piled up more than $65,000 in student loans during her undergraduate program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She is currently a Head Start teacher struggling to make ends meet on her meager salary. With the Degrees Not Debt campaign, Belleci aims to see increases in the purchasing power of Pell Grants, and expansions in federal loan forgiveness programs and institutional aid. At the same time, he said, federal student loan interest rates should be cut to match the low rates at which corporations can borrow from the federal government. Eventually, he hopes, higher education should be free for everyone. To make that happen, “everyone—students, faculty, staff, parents, and administrators—need to work together,” said Belleci. To join him in this work, take the Degrees Not Debt pledge at nea.org/degreesnotdebt.

Carol Gold
COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF RHODE ISLAND

Before I became an adjunct professor, I worked in CCRI’s Human Resources Department for 28 years. What I learned is that when employees are aware of and understand their benefits, rights, and responsibilities, they can spend more time concentrating on their jobs. Union contracts have helped provide that knowledge, understanding, and peace of mind for most employees at CCRI – but not for adjunct faculty. We have no benefits or rights and, depending on a particular department, may not even be sure of our responsibilities. We may or may not be invited to department meetings; we do not serve on committees; we have no input into curriculum development; we have no say as to how courses are assigned or what we are paid for teaching them. The adjuncts at our sister institutions, University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College, are unionized and have a voice. We did not. Now we do. The CCRI adjuncts voted overwhelmingly in early April to join NEA. Now we begin the process of building an organization of energetic and committed members who will work to ensure consistent and equitable treatment of the talented adjunct faculty here at CCRI. Adjuncts working together can make a difference.

By Carol Gold, CCRI adjunct, English
Take the Pledge!
Degrees not Debt!

These days student debt isn’t just a burden. It’s a barrier. Because of it, too many Americans can’t access the higher education they need to get good jobs, own a home, and take part in the American Dream. “We’re all taking out loans, and we’re all working, and it’s just choking us,” says California Teachers Association-Student President John Belleci. That’s why NEA faculty, staff, and student leaders have launched the new Degrees Not Debt campaign. Will you join them? Start by taking the Degrees Not Debt pledge at nea.org/degreesnotdebt.

In 2012, seven in 10 college graduates owed money

On average, each owes a whopping $29,400

In 1993, average debt was just $9,450

The U.S. will need 22 million more college-educated workers by 2018.

Workers who haven’t graduated from college are three times more likely to be unemployed.

Student loan default rates have risen 6 years in a row.

Tuition at four-year public colleges has risen 27% since 2008.

The total amount of student debt in the U.S. is now greater than $1,200,000,000,000

Disruptive Innovations for Adjunct Faculty

By Gary Rhoades

The employment practices, working conditions, and curricular delivery models being paraded through higher-education policy circles and campuses nationwide as so-called “new realities” and “innovative answers” make no sense. In truth, these practices have long been failing our students and country educationally, democratically, and economically. They undermine the common good. At their core is the “new faculty majority” of adjunct or contingent faculty, who now constitute two-thirds of the overall faculty workforce nationwide. Particularly prominent are faculty in part-time positions, who now constitute 49 percent of all faculty.

The patterns that particularly affect these contingent faculty members, and increasingly all faculty in some regards, are harmful to students and should be creatively challenged and changed by faculty. Specifically, there are at least three patterns that undermine educational quality: 1) the “just-in-time” hiring of faculty a few weeks or days before classes start; 2) the “at-will” conditions of employment that disconnect contingent faculty from their peers and students in time and place; and 3) the growing promotion and use of depersonalized curricular delivery models that separate and alienate faculty and students from educational programs they utilize. Each of these patterns works against the interests not just of faculty, but also against the needs of students and the nation. Worse, these practices and patterns are particularly ill-suited to the changing demographics of the United States.

We must challenge and change the employment practices, working conditions, and curricular realities of the majority of the instructional workforce who disproportionately serve the growing majority of students. It is necessary, but not sufficient, to identify, document, and decry the current problematic conditions in the academy. It is up to academics to creatively find ways to counter those conditions, and to also change them.

To enable that action, this article offers three no or low-cost disruptive innovations for contingent faculty, both unionized and not, that are grounded in common sense, in what we know works educationally for our students. These innovations can be advanced and undertaken by groups of faculty (unionized and non-unionized), including contingent faculty. They are reasonable and immediately achievable alternatives to nonsensical conditions of teaching and learning in higher education.

The three innovations are:

1. Countering just-in-time employment with virtual visibility;
2. Countering at-will employment practices with actual due process and virtual hiring halls;
3. Using metro/rural online curricular cooperatives to produce metro-relevant courses.

Each of these is a common sense step to advancing the common good. To find out, in greater detail, how to put each innovation into place, visit nea.org/thoughtandaction.
Protests, layoffs in Maine
The University of Maine system plans to lay off about 165 faculty and staff members this year, and they started this spring at the University of Southern Maine (USM) with a huge swipe at liberal arts faculty. Hundreds of students walked out of class in protest and attempted to block the provost’s office so that he couldn’t meet with faculty. (He fired them by email instead.) The Associated Faculties of the Universities of Maine (AFUM) announced plans in April to file a grievance over the layoffs, challenging the university’s math and claiming that the university has singled-out specific faculty members. Meanwhile, USM students have formed a statewide advocacy group, called #UMaineFuture. “We’re going to make public higher education an election issue this year,” promised USM Student Vice President Marpheen Chann.

More madness in Michigan
A bill, which passed a state Senate panel in late March, would smack a $500,000 penalty against any Michigan state institution that dares to teach labor history. “We’re almost encouraging labor disputes, and I don’t think that’s appropriate,” said Rep. Al Pscholka.

A first in Missouri!
After seven years without a raise, faculty at Harris-Stowe State University finally are getting a 2 percent boost this year, followed by 1 percent next year, thanks to their first-ever collectively bargained contract. The HSSU faculty formed their union in 2013, and voted overwhelmingly in March to approve this first contract. The new agreement also contains a provision that obligates faculty to record a certain number of hours in advisory meetings with students.

Next time, Ohio
Even as they teach up to 80 percent of higher education classes, part-time faculty in Ohio are specifically forbidden by state law from forming unions and collectively bargaining to improve their miserable working conditions. This year, in an attempt to give those faculty members a stronger collective voice, two bills that would have empowered part-time faculty to collectively bargain were introduced into the General Assembly. Although the bills didn’t pass this time, awareness of these important issues is growing greatly in Ohio—and elsewhere.

Welcome, RI adjuncts!!
About 400 contingent faculty members at the Community College of Rhode Island have joined NEA Higher Ed. Learn why they voted yes on pg 10 of this issue of the Advocate.

Trouble in Texas
As the state-ordered 2015 merger of University of Texas-Brownsville and University of Texas-Pan American moves forward, faculty at both institutions are looking to the Texas Faculty Association (TFA) for help. One big question: will tenured faculty keep tenure at their new institution, UT-Rio Grande Valley? Administrators say not necessarily, just because you have tenure at the old university doesn’t mean you’ll have it at the new one. Meanwhile, TFA also has filed suit alleging age discrimination in the firings of three faculty members who were dismissed when UT-Brownsville and Texas Southernmost College dissolved their joint operating agreement. “When faculty rights are violated, we are going to defend them,” said TFA Executive Director Mary Aldridge Dean. “Tenure is a property right, and it is not to be taken without good cause or due process, and these individuals were denied both.”

You’ve been critical of the focus on ‘grit’. Is the discussion fundamentally misguided or is it just mainly a distraction?
The problem with focusing too narrowly on grit as it’s being conceived is that it overlooks the real obstacles that some students face. It can come across as a “pull-yourselves-up-by-the-bootstraps” approach. All the grit in the world can’t compensate for obstacles in low-income communities. All the grit in the world is not going to get your dad a job, or regain the home your family just lost. So I’m not hearing in the conversation about grit an acknowledgment of the effect poverty and income inequality has on student achievement.

Do you think it’s a way to avoid talking about the opportunity gap?
I think so. That’s why it’s very important that we send the right messages and keep the focus where it needs to be. We want educators and others to understand that even with barriers and constraints, there’s still the possibility for action. But we don’t want to send a message that’s only about students working hard. It’s also about them needing help navigating those barriers.

When is grit useful?
Grit is useful when it’s discussed in the context of acknowledging and meeting those challenges. Agency is a much more useful concept. It’s set within an understanding of the obstacles students face. It’s about taking action, but it’s a collective attribute, not just an individual one.

By Tim Walker

For more about grit, and to hear from its proponents, visit neatoday.org/2014/03/25/
Discover the power of your new NEA Online Savings Account.

Members like you asked for a better way to save. You wanted higher returns that could help you do more for you and your loved ones. Our all-new NEA Online Savings Account offers 5X the National Savings Average,* and it’s just one of the high-performing financial products in our new NEA Savings Program. These products are another example of how we’re always looking out for you, so open a new account today.

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* National Savings Average APY is based on specified product types of top 50 U.S. banks (ranked by total deposits) provided by Informa Research Services, Inc. as of 4/1/2014.
¹ Annual Percentage Yield (APY) is valid as of 4/1/2014. This offer applies to personal accounts only. Fees could reduce the earnings on the account. Rates may change at any time without prior notice, before or after the account is opened. Minimum opening balance is $500.
² To qualify for the $20 bonus offer, the applicant must: (i) be an Eligible NEA Member (an individual who is an NEA member as of the account application date, or any of the following individuals who is related to such an NEA member as of the account application date: parent, spouse, domestic partner, son, daughter, parent of the spouse/domestic partner), and (ii) open either an NEA CD or NEA Money Market Account through Discover with an initial minimum deposit of $2,500 or an NEA Online Savings Account through Discover with an initial minimum deposit of $500. NEA affiliation subject to verification. Offer limited to one per Eligible NEA Member, per product, per calendar year. NEA IRA CDs are not eligible for this offer. Bonus will be awarded via account credit within 60 days following the end of the month in which the account is funded and will be reported on IRS Form 1099-INT. Account must be opened at time of account credit. Offer may be withdrawn or modified at any time without notice.

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2012 SUMMARY ANNUAL REPORT
(Plan Year Beginning September 1, 2012)

The following is the summary annual report for the NEA Members Insurance Trust® and Plan (collectively Trust), Employer Identification Number 53-0115260, providing information on the insurance programs sponsored by the National Education Association (NEA) including the NEA Life Insurance® Program, NEA Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance Program, and NEA Complimentary LifeSM Program for the period beginning September 1, 2012, and ending August 31, 2013. The annual report has been filed with the Employee Benefits Security Administration, as required under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA).

BASIC NEA MEMBERS INSURANCE TRUST FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The value of Trust assets, after subtracting liabilities of the Trust, was $122,053,257 as of August 31, 2013, compared to $107,625,428 as of September 1, 2012. During the Trust year, the Trust experienced an increase in its net assets of $14,427,829. During the Trust year, the Trust had total income of $117,311,630 including participant contributions of $104,233,289, a net appreciation in the market value of investments of $8,585,087, and earnings from investments of $4,493,254. Trust expenses were $101,105,822. These expenses included benefits paid to participants and beneficiaries, administrative and other expenses.

INFORMATION FOR NEA LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM

The Trust has a contract with Minnesota Life Insurance Company to pay all NEA Preferred Term Life Insurance claims and The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all other NEA Life Insurance claims incurred under the terms of this program. Because it is a so called "experienced rated" contract, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2012, and ending August 31, 2013, made under such "experienced-rated" contract were $55,764,097 and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was $48,574,942. The total number of participants was 508,323.

INFORMATION FOR NEA ACCIDENTAL DEATH & DISMEMBERMENT (AD&D) PROGRAMS

The Trust has a contract with The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all NEA AD&D and NEA AD&D Plus claims incurred under the terms of the Trust. Because it is a so called "experienced rated" contract, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2012, and ending August 31, 2013, made under such "experienced-rated" contract were $3,173,585 and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was $3,020,980. The Trust has a contract with The Prudential Insurance Company of America which allocates funds toward group insurance certificates for the NEA AD&D Advantage Program. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2012, and ending August 31, 2013, was $13,714. The total number of participants was 171,080 in all AD&D Programs.

INFORMATION FOR NEA COMPLIMENTARY LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM

The Trust has a contract with The Prudential Insurance Company of America to pay all NEA Complimentary Life Insurance claims incurred under the terms of the Trust. The NEA Complimentary Life Insurance Program is self-supporting and paid by premiums from the NEA Members Insurance Trust funds rather than from Member contributions. Because it is a so called "experienced rated" contract, the premium costs are affected by, among other things, the number and size of claims. The total premiums for the Trust plan year beginning September 1, 2012, and ending August 31, 2013, were $1,790,084 and the total of all benefit claims paid under the contract during the Trust year was $1,467,032. The total number of participants was 2,948,391.

YOUR RIGHTS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

As a participant, you have the legally protected right to receive a copy of the full annual report, or any part thereof for a reasonable charge or you may inspect the Annual Report without charge at the office of NEA Members Insurance Trust, Attn: NEA Member Benefits, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 or at the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C. upon payment of copying costs. Requests to the Department should be addressed to: Public Disclosure Room, Room N–1513, Employee Benefits Security Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210. You also have the right to receive from the Trust Administrator, on request and at no charge, a statement of the assets and liabilities of the Trust and accompanying notes, or a statement of income and expenses of the Trust and accompanying notes, or both. If you request a copy of the full annual report from the plan administrator, these two statements and accompanying notes will be included as part of that report. The charge to cover copying costs given above does not include a charge for the copying of these portions of the report because these portions are furnished without charge.
How to take down the two-tier system

I find it horrifying that someone who stands in front of college classes and teaches is on welfare.
—Chronicle of Higher Education commenter, quoted in "Equality for Contingent Faculty..."

I WISH I HAD READ Equality for Contingent Faculty: Overcoming the Two-Tier System, edited by Keith Hoeller, last fall when the 15th highest paid administrator on my campus ($183,025) lamented during a negotiations session that no one at our university had a salary raise in four years—except, of course, the members of the adjunct bargaining unit whose raises were promised by the contract.

Her observation did not account for the fact that our fewer classes filled with more students amounted to more than salary stasis for faculty. For my family, it amounted to a $15,000 loss. Making that argument won me the characterization of being fragile from the fifth highest paid administrator ($220,889).

Had I read Hoeller's section on salaries in his chapter "The Academic System of Faculty Apartheid," I would have been better able to disassemble the administrator's attempt to establish equivalence. Hoeller's section picks apart the salary truths that university administrators work hard to hide by; for example, not responding to adjunct salary surveys. Of the Modern Language Association survey on non-tenure track salaries in the academy, Hoeller reports that "[t]he response rate was only 42 percent, when the normal rate for returns was 90 percent."

Between the lines of the 11 chapter contributors are the stories of warriors who have continued to fight within their local, state, and national unions; within their colleges and universities; and with themselves for the health of the university and college system, for academic freedom, and the democratic health of the United States.

In "The Case of Instructor Tenure: Solving Contingency and Protecting Academic Freedom in Colorado," Don Eron argues that in the balance of contingency is academic freedom. He explains that student evaluations, almost the sole means of evaluating teaching, threaten how teachers work. Offering an unpopular or unsolicited opinion during a staff meeting could be another cause for non-appointment. The tenuous nature of employment reflects the tenuous nature of academic freedom.

Although most contingent faculty have lived what these writers report, these chapters fortify our efforts, offer strategies for building solidarity, and tell the story to a wider audience with the aim of wresting the academy from the clutches of big business. Anyone who cares about the future of higher education should read this book.

Beverly Stewart is vice president of the National Council for Higher Education, and an adjunct professor of English at Roosevelt University in Chicago. She also has served on the board of directors of the Illinois Education Association.