

# Overview

**By Mark F. Smith**

*Mark F. Smith is a senior policy analyst-higher education for the National Education Association (NEA). He previously served as an NEA organizational specialist in higher education. He advocates the policy goals of the association and its affiliates on behalf of college and university faculty and staff. Smith holds a B.A. in history and political science from the University of Wisconsin, and an M.A. in government from Johns Hopkins University. Prior to joining NEA, he served as director of government relations at the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). He is a member of the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association.*

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**T**he Great Recession may be officially over, but higher education has yet to be invited to the recovery. We have “over-invested” in education, some critics claim in arguing for funding cuts. A century ago, historian Frederick Jackson Turner spoke to the centrality of education for preserving democracy. “Democracy,” he stated, “may not realize that education...is essential to its own safety.” Turner then quoted Francis Bacon: “The learning of the few is despotism, the learning of the many is liberty, and intelligent and principled liberty is fame and wisdom and power.” Turner added, “Institutions on private foundations may influence democracy from the outside, but the State University *is* democracy.”<sup>1</sup>

The essays in *The NEA 2011 Almanac of Higher Education* address major problems facing public higher education: our students, funding, the workforce, and the international context. In “Faculty Salaries: 2009–2010” Suzanne B. Clery reports a slight increase (1.4 percent) in

full-time faculty salaries, excluding furloughs and benefit cuts. Faculty purchasing power held steady, but the purchasing power of “lecturers and faculty with no rank declined significantly over the last four decades.” The most dramatic workforce changes: the growth of part-time and of full-time non-tenure-track faculty.

States disproportionately cut support for higher education in hard times, note William Zumeta and Alicia Kinne, in “The Recession is Not Over for Higher Education.” The authors warn of coming cuts “resulting in furlough, layoffs, and big tuition hikes” as well as “major downsizing and restructuring, even as the nation must sharply increase its degree output to cope with global economic competition.”

In “Retirement and Benefits for the Generations,” Valerie Martin Conley shows how state legislatures responded to “an aging population, the sluggish economy, regulatory requirements, and increased scrutiny of public pension plans” with funding shortfalls, decreased benefits for

newer employees, and delayed eligibility for benefits still in play.

In “Negotiating Virtual Space,” Gary Rhoades, Kristine Anderson Dougherty, and I show how policy changes favoring distance education affect workload, curriculum, intellectual property, and the nature of faculty work. We suggest means of strengthening relevant contract provisions.

Patricia Gándara looks at the impact of the current environment on Latino students in “High Stakes and Low Horizons: Changing the Odds for Latino Students.” She discusses changing student demographics, the explosive growth in the numbers of Latino youth, and the barriers preventing academic success. Gándara asks faculty to inspire young Latinos to become teachers, so they, in turn, will inspire the larger Latino population.

Kathryn Mohrman, Yiqun Geng, and Yingjie Wang, in “Faculty Life in China,” examine changes in higher education as the reforms instituted in the post-Mao era take deeper root. The government maintains it “intends to build a modern university system espousing academic freedom” though intellectual freedom remains a challenge. Universities profoundly influenced the history of China in the 20th century, and the size and growth of the system—a 700 percent increase since 1986, with half again as many students enrolled as in the United States—suggests continued centrality.

Henry Lee Allen, in “Faculty Workload and Productivity in Canada in an Era of Global Crises,” contrasts the dominance of public institutions in Canadian higher education to the

mixed system of control in the United States. The same combination of societal, technological, and market forces apply to both countries, he adds. Canadian higher education has accomplished much, but faces challenges as “it resolves its oscillations between public investment and market incentives.”

Vicki J. Rosser addresses the impact of economic decline on staff professionals in “Education Support Professionals: Employment Status and Financial Exigency.” Noting that ESPs “are the most undervalued employees in higher education,” Rosser adds, “many ESP positions are now under siege” as institutions face shortfalls and look into “financial exigency” to justify position eliminations. Already, “all ESP classifications showed decreases in new hires.” Few contracts, Rosser finds, cover the implications of retrenchment on ESPs.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Turner, 1965 [1897], 198.

## REFERENCES

Turner, F.J. “The University of the Future” [1897], in W.R. Jacobs, *Frederick Jackson Turner’s Legacy: Unpublished Writings in American History*. Lincoln, Neb. and London, U.K.: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.