Assessment * Anonymity * Competency-Based Higher Ed * Conservative Christianity * Contingent Faculty * and More.

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Overview

By Mary Ellen Flannery

Four years ago, in this space, I wrote, “This November, you have a choice… Will you vote to prop open the doors of public colleges and universities? Or will you opt to slam shut the door?”

Today, the gap between the two major-party candidates for U.S. president is even more unpleasantly clear. On the one hand, we have the 93 percent owner of Trump University—“Yes, It Was a Massive Scam,” announced the National Review earlier this year—who says, for his own part (it’s all for his own part): “I’m a very smart guy. I went to the best college.”

On the other, we have a candidate addressing the need for millions of other smart guys (and gals, too!), the ones whose lives are edging toward hopelessness, to access their own high-quality higher education. Her college affordability plan promises debt-free college for all, and free tuition for poor and middle-class families at public institutions. She listens to educators. She listens to parents. She listens to students. “I’m with you,” promised Hillary Clinton, as she stood before thousands of NEA members this summer.

This is a fact: Even today, in 2016, with college costs rising faster than the U.S. space program, higher education is still the most reliable pathway to jobs, home ownership, and our own best selves.

But the golden ticket is fraying. As the rights of faculty and staff to speak with a collective voice are sabotaged (see, for example: Wisconsin), the kindred interests of students also are diminished, and the foundation of institutions built by the public, for the public good, are eroded. In this issue of Thought & Action, authors James Freeman and Peter Kolozi write of the “anti-labor winds” that have blown through Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, and elsewhere. “Public employees are right to fear it might get worse,” they portend.
Meanwhile, what’s taught inside our classrooms? Author Steven Ward warns of the popular movement to competency-based higher education, funded by private mega-foundations like Gates and Lumina, and propagated by organizations like AAC&U and others. “Are the organization and its allies saving and updating the liberal arts for the economic demands of the 21st century? Or are they key players in its destruction?” he asks.

Let’s assess. Or let’s not. Of the current craze for assessment in public higher education, author Laurie Occhipinti observes, “We measure, not in a way that is useful for ourselves, or even our students, but in a way that makes the process visible and transparent to an external observer (...) Assessment, then, is a management technique that purports to be a pedagogical technique.”

So what is the answer? Authors Christine Mooney and Edward Volchok have one, or thousands actually: Their students. The interdependent hand-knit American mesh of faculty and students, of union labor and all other workers, especially those laboring in contingent conditions, must be made stronger, they point out—and that work begins in classrooms. “Students should be aware that unions might hold the key to their own upward mobility, to their access to an affordable education and the American Dream,” they write.

And that’s why #ImWithHer.

Mary Ellen Flannery is Thought & Action’s editor. She has worked for the National Education Association as a senior writer and editor since 2004. Previously, she reported on education for The Miami Herald.
What I Learned about Higher Ed Assessment in a Small Village in South America

By Laurie Occhipinti

A few years after I began teaching undergraduates, I was informed that our program needed to be doing continual assessment. But we assess students all the time, I responded. No, I was told, that is not assessment. I dutifully went through a couple of professional development workshops: writing student learning outcomes, program outcomes. I learned to use action verbs, and struggled with the definitional difference between “goals” and “outcomes” and “formative” and “summative.” I wrote student learning outcomes for all of my courses, and worked with colleagues to develop outcomes for our program. I attended meetings where I was told our institution was building a “culture of assessment.” I was appointed to be the assessment coordinator of our multidisciplinary department, and obediently collected our results and passed them along to a larger faculty assessment committee, which reported them to our administration for inclusion in our accrediting reports.

Laurie Occhipinti is the dean of Liberal Arts, Education, Humanities, and Communications at Mount Wachusett Community College in Massachusetts. Previously, she was a professor of anthropology at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. Occhipinti received her Ph.D. and master’s degrees from McGill University. Since the mid-1990s, her research has focused on faith-based organizations working on issues of poverty and development in Latin America. In addition to numerous articles, she is the author of Acting on Faith (2005) and Making a Difference in a Globalized World: Short Term Missions that Work (2014).
As I collected data, collated information, and presented reports, I could not find any evidence that all of this assessment actually led to its ostensible goal: improving student learning. Perhaps, I thought, I simply wasn’t doing it correctly. I experimented with what I felt were more authentic tools, ones that provided a more holistic appraisal of student work—requiring students to submit portfolios, or collecting extensive writing samples—but it quickly became apparent that these required an enormous amount of time, and relied on what I felt were subjective standards for evaluation. These experiments were frustrating to me. While I wanted my assessment techniques to provide reliable and genuine measures of what I was sure my students gained from my classes and program, actually doing this kind of in-depth assessment did not seem to add anything. More manageably, I fell back on simpler alternatives, using what I felt to be rather superficial mechanisms—pre-tests and post-tests, a few questions on an exam—to make it possible to report a measurable outcome.

As an anthropologist who studies economic development, I found myself pondering a question that echoed one asked by well-known anthropologist James Ferguson.¹ In looking at economic development, Ferguson suggested that it was well documented that “development” was not very effective at accomplishing its stated goals: to improve the material conditions of the people that it was supposed to help. Yet governments persisted in creating new projects on top of old failed ones. Ferguson’s analysis revealed that the discourse of development was very effective in reducing issues of poverty to problems that were apparently technical. Issues faced by people without access to resources—shortages of food, poor education, inadequate employment—are not easily solved through simple technical fixes. The problems are interrelated, complex, and con-
textual. At its base, in Ferguson’s analysis, poverty is a political problem: resources are not evenly distributed, but accrue to those with power. By redefining poverty as a limited problem that can be addressed through standardized programs and projects, the state disguised its own political interests, thus de-politicizing both its own actions and the initial problem. While development was ineffective in creating economic change, it was highly effective in extending the reach of a bureaucratic state into remote rural regions, in a process that Ferguson famously dubbed the “anti-politics machine.” The discourse of development adeptly camouflaged a political problem—a particular distribution of resources—under a cloak of technical and bureaucratic interventions.

In contemplating assessment of student learning in the liberal arts and social sciences, I find myself feeling as though I am on familiar ground. The discourse of assessment is that it is about enhancing education. The discourse operates from “the belief that assessment is nothing more than collecting, analyzing, and acting rationally on information about student learning and faculty effectiveness.” While professors have long tested their students on their mastery of skills or knowledge of content, the process of learning itself goes much deeper. We rely on a liberal arts education to develop human beings as citizens who, certainly, have skills and knowledge that are valuable and valued in the world, but who also appreciate beauty, have a sense of reflection and self-reflection, are capable of empathizing with others, who strive toward a greater understanding of the human condition. Many of the impacts of a college education may not be observable to an outsider at all or amenable to objective measurement. Yet assessment insists on reducing the qualitative processes of learning and teaching to a technical problem—defining and measuring objectives. After 20-odd years of “assessment” as a dominant practice stretching from kindergartens through universities, the problem certainly has not been fixed. Just as
Ferguson asked, if development isn’t very good at doing what it says it is doing, why does it continue? I ask, if assessment isn’t doing what it says it is doing, what is really happening?

A discourse of development serves to obscure the political agendas and processes of transformation that accompany development projects, hiding them behind a neutral, technocratic veil. Similarly, the discourse of assessment serves to obscure the bureaucratization of higher education. It uses a neutral, technocratic language to reduce what is a tremendously complex process—learning—into a set of inputs and outputs. Yet, just as in economic development, the purposes and aims of the discourse can be subverted and reworked to serve the needs of those on the ground. By understanding the discourse as a discourse, we may be able to repurpose it to meet our own needs, even while complying with its bureaucratic requirements.

The discourse of assessment uses a neutral, technocratic language to reduce what is a tremendously complex process—learning—into a set of inputs and outputs.

LIES, DAMN LIES, AND OUTCOMES

The discourse of assessment, like any discourse, shapes how we think about its domain, in this case the possibilities of teaching and learning. A discourse provides definitions and values, outlines the limits of acceptable behavior and response, and excludes other kinds of options and thinking. A discourse represents, metaphorically, the rules of the game, a shared vocabulary and set of assumptions about how things work. How, then, does the discourse of assessment shape our approach? There are certainly many dimensions to this, but I want to explore two here that stand out to me.

We measure the measurable. Curricular assessment requires faculty to “document” student learning by measuring achievement toward ostensibly objective outcomes or results. By defining learning as measurable, the discourse of assessment ignores the aspects of learning that are difficult, if not impossible, to measure. Instead, it leads us to focus on that
which can be measured. In my courses and program, for example, one of the things that I surely want to do is to create student empathy with people in other cultures and tolerance for different cultural practices. I have resisted, however, including this as an “outcome,” because I am not convinced that it is measurable in any meaningful sense. I suspect that anthropologists like myself, whether by nature or by training, are hesitant to engage in what feel like reductionist and simplistic measurements about a subject that we know is complex and multidimensional.

Another component of assessment is that it happens over a relatively short time frame, within the context of a course over a single semester, or perhaps more ambitiously in a single student over the four year or so trajectory of their undergraduate studies. It eliminates, then, that much of the information in a course may be forgotten once the final is done—or, more to my point, that a student may be influenced by a course or a program many years after it was completed, in ways that I cannot begin to foresee, never mind go back and measure later. Moreover, it does not produce replicable results over time: one of my problems is that I change my course every time it is taught. An assessment mechanism, to produce valid, comparable data, should be more static.

Assessment, however, requires us to produce relatively immediate results that are quantitative rather than qualitative. As an anthropologist, I have been trained to understand the key benefits and drawbacks of each of these. Like any statistics, the public purpose of assessment data is to give an accurate, true description of the world. But statistics, of course, are constructed to support particular views. “Numbers are created and repeated because they supply ammunition for political struggles, and this political purpose is often hidden behind assertions that numbers, simply because they are numbers, must be correct. People use statistics to support particular points of view, and it is naive to simply accept numbers as accu-
rate, without examining who is using them and why,” wrote Joe Best in *Damn Lies and Statistics: Untangling Numbers from the Media, Politicians, and Activists.*\(^5\) There is a tendency to treat assessment data as a straightforward fact that cannot be questioned, without scrutiny of whether we were asking the “right” question. As faculty, we find ourselves struggling with “the difficult questions around whether an assessment mechanism fits with what’s actually being taught,” writes Matt Reed in his blog, *Confessions of a Community College Dean.*\(^6\) But as with any quantitative measure, suggests Best, “[t]his ignores the way statistics are produced. All statistics, even the most authoritative, are created by people. This does not mean that they are inevitably flawed or wrong, but it does mean that we ought to ask ourselves just how the statistics we encounter were created.”\(^7\)

*We measure, not in a way that is useful for ourselves, or even our students, but in a way that makes the process visible and transparent to an external observer.*

We measure for an audience. Much of the literature on assessment claims that the audience for our measurements is neutral, that we are our own audience, producing numbers to “close the loop.” In fact, faculty regularly change courses and programs based on their feelings about what is working and what isn’t—adjusting readings and assignments, adding or removing courses, and so on. Most faculty that I know, however, produce and document these changes as “assessment-driven” for an external audience: usually our own administration, and beyond that, generally speaking, accrediting agencies and, increasingly, state lawmakers.\(^8\) We are demonstrating that we measured, not in a way that is useful for ourselves, or even our students, but in a way that makes the process visible and transparent to an external observer.

ASSESSMENT AS GOVERNMENTALITY

Assessment, then, is a management technique that purports to be a pedagogical technique. Just as the discourse of development extended the power of the state into remote rural areas, the discourse of assessment
has extended a neoliberal logic of management into one of the last bastions of non-corporate space, higher education. It refashions faculty from unique experts in their fields into interchangeable deliverers of content, or, increasingly, mere evaluators of student competencies.

“When universities become corporatized, as has been happening quite systematically over the last generation as part of a general neoliberal assault on the population, their business model means that what matters is the bottom line,” Noam Chomsky told adjunct faculty during a 2014 speech.9 Assessment is part of this. It compartmentalizes the process of learning, transforming an essentially qualitative and unmeasurable process—learning!—into discrete, ostensibly measurable “outcomes.” The role of the professor becomes that of the mechanical assessor, who applies a universalized, objective rubric. It imposes a logic of standardization—inputs and outputs. It overrules the decisions that are made within the classroom—and even more so as the majority of professors now are untenured and precarious. Assessment becomes a disciplinary technique, a form of governmentality.

Does assessment change what is being taught? In my field, and at the university level, this is not reducible to the simplistic “teaching to the test” notion that we see in K–12. But let me use an analogy here. When I was conducting research on economic development in a remote rural area of the Argentine Chaco, a community had received some public funds to construct a new community center. They discussed where to place the center. The middle of the village seemed like a logical, common sense choice. But an NGO employee involved in the process advised them differently. Make it visible from the road, she suggested. The village itself was not visible from the unpaved rural route that traversed the province. It sat over a mile back in the bush. But the people who sent the money,
Enez Glas, a watercolor on paper mounted on panels, 37” x 78”, 2015, is by Cynthia Camlin, an associate professor of art at Western Washington University. For more, visit cynthiacamlin.com.
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she sagely noted, would want to see the building; they would not get out of their car, risking mud and snakes, trekking to the village itself. The strategic choice was to make the building visible, even though that largely defeated the purpose of a community center, and made the structure far less useful to the villagers themselves. A process of assessment similarly seeks to make our work visible to those casual monitoring agencies, to those who won’t get out of their car. And, as with the Argentinian village, it makes it less useful, defeating its own purpose. Yet, the need to conduct an assessment that will be legible to those external agents does shape what we do. “Assessment not reported to the administration meets the requirements of neither campus assessment procedures nor accreditation standards, and is thus indistinguishable from non-assessment.”¹⁰ Just as James Scott documented in economic development, assessment requires “legibility,” that outsiders (in this case, administrators) are able to understand and make comparisons, in order to facilitate management by those outsiders.¹¹

**It is the recognition that assessment is a management technique, not a pedagogy, which has shaped my response to its demands.**

MAKING ASSESSMENT WORK—DIFFERENTLY

From a faculty perspective, the question becomes one of repurposing assessment. It is the recognition that assessment is a management technique, not a pedagogy, which has shaped my response to its demands. At various points, pondering my options, I toyed with what James Scott called the “weapons of the weak”—minimal compliance with external obligations, foot-dragging and delays, creating intentionally low benchmarks to demonstrate “continuous improvement.”¹² For various reasons, these strategies were not satisfying for me. My more recent solution has been to try to manage the technique myself: to comply with the requirements of assessment, becoming proficient in its own discourse, to try to bend it to the needs of my courses and curriculum, or, at the least, to try to prevent it from doing harm. Again, I see similarities with economic
development. Recognizing the discourse of development for what it is, a discourse that privileges certain kinds of processes and outcomes over others, does not make the issues of poverty go away, and does not excuse a lack of action to try to remedy those problems. Once we recognize the discourse for what it is, and understand that it is a management technique, we are liberated, at least to some extent, from a need to internalize it, and can, instead, treat it as a tool.

Learning the jargon, words like formative and summative, inquiry-centered, artifacts, and benchmarks, and mastering the process of assessment creates a space in which to try to effect positive change. For example, a few semesters ago, I decided I needed to add a prerequisite to one of my upper level courses. Because the course met a general education requirement, it was attracting too many students who were not terribly interested in the subject, turning it into a frustrating class for all concerned, including me. While this was a common-sense solution to my intuitive understanding of the problem, I included it in my annual curricular assessment report. I counted the number of majors and non-majors in the course, represented their grades on a rubric, and announced that the addition of the prerequisite was the response. I reported what was, to me, an ordinary (and meaningful) change to the program as a response to an assessment (demonstrating that we “closed the loop”).

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**IF YOU CAN’T JOIN THEM, BEAT THEM**

Within our program, we defined a couple of goals that we thought could be served through the strategic use of assessment, supporting particular courses, for example, by including an outcome that could best be “met” there. In a climate of budget cuts, faculty retrenchments, and pressures to eliminate small programs, some of the decisions we made were aimed primarily at not losing any ground.
One example of our approach is that even though we are a small program, we have a strong philosophical commitment to maintaining what anthropologists call a four-field approach, including (1) cultural anthropology, (2) biological anthropology, (3) linguistic anthropology, and (4) archaeology. Our permanent faculty include a cultural anthropologist and an archaeologist, and our curriculum includes courses taught by a linguist in another department. Yet several of our program outcomes explicitly reference biological anthropology. We cover this in our four-field introductory course, and in one course for majors, taught by the archaeologist. We have, to some extent, over-represented biological anthropology as an outcome so that we can reference it when we ask, on a regular basis, to hire an additional faculty member. It demonstrates that there is a “need.” While we haven’t been able to hire a third regular faculty, we did successfully deploy this argument to gain approval to hire a replacement faculty to cover a sabbatical leave at a point when not many replacements were being funded, because we could argue that some of our graduating students would not be able to meet the outcome. At the same time, although we strongly wanted each student to have field experience of some type before graduating, we did not include this in our outcomes because we knew that we could not support the courses required; we were concerned that if we offered them regularly, they would be “low-enrolled,” which could be used to justify cutting the program.

In another strategic decision, we chose to repurpose assessment by keeping our outcomes broadly defined, so that they would allow us to “assess” them in a number of different ways.

In another strategic decision, we chose to repurpose assessment by keeping our outcomes broadly defined, so that they would allow us to “assess” them in a number of different ways and in several different courses. While they are certainly an expression of what we want for our students, retaining some flexibility makes them less invasive in each course, and in the program as a whole.
A FINAL NOTE

The pedagogical advantages of assessment are unclear, at least to me. Years after this kind of an approach became dominant in K–12 education, the educational system is perhaps even more profoundly in crisis. The solution? More assessment, more standardized tests. It is a technocratic fix, a discourse that limits the potential solutions. At the same time, the discourse of assessment has extended into universities. While it is not successful at improving education, it is highly successful at increasing bureaucratization. My comparison of assessment to earlier analyses of economic development is not just fortuitous or coincidental: they have both been shaped by identical processes of neoliberalism, or what Robert McChesney calls “capitalism with the gloves off.” Although it began as a set of economic principles advocating more liberal trade policies and lower rates of inflation, neoliberalism mushroomed into an ideological force that mandated decreases in social spending by governments at all levels and a reflexive disdain for public institutions, and even more, a set of assumptions that places economic profit above other values and assumes that the primary function of individuals is as rational economic actors and entrepreneurs. For higher education, and particularly public higher education, neoliberalism has set the stage for significant spending cuts, even as it recast a college education as an individual good, rather than a social good, which served to further justify austerity measures.

A lack of engagement with assessment, however, may lead to our absence from the dialogue and a tacit acceptance of allowing it to be (over simplistically) defined by others. This is my primary argument for engaging in assessment at all. Recognizing assessment as a discourse and a management technique is not a knee-jerk, reflexive dismissal of it. Rather, it is bringing our theoretical tools to bear in a way that can provide us the room to maneuver within this externally imposed regime.
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ENDNOTES

2. My experience, and discussion here, refers to assessment of student learning in the liberal arts and social sciences, not certification exams, licensure exams, or similar instruments that serve to evaluate specific skills within a narrowly defined professional or technical field.
4. In his 2011 essay “The University Besieged,” Lustig put it beautifully: “The liberal arts aren't bodies of knowledge that can be ladled out. They can't be set down on a study sheet (though developing them requires the mastery of specific bodies of knowledge). They are abilities, like the ability to see beauty or do critical inquiry, and are cultivated or brought out (e-duced) of students' latent powers....”
6. Reed, “Assessment Done Well and Badly.”
8. At least 32 states allocate some funds to their public colleges and universities based on “performance” indicators, such as student progression to degree or even salaries earned by graduates. This financial “incentive,” particularly in times of shrinking budgets, provides a powerful incentive for institutions to turn their efforts towards improving their “metrics”—at the expense of other possible values and agendas.
9. Chomsky, “Thinking like Corporations is Harming American Universities.”
12. Ibid.
13. The jargon associated with assessment is extensive, and has even inspired an online phrase generator, at http://www.sciencegeek.net/lingo.html.

WORKS CITED


WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT HIGHER ED ASSESSMENT IN A SMALL VILLAGE IN SOUTH AMERICA


The Competency-Based Approach to Higher Education: Are the AAC&U and Other Organizations Destroying Liberal Traditions?

By Steven C. Ward

Last year the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) celebrated its 100th birthday. Founded in 1915 as the Association of American Colleges (AAC) by a group of presidents from mostly religiously affiliated liberal arts colleges, its high-minded intent was to promote “higher education in all its forms” and “to make more efficient” its member institutions. Historically, the organization garnered a widespread reputation for being at the forefront of expanding and defending the liberal arts, and promoting gender and ethnic equity in colleges and universities across the U.S. Today, its mission remains “to make liberal education and inclusive excellence the foundation for institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education,” and it includes some 1,300 research universities, private liberal arts colleges, community...
colleges, and regional and state public universities throughout the country. Over the past 15 years, the AAC&U has embarked on a new strategy, as evidenced by its slate of initiatives aimed at revising general and liberal education, and embracing a more market-driven, skills or competency-based model of higher education. This strategy, which is supported financially by private foundations like Gates and Lumina, is making these past champions of traditional liberal learning into a major catalyst for transforming it, particularly at community colleges and regional state universities where some of the organization’s recent liberal- or general-education reform efforts have been targeted. However, in their effort to make liberal learning more marketable, vocational, measurable, competency-centered, and skills-based, are the organization and its allies saving and updating the liberal arts for the economic demands of the 21st century as they contend? Or are they co-conspirators in efforts that have created distorted assessments and undeserved panic around higher education’s performance, and, as a consequence, are key players in the destruction of traditional liberal learning?

THE RISE OF THE COMPETENCY MOVEMENT

Beginning in the early 2000s, a new focus on the connection between liberal learning and skills development began to supplant AAC&U’s historical emphasis on inclusion and the importance of the liberal arts in citizenship and public life. This change was likely a defensive response to an era marked by moral hand-wringing over “Beer and Circus” universities that were popularly declaimed to be “Declining by Degrees,” and the subsequent neoliberal-inspired global policy frenzy of rhetoric and reform. From the mid-1990s onward, a slew of national and international reports came pouring out from groups such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank, the U.K.’s
National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (and its Dearing Report), and the policies of the New Labour government of Tony Blair, each arguing for the importance of skills development for global competition and the inception of a “knowledge society” or economy.\(^4\) In the U.S., the emphasis on workplace skills and a supposed gap between the needs of corporations and the skills and competencies taught in universities was at the heart of the 2006 report from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (a.k.a, The Spellings Report), as well as a number of similar reports coming from the National Governors Association and various think tanks.\(^5\) Following in the rhetoric and neoliberal formula of previous reports from the U.K., these reports argued that the U.S. was falling behind in the global economic race and that the growing “skills gap” was to blame. In the dramatic, business-like language provided in The Spellings Report, the commission members warned that “history is littered with examples of industries that, at their peril, failed to respond to—or even to notice—changes in the world around them, from railroads to steel manufacturers. Without serious self-examination and reform, institutions of higher education risk falling into the same trap, seeing their market share substantially reduced and their services increasingly characterized by obsolescence.”\(^6\)

Against the backdrop of this growing neoliberal reform movement, the AAC&U, in 2006, released one of its “signature initiatives,” called Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP).\(^7\) LEAP emphasized creating a new “21st century definition of liberal education” that teaches “essential learning outcomes” guided by a set of “principles of excellence.”\(^8\) This approach, it promised, would “help students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world
settings.” These ideas were put forward not just as a new version of the vague, ill-defined, older notion of the liberal arts, but as measurable and transferable skills that students could showcase to future employers. In this model, content knowledge, although still mentioned, takes a back seat to the generic soft and hard skills, such as communication and creative thinking, that liberal education should provide students for job placement. As Carol Schneider, the former president of the organization, framed it when AAC&U voiced its support for the Common Core State Standards in 2014, “Too many states are still relying on standards that reflect an outmoded model of education—one that is more focused on knowledge acquisition than higher-level critical thinking and problem-solving…. Today’s students and the future of our economy and our democracy depend on significant reforms both in K-12 education and higher education.”

In the second phase of LEAP, introduced in 2009, this new skills-based and business-friendly version of liberal learning sought to move from conceptualization to operationalization through something called the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE). (Yes, they do love acronyms!) The goals of VALUE reflected a growing emphasis in higher education policy and administration on Total Quality Management, a philosophy of management popularized by car manufacturers and others in the 1980s, which focuses on so-called continuous improvement, data-driven production, and quality circles. Here it was necessary “to provide needed tools to assess students’ own authentic work, produced across their diverse learning pathways and institutions, to determine whether and how well they are progressing toward graduation-level achievement in learning outcomes that both employers and faculty consider essential.” In this phase of implementation, these measurement initiatives were generally seen as unique to each campus and locally controlled. Member institutions were encouraged to derive

In this model, content knowledge takes a back seat to the generic skills, such as communication, that liberal education should provide students for job placement.
their own rubrics and assessments to accurately measure the value-added skills and competencies, as defined by the institutions, obtained through exposure to liberal education. However, many who used VALUE seemed to simply copy the examples and typologies provided by the AAC&U.13

As we move into the current decade, the orientation of the AAC&U shifts again. What began as campus-based reforms that were designed to be locally measurable, now become closely linked with the broader, more politically motivated initiatives of venture philanthropy groups such as the Lumina Foundation and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and what is popularly known as the foundations’ college completion agenda. This approach seeks to use competency-based and online education, as well as the standardization and measurement of student learning outcomes, to reform university curricula and move more people to more degrees more quickly and cheaply. It is typified by the approach of Southern New Hampshire University’s College for America (CfA), a 2-year-old program that offers online bachelor’s degrees to students who progress through the program at their own speed, according to their job-oriented “competencies,” and likely pay less than $10,000 for that degree.14 Gates has supported CfA, and competency-based education, in general.15 In fact, since 2009, it has provided more than $14 million to directly support competency-based education, including $9.6 million to Western Governors University, the online competency-based university formed in 1995.16 Gates’ enthusiasm for competency-based education is matched by the Lumina Foundation, which was created when the non-profit USA Group sold its holdings to the for-profit student loan guarantor Sallie Mae (now Navient). According to Lumina, it is important to take “advantage of the proliferation of competency-based models and open courseware to create new pathways to degrees… (and) expanding the availability of prior learning assessment and other approaches to accelerate progress toward degrees.”17
In its latest push, the rhetoric and actions of the AAC&U increasingly has become indistinguishable from Gates and Lumina, the so-called disruptive innovators trying to remake the academy in the names of efficiency, productivity, and marketization. Indeed, Gates, Lumina, and others have become major funders of the organization’s initiatives, and Lumina even previously held a seat on the AAC&U Board of Directors. This funding includes $2.3 million from Gates in 2013, $1.2 million from Lumina in 2014, plus additional money from EDUCAUSE, the promoters of the “Next Generation Learning Challenges Initiative” that promotes what they call “applied technology” and “personalized learning” to increase college completion rates. Since 2010, EDUCAUSE has received over $50 million from Gates.

Perhaps it’s not surprising, then, that the ongoing activities of the AAC&U center on promoting competency-based education and student assessment experiments at different sites around the country. For example, in its “New Initiative Employing VALUE Rubrics to Assess Student Achievement of Key Learning Outcomes” (tough to find an acronym here) launched in the summer of 2014, participating institutions are using the VALUE rubrics to better standardize what students should know. All but seven of the 69 participating institutions are community or regional public universities, none are private liberal arts colleges or among the most elite research institutions. This initiative is being coordinated by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, which is composed of various state college or university presidents or politically appointed members of boards of regents and trustees. Some of these officers, such as those in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system and, until recently, the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, have been pushing for major reforms to higher education in their states through online education and an emphasis on competencies and skills—with strong resistance from...
faculty in both systems. This particular intuitive is also being paid for with a grant from the Gates Foundation.

At the same time, AAC&U also is initiating another Gates-funded initiative called General Education Maps and Markers (GEM) that “represents a large-scale, systematic effort to provide ‘design principles’ for 21st-century learning and long-term student success.” Such an approach is quite similar to the “best elements of standards-related work” rhetoric found in Common Core. GEM draws upon the organization’s “longstanding work in liberal education to develop a portable and proficiency-based framework for general education that helps all students, and especially those who have been traditionally underserved by higher education, learn most effectively and demonstrate and apply their learning outside the classroom.”

This latest initiative is basically the operationalization of the Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualifications Profile, and it contains a clever class-based recoding common among education reformers who use the eduspeak of “serving the underserved” and “establishing new avenues of inclusion” to actually mean a fast, cheap, and dumbed-down version of liberal learning.

By emphasizing marketable skills over knowledge, AAC&U and their competency partners, Lumina and Gates, are forcing students into a compromised version of liberal learning.

The Outcome of Competencies on Liberal Learning

By emphasizing marketable skills over knowledge content, the AAC&U and their competency partners, Lumina and Gates, are forcing students, particularly those in lower-tier public institutions, into a compromised version of liberal learning. Make no mistake, this is not a liberal education as envisioned by Socrates, Cardinal Newman, Wilhelm von Humboldt, J.S. Mill, or other defenders of broader liberal learning and knowledge that is dedicated to freeing the mind and that has been
served up for generations at premier public institutions. It is solely for job training and skill development. Despite their rhetoric of “serving the underserved” and “closing the skills gap,” AAC&U and its partners are contributing to divisions between a broadly educated elite and narrowly educated workers. These groups are responsible for generating new hierarchies between those who receive a cheap, fast liberal education, and those who receive a quality one. Indeed, they are forging barriers and new strata, not removing them. Such a strategy stands in marked contrast to the organization’s past emphasis on quality, across-the-board liberal learning, regardless of the type of student or institution. In this new model those in wealthy liberal arts colleges will go on receiving broad liberal training as a core part to their university experience, while those at lower tier institutions will be loaded up with skills and competencies that align with company needs at a given moment. 

While AAC&U’s version of competencies may have started independently as a way to defend the liberal arts from the forces of market-based reforms threatening to wash over higher education in the first decade of the 21st century, today its rhetoric and ideas have become basically indistinguishable from the “disruptors” who are either trying to bury liberal education or turn it into a competency and skills check list. Locally driven, shared governance style reforms, once a hallmark of AAC&U’s efforts, have all but disappeared. They too have now become just another aspect of the standardized and entrepreneurial university. In these endeavors the AAC&U is largely blind to, or is deliberately ignoring, what their policies look like when they hit the reality of today’s political climate and the swirl of reformers circling higher education. The organization, like its private benefactors, has adopted the strategy that Frank Coffield described as “running even faster down the wrong road.” Rather than defending the idea of liberal knowledge and the importance of knowledge content that is critical to the development of personal growth, economic

These groups are responsible for generating new heirarchies between those who receive a cheap, fast liberal education, and those who receive a quality one.
innovation and political participation, they seek to throw in the towel and join the competency reform fray. They are either politically naïve about how their ideas intersect and fuel other agendas, or they are willing to sacrifice a good chunk of their members, perhaps all but the very elite liberal arts colleges, research universities and students, to the money and political agenda of the higher education reform gods.

Ironically, the implementation of the skills and competencies movement at American universities and colleges is occurring just as the U.K., one of the originators of these ideas, appears to be abandoning its past emphasis on skills and moving back toward knowledge content. Perhaps this signals that Kant’s enlightenment call of *Sapere aude* (Dare to know) still has a future after all. If that is the case, maybe the AAC&U, as it enters its second century of existence, can divert and return to its roots of being a champion for the liberal arts for all. However, this would require a dramatic and broader shift away from the neoliberal economic focus that has dominated education policy at all levels and in many national contexts for the last three decades. The recent move to support free public university education in the U.S. may signal that such a political shift is just beginning.

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**ENDNOTES**

2. AAC&U, “Mission Statement” and “About AAC&U.” Among its 25 current board members, 18 are current university presidents, provosts or chancellors, while its officers—a past chair, vice-chair, and treasurer—are currently university presidents.
7. AAC&U, “Liberal Education and America’s Promise.”
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. For an example of this, see Kansas State University’s rubrics at https://www.k-state.edu/assessment/valuerubrics/.
15. College for America, A Milestone for Competency-Based Higher Ed.
17. Lumina Foundation, Strategic Plan 2013.
18. AAC&U, “Donors to AAC&U.”
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. AAC&U, “General Education Maps and Markers (GEMs).”
26. AAC&U, “General Education Maps and Markers (GEMs).”
27. The DQP is Lumina’s attempt to use learning outcomes to codify what students should have learned upon graduation from a university. For a discussion of the political roots and orientation of the Lumina Foundation see Painter, “The Libertarian Roots of the Lumina Foundation, Part I.”
29. Coffield, Running Even Faster Down the Wrong Road.

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THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO HIGHER EDUCATION: ARE THE AAC&U AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS DESTROYING LIBERAL TRADITIONS?


The 4th R: Encountering Conservative Christianity in the Classroom

By Rebecca Barrett-Fox

Jesus is my friend…I don’t want to disappoint Him. To me, He’s not dead; He’s alive. I don’t want anyone to get talked out of believing in him just because some professor thinks he should.

—Josh Wheaton, God’s Not Dead

I walk into class on the first day, scanning my roster and my classroom for visible signs of difference—or lack thereof—that are likely to affect how my students relate to each other and to me, and that may shape how they approach, engage, and use the material presented in the college classroom. I think deeply about the kinds of differences that are not visible yet are present—in sexual orientation, in family status, in invisible disabilities, and in other categories—and adopt a universal design for learning that seeks to meet the needs of all students, respectfully engaging them and supporting them in their studies. I teach explicitly about the community of the

Rebecca Barrett-Fox is an assistant professor of sociology at Arkansas State University, where she directs Women and Gender Studies. She is the author of God Hates: Westboro Baptist Church, American Nationalism, and the Religious Right (University Press of Kansas, 2016) as well as numerous articles and chapters focusing on religion, hate and extremism, and sexuality and gender.
classroom. I check in with students regularly, asking them to reflect on their learning. I feel good about my sensitivity to students’ unique backgrounds. Then, I unsuspectingly stumble over a landmine: conservative Christianity.

During a discussion, a student becomes offended, angry, hurt, undermined. A parent may threaten to get involved. The dean offers encouragement in her office but shows me a drawer full of handwritten notes she has collected from parents over the years complaining about an anti-Christian bias in a variety of classes: anthropology, biology, geology, physics, sociology, social work, and more. I am confused. I wasn’t even teaching about religion. But, my students remind me, I was. For much of what I teach, while not explicitly about religion, rubs up against the religious beliefs of students in ways that challenge them dramatically. This article examines how scripts that circulate among culturally and theologically conservative Christian students, whether they are categorized as “born again,” “Religious Right,” “Christian Right,” “nondenominational,” “evangelical,” or “fundamental,” aim to prime students for the college classroom. Teaching in this context, of course, can affect professors in all disciplines in that we all (presumably) ask students to question the epistemological frameworks they bring with them to college. As professors, we all (presumably) hope that education can transform individuals and communities, alleviate suffering, and reduce oppression, that our students will be both freer and more responsible for having engaged critically with their world. Many of our conservative Christian students would similarly argue that “truth sets free,” but they may have a very different view of truth and freedom, informed by scripts they have heard...

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college courses, though like other kinds of identity markers, religion intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, etc., and all education is inherently political.¹

The problem is not that course content veers inappropriately into the territory of religion; rather, the challenge is that, for religiously conservative students (as for many religiously liberal ones), religion is expansive, covering all areas of social life. Indeed, for religiously conservative students, religion is one of the defining parts of their identity, and its influence over their behaviors and thoughts does not end at the church door. To distinguish between secular and sacred life would not only be impossible for them, but a sign of weak faith. Religion permeates all parts of their identity, and they are encouraged by their religious leaders not to surrender that in any context—not at the ballot box, not in the classroom. Thus, issues that may not seem to be religious to non-believers may be highly fraught with religious meaning for religious conservatives, so that discussions of American education are “tinged… with an eschatological hue.”² In this way, even the most religiously indifferent professor must recognize the veracity of Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen and Douglas Jacobsen’s warning that “religion is educationally unavoidable.”³

In particular, the “culture war” issues described by James Hunter Davison in 1991—the origins of the universe and human life, politics, economics, poverty, race and ethnicity, gender, and sexuality—are special “hot spots” that arouse impassioned conservative political and theological engagement, and remain areas of potential conflict in the classroom. For example, the basic principle of cultural relativism, central to investigation of cultures other than one’s own, challenges the exclusivity of conservative Christianity’s claim that it alone is the correct religion; hence, the term is often muddled with moral relativism and used with derision by right-leaning groups.⁴ When educators ignore the salience of religion for

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students, they risk “proceed[ing] on the assumption that God is either dead or irrelevant,” an assumption not shared by students.⁵

LEARNING THE SCRIPT

Conservative Christian students may enter the university primed to be defensive and distrustful, having been warned that, especially at a secular university, professors’ goals are to dissuade them from religious belief. Christian publishers, event planners, filmmakers, and church leaders actively warn students of the dangerous terrain that the secular university presents to them. Summit Ministries, for example, offers two-week intensive summer courses, aimed at advanced high school through college-age students, where students are socialized to see themselves as warriors fighting against secular professors. (For their time, they earn credit through Bryan College, a small evangelical college named after William Jennings Bryan, the great orator who, among many other accomplishments, argued against teaching evolution at the Scopes Trial, the 1925 legal case that upheld the illegality of teaching evolution in the state of Tennessee). The Summit Ministries registration website reminds students:

According to Summit Ministries, professors will indoctrinate students with messages supporting feminism, Marxism, secular humanism, and postmodernism.

You are engaged in a battle. Ideas come at you from every direction, and few know how to make sense of the world. Few know how to think Christianly. Few know what they believe; and fewer still, why they believe it. Equip yourself. Learn to equip others.⁶

According to Summit Ministries, professors will indoctrinate students with messages supporting feminism, Marxism, secular humanism, and postmodernism. The result, according to Summit’s website, is that “[a]n alarming number of Christians stumble while in college and around half will renounce their faith because they simply do not have
a defense for what they believe.” To effectively counter the appeal of alternative ideologies that might tempt students away from evangelical belief, students must be rooted in a “Biblical worldview” that promotes traditional gender roles, heteronormativity, capitalism, and American exceptionalism. Students are not safe even in Christian colleges, according to fundamentalists such as Ken Ham, CEO of Answers in Genesis and co-author, with Greg Hall, of *Already Compromised*, which argues that Christian colleges’ failure to teach creationism shows how far secular humanism has infected even conservative educational settings.

The central image of professors in such texts is as “an elitist class of intellectuals [who seek] to police the thought of those Americans whom they [believe cling] to racist, sexist, jingoistic, and other atavistic attitudes.” Perhaps the “professor as adversary” has found its best expression in *God’s Not Dead*, a critically panned but popular (among its targeted audience of conservative Christians) 2014 film about a college student challenged by his philosophy professor to prove God’s existence. Josh, the protagonist, is warned to expect his faith to be tested in an introductory philosophy class, which another student compares to “the Colosseum,” taught by Dr. Radisson, played by actor Kevin Sorbo, an outspoken conservative Christian. On the first day of class, students are instructed to write “God is dead” on a slip of paper, but Josh Wheaton (whose name recalls Wheaton College, a leading evangelical Christian college and home to evangelist Billy Graham’s archives), a Christian, refuses. Dr. Radisson demands that he prove the existence of God before the end of the semester. The battle between them becomes more than academic as the professor stops him in the hallway, forcefully placing a hand on Josh’s shoulder and turning him around to sneeringly announce, “In that classroom, there is a God—and I’m him.”

In the culmination of the film, Josh bypasses scholarly arguments and penetrates the heart of his professor by asking him directly, “Why do you hate God?”
previously warned him “Do you think you’re smarter than me, Wheaton? Do you think there is any argument you can make that I won’t have an answer for?” Josh bypasses scholarly arguments about the existence of God and penetrates the heart of his professor by asking him directly, “Why do you hate God?” The professor must confront his own reasons for feeling that God has failed him, and Josh “witnesses” to the other students in the class. The film includes all the stereotypes of the secular university professor—atheistic, cold, arrogant, and dismissive of students—in contrast to the humble but brave student.

A similar character appears in a tract by Jack Chick, a fundamentalist cartoon artist known for his hellfire-and-brimstone pamphlets. In “Big Daddy?,” a college professor threatens to throw a student out of the class for politely indicating that he does not believe in evolution. The professor immediately changes his mind, however, to humiliate the student in class. (See image 1.)

The two engage in an argument about the scientific validity of evolution versus creationism, and the professor begins to lose his cool, superior attitude. (Literally, he starts to sweat profusely.) Soon he cedes authority in his own classroom, asking the student to explain the origins of life to him. (See image 2.) By the end of the tract, he accepts the fact that evolution is wrong and takes down the beloved image of “the missing link” that decorated his office. He informs his administration that he can no longer in good conscience teach evolution, only to be treated with the same scorn that he had earlier heaped upon the student (See image 3.), who is now leading the class toward the “Sinner’s Prayer”—a simple prayer

Image 1.
that, from an evangelical perspective, insures salvation and that ends each Chick tract. The “Big Daddy” on campus ends up being Our Heavenly Father, not the arrogant professor, now humbled before God but fired by his secular university.

Image 2.

Such images appear not only in Christian education, filmmaking, and publishing, but in the imaginations of students readied to see their professors not as guides to help them develop their critical thinking skills, but as adversaries and even as potential mission fields, potential recruits to their religion. Real students, not just ones in comic strips and movies, feel similarly threatened when confronted by what they perceive to be anti-religious professors. In 2013, Dr. Deandre Poole, an instructor at Florida Atlantic University, asked students in his intercultural communication course to write the word “Jesus” on a piece of paper, then place it on the ground and step on it. The lesson, which was suggested in the instructor’s
guide in his textbook, invited students to think about their discomfort at violating a cultural norm—even though, unlike Islam, Christianity, generally speaking, has no proscriptions against placing religious objects on the ground or handling them in such ways. Unlike in God’s Not Dead, students were not singled out, given extra assignments, or threatened with failure of the course if they did not comply. Instead, the exercise was designed to open class discussion about how, across cultures, different words and images may be treated in different ways.

A student grew agitated during the class period, according to Poole, and confronted him after class, repeating his angry question, “How dare you disrespect someone’s religion?” only this time, according to Poole, “hitting his balled fist into his other hand and saying that ‘he wanted to hit me.’” While the student did not do so, Poole said he was alarmed and notified campus security and filed a report about the student’s threatening behavior.

As the story spread with headlines that Poole, a leader in the Lighthouse Worship Center, a Church of God in Christ, a historically black Pentecostal denomination, received death threats so frightening (and many of them containing language that used racially terroristic language toward Poole, a Black man) that the university placed him on paid leave for fear for his safety. Stories such as this one circulate in conservative Christian media, told from the students’ perspective without regard for any pedagogical value in the assignment, lending legitimacy to the idea that professors are anti-religious and force students to renounce their faith. Indeed, even other professors, such as Paul Kengor, from the very conservative Grove City College near Pittsburgh, shared on Fox News that Poole’s lesson plan is symptomatic of broader hatred for religion on college campuses, claiming the assignment “reflects the rising confidence and aggression of the new secularists and atheists, especially at our sick and surreal modern universities.”

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In 2013, an instructor at Florida Atlantic University asked students to write the word “Jesus” on a paper, and then step on it... as the story spread, he received death threats.
Right-wing commentators missed the point of Poole’s lesson—which worked, ironically, better than expected because its very goal was to invite students to share their unease (if they had any) and think self-reflectively about it. According to James W. Neuliep, the Catholic professor at St. Norbert College who wrote the textbook from which the exercise came, after being instructed to step on the word Jesus, “Most will hesitate. Ask [them] why they can’t step on the paper. Discuss the importance of symbols in culture.”

But the student, who complained to the local news station after the incident, “Anytime you stomp on something it shows that you believe that something has no value. So if you were to stomp on the word Jesus, it says that the word has no value,” didn’t learn the intended lesson. The story was picked up as another version of God’s Not Dead with a heroic student battling an oppressive professor.

**Gross and Simmons report that faculty are hostile to the integration of religion into college curriculum and to practices that go “too far” to accommodate students’ religious views.**

**THE DEVIL IN THE CLASSROOM?**

Despite the promotion in Christian media of such stories as Poole’s, which cast Christian students as victims initially but victors ultimately, students may be rightly concerned that an outspoken defense of Christianity will have adverse effects on their academic success. “Personal talk about religion and spirituality [may] count as a negatively valued form of cultural capital in the upper echelons of the academic universe,” argue Neil Gross and Solon Simmons in “How Religious Are America’s College and University Professors?” Additionally, Gross and Simmons report that faculty are hostile to the integration of religion into college curriculum and to practices that go “too far” to accommodate students’ religious views, especially “if these [practices] conflict with the demands of science or higher learning.”

Students also may experience anxiety that they will “become more secular as their atheist professors call into question the value of religion,”
but the source of their secularization, if it actually happens, may not, in fact, be faculty. The characterization of faculty as anti-religion seems “implausible as a broad generalization,” suggest Gross and Simmons, given that most faculty members express religious belief of some sort and “the bulk of the teaching function in American colleges and universities is being carried out by academicians who are personally sympathetic to religion, albeit not in the most traditional forms.”

Elaine Howard Eckland suggests that the number of science professors at elite universities who are vocally anti-religious is just five percent. If the group appears more numerous, it may be because its members are vocal. Indeed, the majority of professors—even those who are not religious—do not see themselves as hostile to faith, though they are far more likely to report dislike for conservative Christians than other religious groups. In their survey of professors, Gross and Simmons note that more than 80 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “American colleges and universities’ welcome students of faith,” with the highest level of disagreement at community colleges and the lowest at doctoral granting institutions. Further, most professors (81 percent) claim some kind of religious belief, with variation according to the institution, the discipline, and the religion. Academics, in general, are more politically left-leaning because they are less likely to be religious, more likely to be Jewish, and less likely to be theologically conservative Protestant. However, interviews with high-profile scholars who are religious suggest that they do not face discrimination.

In some regards, professors actually may have much in common with the religiously devout. Both may be concerned with inequalities that cause human suffering.
and many kinds of religious faith. Indeed, evangelical Christians support some of the widest-ranging efforts to end human misery, including anti-trafficking measures, drug rehabilitation programs, orphanages, hospitals, and schools. Worldwide, organizations such as the evangelical World Vision work to end poverty and suffering, goals shared by globally-minded scholars. Despite this, conservatives are warned to avoid college majors considered “impenetrable islands of leftism (e.g., sociology, social work, women’s studies, and ethnic studies) that may be impervious to outside perspectives.”

**DIFFERENT SOURCES, SHARED VISIONS**

The problem is not that politically left-leaning, less-religious-than-average professors do not share the same concerns as politically and theologically conservative Christian students. The problem, when that professor triggers the landmine of conservative Christianity in their classroom, is that they see the source of the problems as fundamentally different. For example, sociologists are, by definition, interested in the social roots of social problems. In adopting “a sociological perspective,” they seek the source of inequality (and its solution) in structures. By contrast, religiously conservative students may find the source of social problems in supernatural sources or in individual bad choices. Both of these “Christian” explanations, though, are rooted in sin. As one student explained to me in an anonymous reflection at the end of a sociology course,

> From the Christian perspective of Genesis 3 (The Fall), everything talked about in this class makes sense. Sociology knows that there is something incredibly wrong with the world and tries to explain it through all of these theories and generalizations but there’s only one truth that makes it all come together and that is we are living in a fallen world that needs [to be] redeemed.
From this perspective, sociology helps us see the evidence of the problem—poverty, racism, sexism, economic exploitation—but the source is human sin. And the only real answer is Jesus. Because of humankind’s sin nature—original sin—all people are prone to make choices that result in harm to themselves and others.

Exploitation, in other words, is in our nature, and our social arrangements simply reflect that rather than create it. Ellen Messer-Davidow, University of Minnesota English professor, sees the desire to blame the individual as inherent in a politically conservative position: “The negativity … in attributing the problems of individuals to their sex or race, rather than to their social circumstances is, of course, symptomatic of … sexism and racism but even more fundamentally of … profound pessimism about human nature.” Indeed, while Christian students may reject Nietzsche’s assertion that “God is dead,” the conservative Christian belief that the very nature of humanity is to exploit others is perhaps more nihilistic than anything that purportedly atheist professor ever wrote.

ENDNOTES

4. See, for example, Knight, The Age of Consent: The Rise of Relativism and the Corruption of Popular Culture, with a forward written by Gary Bauer, former Family Research Council president.
6. Summit Ministries’ website may be viewed at: www.summit.org.
8. Sorbo came under fire in 2014, around the same time this film was released, for racist comments, some of which he retracted, and anti-Semitic comments.
10. Bluemke. “The ‘Stomp on Jesus’ Professor Finally Tells his Side of the Story.”
11. Starnes. “Professor Makes Students ‘Stomp on Jesus.’”
12. Drake. “Stepping on Jesus Classroom Exercise Developed by Professor at Catholic College.”
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Anonymity and Authenticity: Writing in College Classrooms

By Stephen Fried

“In a free country…you have the right to be anonymous.”

—John Whitehead, author of A Government of Wolves

“I tried to get my students to write about 9/11,” a new teacher tells us at a workshop, “and some of them just wouldn’t, and got angry about being asked.” Another says the same thing happened in her classroom. The topic remains emotionally charged here on Staten Island, where many firefighters, police officers, and emergency responders live in close-knit communities, alongside families whose members work in the financial center. Neighborhoods, even individual blocks, suffered devastating losses. Yet every fall, near the anniversary, my students write about their experiences on that day, and no one has ever objected or felt anything but relief and inspiration. The difference is—in my class—we write our accounts anonymously, and I collect and read them to the class. It’s an approach that I believe can enhance student participation in almost any kind of college classroom, also improve student writing, and provide specific benefits to classroom culture.

Stephen Fried is an adjunct lecturer in English at the College of Staten Island of the City University of New York. He can be reached at stephen.fried@csi.cuny.edu.
Anonymously is not the only way we write but every semester it becomes everyone’s favorite. Through anonymity, students cast aside concerns about how their writing will make them look in favor of being heard, and of hearing what others have to say. They use the language in which people think, from which emerges durable images and figures, and revealing errors and insights. Some prompts for these exercises might begin from course material I provide: “What is the subtext of this advertisement?” or “What is the crucial ‘turning point’ in this essay?” Student responses might diverge into unexpected insights such as “This ad assumes all home buyers are white,” or make connections between texts as in “Orwell’s sudden awareness of the condemned man’s humanity [in “A Hanging”] is like coming up out of Plato’s cave.” Invitations to more general responses such as “How is class going for you?” or “What would you like to know about the other students?” often ignite discussion, as does “High school is like jail and college is like the Army,” or suggest a new avenue for class response, such as “What’s the closest you’ve ever come to being killed?”

This is not what I’ve typically seen called “class discussion” in my student and teaching life, where the teacher introduces a topic or question, then urges and waits (and waits) for students’ verbal response. That more traditional approach is flawed in inception, execution, and sustainability. It begins with a “prompt” that assumes students’ knowledge and involvement in the topic, then proceeds in a way that reinforces impulsive assertiveness over reflective expression, and too often sets out along a determined course toward a preconceived goal. When I used to teach texts via “discussion,” only a persistent few who were good talkers and performers spoke, mostly to me, occasionally to each other. Most students, my first anonymous course surveys revealed, took the moment as license to let their minds wander, or think judgmentally about the talkers. Fewer than

Through anonymity, students cast aside concerns about how their writing will make them look in favor of being heard, and of hearing what others have to say.
two-thirds were even remotely engaged, and rarely did they contemplate the text, though occasionally they entertained ideas on the topic, which they declined to express. When there was a “successful” discussion, it was rare that everyone talked, or even all those who wanted to, due merely to constraints of time, memory and discursiveness. Since I’ve turned to activities based on anonymous response, not only has it changed how students engage with me and each other, but also how their writing develops.

**HOW DOES IT WORK?**

Every term, I have our printing service cut a 250-stack of canary card stock into 1,000 rectangles (5-1/2" x 4-1/4"). As students enter class, each picks up a few cards from a stack by the door. “Discussion” begins with a prompt to which each student writes on their cards a brief, occasionally timed, anonymous response. Prompts can range from compliance monitoring (“How did Orwell’s essay end?”) to instructor evaluation (“What’s hardest for you to grasp about our first lesson on MLA works cited entries?”) to skills and style exercises (“Simplify the sentence, ‘It came to me in my mind as a thought that the quantity of my happiness quotient was not elevated as highly as previously.’”) to issues raised by a student or professional text (“What are the strongest and weakest things about this essay?”) I also include open-ended topics suggested by students—favorites have included “How did you break up with your last boyfriend/girlfriend?” “Talk about your experience with and feelings about police officers,” and “What’s the best advertisement you’ve seen lately?”

Once the basic process takes hold, each class moves in its own direction. Short-term results include the virtual absence of “dead air.” The long run sees a welcome change in writing style and content. Students’ writing develops increased concreteness of details in examples and succinctness of language in argument, specific virtues from which, for many developing writers, quantitative, word-count assignments too often lead away.

*When I used to teach texts via “discussion,” only a persistent few who were good talkers and performers spoke, mostly to me, occasionally to each other.*
“Collective Memory” is an interactive public performance by Sheryl Oring, an art professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, which posed the question: “What would you like the world to remember about 9/11?” For this project, a pool of ten typists, each dressed in black ‘60s-era office attire, set up a public typing pool in New York City’s Bryant Park on the 10th anniversary of September 11. Passersby were invited to share their thoughts and the typists recorded their words verbatim on cards like the one published here. For more, see www.sheryloring.org/collective-memory.
After everyone has had time to write, I collect the cards and read them aloud. I don't have students read their own or each other's because my delivery ensures uniform clarity, maintains a neutral and non-judgmental tone, deciphers near-illegibilities, and reinforces students' sense they write with the full freedom of anonymity. Sometimes I set aside ones I'll come back to for clarification, or divide them into piles of similar responses, or according to some other organizational principle. An instruction I give at the outset is “Trust your first thoughts and don't censor.” I've never received a racist or ethnically biased response, though a few sexist and homo/trans/queer-phobic ones have prompted productive mini-lessons. Should such happen, I've decided I'd state that, though I respect students’ free speech, I also exercise my own as to what I won't read aloud. Fortunately, the extreme incivility that the distant anonymity of the Internet can foster does not manifest within the collaborative proximity and supportive culture of the classroom. I especially try to respect humor and to neutrally deliver lines, including explicit language and forays into hip-hop lyrics, which provide particular entertainment when I deliver them.

EXERCISES ON A THEME

Our class focuses on the theme of rhetoric, with specific attention paid to product and service advertisements. We also explore political, religious and lifestyle propaganda, including military recruitment commercials, and ambiguous ideological ploys like the European Union’s retracted “Enlacement” video on YouTube. One benefit of this theme is that it leads naturally to controversial issues for student research, such as militarism, smoking, abortion and, via the current spate of advertising by for-profit colleges and the increasing adoption of for-profit models by public institutions, to the close-to-home subject of student debt.

Fortunately, the extreme incivility that the distant anonymity of the Internet can foster does not manifest within the collaborative proximity and supportive culture of the classroom.
Another benefit is that, because Internet searches for information about advertisements lead mostly to more advertising, students’ quickly shift their inquiries to our university’s databases and to print journals, where they find critical alternatives to the default receptive approach to this taken-for-granted material.

To introduce our theme and the survey card method, I often begin with the following exercise: I tell the class, “The U.S. was attacked on September 11, 2001. Of the 19 hijackers who participated in the attack, 15 were citizens of and had passports from one single country. What country was that? Feel free to guess if you don’t know.” Everyone writes the one or two words necessary, and then I read the responses. Unless there are veterans in the class, it’s rare anyone knows. As I read, I stack the cards separately by country and then record each country’s frequency on the board. Thus far the overwhelmingly prevalent response is Iraq. Once we’ve got the right answer, if there’s no other discussion I point out that certain news outlets worked extensively to portray a nonexistent connection between the attacks and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. In a first semester freshman English, I might also briefly read from Amy Gershkoff and Shana Kushner’s “Shaping Public Opinion: The 9/11–Iraq Connection in the Bush Administration’s Rhetoric.” Then, in the second-term course, which emphasizes research methods, I might assign critical reading and fact-checking on the entire text.

For the next exercise, I say, “This one isn’t about what you know already but about what you can understand through careful reading and thinking.” I write on the board “You can’t get more cavity-fighting fluoride than with Crest,” and ask everyone to write on a card: first, what this statement’s author wants readers to think, and then what it really says. This simple statement serves to illustrate the “excluded middle” whereby “can’t get more” means “get exactly the same amount,”
so that the ad means all toothpastes have fluoride content equal to or less than the regulatory maximum. Our discussion also opens the area of text versus subtext, which becomes central to our study of advertising.

While the specific exercises may vary to suit each teacher’s course themes and goals, the benefits of anonymity to student writing will be consistent. Initially, it bypasses persona, the construct one wishes others to perceive, and circumvents students’ anxiety around fear of failure, given that simply to answer is to succeed. Anonymity also curbs impulses to self-censorship: students neither feel compelled to present themselves in a preconceived way, nor restrain themselves from expressing strong feelings, even cynical and profane ones, that raise the attention of the group and spur discussion. Tangential and topic-unrelated responses, which bespeak frustration with anything from the idea under discussion to the entire educational system, provide real-time indices of attention and engagement. Crucially, working this way stimulates interest in others’ writing and in others’ reaction to one’s own, both freely observed, without embarrassment or preconception.

In effect, each anonymous exercise has students participate in and consider the outcome of a survey, a process that becomes more formal as they proceed toward term-end research projects. These projects require students to select and present a video advertisement, and then administer to the class a survey of their own design in which an independent variable, often gender, is examined relative to some measure of response to the advertisement. Finally, they incorporate their results and discussion into a research paper that also presents the production background and analyzes the visual and verbal rhetoric of the chosen ad. For the surveys, they cite themselves as sources of what current MLA practice regards as an “interview.”

The direct, concise style fostered by these problem-solving exercises also provides a gateway to scholarly writing and avoids the redundancy

**Anonymity bypasses persona, the construct one wishes others to perceive, and circumvents students’ anxiety around fear of failure. Simply to answer is to succeed.**
and inflation that too often fill responses to “word count” assignments, which are readily perceived as holes to be filled, as is so well-defined by Richard Lanham and elaborated upon by Nils Clausson:

The default style of most inexperienced student writers is what Lanham in *Revising Prose* calls the School Style, a style “compound-ed in equal parts, of deference to a teacher of supposedly traditional tastes, at despair of filling up the required number of pages before tomorrow morning, and of the mindlessness born of knowing that what you write may not be read with attention.” In the neutral rather than honorific sense of the word style, the School Style is, then, very much a style, with recognizable defining features that students are unaware of since they do not see it as a style at all, just as they do not see their own accents as accents. The student prose style is overwhelmingly declarative; that is, it makes assertions unaffected by a consideration of any specific audience to which it might be directed.... only the teacher as grader or examiner. Now if students are ever going to acquire writing styles other than the deplorable School Style, then they need to study the styles of a wide range of prose, for only then will they perceive a style as a style.⁶

Students begin our anonymous enterprise in full equality: the paper is blank and so are they, as authors, with rights not only of free speech but invisibility, and no need to fear what might be revealed or, as one student described it, “naked in disguise.” How a writer looks and acts and whatever judgments might accrue to those characteristics don’t matter. As terms progress, recognition of one’s own and others’ styles grows. Students come to understand writers’ disembodied voices in terms of character and of the ways writing can create the voices that best reach out to others. Each class’s story is told as it is invented, at once heard and incorporated into each character’s arc.

**ACTIVITIES AND EVALUATIONS**

Here are some additional card activities I’ve found work well, but still form only a bare beginning for what we teachers might devise: applications to enrich our instruction and our students’ writing lives.
Fix/simplify this sentence. For work on skills and style I have students correct and clarify short samples of student writing, “without altering the original writer’s intentions” and we examine the results. In a variation, student groups work competitively on the same sample and place their results on the board for further, round-robin correction.

Who did the reading assignment? To evaluate compliance with and comprehension of reading assignments, I give a low-stakes, anonymous quiz that might ask, for example, “How did each of the two texts we read for homework end?” or “What is each author’s main point?” so that I get a sense how many read the homework and understood it in depth. The results have, on occasion, been real eye-openers. I let students know from the start that, while they’re not expected to understand everything they read perfectly, they’re assumed to have fully read each assigned text. While I abhor any kind of group sanctions based on such results, low compliance figures can lead to signed quizzes, followed up by requirements for handed-in annotation tasks or take-home tests for those not doing the work.

How’s it going? I poll students at the end of a lesson, though not at the end of a class, to uncover questions, anxieties and uncertainties, and find out what was clear and what requires further elaboration.

Where do we stand? And where to now? In addition to starting discussions, if an inquiry discussion stalls in static repetition or contention, we all write on the issue.

Paraphrase this. If I ask the class a question about, say, a matter of textual analysis or interpretation, the aggregate answer is always better than anything that would come up in open verbal discussion, and often better expressed than I could have done it myself.

Group research. For research practice, students work in groups using their laptops or phones to access online information—sometimes
on separate, related tasks, other times all on the same task—and each group produces a single “presentation card” that I read to the class. Later in the term, I add a documentation element, where MLA citations and works cited entries are produced for sources, using skills developed from classwork and also online citation services like KnightCite.7 One favorite exercise calls for research on product ingredients via consumer and technical sites. Typically, I present Unilever’s suggestive “How Dirty Boys Get Clean” campaign for Axe Shower Gel7 and then ask groups to research the ingredients.8 Many are known or suspected carcinogens, with others widely recognized as allergens.

Rate this instructor and course. At midterm and at the end of each term, I have students assign me letter grades, comment on the best and worst things about the class, and say whatever else they choose to say. I’ve found these comments of enormous value, more so than official evaluations, in modifying my instructional behavior, with improvement noted in subsequent ratings.

Piggybacked individual communications. In certain situations, I need to obtain an anonymous response from one student in particular, for example, when we write about the September 11 attacks and someone recounts a personal tragedy. To reach that student, when I solicit a response from the class on another matter, such as the clarity of a lesson, I add to the prompt: “When we wrote about the September 11 attacks, one of the class wrote about losing a family member. I won’t read that account aloud without their permission, so I’d like just that person to also tell me on this card whether or not it’s okay for me to share it.” As a fail-safe, or when there is more than one person’s response involved, I might also ask that a detail of their account, such as the name of the person they wrote about, be included to identify them as the author. This single-response tactic can also be applied in other cases, such as when a previous survey has had a significant but incomplete response, so that I might say, “When

My students, who live so much of their lives on the Internet, where they can’t know exactly who they’re talking to, feel comfortably at home in anonymity.
I asked about the previous lesson, someone wrote ‘At one point I got really confused!’ so now, on this new card, I’d like that person to tell us just what that point was and the nature of their confusion.”

My students, who live so much of their lives on the Internet, in anonymous chat rooms on Reddit or obfuscating social-media and dating sites like Instagram or Tinder, where they can’t know exactly who they’re talking to, feel comfortably at home in anonymity. In anonymous end-term surveys, they tell me the anonymous cards are perennial favorites. After one term’s end, one of my best students ever emailed me her appraisal of the method:

Anonymity is a huge topic now and this upcoming generation values it immensely, with things such as Snapchat, Whisper, and other apps that delete messages after they’re read, etc. Privacy and anonymity are becoming more coveted, maybe because we feel like we’re always being watched (because we are). So it makes sense that people would be more comfortable in a classroom setting if they were allowed to express themselves in the usual fashion they do.9

Based on student endorsements like this one, and the improvements in class participation and writing that I’ve seen, I believe I have the answer for that teacher whose students wouldn’t write about 9/11, or my many other colleagues who ask questions and hear crickets. Try anonymity.

ENDNOTES
2. The European Union’s retracted “Enlacement” video can be viewed on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPYTxb03U08 (accessed August 29, 2014).
3. Fifteen of the 19 hijackers in the September 11, 2001 attacks had passports from Saudi Arabia.
5. NoodleTools, “How Do I Cite a Survey I Distributed?”
7. See KnightCite documentation service online at http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/index.php
8. Unilever Corporation’s “Sexy Axe Ad—How dirty boys get clean!” can be viewed on Youtube. at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPEWzUNQg1I. Unilever Corporation’s Axe Shower Gel label: http://postimg.org/image/mr0l5uthp/ This is a posting of my own scan. The ingredient list is not readily available online, or other than by purchase or perusal at a retail outlet. They are, in order of amount: water, sodium laureth sulfate, cocamidopropyl betaine, fragrance, cocamide MEA, PPG-9, menthol, citric acid, sodium chloride, tetrasodium EDTA, methylchloroisothiazolinone, methylisothiazolinone, Blue 1 and Red 33. Two of the main ingredients—cocamidopropyl betaine and sodium laureth sulfate—are listed with some discussion on this webpage about shower gels: https://suite.io/galaxia-dawn-canada/2se92sn


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Sting

By Rich H. Kenney, Jr.

With my lecture
on the brink of defeat
to side conversations
and roaming cell phone eyes,
I asked if anyone
had trouble paying attention
to the newly introduced idea
when the quietest student of all
raised her hand and said
it was the wasp
skimming the ceiling
that had hers - and every head
looked up in time to see
the gliding yellow-black
buzz-duster, its long legs
dangling like landing gear
looking for a runway.

For a second, it hovered
over the middle row as if
pondering descent
onto a mound of chow mein-
then quickly crossed the room
in one face-felt swoop-
the face belonging to Kicks

Rich H. Kenney, Jr. is director of the Social Work Program and an assistant professor at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska. Recent publications include nonfiction prose in Faculty Focus and Social Work Today; poetry in Steam Ticket—A Third Coast Review.
who removed his cap
in reprisal when the gentle
voice opined composure
and suggested we keep
in check any weapons
that whack or smack-
for venom’s fresh spill,
she warned,
summoned trouble-
reckoning a nest of unrest.

She whispered
it wasn’t worth the risk
and explained how
one of her friends
got stung in the mouth,
creating angst and tongue-swell.

And so we sat
for what seemed
a semester with sealed
lips and trailing eyes-
a kind of rattled serenity
I never thought possible
thanks to a lesson in presence,
one may I learn to land.
The Professoriate Reconsidered: A Study of New Faculty Models

By Adrianna Kezar, Daniel Maxey, and Elizabeth Holcombe

The following is an excerpt of a longer report from The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success at the University of Southern California.¹

In recent decades, the employment model in higher education has markedly changed. Tenure-track faculty now represent just about 30 percent of the instructional faculty across all non-profit institutions.² Meanwhile, most faculty members who provide instruction at colleges and universities today are non-tenure-track faculty, the majority of them employed as adjuncts on term-to-term contracts, receiving meager compensation and usually no access to benefits, and encountering unsatisfactory working conditions.

A mounting body of evidence suggests that institutions’ failure to properly support this segment of the faculty is resulting in numerous negative impacts on the enterprise. Specifically, it is detrimental to student learning and outcomes. This includes problems for first-year persistence, retention, transfers from two- to four-year colleges, and graduation rates, with some of the impacts seen among first-generation and remedial students, who

Adrianna Kezar is professor of higher education at the University of Southern California and co-director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education. She also directs the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success. Daniel Maxey is a provost’s fellow in the Office of the Provost at Santa Clara University. He previously served as co-director of the Delphi Project. Elizabeth Holcombe is a research assistant in the Pullias Center, and a provost’s fellow in Urban Education Policy, Rossier School of Education, at the University of Southern California.
are the object of numerous special initiatives. Furthermore, increasing reliance on contingent appointments contributes to a variety of institutional problems, ranging from poor morale to ineffective governance. For example, there are signs of strain as a shrinking pool of tenure-track faculty takes on an increasing and likely unsustainable level of responsibility for satisfying the multiple obligations of curriculum development, departmental and other forms of service, and conducting research.

In the face of these conditions, the Delphi Project has sought to consider different faculty employment models and initiate a nationwide discussion aimed at creating a compelling vision for the future of the professoriate that will:

- be attractive to new faculty members,
- more effectively facilitate student learning,
- respond to external stakeholders’ critiques, and
- better sustain campus and systemic operations, and the health of the profession and overall enterprise.

The project emerged from the belief that the best way to begin developing such a vision is to examine the perspectives of a wide array of higher education stakeholders and to identify key areas of agreement that reflect opportunities for groups to work together toward change. With the term faculty model, we mean a set of elements that make up faculty career/work that includes contracts, roles, values, training, responsibilities, and priorities. We are not presenting a single new faculty model here; rather, we address an array of elements that could forge potential future faculty models.

In recent years, a few notable efforts to envision or create new faculty models have taken shape, although these are as yet isolated cases. Perhaps the best known effort was Ernest Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered, a book proposing what was then a new way to think about faculty work. More recently, in their book, The Humanities, Higher Education, and Academic Freedom: Three Necessary Arguments, Bérubé and Ruth suggest a new, teaching-intensive, tenure-track model. Medical schools already have developed a set of relatively new faculty arrangements that differentiate roles across clinical, teaching, and research lines; the medical school model also includes a more modest role for tenure, and fosters the par-
participation of all faculty members, regardless of their contract type, in governance. Meanwhile, Northwestern University has proposed to end distinctions among faculty, calling all faculty “professors,” and ending the use of non-tenure track terminologies. They are also in the process of starting a faculty promotion and advancement model that applies to all faculty, including professional development and involvement in governance. There are other examples of emerging ideas on campuses, as well, but there has been little attention to examining stakeholders’ view of these and other alternatives on a national scale.

Through the research presented in this report, we hope to identify and better understand the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches and the points of consensus about possible paths forward. This research tried to answer the following question: What might be some key characteristics of the future faculty in the U.S.? No strategic or principled model has yet emerged as an alternative to our current arrangements, nor has any future faculty model been critically examined.

**SURVEYING STAKEHOLDERS**

“There are some interesting concepts in the survey. I think the challenge overall is that academic institutions, and academics themselves, are not generally open to change. While many of the ideas presented would likely improve the quality of education for students and the quality of life for faculty, I don’t foresee a situation where these changes could be made nationally. Individual institutions might implement some of these. Change is hard.”

— Comment from an accreditor.

In this survey study, we collected the views of faculty (unionized and not, also tenure-track and not), as well as campus administrators, board
members, accreditors, and state-level higher education policymakers at a broad range of institutions, including public and private, two-year and four-year, and various Carnegie classification types, to gain a better understanding of these stakeholders’ views about potential new faculty models.

The survey included 39 two-part scaled response items, each presenting a potential attribute of a future faculty model, and it was disseminated between February and March of 2015. More than 1,500 responses were received, including about 900 from tenured or tenure-track faculty, and about 130 from non-tenure-track faculty. A little less than half of faculty respondents were union members.

These survey items were organized into eight categories related to faculty roles: 1) faculty pathways; 2) contracts; 3) unbundling of faculty roles; 4) status in the academic community; 5) faculty development, promotion, and evaluation; 6) flexibility; 7) collaboration, and community engagement; and 8) public good roles. Key findings include:

- Overall, we found general agreement across many of the questions and categories in this survey, indicating greater-than-anticipated potential for common ground and a way forward to create new faculty roles.
- Areas of strong agreement included the need for more full-time faculty, ensuring some sort of scholarly component in all faculty roles, fostering more collaboration among faculty, allowing some differentiation of roles focused on teaching and research, and developing a more complex view of scholarship, as epitomized by Boyer.6
- A major theme that emerged was the overarching need to maintain and restore professionalism to the faculty role, which relates to issues such as protecting academic freedom, inclusion in shared governance, equitable pay, career advancement, professional development, and the like.

A major theme was the overarching need to maintain and restore professionalism to the faculty role, which relates to issues such as protecting academic freedom...
We did not find remarkably resistant views among unionized faculty in our survey nor, indeed, views that were much different from those of faculty overall. Although the collective bargaining process might add a layer of complexity to making decisions about faculty employment and contracts, our survey responses indicate that the views of faculty members (both full- and part-time; tenure track and non-tenure track) who are in collective bargaining agreements are not distinctly different from their non-unionized peers.

Although many stakeholders had interest in and found many areas of a future faculty model attractive, there were gaps in interest in some proposals and in views on their feasibility in certain areas. Stakeholders registered concerns about the feasibility of proposals such as creativity contracts, more customized faculty roles, more flexible faculty roles, and creation of consortial hiring arrangements.

An important contribution of our survey is that the data collected challenge several pervasive myths. The notion that faculty members, administrators, and policymakers do not and cannot share similar perspectives on changing the future of the faculty—or, in the very least, some basic components of a potential future faculty model—is simply not borne out by the data. The view that unions are unwilling to engage in new models of faculty work is not at all reflected in the data, either.

While this study does not speak directly to financial concerns—the idea that the cost of change is too much to bear, particularly if that change involves equitable compensation for all faculty—we have conducted other work that complicates the myth that finances are preventing the pursuit and implementation of changes to the faculty model. In our publication, *Dispelling the Myth,* for example, we identify ways that institutions can
find the funds necessary to better support faculty and improve the quality of instruction. Our work suggests that the willingness to fund these changes—or the lack thereof—speaks to leaders’ priorities.⁷

The following pages more closely examine our survey findings in three areas of faculty work: faculty pathways, contracts, and unbundling of roles. Additional findings in five other areas are available online.⁸

**There was unified agreement in providing multiple pathways for faculty to focus long-term in a particular area such as research, teaching, or clinical practice.**

Currently, faculty work is dominated by two types of tracks or pathways: a tenure track, which typically involves faculty in research, teaching, and service in varying, and sometimes unbalanced proportions, and a non-tenure track, which typically employs faculty to focus primarily on one of those activities. However, due to the poor working conditions and lack of status typical of non-tenure-track positions, non-tenure-track pathways at many institutions fail to engage faculty optimally in even the one area of work that is their intended responsibility.

The first section of the survey sought to explore stakeholders’ views about alternate pathways and arrangements that could help to create a broader—and in some cases, a more customized—range of work roles, which would allow faculty to maximize their engagement in scholarship, creativity, satisfaction, and productivity.

**KEY AREAS OF AGREEMENT ON FACULTY PATHWAYS**

**Multiple pathways and differentiated roles**

There was unified agreement and moderate interest across the stakeholder groups in providing multiple pathways or tracks for faculty to pursue appointments that focus their primary, long-term responsibilities...
in a particular area such as research, teaching, or professional or clinical practice. Here, rather than maintaining a focus on teaching, research and service (with a dominant role for research), faculty would have greater flexibility to primarily focus on one area. This was determined to be an item to consider for the future professoriate. There also was strong agreement across groups that faculty roles should be differentiated among different types of institutions. For example, liberal arts colleges might need a different type of faculty role than, say, research universities: those varying missions wouldn't be served by a one-size-fits-all faculty model.

Broadly defined scholarship for all

Faculty members, administrators, and policymakers also showed strong agreement and interest in ensuring that faculty members were supported in maintaining some role in scholarship, regardless of whether their primary focus is on teaching, service, or research. (Scholarship was broadly defined and involves not only traditional research but also application of research or scholarship on teaching.) Many adjunct faculty members currently lack access to such opportunities. Or, when opportunities are available, support through compensation and funding is not always available.

Multiple definitions of scholarship

Another area of strong agreement and interest across surveyed groups was around a more widespread implementation of the broader view of scholarship advanced in Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered. Boyer asserted that scholarship should be broadly defined to encompass research on teaching, institutional service, and community engagement, and more varied forms of research that include synthesis. Although parts of Boyer’s proposal have been adopted in varying degrees at some institutions, the data from this study suggest strong agreement to prioritize this work.
Table 1. Stakeholder Groups’ Views on Faculty Pathways
Including frequency of positive and negative responses on attractiveness for each group, in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Pathways</th>
<th>Tenure-Track Faculty</th>
<th>Full-Time NTTF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating opportunities for highly customized and continuously changing faculty pathways through Creativity Contracts.</td>
<td>A 50%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U 34%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing multiple pathways or tracks for faculty members to pursue appointments that focus primary, long-term responsibilities in a particular area of practice.</td>
<td>A 53%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U 31%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancing a more complete and widespread implementation of Ernest Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered.</td>
<td>A 73%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U 11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating greater differentiation of faculty contracts and roles among different institutional types to ensure that distinct missions are served.</td>
<td>A 39%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U 38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing the majority of faculty members’ roles throughout higher education around responsibilities for teaching and student development.</td>
<td>A 27%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U 58%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting all faculty members who teach, regardless of contract or rank, in conducting scholarship.</td>
<td>A 83%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U 7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligning individual faculty pathways more closely to departmental and institutional needs.</td>
<td>A 26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U 48%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A - Attractive  U - Unattractive

Note: Values that are bolded and underlined indicate that more respondents in the corresponding stakeholder group viewed the potential attribute of future faculty models as feasible, rather than infeasible.
Table 1. Stakeholder Groups’ Views on Faculty Pathways
Including frequency of positive and negative responses on attractiveness for each group, in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part-Time NTTF</th>
<th>Provosts</th>
<th>Deans</th>
<th>Accreditors</th>
<th>Governing Boards</th>
<th>SHEEOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>60%</strong></td>
<td>57%</td>
<td><strong>68%</strong></td>
<td><strong>74%</strong></td>
<td><strong>55%</strong></td>
<td><strong>71%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76%</td>
<td><strong>88%</strong></td>
<td><strong>83%</strong></td>
<td><strong>83%</strong></td>
<td><strong>80%</strong></td>
<td><strong>71%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>62%</strong></td>
<td><strong>63%</strong></td>
<td>57%</td>
<td><strong>65%</strong></td>
<td><strong>70%</strong></td>
<td><strong>71%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>55%</strong></td>
<td><strong>53%</strong></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td><strong>57%</strong></td>
<td><strong>75%</strong></td>
<td><strong>71%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>91%</strong></td>
<td><strong>77%</strong></td>
<td><strong>75%</strong></td>
<td><strong>87%</strong></td>
<td><strong>75%</strong></td>
<td><strong>71%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>33%</strong></td>
<td><strong>68%</strong></td>
<td><strong>58%</strong></td>
<td><strong>56%</strong></td>
<td><strong>90%</strong></td>
<td><strong>57%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creativity contracts

Another component of Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered included in the survey met with moderate interest and strong agreement across stakeholder groups. Creativity contracts are a tool for facilitating faculty members’ participation in a broader range of scholarly activities by engaging them in highly customized and continuously changing faculty roles. Each group agreed that giving faculty members the ability to negotiate involvement in a variety of roles over the course of their careers is an important feature to consider for future faculty models, rather than the more narrow foci and largely unchanging roles that define faculty work today.

Key areas of disagreement

One area where the data revealed disagreement was the proposal to focus the majority of faculty roles on teaching, reserving research and service as more exceptional roles for only a small subset of faculty at research-oriented institutions. While state executive officers, board members, accreditors, and provosts were interested in reducing research and service responsibilities, faculty members (tenure-track and, to a lesser extent, part-time and full-time non-tenure-track, too) and deans did not find an increased focus on teaching at the expense of research and service to be an attractive idea.

Another point of disagreement was the survey item that called for more closely aligning faculty work to departmental and institutional needs, rather than having a more individual orientation. Board members, state executive officers, provosts, and deans were more interested in this proposal, while faculty of all types found it to be unattractive. Autonomy has long been an important part of faculty work. Conversations about future faculty roles need to take this historical context into consideration, and supporters of greater alignment with departmental and institutional goals will need to make clear justifications for why this might be an important priority.

How might current contracts be altered to best suit the needs of faculty members, students, departments, and institutions, as well as the communities they serve?
STAKEHOLDERS’ PERSPECTIVES: CONTRACTS

The current range of faculty contract types—tenured, tenure-track, full-time non-tenure-track, and part-time or adjuncts—dominates the higher education landscape. If this system is in need of revision, what types of contracts might replace them? Or, how might current contracts be altered to best suit the needs of faculty members, students, departments, and institutions, as well as the needs of the communities they serve? The second section of the survey explored views about potential changes to contracts, ranging from mere modifications of the current model to more extensive changes that would dramatically alter the status quo. This section also acknowledged that the type and degree of change necessary might be differentiated across the enterprise, depending on the different missions and conditions on the ground at individual institutions and within academic units.

KEY AREAS OF AGREEMENT ON CONTRACTS

Incentive and reward structures

Unified agreement and moderate interest was found among all stakeholder groups in revising incentives and reward structures and policies to better reflect institutional priorities. For example, teaching institutions could tie promotion and salary increases more directly to measures of teaching excellence, rather than to research productivity.

Institutional consortia

There also was unified agreement and moderate interest across groups that consortium agreements were an approach to consider. Consortium agreements allow neighboring institutions to create shared, full-time faculty positions for individuals who otherwise would be hired by multiple institutions in the consortium individually and often on part-time contracts.9

Full-time, non-tenure-track and teaching-only tenure-track positions

There was agreement among most stakeholder groups on creating more full-time, non-tenure-track positions to reduce reliance on part-time positions, although the levels of interest were mixed across groups.
### Table 2. Stakeholder Groups’ Views on Contracts
Including frequency of positive and negative responses on attractiveness for each group, in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contracts</th>
<th>Tenure-Track Faculty</th>
<th>Full-Time NTTF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phasing out tenure in favor of multi-year, renewable contracts.</td>
<td>A 9%</td>
<td>U 86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a tenure track, but modifying it by implementing term-tenure contracts eligible for renewal every 10–15 years.</td>
<td>A 14%</td>
<td>U 74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding teaching-only tenure positions to the faculty.</td>
<td>A 45%</td>
<td>U 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a faculty model that closely resembles the current system of tenure-track, full-time non-tenure-track, and part-time faculty, but with some modifications.</td>
<td>A 58%</td>
<td>U 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the utilization of full-time non-tenure-track appointments to reduce reliance on part-time positions.</td>
<td>A 63%</td>
<td>U 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating consortium agreements among local institutions to develop shared, full-time faculty positions.</td>
<td>A 59%</td>
<td>U 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising incentives and rewards structures and policies to better reflect different institutional priorities.</td>
<td>A 61%</td>
<td>U 15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A - Attractive     U - Unattractive

Note: Values that are bolded and underlined indicate that more respondents in the corresponding stakeholder group viewed the potential attribute of future faculty models as feasible, rather than infeasible.
## Table 2. Stakeholder Groups' Views on Contracts

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<th>Accreditors</th>
<th>Governing Boards</th>
<th>SHEEOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phasing out tenure in favor of multi-year, renewable contracts.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a tenure track, but modifying it by implementing term-tenure contracts eligible for renewal every 10–15 years.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding teaching-only tenure positions to the faculty.</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a faculty model that closely resembles the current system of tenure-track, full-time non-tenure-track, and part-time faculty, but with some modifications.</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the utilization of full-time non-tenure-track appointments to reduce reliance on part-time positions.</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating consortium agreements among local institutions to develop shared, full-time faculty positions.</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising incentives and rewards structures and policies to better reflect different institutional priorities.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A - Attractive     U - Unattractive

Note: Values that are bolded and underlined indicate that more respondents in the corresponding stakeholder group viewed the potential attribute of future faculty models as feasible, rather than infeasible.
Additionally, there was agreement among most groups and moderate interest in adding teaching-only tenured positions to the faculty. Note that the teaching-only concept presented here is not the same as the item in an earlier section that calls for teaching to be the primary focus for a majority of faculty. By contrast, the contracts proposal discussed here suggests making teaching-focused tenure-track positions an option, one type of faculty position among several position types.

**For non-tenure-track faculty, the status quo represents a system that has not worked well for them. There is unease about sticking with a system viewed as broken.**

**Key areas of disagreement on contracts**

Much of the current discussion about future faculty models focuses on a choice between two contrasting ideas: maintaining a model closely resembling the status quo or taking the more radical step of eliminating tenure and replacing it with some alternative system, such as one built on multi-year contracts. We included three questions that cut to the core of the debate between these different approaches, asking respondents to evaluate the following three proposals:

1. **On maintaining the status quo:** Maintaining a faculty model that closely resembles the current system of tenure-track, full-time non-tenure-track, and part-time faculty, but with some modifications.

2. **On phasing out tenure:** Phasing out tenure in favor of multi-year, renewable contracts (typically shorter contracts during a probationary period, then increasing to five years later on) with clear protections for academic freedom, clearly defined grievance processes, and clear expectations for faculty members’ contributions to teaching, research, and service.
3. **On a middle option, keeping tenure but moving toward renewable term-tenure contracts:** These contracts would be eligible for renewal every 10 to 15 years.

To many groups, the idea of sticking with the current arrangements, even with some modifications, is unattractive; these groups include full-time non-tenure-track faculty, part-time non-tenure-track faculty, state executive officers, and board members. The highest level of responses against the status quo came from state officers. For non-tenure-track faculty specifically, the status quo represents a system that has not worked particularly well for them. There is unease about sticking with a system that many view as broken.

Proposals that involve eliminating tenure are just as unattractive—if not more so—to other groups, notably tenure-track faculty and deans. Perhaps unsurprisingly, tenure-track faculty expressed the strongest opinions that phasing out tenure in favor of multi-year, renewable contracts was unattractive. Accreditors, board members, and state officers were the most interested in the idea.

On the third proposal, regarding term-tenure contracts, opinions were mostly divided between the internal institutional stakeholders and external policymakers. While faculty groups, deans, and provosts found the idea unattractive, accreditors, board members, and state officers approved.

**STAKEHOLDERS’ PERSPECTIVES: UNBUNDLING FACULTY ROLES**

The unbundling of faculty roles is a phenomenon that has been unfolding since the inception of American higher education. Generically, unbundling is the differentiation of tasks and services that were once offered by a single provider or individual (“bundled”) and their subse-
quent distribution among multiple providers and individuals.\textsuperscript{10} The third section of the survey contained a number of potential attributes of future faculty models that involved professional and instructional unbundling, thus breaking the triad of research, teaching, and service. Instructional unbundling refers to separating the different roles involved with teaching into course design, delivery, assessment, and advising.\textsuperscript{11} Many experts on faculty issues believe that the unbundling of faculty roles is a trend that is likely to continue; in light of this, it is important to understand some of the ways that unbundling will affect faculty roles in the years to come.\textsuperscript{12}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unbundling of Faculty Roles</th>
<th>Tenure-Track Faculty</th>
<th>Full-Time NTTF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanding the number of positions that are focused more exclusively on teaching, research, or service.</td>
<td>A 36% U 42%</td>
<td>A 60% U 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the use of technology and instructional software to give faculty members opportunities to use in-person class time to engage students.</td>
<td>A 40% U 33%</td>
<td>A 48% U 28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making greater use of educational professionals whose roles complement the knowledge and skills of traditional faculty members.</td>
<td>A 39% U 38%</td>
<td>A 42% U 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbundling the instructional role to focus faculty members’ attention on the most essential tasks, such as curriculum development, course design, and outcomes assessment.</td>
<td>A 23% U 55%</td>
<td>A 30% U 47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{A - Attractive} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{U - Unattractive}

Note: Values that are bolded and underlined indicate that more respondents in the corresponding stakeholder group viewed the potential attribute of future faculty models as feasible, rather than infeasible.
KEY AREAS OF AGREEMENT ON THE UNBUNDLING OF FACULTY ROLES

While the survey responses revealed several key points of agreement on possible changes to faculty pathways and to contracts, reactions were generally more mixed on the question of unbundling faculty roles. Among these contested questions, the survey item with the most agreement among groups was the proposal to expand the number of positions that focus more exclusively on teaching, research, or service, rather than retaining the emphasis on all three roles within most faculty positions. This proposal reflects a trend that has already been occurring over the last 30 to 40 years. It is possible that interest in this proposal is a reflection of stakeholders’ familiarity with this trend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unbundling of Faculty Roles</th>
<th>Part-Time NTTF</th>
<th>Provosts</th>
<th>Deans</th>
<th>Accreditors</th>
<th>Governing Boards</th>
<th>SHEEOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanding the number of positions that are focused more exclusively on teaching, research, or service.</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing the use of technology and instructional software to give faculty members opportunities to use in-person class time to engage students.</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making greater use of educational professionals whose roles complement the knowledge and skills of traditional faculty members.</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbundling the instructional role to focus faculty members’ attention on the most essential tasks, such as curriculum development, course design, and outcomes assessment.</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
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<td>35%</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Areas of disagreement on unbundling

The greatest area of disagreement emerged from responses to the last proposal in the section: unbundling the teaching role into many discrete responsibilities. In comparison with other proposals in this section, the fourth proposal entails more dramatic unbundling of the instructional role by only involving faculty members in such tasks as curriculum development, course design, and outcomes assessment.

Respondents from the accreditation community and state officers supported unbundling instruction in this way, and their support was mirrored in their interest in taking care of other instructional activities through some combination of technology and additional educational professionals. However, these stakeholder groups’ responses on this fourth proposal contrast with the views expressed by all faculty groups, provosts, and deans. Although there was some mixed interest in the other proposals—splitting faculty roles into teaching, research, and service, and introducing technology or paraprofessionals to support instruction—this final survey item found only weak interest among these key groups. The responses suggest a concern that unbundling the faculty role in instruction can lead to faculty members losing meaningful involvement in work related to one core institutional mission: teaching.

Said one tenured/tenure track faculty member: “This ‘unbundling’ concept is troubling. These tasks are the faculty role.” A full-time, non-tenure-track faculty member agreed: “I think unbundling is a terrible idea. The experience of teaching real students in the classroom is necessary for knowing how to design a course, a curriculum, and knowing what standards to use for assessment.”

These quotes indicate faculty concerns that the various instructional tasks of faculty are too intertwined to be unbundled this way, and also that such unbundling would lead to an increasing undervaluing and de-professionalizing of the faculty role.
Technology and education support professionals

The second proposal, to increase the use of technology for content delivery to free up class time for in-person student engagement, was met with strong interest among all groups except faculty. A similar split can be seen in the responses to the third proposal, to complement traditional faculty with other educational professionals. Faculty members responded to this idea with far less interest than was expressed by other stakeholders.

It is important to note that we have examined the issue of unbundling the faculty role in earlier research and we discovered that very little research exists on the efficacy of unbundling; rather, most existing research points to potential problems.13

We have examined the issue of unbundling the faculty role and discovered very little research on the efficacy of unbundling; rather, most research points to potential problems.

A CLOSE LOOK AT FACULTY MEMBERS IN UNIONS

“Collective bargaining agreements will constrain most public universities with unions making most of these options impossible.”

—Comment from a dean.

Because unions have been characterized so regularly and fervently as a major obstacle to change, we decided that it would be particularly important to compare the responses of faculty members in collective bargaining agreements to the full sample of faculty members in our study. Our analysis found that union members’ perspectives on proposals were not remarkably different from the views expressed by members of the faculty overall. In this section, we present some of the differences that did emerge in our analysis, organized by faculty rank. An important point to take away from this section is that, although the collective bargaining process might add a layer of complexity to making decisions about faculty
employment and contracts, the views of faculty members who are in collective bargaining agreements are not distinctly different from those of their non-unionized peers.

**Unionized tenure and tenure-track faculty**

Tenured or tenure-track faculty in collective bargaining units showed little, if any difference in their responses on the attractiveness or feasibility of proposals in the survey, as compared to tenured and tenure-track faculty overall. In those cases where differences were exhibited, survey responses showed a difference of a very few percentage points. The section on unbundling of faculty roles was the one section of the survey in which a major difference appeared to correspond to unionization. In that section, eight percent more of the unionized tenure-track faculty express interest in expanding the number of teaching-, research-, or service-only positions among the faculty as compared to the tenure-track faculty average, and nine percent more unionized tenure-track faculty find increasing use of technology to supplement instruction attractive. Additionally, about five percent more union members find the use of paraprofessionals attractive. Thus, unionized faculty demonstrated views that were more favorable of the attractiveness of these elements of new faculty models, as compared to the overall averages.

**Unionized full-time non-tenure-track faculty**

Full-time non-tenure-track faculty members in collective bargaining units were also highly similar in their responses to their peers overall. There were only a few areas of pronounced difference. In the faculty pathways section, more union members express interest in providing multiple pathways for long-term focus on teaching, research, or clinical practice (11 percent more in the unionized group find this attractive), in creating

**Although the collective bargaining process might add a layer of complexity, the views of these faculty members are not distinctly different from those of their non-unionized peers.**
different contracts and roles among different institution types (14 percent more find this attractive), and in focusing a majority of faculty roles around teaching and student development. An additional eight percent more of union members found phasing out tenure attractive as compared to full-time non-tenure-track faculty members overall. Like their tenured and tenure-track colleagues in bargaining units, these faculty were more interested in unbundling than the full-time non-tenure-track average: 12 percent more unionized faculty found expanding exclusive teaching-, research-, and service-only positions attractive, 17 percent more found increasingly technology in instruction attractive, 10 percent more found making greater use of paraprofessionals attractive, and 12 percent more found it attractive to unbundle the faculty role to focus on essential tasks.

Unionized part-time non-tenure-track faculty

These faculty in unions were similar to their peers who were not in unions. The main differences were in the contracts section. As compared to the non-unionized peers, 13 percent fewer unionized part-time faculty found the idea of phasing out tenure for multi-year contracts attractive and nearly 10 percent fewer showed interest in implementing term tenure. An additional 10 percent of unionized part-time faculty found adding teaching-only tenure positions attractive, as compared to part-time faculty overall, and 10 percent more showed interest in maintaining the status quo.

CONCLUSION

Our report points to many areas of agreement that can serve as starting points for discussions, lending points of consensus to move from idea to reality and promote greater dialogue about the future of the faculty. It
dispels pervasive myths that suggest there is a tremendous and impassable gulf between stakeholder groups’ views about the purpose and structure of the faculty. If this report has any effect, we hope that it will help to provoke a collaborative dialogue about change. We believe that efforts to consider, design, and implement future faculty models are more likely to be successful when a diverse group of stakeholders are involved and engaged in each stage of the process.

As these conversations unfold and new visions for faculty work move forward, it is necessary to continue conducting research on how changes in these roles impact faculty work, performance, institutional goals, and student outcomes. Very little research has been done on faculty roles, and changes in faculty roles have rarely been guided by research. In our work, we continue to trace the changes taking place in faculty roles, and we seek to push back against the lack of accountability for changes that ignore data on the impact they have on students and faculty and neglect existing knowledge about best practices.

Fortunately, our survey data reflect enthusiastic interest in new approaches and in certain key attributes of future faculty models. Here there is the potential to envision and adopt a greater diversity of roles beyond the traditional tenure track and the non-tenure-track positions that have grown to become a majority of the professoriate. The data presented here offer some valuable insights about proposals that might be discussed, adapted, adopted, and implemented as institutions—and the enterprise as a whole—explore the future of the faculty.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success by visiting www.thechangingfaculty.org. For the full report, see http://www.uscrossier.org/pullias/research/projects/delphi/.

2. Kezar and Maxey, Adapting by Design: Creating Faculty Roles and Defining Faculty Work to Ensure an Intentional Future For Colleges And Universities; NCES, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

Completion,” pp. 167-94; Kezar and Maxey, “Understanding Key Stakeholder Belief Systems or Institutional Logics Related to Non-Tenure-Track Faculty and the Changing Professoriate.”


7. The Delta Cost Project and other sources have shown how funding for instruction and academic budgets has declined, as other priorities subsume larger shares of budgets. Informative reports on this topic and others related to higher education finance and costs can be found on the project’s website at www.deltacostproject.com.

8. Due to space limitations, we can’t share perspectives on all eight categories of the survey.

9. An example of an existing consortium agreement is the Five Colleges Consortium in Massachusetts. Information can be found at www.fivecolleges.edu.

10. Smith, The Unbundling and Rebundling of the Faculty Role in E-Learning Community College Courses, pp. 43-5.


12. Kezar, Gehrke, and Maxey, Unbundling versus Designing Faculty Roles.


WORKS CITED


Kezar, A. and D. Maxey. 2015. Adapting by Design: Creating Faculty Roles and Defining Faculty Work to Ensure an Intentional Future For Colleges And Universities. Los Angeles: The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success.


Smith, V. C. 2010. “Essential Tasks and Skills for Online Community College Faculty.” New Directions for Community Colleges, 150.
Recommendation

by Peter Schmitt

Her poem touched me, and it made me laugh, a sweet and witty elegy for her cat, and after she graduated I wrote a long, enthused letter on her behalf when she applied to join the police force. Whatever possessed me, later, to Google her lines, finding she’d lifted them wholesale from an obscure British poet, my first thought was to write again—to her sergeant. But then I stopped; she’d put one over on me, and I hoped she wasn’t patrolling the streets, assigned anything dangerous or urgent, but using her true talents at a desk, investigating fraud, or identity theft.

Peter Schmitt is the author of five collections of poems, including Renewing the Vows, from David Robert Books. He has received The “Discovery” Prize, The Lavan Award from The Academy of American Poets, and The Peterkin Prize from Converse College. He has taught creative writing and literature at the University of Miami since 1986.
We’re Not All White Men: Using a Cohort/Cluster Approach to Diversify STEM Faculty Hiring

By Sandra Sgoutas-Emch, Lisa Baird, Perla Myers, Michelle Camacho, and Susan Lord

The lack of diversity among higher-education faculty in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines represents a grave structural inequality with serious consequences for our students. Fixing it means rethinking the pathway to the professoriate for women and people of color, and avoiding the problems with hiring in STEM fields that persist for many reasons, including: 1) structural factors and the social context of hiring; 2) personally held beliefs and values, including implicit biases of those in positions of leadership; and 3) the absence of policies and processes to address historically underrepresented minorities.

Sandra Sgoutas-Emch is the director of the Center for Educational Excellence and a professor of psychological sciences at the University of San Diego (USD). Her areas of expertise include faculty development, community engagement and the biopsychosocial variables linked to stress. Lisa M. Baird, Ph.D., is a professor of biology at USD. Her research interests include girls/women in STEM disciplines and developmental changes occurring during plant growth at the cellular, subcellular and molecular level. Perla Myers, Ph.D., is an associate dean in the USD College of Arts and Sciences and a professor in the Department of Mathematics. Myers’ most recent work involves the improvement of the mathematical education of teachers. Michelle Camacho, Ph.D., is a professor in the sociology department at USD. Her book, Borderlands of Education: Latinas in Engineering, is co-authored with Dr. Susan Lord. She is also co-editor of Mentoring Faculty of Color: Essays on Professional Development and Advancement in Colleges and Universities (with Dwayne Mack and Elwood Watson). Susan M. Lord is professor and chair of electrical engineering at USD. Her research focuses on the study and promotion of diversity in engineering including student pathways and inclusive teaching.
We know that traditional faculty searches and attempts to diversify faculty are ineffective in landing faculty of color and women, especially in STEM. These traditional procedures generally entail: writing a narrow job description that focuses solely on disciplinary scholarship and teaching (to the exclusion of other elements that could more broadly appeal to a wider pool); publishing the position announcement in the leading journals in the fields (and neglecting specialty outlets); using networks that perpetuate typical hiring practices; and attending traditional disciplinary conferences to recruit, and sometimes interview, prospective candidates. To address these problems, many institutions are turning to innovative methods to diversify their faculties. These include developing job descriptions that focus on areas of interest to a more diverse pool of faculty, which may include aspects of the institutional mission, such as a commitment to social justice or community engagement. These descriptions also include opportunities for collaboration, including cross-disciplinary initiatives or undergraduate research mentorship, and the creation of strategic plans or goals that highlight a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

One approach being implemented to enhance diversity is using cohort or cluster hiring, whereby a college or university hires a group of faculty with common interests, but who come from different disciplinary backgrounds. Institutions including the University of Illinois, University of Chicago, and North Carolina State University have found that a cohort approach to hiring has improved retention of faculty of color, enhanced socialization, and reduced feelings of isolation among faculty of color by providing a “built-in” support network. That ‘critical mass’ of faculty of color also helps build community and increase retention, research shows. Additionally, a recent report by the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities/Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Advisory committee concluded that cohort/cluster hiring, although new and
untested, has the potential to increase faculty diversity, enhance campus climate and develop a supportive environment for faculty success. That report focused on large, research-oriented institutions; work still needs to be done to examine the efficacy and success of such types of hires at other institutions, including primarily undergraduate institutions (PUI).

The University of San Diego (USD) is one such institution—a medium-sized, private, independent PUI—but with a distinctive commitment to advancing female faculty in STEM fields. Since 2011, when USD won a National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE grant to develop a comprehensive project known as AFFIRM (Advancement of Female Faculty: Institutional Climate, Recruitment, and Mentoring), the grant team and others have focused on addressing issues related to race, ethnicity, and gender among USD faculty, particularly those in STEM and the behavioral/social sciences. Although a majority of undergraduate students majoring in some STEM disciplines at USD are female (62 percent), these percentages are not reflected in the percentages of women faculty, who number just 38 percent. These disparities mean students often lack adequate mentorship and representation among faculty. These relationships can be key to retention of both females and students of color in the STEM disciplines. Therefore, one aim of AFFIRM is to recruit women faculty, especially women faculty of color in STEM. This paper describes how AFFIRM achieved a successful cohort/cluster hire among women of color in STEM. The authors of this paper, who are members of the AFFIRM grant team, believe our process could serve as a useful framework for transforming faculty hires at other campuses, especially at PUIs.

**STEP ONE: APPROVAL AND BUY-IN**

A number of structural conditions enabled this cohort/cluster approach to faculty hiring to be successful. First, support from USD's
upper administration and deans was critical. In our grant proposal to the NSF, the provost promised at least two faculty positions in STEM and social/behavioral sciences. Having this commitment in writing proved to be important, as the provost who made this decision left the institution shortly thereafter. The interim provost, having the document in hand, agreed to honor the commitment.

Second, the credibility of the AFFIRM faculty team—an interdisciplinary team of women from departments including biology, mathematics and computer science, psychological sciences, sociology, and electrical engineering—was essential for buy-in by the chairs. All of the AFFIRM team members are full professors and hold respected positions on campus, including several department heads, an associate dean, and the director of the Center for Educational Excellence. By the time USD actually embarked on cluster/cohort hiring in STEM, the AFFIRM team had been working together for three years on grant initiatives, including developing a mentoring program and an interactive theatre program that facilitates dialogue on diverse faculty issues.6

In fall 2013, the AFFIRM team met with the deans of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering, as well as the vice provost for inclusion and diversity, to discuss and formulate a method of advertising the two new positions. During this discussion, the idea of hiring a STEM faculty cohort/cluster to facilitate mentoring, diversity, and interdisciplinary studies emerged and was enthusiastically approved. However, the discussion did not include a roadmap or process for how to conduct these hires.

Initially, the team considered a competitive process to allocate these two positions among USD’s many STEM and social/behavioral sciences departments. However, the AFFIRM team anticipated that departments not chosen would be unhappy, while the departments chosen might just
do “business as usual,” deciding on a candidate that reflected the status quo. Therefore, the decision was made by the AFFIRM team to cast a wide net to attract candidates interested in mentoring a diverse community of students and in collaborating on interdisciplinary initiatives that contribute to the campus-wide intellectual efforts.

**STEP TWO: THE SEARCH BEGINS**

The search process began with an invitation to all eligible departments to be included in a cohort/cluster hire that emphasized undergraduate mentoring, diversity and interdisciplinarity. Figure 1 outlines the search and selection process.

Through the NSF ADVANCE grant and a task force commissioned by the provost, the university had completed a faculty recruitment toolkit that included best hiring practices for diversifying the faculty. One key area that has been identified as problematic for achieving a more diverse pool of candidates is the way faculty job advertisements are written. Typically, advertisements for STEM faculty positions are written tightly and prescriptively, but for this cohort/cluster, with the support of the administration, the use of the toolkit, and based on research at other institutions, the team used a different approach.

The team created one general version of the advertisement, plus versions that contained language specific to each of the participating departments. Key phrases used to attract a diverse pool included statements about USD’s commitment to diversity, such as “We endeavor to build a cohort of teacher-scholars who will offer a strong contribution to the diversity of USD,” and prompts candidates to describe their interest in mentoring students from underrepresented groups, diversity and inclusion, and interdisciplinary teaching and research. Candidates also were asked to provide a letter of recommendation that specifically addressed
Applications received

*Initial Screening by AFFIRM Team*
Applications received by the AFFIRM team and screened to ensure:
- Submission of all application materials.
- Interest in mentoring female students and students from under-represented backgrounds.
- Interest in working as part of an interdisciplinary cohort.
- Interest in promoting interdisciplinary collaborations in the undergraduate curriculum.

Applications passing initial screening

*Departmental Review*
Applications sent to appropriate departments (some sent to multiple departments) for review:
- Each department performed customary evaluation of applicants and selected 0-3 candidates.
- With support from the deans/provost each department selected up to 2 candidates for campus interviews.

Candidates invited for campus interviews

*Campus Interviews*
Applicants went through the customary on-campus interview process according to the host department, plus interviews with:
- Members of the AFFIRM team.
- The deans of arts and sciences and engineering.
- The associate provost for inclusion and diversity.
- The provost or vice-provost.

Up to one candidate recommended by each department

*Provost’s/Deans’ Decisions*
Eight faculty members were selected to be invited to the cohort via:
- The two original faculty lines promised by the provost.
- An additional line requested by the deans/provost and granted by the president for the cohort.
- Two existing lines granted by departments for the cohort.
- Three faculty members hired through regular processes.

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Figure 1.
Outline of the Search Process for the Cohort/Cluster Hire.
their efforts and commitment to mentoring and interdisciplinary teaching and research.

**Step Three: Applicant Review and Hiring**

In February 2014, 217 applications were received: 47 percent of the applicants were white, 28 percent Asian, 10 percent Hispanic or Latino, four percent black, two percent two or more races, and one percent American Indian or Alaska Native. Overall, 45 percent of the applicants were women, 48 percent men, and seven percent declined to state. The AFFIRM team reviewed the applications using a rubric produced from the job description, and vetted the pool based on the candidates’ statements about mentoring and interdisciplinary undertakings. Specifically, the AFFIRM team was looking for evidence that applicants addressed the criteria outlined in the job description, including a stated commitment to mentoring, diversity and interdisciplinary work, substantiated by the candidate’s accomplishments, as well as thoughtful reflections. At least two AFFIRM team members reviewed each file. Those candidates who did not include the requested statements or did not meet the standards of the criteria were eliminated.

The team was looking for evidence that applicants addressed the criteria outlined in the job description, including a stated commitment to mentoring and diversity.

After the interview process, each department forwarded the selected candidate(s) to the dean with a brief rationale. The AFFIRM team
met in late April and, given the strength of the candidates, decided to make the recommendation, without ranking, to hire as many as possible. Representatives from the AFFIRM team then met with the deans and the provost, and advocated hiring more than two candidates. Impressed by the candidate pool, the deans and the provost agreed. Specifically, the provost agreed to fund a third tenure-line position, and an additional three departments were approved and encouraged to use open lines. Additionally, two women who were being hired through regular searches and satisfied the criteria of the AFFIRM call were invited to join the cohort/cluster. This brought the total size of the cohort/cluster to eight women faculty members, including five women of color. These new women assistant professors included a chemist, a biochemist, a biologist, an industrial and systems engineer, a mechanical engineer, a mathematician, and a marine biologist....

**STEP FOUR: REFLECTING ON COHORT HIRING**

During interviews conducted in their first semester on campus, each cohort member explained why she applied to USD and her reactions to the cohort/cluster advertisement. Most were attracted to the idea of a cohort/cluster. Other comments included wanting a teaching-oriented college, being attracted by the San Diego location, being attracted by the quality of the faculty members already in their desired department, and an appreciation for the interdisciplinary focus of the cohort/cluster. Others stated that the words “in one or more departments” in the ad caused ambiguity. The women felt that having the AFFIRM team as part of the hiring process indicated an institutional commitment to supporting ambitious research. Some saw the ad as an effort to encourage women faculty of color in STEM, but did not see the call as exclusively for women. Finally, many of the cohort members wondered who would

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**The new women assistant professors included a biochemist, a biologist, an industrial engineer, a mechanical engineer, a mathematician, a marine biologist....**
make the hiring decision: the chair, the search team, the AFFIRM team, or the provost?

The cohort/cluster members were asked further about the interdisciplinary nature of the cohort/cluster, and, specifically, to identify positive factors in such an approach to the hiring process. Overall, the remarks showed a significant level of enthusiasm that coalesced around several general themes, including an interest in exploring the possibilities that a cohort/cluster could present for research and teaching. One candidate commented, “Collective work is at the core of my beliefs, so this fits....” Another person noted “I need to work with faculty in other departments in order to do my research. I came from a program that had an interdisciplinary approach and it was very productive.” Others felt that incorporating interdisciplinary themes in their teaching helps students to understand how a particular subject area has applicability in other STEM disciplines. They also talked about the potential for interdisciplinarity to attract underrepresented students to the field, and suggested that such an approach could help students on the job market. The cohort/cluster group also was eager to work collaboratively on interdisciplinary grant proposals. They described interdisciplinary work as the wave of the future, and reported that academic journals increasingly are encouraging the bridging of intellectual perspectives.

The cohort/cluster members described interdisciplinary work as the wave of the future, and reported that academic journals are increasingly encouraging the bridging of intellectual perspectives.

After one year, some members of the cohort/cluster already have begun conversations on interdisciplinary collaborations to address academically rich and challenging research questions, to create and teach interdisciplinary courses such as social justice and engineering or modeling, and to apply for larger grants together. These individuals have stated that their different backgrounds stimulate creativity and foster an environment conducive to research.
Little Gull 2, a drawing, 46" by 42.5", 2013, is by Lorena Salcedo-Watson, a visiting artist at Stony Brook University. For more, see http://lorenasalcedowatson.com.
Although most candidates saw the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to research and teaching, some also expressed concern about how they would be evaluated for tenure and promotion. These comments mainly centered on the lack of understanding of how interdisciplinary work would be valued and how much time interdisciplinary work would take given all the other work that was expected. Statements such as “I’m trying to figure it out. Not sure the AFFIRM team knows how it will work either” and “How will AFFIRM develop interdisciplinarity? I feel like it is being left to us to figure it out” point to some uneasiness. One said that universities prize an interdisciplinary focus but do not know how to put it into action. Moreover, some felt that interdisciplinary research would be too much of a potential burden on their time. Some did not want to be “pigeonholed” to do interdisciplinary research because they felt there was not enough time to do that plus their own research. Others felt they would need to spend time learning about the other disciplines and “if I can accept their point of view, it will likely open up my own perspective but it will be challenging.” Many were not sure how to access support for the interdisciplinary research. The chair’s interest in interdisciplinary research was mentioned as a key factor. Some felt they had a supportive chair and that team teaching would be valued.

The AFFIRM team also spoke to chairs, and recorded their responses during a regular chairs’ meeting in the College of Arts and Sciences. The chairs from the School of Engineering were not present to comment (with the exception of one who is a member of the AFFIRM team) and, therefore, their responses are not recorded here. In addition, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences was present at the meeting and provided some insight from the view of an upper-level administrator. At the time of the meeting, interview candidates had been selected, and some had
been to campus, but the search was not final. Therefore, departments still did not know if they would get one of the two positions promised by the Provost’s Office.

Chairs asked questions about the hiring process. One stated that the search was an “exciting and an unusual search and our department received great candidates that were filtered through the AFFIRM team.” The chair wished to have the same quality of candidates in ‘normal’ searches, but was curious about how the departments were competing against each other (for the hires) because “getting serious at the departmental level has been hard. We can’t tell our faculty and candidate about next steps because the final say is at the dean and provost level.” Another chair said: “there were some remarkable people in the pool from which we chose two—a candidate whose file looked incredibly good, but whose job presentation was not so great. The other, who seemed blander on paper, seemed after the visit like a good fit.” The chair also pointed out that interdisciplinary searches require the time-intensive involvement of other departments, and that there wasn’t enough time to have inter-departmental conversations before decisions needed to be made.

The chair of a third department stated that her department learned a great deal and will change the advertisement description for future hires: “We chose two of the 12 we were given and we were very excited about the first one.” This chair was a little uncertain about how “it will play out because the candidate was concerned that she did not know how the decision would be made.” She requested more information about the process to share with candidates, including how candidates might be vetted differently. The chair of a fourth department expressed surprise at the great quality and interdisciplinary strength of the candidates, considering how late in the academic year these interviews occurred. The chair felt that both of the candidates would have advanced to the next stage in
a “regular” search and asked for clarification regarding how these hires would work in an interdisciplinary manner when only one department was vetting the applications. This chair mentioned that getting the list of all of the finalists would have facilitated the assessment of interdisciplinarity, as would going to other departments’ finalists’ talks. But since the interviews all happened at the same time, attending other departments’ talks was not possible. Another said the department liked their finalist and her talk very much, but struggled with the definition of interdisciplinarity. Finally, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences commented that the process resulted in candidates with excellent credentials and that the finalists were an exciting group of candidates—“more exciting than some candidates during past hiring years.”

LESSONS LEARNED (AND STEPS TO TAKE)

The AFFIRM team organized and implemented an ambitious plan to hire a diverse cohort/cluster of women faculty in STEM who shared an interest in mentoring undergraduate students and in interdisciplinary research and teaching. The learning curve for this type of hire at our institution was steep for a variety of reasons. Because this cohort/cluster hire was the first of its kind at USD, there was no previous process to use as a guide. Additionally, a “just-in-time” hiring approach was implemented to allow as much flexibility as possible to develop procedures and adjust to unforeseen circumstances. This flexibility sometimes led to difficulty in keeping open the lines of communication, and the lack of an overall initial plan caused confusion and some frustration, as seen in some of the comments above. The AFFIRM team needed to facilitate more communication among themselves, the department chairs, the AFFIRM cohort/cluster candidates, and the administration. Additionally, although the university ended up with excellent candidates to choose from, the interdisciplinary part of the hire could have been more thoroughly vetted if the
searches had started much earlier in the academic year. Having multiple departments interview and look at the files could have contributed to a more robust process focused on interdisciplinarity.

Having advertisements with inclusive language and requiring candidates to satisfy more than just the typical requirements were also crucial. Requiring applicant statements about mentoring undergraduate research and experience working on diversity issues, as well as their interest in being part of an interdisciplinary cohort/cluster, made a difference in the type of candidate that chose to apply.

Another important lesson we learned was that it’s key to have a screening committee review the candidate files to ensure they satisfy the search criteria—an interest in undergraduate mentoring, and diversity and inclusion—prior to forwarding them to the departments. By initially narrowing the pool, USD was able to offer positions to excellent candidates. It was equally important that the AFFIRM team left the judgment on other criteria, such as scholarship, to the departments’ expertise. Although this initial screening was met with some skepticism at first, the fact that departments were able to select the final two to three candidates from a pool of choices made the process more acceptable.

We also discovered how essential it is to have an active and committed support system. Having a supportive provost and deans and co-principal investigators with administrative positions made the hiring possible and also helped to shape the support systems and retention efforts for the hires. Additionally, the AFFIRM External Advisory Board, which includes a provost with extensive ADVANCE grant experience, was extremely helpful. During the board’s annual meetings with upper administration, they stressed the need to make progress on the promise of new hires. This advice from an external body was invaluable in moving things forward.

An important lesson we learned was that it’s key to have a screening committee review the candidate files to ensure they satisfy the search criteria prior to forwarding them.
While praising the cohort/cluster hire effort and its impact, the advisory board also gave several recommendations toward the success of the cohort faculty and also future hiring at USD. Specifically, they recommended “departmental structures be reviewed to ensure that the new faculty are treated fairly as they pursue tenure. The interdisciplinary work that the new faculty perform may not fit into the traditional career paths of faculty, and thus may be more difficult to evaluate. Allegiance to departments must be well-defined so that faculty understand their teaching commitments. This new approach is being carried out largely by untenured faculty. This could be a dangerous experience for the new faculty. As part of the mentoring this new cohort/cluster receives, we recommend that senior faculty who have experience with interdisciplinary research participate regularly.” In addition, they recommended that USD administration “review the procedures that were used in this last search with a view as to institutionalizing them for future hires. If USD continues this implementation with the result of substantially increasing diversity of its faculty in the next few hiring cycles, it would position USD as a unique university.”

Addressing the watershed issue of recruitment and retention of women faculty, and particularly women faculty of color in STEM, is a key concern of many higher education institutions. The importance of diversity is recognized as our society moves forward. Diversity enriches the ideas and solutions that emerge. Additionally, student demographics are changing and, therefore, more faculty that represent these changing demographics are needed. Using a novel approach and process to faculty hiring, a select group of STEM departments was able to accomplish the goal of hiring more women faculty, including several women faculty of color.

Our example suggests that, if institutions truly want to diversify their faculty, they must change the way they approach faculty hiring.
face significant challenges to attracting a diverse faculty pool. Our team was successful because it generated administrative support, obtained buy-in from key departments in STEM, and utilized a variety of tools before and during the search process. In the year since the cohort faculty arrived on campus, mentoring support and community building are moving our retention efforts forward. Taking the lessons from this hiring experience to heart, our institution continues to implement innovative approaches to hiring faculty in all areas of campus. This cohort/cluster hire was just the first of many such efforts to truly diversify the university.

ENDNOTES
2. Ibid. See Light, “‘Not Like Us’: Removing the Barriers to Recruiting Minority Faculty,” pp. 164-80 and Smith, et al., “Interrupting the Usual: Successful Strategies for Hiring Diverse Faculty,” pp. 133-60.
3. Flood, “Research Cluster Hires Boost Faculty Diversity.”
5. Urban Universities for Health Faculty Cluster Hiring for Diversity and Institutional Climate.
9. USD job advertisement.

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WE’RE NOT ALL WHITE MEN: USING A COHORT/CLUSTER APPROACH TO DIVERSIFY STEM FACULTY HIRING


Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Sector Unions and New York’s Triborough Amendment

By James E. Freeman and Peter Kolozi

Ever wonder why union members’ salary and benefits, workload agreements, and other aspects of their collective bargaining agreements, or “contracts,” often remain unchanged and enforced during the all-too-common periods when public employees labor without a contract?¹ In New York, the answer boils down to an understanding of the Public Employees’ Fair Employment Act (commonly known as the Taylor Law) and one particular clause in the law, the Triborough Amendment. Together they have provided powerful stability in New York’s public union workplaces, while sacrificing public employees’ right to strike.² This essay provides a brief summary of both measures and argues that this amendment to the Taylor Law be watched over diligently, lest the winds of anti-labor sentiment, which have blown through Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio, end up in New York and elsewhere.³

For six years, the 25,000 faculty and staff members of the Professional Staff Congress, the union of the City University of New York (CUNY), worked without a contract.⁴ During this time, every one of them continued to serve their students day in and day out. This situation is not

James E. Freeman is a professor and Peter Kolozi an associate professor of political science at Bronx Community College, City University of New York (CUNY). They can be reached at james.freeman@bcc.cuny.edu and peter.kolozi@bcc.cuny.edu.
unique to CUNY. Despite high-profile strikes by private-sector workers, including the nearly 40,000 Verizon workers on the picket line this year and the fast-food workers who walked off the job in hundreds of U.S. cities last year, it’s rare to see rank-and-file public union workers electing to strike in the absence of a contract. Meanwhile, home mortgages are paid off or renegotiated, college costs planned and budgeted, credit card debts erased, car payments maintained, retirements considered, health care costs managed, and tens of thousands of people, up and down the economic food chain of public employees, reap the benefits that accrue from stable, long-term public worker contracts.

Employment stability means economic stability, not only in employee households but also across communities...long-term contracts enable smart fiscal policies.

Simply understood, employment stability means economic stability, not only in employee households but also across communities and states. From an employee’s point of view, working without a contract produces much anxiety. But from a municipal or state perspective, the absence of a public-employee contract also makes it very difficult to accurately and efficiently budget, operate, and plan for stable financial revenue and expenditures. The presence of long-term contracts enables smart fiscal and budgetary policies that impact local and state bond ratings, unemployment rates, real estate development, and so on.5

The effects of stable contracts also extend to our workplaces, and, in higher education, to our ability to serve students. Denying employees a contract (or even a dialogue about one) is a lousy way to ask employees to remain committed, creative, and passionate in their work, which in many instances is work on behalf of a public good such as education or health care. Imagine a private-sector employer in a profitable enterprise telling her workers, again and again, over a period of five years, that there will be no discussions or evaluations of work performance, and no possibility of salary raises or bonuses. Would that employee have great morale? Would she be justified in looking elsewhere for better employment?
Meanwhile, public employees are right to fear it may get worse. A brief review of local and national news reveals a good deal of hand wringing by the political class about public employment. Rhetoric from state political leaders from Florida to Michigan, from Iowa to Maine, makes clear that unions are under attack in unprecedented ways. In this decade, state legislatures have passed laws to reduce the scope of collective bargaining, to eliminate compulsory dues payments, and to withhold state pension contributions, while local ordinances have been revised to allow so-called “right to work” zones within counties. In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo has made it clear he is no reliable friend of teachers’ unions, demanding the expansion of charter schools and tying the entire fiscal budget process to his conservative public school vision. 

At the same time, unions’ ability to beat back these anti-worker efforts is diminished by their decreasing membership and, consequently, their decreasing power.

Under these current conditions, the Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law provides a modicum of personal financial stability and some respect for thousands of public workers who continue to work without a contract, as well as state and local budgetary predictability.

HOW DID WE GET THESE LAWS?

In 1967, Governor Nelson Rockefeller signed into New York’s civil service law the Public Employees’ Fair Employment Act. The act, written by George W. Taylor, a University of Pennsylvania professor and chair of Rockefeller’s Committee on Public Employee Relations, created, among other things, a state agency called the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB) to negotiate in good faith with public employees who belonged to collective bargaining units, or unions. Commonly known as “the Taylor Law,” the act declared, “it is the public policy of the state...to promote harmonious and cooperative relationships between government...
and its employees and to protect the public by assuring, at all times, the orderly and uninterrupted operations and functions of government.” In other words, the law suggests the public is well served by a smooth and consistently engaged workforce of public employees. (Unfortunately, this language that speaks to the public benefit of public employment seems overlooked, if not absent, from much of today’s rhetoric related to public labor.) Further embedded in the law is the statement, “no public employee shall cause, instigate, encourage or condone a strike.”

Thus, the prohibition on strikes is clear. What was less clear—until the passage of the Triborough Amendment in 1982—was the status of public employer/employee relations after collective bargaining contracts expired. Without clarity in this area, it was possible for all aspects of one’s employment to vanish the moment the clock counted down on the final day of the contract. Public employees were left with no floor to their working conditions and no ability to strike to force bargaining—much less good-faith bargaining.

After a ruling by PERB in 1972 involving the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority employees, the law was amended so that employers could not alter the terms and conditions of employment when a contract expired. However, the courts continued to hear cases regarding the validity of expired employment obligations until 1982. At that time, the Triborough Amendment was added to the Taylor Law.10

The Triborough Amendment requires public employers to maintain the terms and conditions of the previous, expired contract—salary schedules, pension contributions, workload limits, and more—until a new contract is signed, no matter how many years it might take. With that, the worst-case scenario for employees—no strike and no contract—was avoided to some degree, and the amendment was generally interpreted as a gain for labor. According to the Rockville Centre Teachers’ Association,
an affiliate of the New York State United Teachers, “Triborough has made New York an exemplar in ensuring stability and continuity in providing public services by virtually eliminating the strikes that were so painful both to workers and communities.” And, “public workers want stability, not crisis. Triborough has been critical in ensuring that the delivery of vital public services—most especially the education of our children—are not disrupted by protracted labor disputes.” Others have argued that opting for stability over the ability to strike has created a weaker union and has precipitated the long decline in union membership, activism, and political influence.

The strike prohibition also established a power dynamic. While administrators can ignore their role in good-faith negotiations, workers would be breaking the law if they suggested a work slowdown or strike to bring negotiations to fruition. In an interesting way, the strike prohibition suggests that employees’ strikes may be more destructive to the public good and the orderly functioning of government than employer’s failure to negotiate fair contracts with thousands of dedicated public workers.

Recently, additional—and dangerous—forays have been made into the terms of the Taylor Law and the Triborough Amendment. Just as Governor Rockefeller commissioned the Taylor Committee, in 2011 Governor Cuomo assembled a commission of his own. Called the Mandate Relief Redesign Team (or Council), Cuomo charged this group with examining options to the Triborough Amendment, including its “freeze” or “suspension.” Its report indicates the Triborough Amendment was discussed as a “critical issue,” but the commission did not offer any specific recommendations about rejecting the amendment, even though these requests were made to the commission.

Consider the current political climate in New York and understand that these threats to unions and their members are very real. With the
state Senate dominated by pro-business Republicans, and an anti-labor Democrat in the governor’s mansion, the historical statutory accord between public sector unions and their employers is under threat. Businesses and their friends in government at all levels have nearly destroyed private sector unions and, as a result, private-sector pay has stagnated. At the same time, anti-tax Democrats such as Cuomo and his allies in both parties provide generous tax breaks to New York’s wealthiest citizens and its private corporations, draining the state’s coffers and squeezing budgets at the state, county, and municipal levels.

According to a recent report by the watchdog group Good Jobs First, New York awarded $22.6 billion in corporate subsidies since 2007. In this political climate, it’s too easy to point the finger at public employees instead of private corporations as the culprit in New York’s budget woes. Not surprisingly, anti-Triborough voices are gaining traction. For example, New York State School Boards Association President Florence Johnson says the Triborough Amendment has “result[ed] in union members getting much larger raises than those in the private sector and tilts the playing field towards unions in contract talks.”

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The historical question at the heart of the Taylor Law and Triborough Amendment still needs our answer: Is it worth it for public employees to hold onto their salary step increases, and frozen healthcare costs, and other obligations of an expired contract in lieu of the ability to strike?

Some say the answer is no. They argue the Triborough Amendment is a classic Faustian bargain that serves the interests of bosses at the expense of workers. Absent the ability to strike, and some may say the right to strike, public employers may have no incentive to negotiate in good faith and public employees no special weapon to force their hand. The essential
balance of power between employers and unionized employees is tipped in favor of the public employer and state politicians, who can burnish their anti-labor credentials by waging public campaigns over expired contracts and reveling in the free publicity around their refusals to negotiate.\textsuperscript{19} This imbalance of power is most clearly manifest in the one-directional, state-imposed penalties for breaching the Taylor Law, which provides monetary fines and jail time to unions and their workers only, not the state or city.

Historically, strikes have been understood to be dramatic and often effective tools to force real negotiations for workplace protection and economic security. As children, we learned in history class about the power of striking American railway, auto, textile, or steel workers. As adults, we have cheered on our union brothers and sisters who have made the bold decision to strike for better wages and working conditions. We understand why others have suggested that by ceding the right to strike public employees have given up their most effective means of pressuring recalcitrant government officials to engage in sincere negotiations.

Others have suggested that the language of “essential services” public employee be revised to not include teachers, as currently is the law in 11 states.\textsuperscript{20} One could argue that teachers, while valuable to the lives of millions of people, are not the same as firefighters, police, or postal workers. When teaching ceases during holidays, winter recess, or in the summer, no one would claim an essential service tied to the health and safety of the public is in jeopardy.

The Taylor Law should be repealed; through rigorous union activity as well as a campaign to educate the public on the social and economic value of union labor. The right to strike, for both economic and workplace issues, is all but guaranteed in the National Labor Relations Act. We believe teachers deserve this right. Yet, at a time when the political winds
are blowing strong against labor, we see the Triborough Amendment as a concession worthy of acknowledgement. Until our unions organize more new members and amass new power—and we do believe this must also be a priority—the Triborough Amendment provides much needed continuity of employees’ terms of employment, while also providing economic stability to our local and state communities. This is the “essential service” provided by thousands of public employees; the ebb and flow of workplace stability, consistent and livable wages and benefits, professional development, and professionalism in one’s field of public employment. Absent genuine good faith bargaining by cities and states, the work of public employees slowly becomes non-essential.

In fact, the Taylor Law may have it backward: it is not strikes that should be forbidden... A better law would bar employers from bad-faith negotiations.

Yes, forgoing the right to strike is a sizeable concession. But striking is never an end in itself. Rather, it should be viewed as a means to another end. A strike, to be successful and not simply an act of desperation, requires rank and file mobilization, communication between all levels of the workforce, including management, and most importantly, public support based on a clearly articulated rationale tailored to the concerns of the public.21

A union that can effectively mobilize the foundations of a successful strike may be a union that does not need to rely on one to achieve its ends.
The Triborough Amendment does not prevent us from active unionism. The Triborough Amendment provides a modicum of economic stability to those who provide valuable public services—teachers, faculty and staff, sanitation workers, public transportation workers, fire fighters, and police officers—during the difficult if not disrespectful times we labor without a contract. In the meantime, we must continue to communicate, organize, and mobilize support so that not just us, but all workers win the dignity, respect, and recognition that comes with a good labor contract.

ENDNOTES

1. State statutes governing public employees and collective bargaining vary. Some states, such as North Carolina prohibit public sector workers from collective bargaining. In other states, among the most recent being Wisconsin, public sector workers collective bargaining is limited to wages and benefits.


3. New York State has the highest union member density in the United States, and 71 percent of public sector workers in the state are union members. Milkman and Luce, “The State of the Unions 2013: A Profile of Organized Labor in New York City, New York State, and the United States.”

4. The Professional Staff Congress (PSC) is the union that represents faculty and staff at the City University of New York (CUNY) and the CUNY Research Foundation. In June 2016, the PSC and CUNY reached agreement on a contract. In August 2016, members of the PSC collective bargaining unit voted to ratify the new contract.

5. Kersten, “Public Sector Unions Provide Many Important Benefits to Public Workers, Political Debate and Society as a Whole.”


15. See Milkman and Luce for more about the decline in private sector unions in New York. For wage stagnation and decline see, Mishel, et al., “Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts.”


18. Raines, “The Triborough Amendment: Necessary Protection for Public Employees or a Barrier to Reform?”


21. There are several examples of teachers’ unions doing this quite successfully including in Seattle and St. Paul, Minnesota. See Strauss, “The Surprising Things Seattle Teachers Won for Students by Striking.”

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A Reflection on Educating College Students About the Value of Public-Sector Unions

By Christine Mooney and Edward Volchok

This year, labor unions got a reprieve: The Supreme Court deadlocked in a much-anticipated case that could have turned almost every state into Wisconsin, where partisan interests have crippled union power. The case, Friedrichs vs. California Teachers Association, addressed a previous case, Abood v. Detroit Board of Education, which held that public-sector unions, such as teacher or police unions, can require non-members to pay fair share or “agency” fees to cover the costs of bargaining contracts that benefit all workers. The stakes were high: If the court had overruled Abood, millions of public-sector employees could have opted not to pay fees to unions, and thousands of union contracts would have been affected. The plaintiffs were represented by the Center for Individual Rights, a non-profit public interest law firm with ties to the billionaire Koch brothers and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a corporate-funded organization of conservative legislators and lobbyists.¹

The Supreme Court heard the Friedrichs case on January 11, 2016. A month later, conservative Justice Antonin Scalia died. On March 29, the

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¹ Christine Mooney is an associate professor at City University of New York’s Queensborough Community College, where she also serves as a member of the University Committee on Student Entrepreneurship, co-program director of the Community College Innovation Challenge, and as a faculty mentor for student cohorts in the New York State Business Plan Competition. Edward Volchok is an associate professor of business at Queensborough Community College. He also is a marketing strategist with 28 years of experience in branding, marketing communications, new product development, and customer relationship management.
court issued a 4–4 decision that leaves *Abood* unchanged, and unions still able to charge agency fees. But many other legal challenges to fair-share or agency fees remain in the lower courts. And, while the court’s decision may leave federal law unchanged for now, it does not affect the battles labor faces, especially those in state legislatures.

Twenty-six states already have passed so-called “right to work” legislation, which outlaws agency fees, and several more states have pending legislation.2 One of the most notable was ratified in 2011 in Wisconsin, where at the urging of Republican Governor Scott Walker, a member of ALEC, the state legislature passed Act 10 or the Wisconsin Budget Repair Bill, outlawing agency fees and limiting the collective bargaining rights of unions.3 As a result, unions in Wisconsin were devastated. The Wisconsin Education Association Council, an affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA), lost a third of its members. Meanwhile, state membership in the American Federation of Teachers was halved, and the 70,000-person membership of the Wisconsin state employees union fell by 70 percent.4

These are dramatic drops that follow a long and steady national decline in union membership. In the mid-1950s, nearly 35 percent of all wage and salary workers were union members but by 2015, just 11.1 percent were members of a union.5 Paired with the growing threat of “right to work” legislation, these figures raise serious issues about the viability of unions in the U.S.6 Consider the disparate rates of growth in NEA membership among agency-fee states, many in union strongholds in the Northeast and West, and among non-agency fee or “right to work” states, many in the South and Midwest. In 2014, while NEA membership grew by 5,300 educators in agency-fee states, it fell by 47,000 in the others.7

Loss of union membership means a loss of union power—and it has a cascading effect for readers of *Thought & Action* and their students, as well as other union members.
as other union members. It’s not just that institutions pay lower salaries to non-unionized faculty and staff. The same forces that want to eliminate agency fees seek lower taxes. Lower taxes mean reduced state funding for public institutions of higher education. For students, this means less faculty support, more crowded classrooms, fewer regularly scheduled classes, and higher tuitions. Higher tuitions also mean more student debt, or declining enrollments. In Louisiana, the state that has slashed its higher education budget more than any other, state tuition has shot up 140 percent and state universities have seen declining enrollments.

What do our students know of all this? Based on our classroom experiences, not much. Even if we factor out the direct consequences to their educational experience of having unionized faculty, our students’ futures as workers in the U.S. are integrally tied to the future of workers. We should take the teachable opportunities provided by *Friedrichs* and pending “right to work” legislation to discuss the changing nature of work and unions.

We should take the teachable opportunities provided by *Friedrichs* and pending “right to work” legislation to discuss the changing nature of work and unions.

1. Are unions still relevant to today’s workers? An interesting class discussion for a management course could be based on recent headlines on efforts to organize independent contractors at firms like Uber and Lyft.

2. What role, if any, can unions play in the lives of students? Most of our students don’t know how the labor movement achieved gains we now take for granted. These advances include the eight-hour work day, the prohibition of child labor, safer workplaces due to the stricter enforcement of occupational health and safety standards, tax-free employer contributions to health insurance,
the minimum wage, unemployment insurance, a more equitable workplace, and family leave.

3. As jobs that sustained the middle class become increasingly scarce and benefits associated with full-time employment evaporate, how will the nation’s 53 million freelancers pay for health care and retirement, and survive during gaps in employment? Do unions have any role to play in protecting workers who have been transformed into “contractors”?

There are no easy answers to these questions. But we must pose them to students as we not only prepare them for the workforce, but also ask them to examine greater existential questions. These existential questions address issues of how an individual defines himself or herself in relation to family, friends, work, co-workers, and to society as a whole, given their social, economic, and political situation. Labor history is rife with lessons for our students.

UNIONS: HAS HISTORY TAUGHT US ANYTHING?

Rose Cohen was one of the few survivors of the catastrophic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire on March 25, 1915, in New York City. The fire began around 4:40 p.m., shortly before the end of Rose’s shift, and quickly spread through the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the Asch Building, located just below the city’s Washington Square. But when workers attempted to flee the inferno, they were trapped. Management had locked the factory doors to bar union organizers from entering and to prevent workers from taking unauthorized breaks. The fire, one of the worst workplace disasters in American history, claimed the lives of 146 of Rose’s co-workers, most of whom were Jewish and Italian women aged 16- to 23-years-old—the same age span as many of our current college students. The youngest victims were 14 years old.

Imagine if we could travel back in time to ask a young factory worker like Rose, “Why be a member of a union?” Rose, of course, never had that opportunity. She might have answered by expressing hope that the union movement would help achieve a fairer, more just society. She might
have expressed her wish for rights that probably seemed utopian then, but most Americans take for granted today. No doubt she would have wanted reasonable work hours; a five-day, 40-hour workweek with weekends free. Rose also would have hoped for higher hourly wages, paid overtime, and a more equitable distribution of wealth. She would have hoped for an end to child labor. And, of course, after surviving the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, she would have wanted a safer workplace.

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The passage of legislation to protect workers came 20 years after the fire, when the National Labor Relations Act, or Wagner Act, was signed into law in 1935. This Depression-era legislation guarantees the rights of private-sector workers to form unions and collectively bargain for such things as pay, safe working conditions, sick leave, and more. Within months of the act’s passage, nearly 2,000 auto workers at General Motors plants in Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio would test their new rights through sit-down strikes that forced management to recognize the United Auto Workers and sit down with the union at the bargaining table. Eventually, not only did those workers win salary raises, they also won the right to talk to each other at lunch. Victories like these helped support the vibrant middle class and consumer economy of the post–World War II era. By the 1940s and 1950s, when union membership peaked, income inequality was at its nadir.12

With the success of the union movement, union leaders accepted a sharp demarcation between “managing” and “working.”13 Consequently, labor paid a huge price for their lack of boardroom access, starting in the late 1960s when wage competition became international. Seeking to reduce costs, management began moving production—and high-wage union jobs—to low-wage countries. By the end of the 1980s, less than 17 percent of the American workforce belonged to a union, or half the proportion of 30 years earlier. Hardest hit were manufacturing, mining and
construction unions. Only public-sector unions continued unscathed.¹⁴

But public unions would soon face their own adversary. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan redefined public-sector labor relations when he fired almost 12,000 striking air traffic controllers, all federal government employees. Their union, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), had been at the bargaining table for months, seeking better working conditions and pay. When contract negotiations stalled, the controllers went on strike. “They are in violation of the law,” Reagan declared, “and if they do not report for work within 48 hours they have forfeited their jobs and will be terminated.”¹⁵ Reagan not only terminated these workers, he decertified PATCO.

Nonetheless, even as fewer Americans belong to unions, a notable shift in Americans’ attitudes towards unions is promising. According to the 2015 Gallup poll, 58 percent of Americans approve of labor unions, up from 53 percent in 2014.¹⁶ What’s most encouraging is that young adults aged 18 to 34 are the most supportive of all age groups. The fact that more Americans favor unions may reflect the economic insecurity many Americans feel, given that the middle class is shrinking and more people are living below the poverty line.¹⁷

**Our Students’ Place in the American Dream: Is There a Role for Unions?**

One growing group of Americans being squeezed out of the middle class is freelancers, the many workers who labor without job security under work-for-hire arrangements. By 2020, it’s estimated that more than 40 percent of the workforce—60 million people—will be freelancers.¹⁸ Under the National Labor Relations Act, freelancers are contractors, not employees. Their employers are neither obliged to bargain with them, nor to provide bene-
fits like health insurance, paid vacations, or severance pay upon dismissal. As Sara Horowitz, executive director of the 200,000-member Freelancers Union told the New York Times, “In today’s economy, there’s a huge chunk of the middle class that’s being pushed down into the working class and working poor and freelancers are the first group that’s happening to.”

This is the job market that awaits our students. In the freelance economy, many of our students will work harder and longer while they earn less. How unions can help these workers needs careful study and will, no doubt, require a long struggle to change people’s attitudes and our laws.

The idea that hard work can change the life of any American is becoming more and more elusive. The rich are getting richer, the poor stay poor, and those in the middle struggle to stay afloat. The average American worker simply can’t afford to buy a mid-sized house, pay for electricity and high-speed Internet, have a car and keep it gassed up, feed their family, and occasionally go out to eat.

Making matters worse, the Pew Research Center reports that 69 percent of undergraduates who graduated in 2012 borrowed money to finance their education. Current students will have between $39,000 and $42,000 in student loan debt by the time they earn a bachelor’s degree. And, the average holder of a bachelor’s degree takes 21 years to pay off his or her debt. Given the vicissitudes of the American job market, we wonder whether these graduates will emerge from debt by the time their children are ready to enter college. We also worry about how students who fail to graduate will pay off student loans.

A recent paper from the Center for American Progress shows how unions can revitalize the American Dream. It builds on the research of Raj Chetty, a Stanford University economist who identifies five factors that strongly correlate with a child’s ability to break out of intergenerational poverty: 1) single motherhood rates, 2) income inequality, 3) high

The average American workers simply can’t afford to buy a mid-sized house, pay for electricity and high-speed Internet, have a car and keep it gassed up, feed their family...
school dropout rates, 4) social capital, and 5) racial and economic segregation. The Center for American Progress researchers added a sixth factor: union membership of parents. These researchers found that unions still boost children out of poverty. In fact, in areas with high union membership, children born into low-income families have greater probability of ascending to higher incomes than children born into areas with low union membership. This increased economic mobility extends to children whose parents are not union members, but live in high-union areas, the study found. The researchers suggest several reasons, besides union parents’ earning higher wages, for the association between union membership and higher economic mobility. These include the lobbying efforts of union members to encourage greater spending on public education from pre-kindergarten through university, easier access to affordable health care, and raises to the minimum wage. The study concludes, “Localities with higher union membership are also areas where children of poor parents end up higher in the national income distribution and children throughout the income distribution earn more in these areas.”

These efforts are apparent in New York, where 24.6 percent of the state’s workers belong to a union, the highest proportion in the nation. Throughout New York, unionized educators have advocated for the rights of their students, and against increased student testing. Their success is evident through the work of the Common Core Task Force, appointed in September 2015 by Governor Andrew Cuomo and charged with reviewing the elementary and secondary school curriculum standards adopted by the state. In a report released on December 10, 2015, the task force recommended a series of 21 changes, including significant reductions in student testing and flexibility to allow educators to develop appropriate curricula. One of the most significant recommendations was the delay in evaluating teacher performance based upon student test scores until 2019.
The report represents a collaborative effort of individuals with committee membership from key union leaders in New York. More importantly, the report underscores the power of a collective voice, a union and the changes that can be effectuated by their efforts.

UNIONS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The same urgent need for a collective voice extends to higher education, where union members across the U.S. are fiercely defending students’ ability to access a high-quality, affordable public higher education. In Wisconsin, Governor Walker and the state legislature have dramatically cut funding to public colleges and universities, which has led to larger class sizes and course eliminations, and likely will force students to take more time to graduate. Faculty responded this spring with a series of rolling no-confidence votes. In 2015, Arizona’s Republican Governor Doug Ducey proposed cutting all financial support for the state’s two largest community colleges. And in Illinois, budgetary battles between the Republican Governor Bruce Rauner and the Democratic-controlled General Assembly resulted in all state universities and community colleges operating without any state funding for nearly a year.

To cover cuts in state funds, public universities across the U.S. are hiring more low-paid adjunct or contingent faculty, and raising tuitions. Higher tuitions force students to borrow more money, work longer hours, and study less. While students protest, faculty and staff unions stand by their side as proponents of college affordability measures on Capitol Hill, such as Representative Tammy Baldwin’s “In the Red” proposed legislation.

In New York, we face the same struggles. In mid-December 2015, over the objections of faculty and staff unions at the State Universities of New York and the City University of New York, Governor Cuomo vetoed a “Maintenance of Effort” bill passed by the New York Legislature,
which would have ensured that funds generated from higher tuition be used for additional staff and programs. Under Cuomo’s administration per-student investment in the City University of New York is down 14 percent. As in the rest of the country, New York’s public colleges and universities increasingly rely on tuition to keep the lights on.

Ultimately, our local issues illustrate just how much students need to understand about American labor. As unionized faculty, we are both role models and educators, who must teach our students the value of union membership. Students should learn the history of labor, and how unions provide vital employment training and workplace safety. Even more important, they should be aware that unions might hold the key to their own upward mobility, to their access to an affordable education and the American Dream.

**Students should be aware that unions might hold the key to their own upward mobility, to their access to an affordable education and the American Dream.**

**Obstacles and Challenges Ahead**

We note at least two challenges ahead, as we take on the work of educating students about unions. First, students across all disciplines must be aware of the historical role that unions have played in advancing public higher education. Making this difficult for faculty, virtually all available textbooks for our introductory business course present management’s view of business, not labor’s. Furthermore, our textbooks are not unique in their minimal coverage of unions—this issue extends to history, economics, human services, and other courses. No wonder most students respond with blank expressions whenever we mention unions. Unions are mostly absent from classroom discussions of corporate social responsibility, globalization, and even the management of human resources.

We must supplement textbooks with appropriate materials. These could include the Center for American Progress’ study on union and economic mobility, which would enliven our classroom discussions on corporate social responsibility, the impact of globalization on business
and our society, how to manage employees, and the ever-changing job market. We could discuss the quality of the evidence presented in this study and help our students distinguish between a statistically significant correlation and an experimentally proven, causal relationship. Including the topic of unions and employees’ rights in classroom discussions would help students build critical thinking skills.

We also could discuss John Hoerr's classic article, “What Should Unions Do?” Hoerr argues that unions must find ways to reinvent their structure and refocus their energies to face the changing technological and innovative economy, to remain a driving force in the future of the American workforce.

A second challenge to our efforts is the work by some lawmakers, including a 2014 effort in Michigan, to punish universities for teaching about unions. The Michigan bill, which passed an appropriations committee, would have specifically cut $500,000 in state funds to Michigan State University for labor-related courses. The law that actually passed requires Michigan universities to stay neutral on the subject of unions. Clearly, faculty and staff must resist efforts to limit their academic freedom rights, and use the collective bargaining process to protect those rights.

America is at a crossroads. There is widespread agreement that the American Dream is fading. But, we are a deeply divided country. The forces behind the *Friedrich* case will certainly try again. The current vacancy on the Supreme Court—and who will choose the justice to fill Scalia’s seat—underscores the importance of November’s election. But even beyond the election, the question facing faculty and students is this: Can our unions revitalize the American Dream?
ENDNOTES
1. For more on ALEC’s agenda, see ALECexposed.org.
2. The 26th state was West Virginia on February 12, 2016. The law has not yet gone into effect.
4. Samuels, “Walker’s Anti-Union Law has Labor Reeling in Wisconsin.”
8. Schmidt, “Unionizing Pays Big Dividend for Professors at Regional Public Universities.”
10. Scheiber and Isaac, “Uber Recognizes New York Drivers’ Group, Short of a Union.”
15. Reagan’s statement to the media on August 3, 1981, may be found at: https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1981/80381a.htm
17. Ibid.
18. Schrader, “Here’s Why the Freelance Economy is On the Rise.”
20. Soergel, “Even Americans Can’t Afford the American Dream.”
21. Frey, “Cumulative Student Debt Among Recent College Graduates.”
25. Duke et al., op cit.
30. Douglas-Gabriel, “Illinois Gives Universities $600M in Funding, But is it Too Little Too Late?”
32. Clarion Staff, “Cuomo Vetoes CUNY Funding Bill.”
34. Holland, “State Funding to MSU Won’t be Cut for Alleged Union-related Activity.”
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Academia has never been tranquil waters, but we would rather they roil with ideas and inventions than the current rash of violence on our campuses and in our communities. The Thought & Action Review Panel asks: What are the sources of violence, how does it manifest itself among our students or would-be students, and how can faculty, staff, and their unions create safe spaces for ALL students to learn?

Consider the following questions: With 26 percent of women in their senior year of college reporting they were sexual assaulted during their college years, we ask: what feeds this epidemic of sexual violence, and how can faculty and staff help? With more than 50 shootings on campuses in 2015, we ask: Do campus-carry laws enable violence, or discourage it? What are the effects of guns on campuses on teaching and learning?

Can unions bargain for safe conditions for learning? Do all faculty have equal access to resources that might make them safer? And what about the growing number of racial and racist experiences on campuses?

Submissions are due October 1, 2016.

As always, other submissions about issues in higher education, including the art of teaching, are welcome. New scholars are encouraged to submit, as are poets and visual artists. Please understand the panel prefers short to long and seeks a “reader-friendly” tone. Please also appreciate that specific guidelines around style must be followed. All submissions will be entered automatically into the competition for three $2,500 “NEA Excellence in the Academy” awards.

For more information, contact Editor Mary Ellen Flannery at mflannery@nea.org.
NEA Art of Teaching Prize

A $2,500 award for an article that illuminates one educator’s approach to the complex and intangible dynamic that inspires a love of learning or an article that offers practical approaches to improved teaching and learning at the college level.

NEA Democracy in Higher Education Prize

A $2,500 award for an article that contributes to the expansion of the welcoming and democratic culture of higher learning and the ideals of tolerance, justice, and the unfettered pursuit of truth traditional to the academy.

NEA New Scholar Prize

A $2,500 award for an article by a scholar with less than seven years of full- or part-time employment in higher education. The submission may be made in either of the categories above.

The National Education Association Excellence in the Academy Awards are intended to advance the Association’s commitment to higher education. The Thought & Action Review Panel will select the winning articles from among those published in 2017 by the journal. The competition is open to the entire academic community.

Please send submissions to:
Mary Ellen Flannery, Editor
National Education Association
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
mflannery@nea.org

To learn more about this year’s special focus or submission guidelines, visit www.nea.org/he or send an e-mail to: mflannery@nea.org
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