

ESPs: Professional Development Opportunities

By Vicki J. Rosser

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Education support professionals (ESPs) include workers in service/support, clerical/secretarial, technical/paraprofessional, service/maintenance, and skilled crafts. ESPs, while vital contributors to the teaching, research, and service missions of colleges and universities, are easily overlooked as professionals. Though neither members of the faculty nor senior administration, they are the backbone of their organizations. Students and faculty members may come and go, but most ESPs are geographically bound. They provide expertise, consistency, and—most important—historical context and institutional memory.

In exchange for supporting and serving the educational mission of the college, ESPs ask for equitable compensation packages. Among the desired benefits: the opportunity to grow by acquiring new skills, training, and meaningful professional development, often building on their functional expertise. College officials should view ESPs as lifelong learners; they should enhance learning and professional achievement for all who support their institutions and serve students, directly or indirectly.

Opportunities for ESPs to pursue additional skills training, and professional development, critical

aspects of building and maintaining a quality workforce, take many forms: new employee orientation, in-service training, relevant and current skill set training, and career-enhancement.¹ ESPs can acquire such education through external and internal programs. External programs often include national or regional meetings, workshops, seminars, and conferences within a functional specialization, including licensing and skilled credentialing. Internal opportunities include training and development workshops and seminars and academic course work provided by the employer.² State and federal statutes may require maintaining or updating the credentials and skills needed to remain current with certification or license requirements; in any case, this education benefits the worker and the college.

This article updates the status of ESPs at colleges and universities, and then examines the skills training and professional development opportunities provided by their collective bargaining contracts.

ESPs: A STATUS UPDATE

What is the status of ESPs across the United States?³ What is the current array of ESP positions,

the number and percentage in skilled crafts and support/service, for instance? And what are the latest demographic trends—the gender and race/ethnicity composition of the ESP workforce, for example? More than 1,525,143 ESPs worked in U.S. postsecondary institutions in Fall 2003 (Figure 1). Here's the breakdown: 611,273 support/service employees (39 percent), 435,861 clerical/secretarial (29 percent), 233,183 service/maintenance (15 percent), 193,278 technical/paraprofessional (13 percent), and 61,548 skilled crafts (four percent).

Figure 2 shows the distribution of ESPs (N = 1,023,536) by occupation within *public* institutions in fall 2003. Again, the breakdown: 403,769 support/service employees (39 percent), 285,940 clerical/secretarial (28 percent), 148,214 service/maintenance (14 percent), 139,544 technical paraprofessional (14 percent), and 46,069 skilled crafts (five percent).

Fewer ESPs worked in *private* institutions (471,668, Figure 3). But the rank order of occupational categories remained the same: 190,636 support/service employees (41 percent), 141,212 clerical/secretarial (30 percent), 72,964 service/maintenance (15 percent), 51,533 technical/paraprofessional (11 percent), and 15,323 skilled crafts (three percent).

ESP OCCUPATIONAL EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Figure 4 shows the ten-year employment trend for ESPs by occupational category. Only support/service employees (43.7 percent) and technical/paraprofessionals (5.0 percent) showed significant hiring increases since 1993. Skilled crafts showed the largest decrease (3.9 percent), followed by service/maintenance (2.6 percent). Increased outsourcing and cost containment measures implemented by colleges and universities may have affected these two categories most seriously.⁴ The number of clerical/secretarial employees remained flat (0.5 percent decrease)—a negative sign since job responsibilities and federal reporting requirements continue to increase.

Do changes in full-time and part-time positions show a reciprocal relationship, as often assumed? Not for ESPs, at least since 1995. The total number of part-time ESPs decreased continually since 1999 (Figure 5). The only increases: support/service (18.7 percent) and clerical/secretarial (0.05 percent). These changes reflect the ESP totals.

The percentages of ESPs by gender and occupation remain largely gender specific (Figure 6). The service/maintenance (men = 62.5 percent, women = 37.5 percent) and skilled crafts (men = 93.1 percent,

Figure 1. Percent of Education Support Professionals (ESPs) by Occupation: Fall 2003

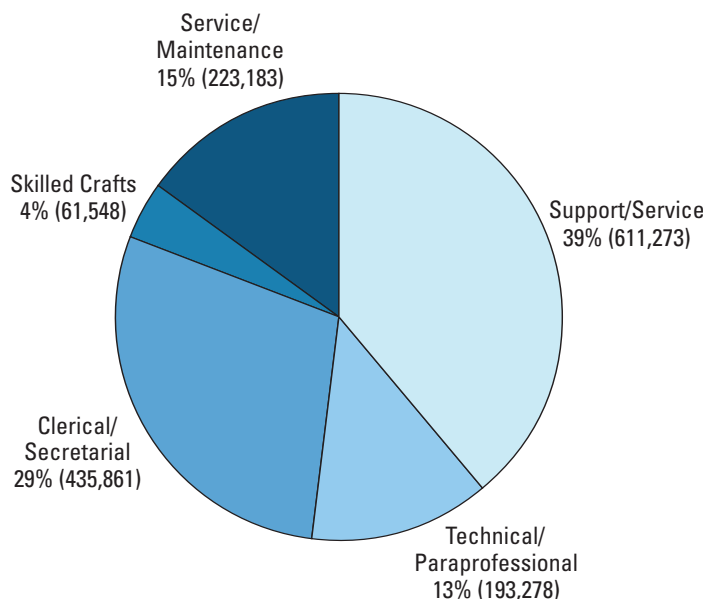
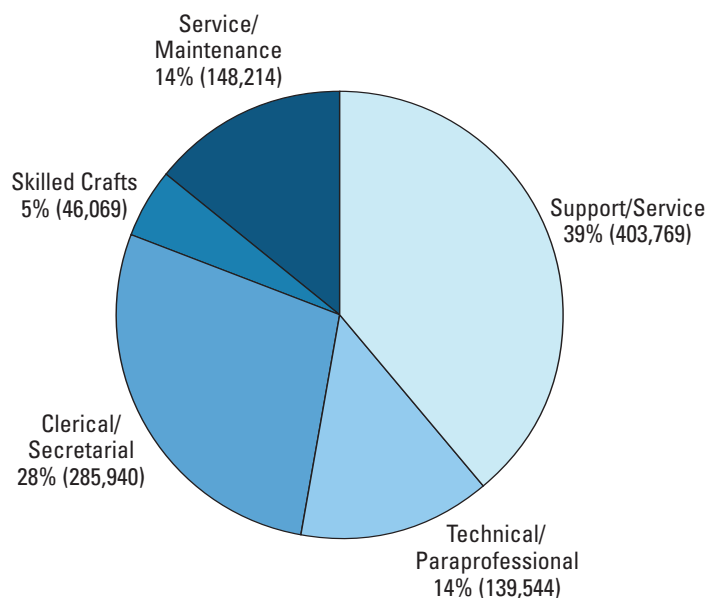
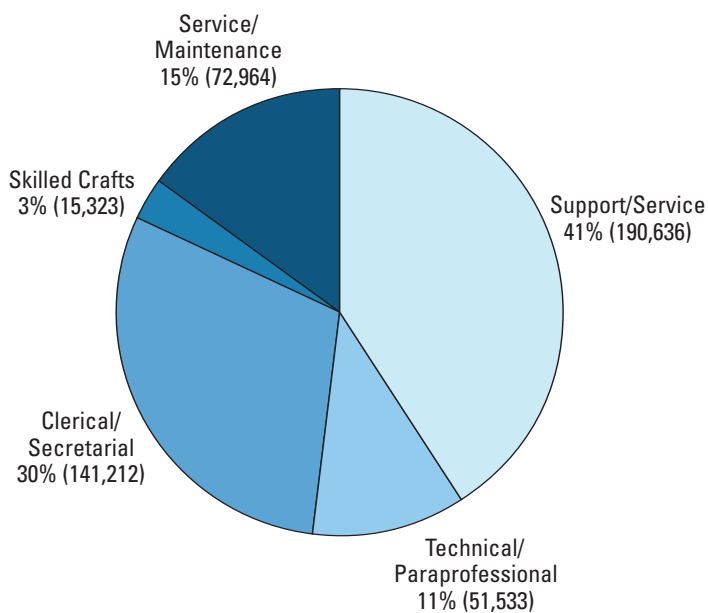


Figure 2. Percentage Distribution of ESP Staff by Occupation, Public Institutions: Fall 2003

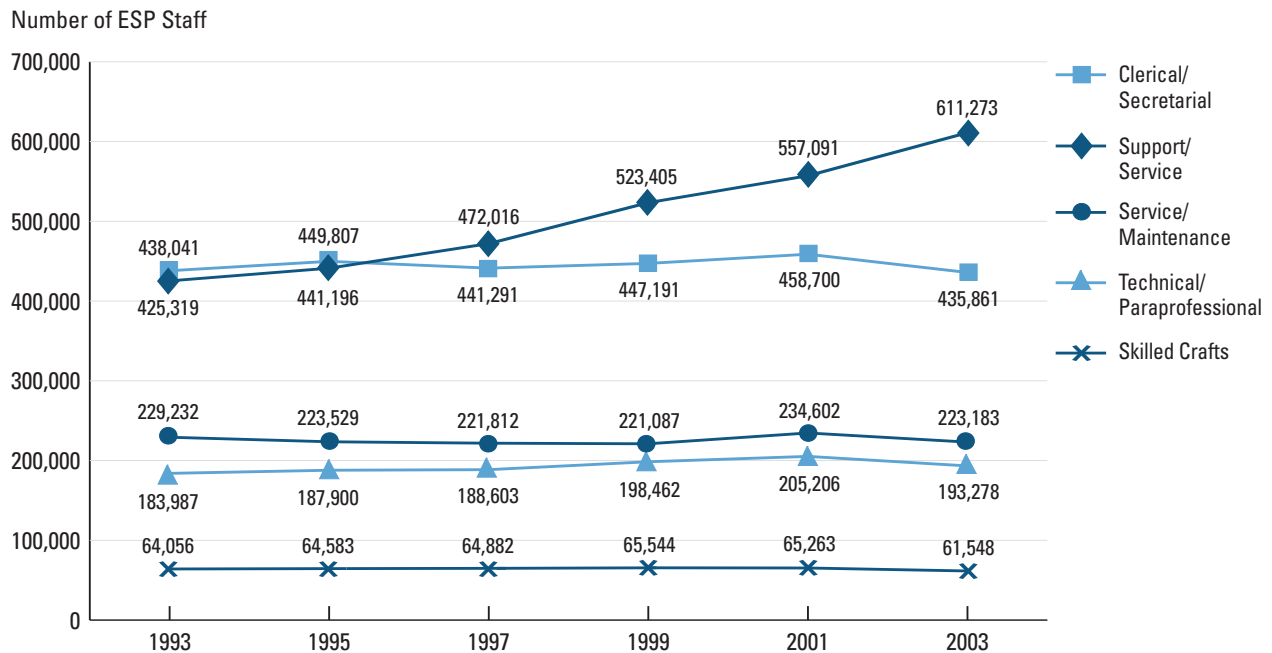


Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2003, and Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04, E.D. Tab, May 2005.*

Figure 3. Percentage Distribution of ESP Staff by Occupation, Private Institutions: Fall 2003



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2003, and Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04, E.D. Tab, May 2005.*

Figure 4. ESP Staff by Year: Fall 1993 through Fall 2003

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2003*, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04, E.D. Tab, May 2005*; Johnsrud, L. and Banaria, J. "Higher Education Support Professionals: Trends in Demographics and Worklife Perceptions," *The NEA Almanac of Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 2005, 85-102.

women = 6.9 percent) areas continue to employ more men. But the clerical/secretarial (men = 13.6 percent, women = 86.4 percent), technical/paraprofessional (men = 40.6 percent, women = 59.4 percent), and support service (men = 40.1 percent, women = 59.9 percent) categories continue to employ significantly more women (Table 1).

NEW ESP HIRES

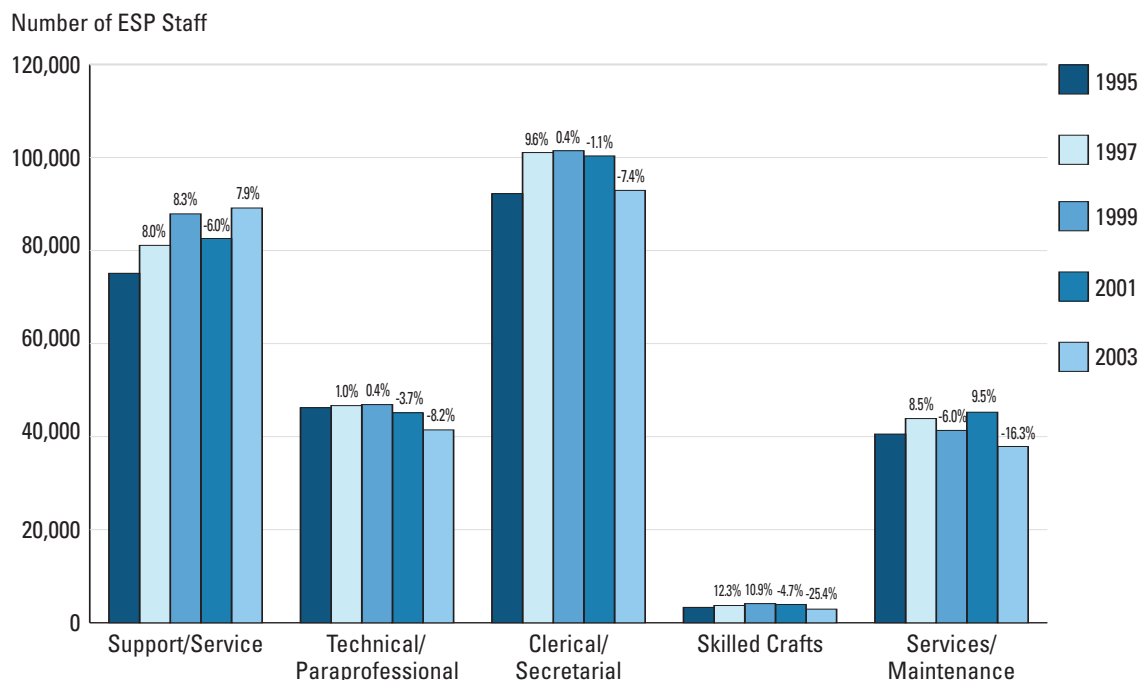
What is the breakdown of new ESP hires by institutional control (public and private) occupational category, and race/ethnicity?⁵ Degree-granting institutions hired 70,216 new ESPs for full-time permanent employment between July 1 and October 31, 2003. These hires included 32,242 (46 percent) in support/services, 16,651 (24 percent) in clerical/secretarial, 10,457 (15 percent) in service/maintenance, 9,438 (13 percent) in technical/paraprofessional, and 1,427 (two percent) in skilled crafts.

Public institutions hired approximately 13,000 more ESPs than private institutions (Figure 7). Of the 41,653 newly hired ESPs at public institutions,

19,247 (47 percent) were in support/services, 9,239 (22 percent) were clerical/secretarial, 6,857 (16 percent) were service/maintenance, 5,307 (13 percent) were technical/paraprofessional, and 1,003 (two percent) were in skilled crafts. Private institutions hired 28,563 new ESPs. There were 12,995 (45.5 percent) newly hired support/services employees, 7,412 (26 percent) clerical/secretarial, 4,131 (14 percent) technical/paraprofessional, 3,601 (13 percent) service/maintenance, and 424 (1.5 percent) worked in skilled crafts (Figure 8).

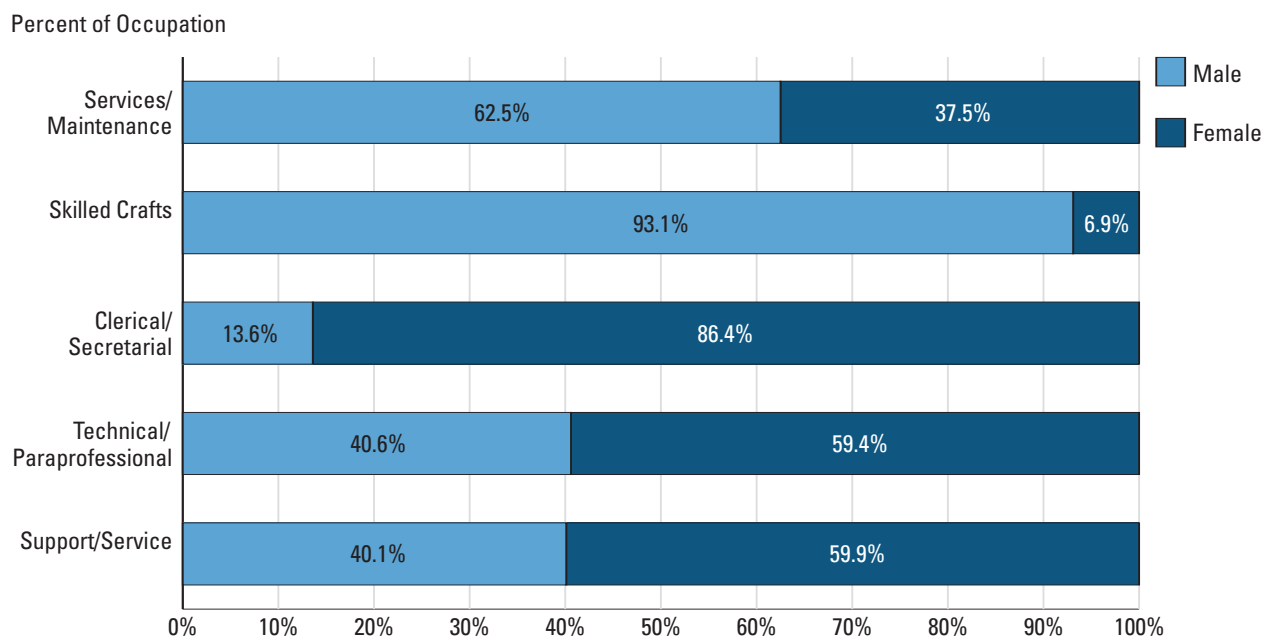
Table 2 shows the new hires by race/ethnicity and employment category. White ESPs continue to be the largest number (49,556) and percent (54.9 to 71.3) of new hires within all five occupational categories, followed by the number (10,434) and percent (10.3 to 23.9) of Blacks, Hispanics (n = 6,300, 5.4 to 14.2 percent), Asian Pacific Islanders (n = 4,086, 2.3 to 7.7 percent), Native Americans (n = 593, 0.7 to 1.2 percent), and non-resident aliens (n = 2,673, 0.6 to 5.9 percent). The "unknowns" did not indicate their race/ethnicity by occupational category.

Figure 5. Part-Time ESP Staff: Percent Change from 1995 to 2003



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2003*, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04, E.D. Tab, May 2005*; Johnsrud, L. and Banaria, J. "Higher Education Support Professionals: Trends in Demographics and Worklife Perceptions," *The NEA Almanac of Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 2005, 85-102.

Figure 6. Percentage of ESP Staff by Gender and Occupation: Fall 2003

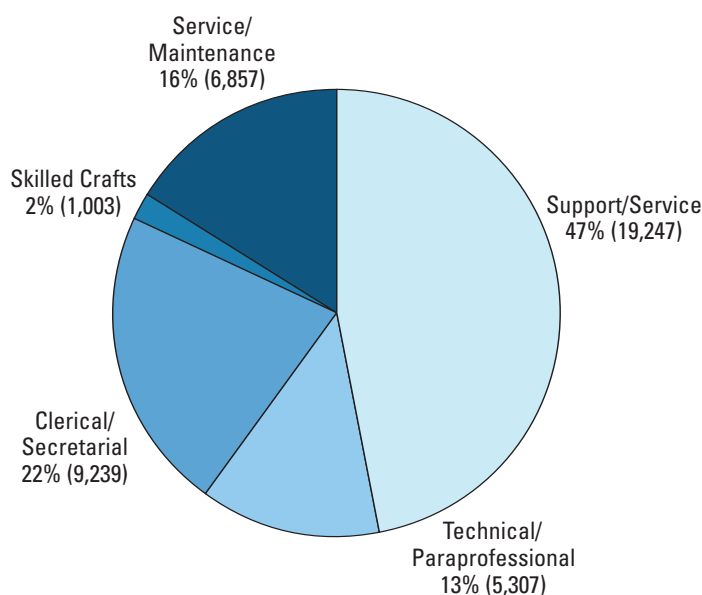


Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2003*, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04, E.D. Tab, May 2005*.

Table 1. Percent Change in ESP Staff by Gender and Occupation: 1993 through 2003

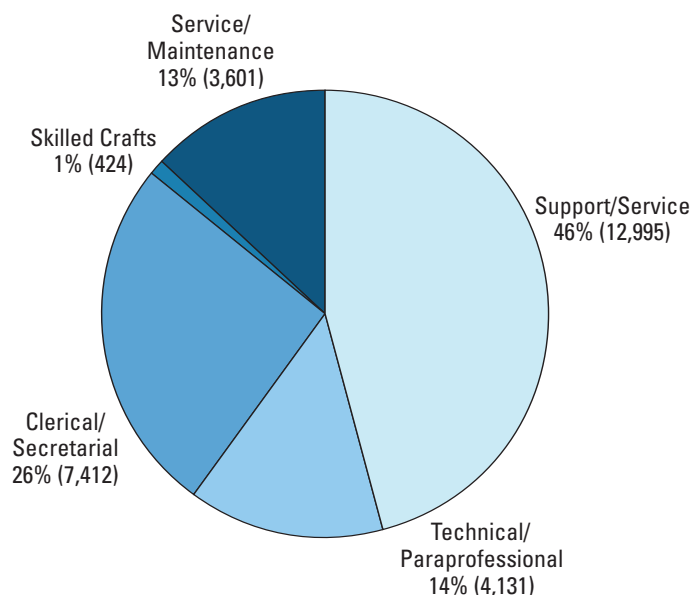
Occupation	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	% Change: 1993 to 2003	% Change: 2001 to 2003
Service/Maintenance	229,232	223,529	221,812	221,087	234,602	223,183	-2.6%	-4.9%
Female	88,168	86,183	84,791	85,087	90,406	83,795	-5.0	-7.3
Male	141,064	137,346	137,021	136,000	144,196	139,388	-1.2	-3.3
Skilled Crafts	64,065	64,583	64,882	65,544	65,263	61,548	-3.9	-5.7
Female	4,164	4,089	4,498	4,535	4,743	4,259	2.3	-10.2
Male	59,901	60,494	60,384	61,009	60,520	57,289	-4.4	-5.3
Clerical/Secretarial	438,041	441,196	441,291	447,191	458,700	435,861	-0.5	-5.0
Female	387,143	386,490	382,137	385,742	396,577	376,560	-2.7	-5.0
Male	50,898	54,706	59,154	61,449	62,123	59,301	16.5	-4.5
Technical/ Paraprofessional	183,987	187,900	188,603	198,492	205,206	193,278	5.0	-5.8
Female	110,746	111,904	112,721	118,020	121,159	114,758	3.6	-5.3
Male	73,241	75,996	75,882	80,472	84,047	78,520	7.2	-6.6
Support/Service	425,319	449,807	472,016	523,405	557,091	611,273	43.7	9.7
Female	258,641	272,655	284,370	315,482	338,730	365,870	41.5	8.0
Male	166,678	177,152	187,646	207,923	218,361	245,403	47.2	12.4

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2003*, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003-04, E.D. Tab, May 2005*; Johnsrud, L and Banaria, J. *Higher Education Support Professionals: Trends in Demographics and Worklife Perceptions*, "The NEA 2005 Almanac of Higher Education. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 2005, 85-102.

Figure 7. Percent of New ESP Hires by Occupation, Public Institutions: Fall 2003

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2003*, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003-04, E.D. Tab, May 2005*.

Figure 8. Percent of New ESP Hires by Occupation, Private Institutions: Fall 2003



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2003*, and *Salaries of Full-Time Instructional Faculty, 2003–04, E.D. Tab, May 2005*.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTRACT RIGHTS

One key issue affecting the quality of ESP work-lives is the right to pursue skills training and professional development.⁶ What opportunities do collective bargaining contracts provide ESPs for these activities?

NEA's Higher Education Contract Analysis System (HECAS) includes collective bargaining agreements covering full- and part-time ESPs in two- and four-year public and private institutions in all unions, including NEA, AFT, SEIU, and independents. The search included these words and phrases: tuition, tuition reimbursement, tuition remission, tuition waivers, training and education, professional development, professional growth, and skills training.⁷ The search generated 218 contracts: 151 from two-year institutions and 67 from four-year institutions. All but six contracts covered public institutions. There were 141 contracts that covered full *and* part-time employees; 77 contracts covered only full-time employees.

Rights to skills training and professional development activities are usually placed under contract articles devoted to benefits, fringe benefits, professional development, compensation-tuition waiver,

tuition assistance, instructional fee remission, training and employee development, and development and educational benefits. Much language centers on professional development and skills training. The contracts often note the means to attend these professional development activities and skills training as college or education tuition remission or waivers, and/or reimbursement of tuition, conferences, conventions, and training workshops and seminars.

The definitions of "skills training" and "professional development" overlap, but "skills training" refers primarily to skilled crafts and service/maintenance ESPs who are updating their skills, crafts, and licensing requirements. "Professional development" relates primarily to support/service, clerical/secretarial, and technical/paraprofessional ESPs who desire occupational growth, educational advancement, and technical training. The contract language for professional development activities varies from specific statements delineating each right to broad statements with lots of room for interpretation. The benefits range from minimal to substantial. Minimal language suggests that the university or college "encourages self-development" or that employees should "actively participate" in staff development.

Table 2. New Hires by Race/Ethnicity and Employment Category: Fall 2003

	American Indian, Alaskan Native	Asian, Pacific Islander	Black, Non- Hispanic	Hispanic	White, Non- Hispanic	Non- Resident Alien	Unknown	Total
	Number							
Clerical/Secretarial	159	695	2,795	1,906	12,164	146	493	18,358
Service/Maintenance	105	248	2,588	1,531	5,930	96	311	10,809
Skilled Crafts	18	36	152	168	1,056	9	42	1,481
Technical/Paraprofessional	75	749	1,237	762	6,274	316	371	9,784
Other professionals	236	2,358	3,662	1,933	24,132	2,106	1,280	35,707
	Percentage							
Clerical/Secretarial	0.9%	3.8%	15.2%	10.4%	66.3%	0.8%	2.7%	100.0%
Service/Maintenance	1.0	2.3	23.9	14.2	54.9	0.9	2.9	100.0
Skilled Crafts	1.2	2.4	10.3	11.3	71.3	0.6	2.8	100.0
Technical/Paraprofessional	0.8	7.7	12.6	7.8	64.1	3.2	3.8	100.0
Other professionals	0.7	6.6	10.3	5.4	67.6	5.9	3.6	100.0

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, *Staff in Postsecondary Institutions datafile, Fall 2003*.

Contracts providing substantial rights to ESPs offer full tuition and/or workshop and seminar remission and reimbursement for their skills training and professional development activities.⁸

Who qualifies?

Most contracts indicate that employees must have at a minimum, “full-time status with six months of continuous service” to qualify for professional development activities. Some contracts require a year of full-time employment. Some contracts provide for tuition waivers, reimbursements, or remission for any course taught on any permanent campus in the university system. Some community college contracts permit employees to complete their baccalaureate degree at a four-year institution.⁹ Many contracts specify contingencies such as “contingent upon acceptance into a course or degree program,” “availability of classroom space or delayed registration,” “passing the course or maintaining a C or better average and GPA,” and “student ability to complete the course.”

Another desirable contractual benefit: the right for ESPs to “transfer their educational benefit to a spouse and/or dependents.”¹⁰ Most contracts follow the Internal Revenue Service definitions of “exemptions” to identify a spouse and dependents, though a few contracts use “partner” instead of spouse.¹¹ Ideally, spouses and dependents can be “granted remission for

instructional fees;” in some cases dependent remission may “include out-of-state instructional fees.” Most tuition remission programs are “limited to one undergraduate degree per employee, spouse and each of the dependent children.” Some contracts do not permit the employee’s spouse and/or dependents to benefit simultaneously from these provisions. No contract permitted transfer of required training needed for licensing and updating of crafts or maintenance skills to the spouse/partner or dependents.

Who pays?

The opportunities and means of activities from which ESPs can choose often include tuition remission or waivers, reimbursement of tuition, conferences, conventions, and training workshops and seminars. The cost to ESPs of obtaining professional development and skills training varies by college and university and by the availability of institutional resources. Cost coverage ranges from full tuition waivers and reimbursement costs to partial coverage, usually ranging from 30 to 75 percent. ESP coverage often exceeds spouse/partner or dependent reimbursement. But in almost every contract, “the cost of books, supplies, and fees remain payable by the student employee.” The required training and updating of skilled crafts and maintenance worker proficiencies, particularly when occupational health and safety are at issue, are fully covered.

When can ESPs attend?

The right to financial support for professional development and skills training activities contributes to the worklife quality of ESPs. But when and where do contracts permit ESPs to attend these development activities? Most contracts do not permit ESPs to take classes that conflict with their workday duties and tasks. These professional training activities, state the contracts, must occur after work time. The exception: updating licenses required by state and federal statutes. Some ESPs can negotiate with their immediate supervisor to take classes during their work time if the absence does not disrupt the unit's work. But missed time must be made up. Workplace seminars, workshops, conferences, and direct skills training often occur during work hours. ESPs are not required to make up the time taken for activities considered a primary or essential part of job responsibilities.

How long can ESPs benefit?

ESPs can often benefit by taking undergraduate or graduate courses. Many contracts permit ESPs to attend the nearest college or another institution within their university system when the home institution does not offer a needed specialty. The number of courses permitted and the length of time to complete them also vary. Some contracts permit ESPs to take eight or nine credit hours per semester for up to eight semesters and four summers (or 18 credit hours for 24 quarters). ESPs who retire while attending classes must often complete the degree within a year. There is a time and course limit even in contracts permitting ESPs to continue until the degree is completed. Similar criteria apply to spouses and dependents.

Some contracts permit ESPs to apply for up to 12 months of educational leave after contributing three or more years of full-time professional service. Time limits do not apply to training and updating of ESPs in the skilled crafts and maintenance category when mandated by statute.

Conclusion

ESPs are loyal, dedicated professionals who support the mission and operation of our colleges and universities. The interactions between ESPs—one of the largest groups within colleges and universities—and students, faculty, senior administration, and the

public are crucial to institutional vitality. Continued professional development and skills training foster that vitality.

NOTES

¹ National Education Association, 2003.

² About 85 percent of ESPs have some college education, 28 percent hold a two-year degree, 19 percent earned a bachelor's, and eight percent attained a master's degree or higher (National Education Association, 2003).

³ U.S. Department of Education, 2005.

⁴ Johnsrud, 2000.

⁵ We do not know the number of ESPs lost during the same time period.

⁶ National Education Association, Higher Education Research Center, 2002.

⁷ National Education Association, Spring 2005.

⁸ Youngstown State University, OH080, Article 27; University of Massachusetts-Amherst, MA024, Article 24, for example.

⁹ Metropolitan Community College, NE040, Article XXXI; Solano Community College, Atlantic Cape Community College, NJ187, Article XV, for example.

¹⁰ Jefferson Community College, OH082, Article 17; University of Detroit Mercy, MI330, Article VII, for example.

¹¹ Lane Community College, OR138, Article 13; New York University, NY142, Article 6, for example.

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