

Overview

By Harold S. Wechsler

Harold S. Wechsler is a professor of education at the Steinhardt School of Education, New York University. A former editor of NEA higher education publications, Wechsler writes on the history of minority access to college, efforts to reduce racial and ethnic prejudice on college campuses, ethnic studies, and education for business and for teaching. He is currently studying the encounter between first- and second-generation students and American colleges before 1960.

Wechsler's publications include "Eastern Standard Time: High School-College Collaboration and Admission to College," published by the College Board in A Faithful Mirror: Reflections on the College Board and Education in America, an anthology of essays commemorating the board's centennial, and Access to Success in the Urban High School: The Middle College Movement, a study of high schools for at-risk students, located on community college campuses, published by Teachers College Press. He is currently co-editing (with Linda Eisenmann and Lester Goodchild) the third edition of The History of Higher Education (Pearson).

NEA—older at 150 than most American schools, districts, colleges, and universities—has hosted the debates and produced the documents marking key turning points in the history of American education. The Committee of Ten (1893), for example, proposed major reforms of the nation's high school curricula, thereby redefining the relationship between schools and colleges. The Cardinal Principles of Education (1918) symbolized the ascent of progressive education a generation later. NEA nurtured many professional and academic associations—including the Parent Teacher's Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the American Association for Higher Education. Its support of school, college, and association desegregation helped to right a long-standing wrong. Its move to collective bargaining improved the conditions of academic work, gave its members a voice in state capitols and in Washington, D.C., and provided a vehicle for professional development.

NEA celebrates its sesquicentennial by continuing to protect the welfare of the academic profession, including more than three million colleagues who teach in or support the work of our schools and

colleges. Its defining characteristic remains constant: advocating a positive academic agenda focusing on student success.

The *NEA 2007 Almanac of Higher Education* examines the association's history on the postsecondary level in "Higher Education and the National Education Association: A Sesquicentennial Review." Written by Wayne J. Urban, a noted historian of collective bargaining, the essay traces the move from an initial balance between K-12 and higher education concerns within NEA to the eclipse of higher education issues during the interwar period. Adoption of collective bargaining in the 1970s culminated a post-World War II resurgence of higher education interests. A renewed emphasis on professional concerns and educational reform now complements the bread and butter focus characterizing the early years of unionization. "Given the current anti-union climate," Urban concludes, "one can only hope that NEA and its higher education bodies can realize their twin goals of occupational and educational improvement."

How is higher education faring in NEA's sesquicentennial year? Faculty salary increases averaged three percent in 2005–2006, Susan Clery and Amelia Topper

report in “Faculty Salaries: 2005–2006.” The average faculty salary rose to \$66,123. Clery and Topper note two widening salary gaps: the gender wage gap at public colleges, and the salary gap between public and private institutions. Salaries for faculty members at institutions with collective bargaining agreements, they add, remained higher than the pay received by colleagues at institutions without these agreements.

Nine states reported double-digit increases in higher education appropriations between FY 2006 and FY 2007, William Zumeta notes in “Financing Higher Education Access in Challenging Times.” Another 22 states reported increases of over five percent. The median year-to-year change for the 42 reporting states was 5.3 percent, well above the inflation rate. Adequate state student aid funding, Zumeta notes, would stem the rapid increase in net tuition revenue (nearly 37 percent of total education revenue in FY 2005).

Academic values require vigilant defense—now as in 1857. Philip G. Altbach assesses the state of academic freedom in “Academic Freedom in a Global Context: 21st Century Challenges.” Some non-industrialized nations directly challenge this essential academic norm; threats are subtler in most industrialized nations. External sources, he adds, initiate many threats; research results are often considered proprietary, and are sometimes suppressed in “corporatized” parts of universities. “Managerialism” may threaten academic freedom as it reduces faculty autonomy.

Also subtle, but real: “the toxic vestiges of prejudice, discrimination, xenophobia, and ethnic antagonism,” reports Henry L. Allen in “The Evolving Nexus of Diversity: Ethnic Minority Faculty Views on Workload and Productivity.” Economic downturns may disproportionately affect ethnic minority faculty members, but so does administrative and collegial insensitivity. Most ethnic minority faculty see themselves as trailblazers for future academic generations. Accomplishing this goal, Allen concludes, requires enthusiastic support, not structural and collegial indifference.

Working conditions also face erosion absent faculty vigilance, report Christine Maitland and Gary Rhoades in “Bargaining Family-Friendly Space in the Workplace.” Employers, they note, “retreat from their responsibilities towards employees by hiring

more contingent personnel, reconfiguring health care benefits, and walking away from ‘family-friendly’ benefits, child and family leaves, and childcare support.” Unions, Maitland and Rhoades add, must negotiate for living wages and for provisions enabling employees to fulfill family responsibilities.

Individual actions complement the Association’s role in providing for the future, Valerie Martin Conley documents in “Retirement and Benefits: Expectations and Realities.” The average age of the full-time faculty workforce increased from 47 in fall 1987 to 50 in fall 2003, and to 54 for full-time *tenured* faculty members. These increases—combined with the shift from defined benefit to defined contribution retirement plans, the proliferation of early retirement incentives, and the problems facing Social Security—translate into a need for proactive financial preparation for retirement.

American colleges and universities employ more than 1.5 million education support professionals, writes Vicki J. Rosser in “ESPs: Securing Quality Health Care Benefits.” Equitable health insurance plans, she notes, help to prevent work disruptions due to illness and to assure quality health care when illness occurs. Rosser’s essay includes collective bargaining contract language designed to stem recent declines in employment-based health coverage.

Americans conferred honor and trust on NEA when Congress granted the association a permanent Congressional charter in 1907. In 2007—the charter’s centennial and NEA’s sesquicentennial year—the association reaffirms that trust as it embarks on the next stage of its history.

The *Almanac* includes a CD-ROM containing faculty salary data by institution for 2005–2006, articles from previous *NEA Almanacs* and issues of *Thought & Action: the NEA Higher Education Journal*. The disk also includes the *College and University Analysis System* (CUDAS), a database developed by NEA that encapsulates key IPEDS data with an easy to use search and retrieval engine.

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