

Higher Education and the National Education Association: A Sesquicentennial Review

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When I was in elementary school in 1953, the state of Ohio, where I was born and grew up, experienced its 150th, or sesquicentennial anniversary. The title of this essay allows me to reuse a word I learned as a youngster, one that I never dreamed I would use again.

The year 2007 marks the sesquicentennial anniversary of the National Education Association (NEA). This article encapsulates 150 years of higher education activity in the association. One essay cannot fully cover such a long period and such a broad topic. But by highlighting key trends and topics, we may appraise the current place of higher education in NEA. I will divide the 150 years into periods of roughly 50 years each, and then subdivide the last 50-year period into slices of 15, 12, and 23 years respectively.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND NEA: 1857–1907

One problem, at least through much of the 20th century, animates this essay: the relationship of higher education representatives within NEA to other parts of the association, especially to the workforce in elementary and secondary schools.

Tensions in these relationships were muted, if present at all, at the association's founding in 1857. In that year, officers of ten state teachers associations issued a call for teachers from all over the nation to attend a conference in Philadelphia. That conference created the National Teachers Association (NTA) as "an association that shall embrace all the teachers of our whole country, which shall hold its meetings at such central points as shall accommodate all sections and combine all interests."¹ This inclusive language, and the relatively undifferentiated character of

American education in 1857, meant that the association welcomed teachers from the nation's schools, academies, and colleges. By one count, colleges and universities sent one-fourth of NTA's founding members.²

NTA's emphasis on teachers meant that famous lay and administrative educational leaders, such as Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, could at best enthusiastically support the "practical" teachers who led the organization.³ The term "teacher" encompassed a far broader swath of workers in America's schools than it does now; the elaborate administrative hierarchy typical of modern educational enterprises did not exist at NTA's founding. "Practical teachers" embraced the leaders of the few large schools, and groups of schools, mostly in the nation's largest cities.

NTA grew as other state teachers associations joined the original ten. In 1858, the growing ranks of teacher trainers organized the American Normal School Association (ANSA), a separate group. ANSA and NTA founded during the Civil War, but, as the war's end drew near in 1865, school leaders, representing the nation's large city and state systems of public schools, organized the National School Superintendents Association. In 1869 a federation of college men founded the Central College Association. In 1870, these groups joined with NTA to form the National Education Association, culminating a successful attempt to broaden its reach.

To accommodate these new constituencies, NEA added four departments to the parent body representing teachers in the state teachers associations. Three departments represented the normal schools, school superintendents, and colleges, respectively. A new department represented elementary schools. The roster of departments did not include secondary schools. Most observers considered the high schools and the academies—the universe of secondary education—as post-eighth grade institutions that had much in common with the colleges. Today's complicated, hierarchical, educational ladder of schools emerged later in the 19th century as the nation's elementary, secondary, and tertiary schools began to differentiate.⁴ Academy and high school teachers and leaders found their place in NEA's Department of Higher Education until 1887, when it added a separate Department of Secondary Education.⁵

Given the affinity of secondary schools and colleges, it should not be surprising that Zalmon S. Richards—NTA's first president (1858)—came from

the ranks of higher education. Richards, a Williams College graduate, taught in country schools and village academies, conducted teacher's institutes, and led two academies including his own school, Union Academy, which he opened in Washington, D.C. in 1851. He was also a faculty member of Columbian College—today's George Washington University—when he became NTA president.⁶ Speakers at the earliest NTA conventions included college professors, and high school and academy representatives.⁷

NTA accorded prominence to higher education, broadly and properly construed to include secondary education; its standing further increased when the Department of Higher Education became an NEA constituency in 1870. But the influence of college and university officers and faculty transcended that department. The composition of the Committee of Ten—whose influential report on the high school curriculum (1894) made it the association's most famous undertaking during NTA-NEA's first half-century—included a strong higher education contingent. The parent committee and its nine subcommittees, which considered the subjects in the curriculum, totaled 100 people. Of this 100, "fifty-three were college presidents or professors." That higher education provided over half of the group considering the nation's secondary school curriculum created no controversy. "When the Committee of Ten was appointed, there was little feeling of rivalry between public-school leaders and college men."⁸ Nor did the committee's recommendations for an enriched, academic high school curriculum—as a gateway to college or to life—provoke controversy at the time.

Higher education representatives remained prominent in NTA-NEA's leadership. From 1858 to 1924, for example, 24 of the association's presidents, more than one-third of the total, came from colleges and universities including Columbia, Girard College, Harvard, Kenyon College, Northwestern University, Princeton, the University of Vermont, and Washington University. Staff leaders, the secretaries of NTA-NEA, came from St. John's College (1864), Peoria Normal School (1866, 1872–1873), the University of Kansas (1887–89), the University of Nashville (1890), and Rutgers (1891).

Prominent early presidents of the Department of Higher Education included James H. Baker of the University of Colorado, Elwood P. Cubberley of Stanford, Charles W. Eliot of Harvard, Guy Stanton Ford of the University of Minnesota, Daniel Coit

Gilman of Johns Hopkins, G. Stanley Hall of Clark, Burke A. Hinsdale of the University of Michigan, Eli T. Tappan of Kenyon College, and Benjamin I. Wheeler of the University of California.⁹ All but Cubberley were presidents of their institutions; the Department of Higher Education preferred high administrative office in its leadership ranks. Yet the late 19th century university presidency had not yet distanced itself from faculty ranks. We now select university presidents from many backgrounds; presidents more often came from normal school faculty and lower administrative ranks a century ago.

Within the Department of Higher Education, the key problems included the place of Latin, Greek, and modern languages in the college curriculum, the advent of the elective system, the establishment of a national university, student life, social fraternities, entrance requirements, athletics, teacher education, and athletics.¹⁰ The absence of the occupational concerns of college teachers echoed their absence in the case of schoolteachers in the larger NEA.

College and university faculty and administrators thus played an exceptionally strong role in this relatively well-integrated association of teachers and educational leaders. NTA-NEA expected its members to consider the entire American educational enterprise—not just higher education—when discussing immediate problems and possibilities.

At the turn of the 20th century, NEA and its Department of Higher Education had become a setting for serious discussion of important educational issues. But stirrings within the ranks yielded a different association by the end of World War I.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND NEA, 1907–1957

NEA's leadership put the organization on a more permanent footing at its 50th anniversary (1907). The association's original charter set to expire (1906), its leaders had requested a new, permanent Congressional charter in 1905. Congress granted that charter in 1907, and the group officially became the National Education Association. Growing disputes over the nature of the association entered the charter discussions. Some members, especially Chicago teacher unionist and activist Margaret Haley—a force in NEA throughout the early 20th century—and New England educational journalist S. Y. Gillan, charged that the association was controlled from the top.¹¹ Haley and Gillan lost their fight to democratize the association through the new charter, but Haley

continued to exercise strong influence on behalf of women elementary school teachers, especially on the issue of association control.¹² Haley and her constituents experienced intermittent, but significant, successes electing Ella Flagg Young as the first woman president of NEA in 1910 and establishing a Department of Classroom Teachers in 1912.

Women continued to use NEA's organizational structure to influence, if not dominate, NEA affairs in the second decade of the 20th century. NEA regularly convened its annual meeting in large cities with many women teachers. All attendees could join the association and vote on its business. Local women leaders, often cooperating with Haley and other women activists, turned out a strong contingent of teachers, thereby exercising, at least, a veto over NEA leadership plans. Chafing at this organizational difficulty, NEA leadership pushed a reorganization plan through a national meeting in the early 1920s, when it met in Salt Lake City, Utah. This setting worked against women teacher activists since Utah's women teachers voted with their male leaders, not against them.¹³

The reorganized NEA conducted its business in a representative assembly composed of members elected by local and state teacher associations. The assembly was an organizational improvement over the town meeting format in which all members could speak and vote. But it also served to control schoolteacher demands. Male normal school representatives shared influence within NEA with the school superintendents and their administrative underlings, who controlled the powerful Department of Superintendence.¹⁴

These two interests learned how to placate the women teachers who made up the bulk of normal school student bodies, public school teachers, and the NEA membership. But NEA leaders also drew upon the burgeoning numerical strength of schoolteachers to build a powerful educational actor on the national scene, especially after NEA established a permanent headquarters in Washington, D.C. in 1917. An occupational association seeking national visibility and influence, NEA's leadership cadre understood, needed a presence in the nation's capital.

Organizational jockeying for power and influence occurred at NEA's annual meetings. The result: interests of the elementary and secondary schools, particularly the public schools, came to dominate while the Department of Higher Education receded in importance. Attendance at department meetings began a steady decline in 1910, and the inability to

find anyone to hold office led to its official end after its 1923 meeting. Meanwhile, NEA membership grew from 10,000 in 1918 to 200,000 in 1929.

But higher education leaders had not abandoned their own welfare. Rather, the birth of new organizations such as the Association of American Colleges in 1915, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in 1915, and the American Council on Education in 1918 meant they could focus on outlets where their interests predominated.¹⁵ Higher education did retain some influence within the association, however. Several higher education faculty and administrators held important positions between 1923 and 1942. For example, Frederick Hunter of the University of Denver and Henry L. Smith of Indiana University served as NEA presidents. Lotus D. Coffman of the University of Minnesota, and Felix Adler, Charles A. Beard, John Dewey, and George Strayer, all of Columbia University, joined the concerns of higher education and the public schools by addressing academic freedom, tenure, and due process.¹⁶ The Great Depression also caused enormous economic dislocations in colleges and universities and in the public schools. Communist hunters provided another link between K-12 and college members by threatening the job security of faculty in both sectors.

NEA revived the Department of Higher Education in 1942, and the reconstituted department diligently sought to restore its earlier influence within the parent association. It, like the rest of NEA, initially concentrated on the effects of World War II on the educational enterprise, focusing on the draft and related issues. But the end of the war spurred the department into a new phase. In April 1946, its leaders convened “two hundred selected leaders from American colleges and universities to formulate cooperative plans to meet the problems incident to the education of veterans.”¹⁷ That successful meeting encouraged the Department to sponsor an annual national conference on higher education, which took place in Chicago each spring between 1947 and 1967.

The first conferences focused on plans to assimilate the many veterans enrolling in colleges and universities under the GI Bill. Working groups—19 at the 1947 conference, for example—considered, debated, and reported on such topics as enrollment, equal opportunity, plant, instruction, admissions, faculty, finance, and organization.¹⁸ Not every working group dealt exclusively with returning veterans,

but their needs dominated the proceedings. The innovative discussion, debate, and report format replaced the department’s prior focus on speeches.

Changes in the title of the annual Department of Higher Education conference reflected partial resolution of GI-related problems. The title changed from “Current Problems in Higher Education” to “Current Trends” in 1948 and to “Current Issues in Higher Education” in 1950. The Korean War, which broke out in that year, threatened disruptions on American campuses resembling the dislocations of World War II.¹⁹ The conference later focused on critical issues, such as the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1959, and the burgeoning student movement in the middle 1960s.

The Department of Higher Education changed its name to the Association for Higher Education (AHE) in 1952, though the title page of its annual conference bulletin stated it was “A Department of the National Education Association.”²⁰ This name change indicated some policy independence from NEA while acknowledging financial dependence. Here’s the Association’s self-description in 1963:

The Association for Higher Education, a self-governing department of the National Education Association, is an organization of individuals concerned with promoting the cause of higher education in the United States. It is the only organization open both to administrators and to faculty members on an individual membership basis.²¹

Two years later, AHE added this self-description:

Approximately 22,000 individual faculty members and administrators from over 1,600 publicly and privately controlled colleges and universities located in all fifty states and in twenty-four foreign countries make up its membership. It is the *one* national professional organization in which membership is open on an individual basis to both faculty member and administrator alike, as well as to others whose major professional activity is in or closely related to higher education.²²

AHE was now willing to enumerate its membership and to open itself to members from groups other than faculty and administrators. Possible members included university staff members, and members of philanthropic organizations, publishers, think tanks such as the Brookings Institution, and federal, state, and local governmental agencies related to higher education. AHE soon became a powerful actor on the

higher educational stage, the same role that NEA envisioned for itself in the larger educational arena.

AHE further increased its visibility by initiating a quarterly publication, *So they say... about Higher Education*, shortly after the 1952 name change. *So they say...* described itself as a “digest of articles on higher education prepared four times each year for the Association For Higher Education (NEA) by the Educational Research Service and the NEA Research Division.”²³ Its contents came from *Education in Lay Magazines*, an Educational Research Service publication that digested articles on education from the popular press. NEA’s Research Division—within which the Educational Research Service was housed to respond to the needs of educational administrators for information immediately relevant to their practice—could easily prepare a version of *Education in Lay Magazines* for a higher education readership.

AHE now had another tangible product.²⁴ But beginning in November 1958 NEA’s Research Division yielded the editorship of *So they say...* to the Higher Education unit of Stanford University.²⁵ Two years later, the digest included articles from K-12 and higher education journals.²⁶ AHE’s lessened dependence on NEA for support and publicity reflected its desire to become independent: affiliated with, rather than operated under, NEA. More about this relationship later, but first, here’s another indicator of the increased strength of higher education within NEA.

NEA and its Department of Superintendence established the Educational Policies Commission (EPC) in the mid-1930s to bolster the cause of public education amidst attacks by economic interests who used the depression to attack all public institutions. EPC’s goal: to establish public education as a pillar of American democracy and a bulwark against the biased attacks of the spokespeople for economically privileged.²⁷ As the depression waned and war clouds gathered, EPC addressed the challenges posed to schools by war. The commission also tackled practical topics, such as the content of civic education and the future of the high school.²⁸ It issued volumes on elementary (1948) and secondary schools by the 1940s.

By this time, NEA had to consider EPC’s future. EPC evolved from combating ideological opposition to public education to a high prestige blue-ribbon body that studied and issued pronouncements on key educational policy issues. In 1947, NEA and its

superintendence department, by now called the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), restated their support of EPC and made a minor adjustment in the composition of the body. NEA’s Executive Committee had appointed EPC members, but beginning in 1947, at least four appointees were to represent respectively AASA, and the elementary, secondary, and higher education departments.²⁹

This action signaled the increased visibility and influence of the Department of Higher Education in NEA affairs. Three years after their appearance on EPC, the higher education forces began forceful lobbying for a report to complement EPC’s earlier volumes on elementary and high schools. EPC agreed to address the consequences for higher education of the impending influx of baby boomers already moving through the elementary schools and soon to flood the high schools. The report’s focus remained unspecified until 1953, when an EPC sub-committee, including the representative from the Department of Higher Education, produced a specific blueprint. The report, noted the subcommittee, must justify the significance of higher education, and specify finance—especially ways to increase financial support—as the key topic.³⁰ It was no coincidence that Herman B. Wells—president of Indiana University and the first president of the reconstituted Department of Higher Education (1942)—chaired EPC at the time.

The EPC report on higher education (1957) included the requested chapter on finance, along with chapters on admissions, curriculum, faculty, research, and policy. Realizing the potential of American higher education, the report stated, required financial support from the federal government.³¹ This recommendation complemented NEA’s advocacy of federal aid to public elementary and secondary education as an equalizer of educational opportunity between poorer and wealthier school districts and states. NEA’s leaders had pursued federal aid since the post-World War I reorganization, and concluded that the baby boomer influx argued strongly for that policy.

By NEA’s centennial in 1957, the leaders of the Department of Higher Education had become full partners with colleagues from elementary and secondary education. But centennial celebrations, self-congratulations, and accomplishments masked two developing fissures that fractured the association within a decade. We discuss how those fissures developed as NEA began its third half-century.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND NEA: 1957–1972

The seeds of a drastic reorganization were sowed while NEA celebrated its centennial. Two articles on the centennial concentrated on the widening gap between the school administrators controlling NEA and its schoolteacher majority.³² NEA, the articles noted, stifled the pursuit of the occupational interests of schoolteachers, especially when these interests conflicted with the interests of their administrative superiors. Teacher strikes, which occurred sporadically immediately after World War II and loomed again in the late 1950s, symbolized this divergence. The articles also criticized NEA's tendency to temporize in the field of civil rights, in deference to its segregated affiliates in the South. The articles depicted NEA as inappropriately conservative on desegregation three years after the landmark *Brown* decision—a time when the nation's move toward social justice for its minority populations needed leadership from the education profession.

Teachers' strikes—mostly in the nation's large industrial cities and notably in New York City—shook the educational world from the late 1950s through the 1960s. The prominence in these strikes of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), founded in 1916 as an integral part of the organized labor movement, gravely challenged NEA. How should the association counter a union that appealed exclusively to the occupational interests and grievances of classroom teachers? NEA's initial answer: teachers belonged to an educational profession, a family of related occupations with joint responsibility for the welfare of the nation's children. NEA did not stress that administrators assumed a parental role within that family and often treated teachers like children.

The association fought hard, but failed to counteract AFT's influence, especially in the large cities.³³ AFT also contrasted its stance to NEA's on desegregation. AFT, with few if any local or state southern affiliates, prohibited its affiliates from segregating its members shortly after the *Brown* decision. NEA's go-slow policy reflected the strength of its segregated state and local affiliates. The result: big city and many other teachers outside of the South saw little to attract them to NEA. Later, when competing with AFT to represent local teachers, NEA often seemed a weak alternative to a teachers union that was part of a labor movement that thrived on bargaining.

While the NEA hierarchy looked for ways to combat the AFT in the 1960s, a union movement within the association flourished without leadership support. Urban NEA affiliates, mainly in medium size cities, and state affiliates in northern, Mid-western, and west coast locations, saw a chance to win the allegiance of teachers via bargaining units. NEA's "urban movement,"³⁴ as described by a leader from Nashville, Tennessee, set out to free the association from the control of AASA and their allies in NEA's highest staff ranks. Their fierce battle against the NEA establishment forced the retirement of an executive secretary and the departure of his successor. The decade-long battle culminated in a constitutional convention in the early 1970s. NEA, the convention decided, must become a rival union to AFT that solved teachers' occupational problems through collective bargaining. It must, the convention added, cast off groups that were ancillary at best to teachers' interests.

AHE was one of these groups. Beginning in the 1950s, AHE took halting steps to reduce dependence on NEA, and it eventually assumed many support functions heretofore performed by the parent organization. This bureaucratic distancing reflected a substantive difference. NEA's move to become a teachers' union directly contradicted AHE's claim to be the sole organization representing higher education faculty and administrators.

NEA's higher education community questioned that claim. A 1967 higher education task force did not endorse collective bargaining, but it espoused an increased faculty role in institutional governance, especially in academic decisions. Meanwhile, NEA-affiliated community college faculties in Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, and Wisconsin negotiated collective bargaining agreements with their administrations. This activity in turn led to establishment of a National Faculty Association of Community and Junior Colleges (NFACJC) within NEA (1967) and to a commitment, a year later, to organize four-year college and university faculty to negotiate collective bargaining agreements with their employers.³⁵ These moves heightened tensions with AHE, which reiterated its commitment to serving faculty and administration.

A second policy fissure emerged. Since its post-World War I modernization, NEA saw the health of the nation's *public schools* as a key guarantor of a democracy. But AHE wished to advocate for public and private colleges and universities. The two groups

often finessed their differences without fracturing their relationship until federal aid for elementary, secondary, and higher education became a distinct possibility and then an accomplished fact in the 1950s and 1960s. The difference then came to look more like a fault line that could become an earthquake at any time.

NEA wanted federal aid for public schools only. Support would go to state departments of education and local school districts to use as they saw fit. Its leaders especially feared the campaign of the Roman Catholic Church for a portion of federal aid. They looked askance as a series of Supreme Court decisions in the 1950s lowered the wall of separation between church and state that, they believed, should have barred such aid.³⁶ But AHE preferred categorical aid to general federal aid and would consider aid to public and private colleges, even church-related private institutions.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 ended the debate by providing financial aid for *students* in public and private colleges—a precedent established in NDEA. The act also allowed direct aid to private *institutions*. Higher education interests considered this result a great success, but NEA leaders found the act a bitter pill to swallow.

NEA's teacher activists agreed with the hierarchy's allegiance to the public schools and with confining federal aid to public schools. They therefore did not change the association's allegiances when they resoundingly defeated the administration-oriented group of NEA leaders in the constitutional revision of 1972. These activists had little sympathy for their leadership's affinity for school administrators and their claim to speak for both groups. AHE repudiated the remodeled NEA's *raison d'être* when it rebuffed a proposal to assume responsibility for organizing college faculties to bargain collectively. The tendency to accept members paying only departmental dues heightened NEA teacher suspicion of and anger with AHE and other NEA departments.

AHE and NEA divorced in 1971; AASA and the Associations of Elementary and Secondary Principals left the association in the same year.³⁷ AHE's departure left NEA without a policy focus for higher education. But it retained junior and community college affiliates that engaged in collective bargaining, a national association of those affiliates, and a commitment (and some staff resources) to pursue collective bargaining for other two-year and four-year college faculties.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND NEA: 1972–1984

For more than a decade after its 1972 constitutional revision, NEA's higher education operation deemphasized AHE's policy orientation, and its cooperation with the American Council on Education, the Association of American Colleges, and the Association of American Universities. NEA focused on building a strong union of schoolteachers and of higher education faculty, devoted to collective bargaining and related means of pursuing their occupational interests. It recognized this priority in its higher education sector through the NFACJC and the National Faculty Association (NFA), composed of affiliates in four-year colleges and universities. These associations merged in 1974 to form the NEA National Council for Higher Education.³⁸ NEA's growing field staff spread the message of collective bargaining to affiliates throughout the country. The net result: within about a decade, NEA's growth made it one of the nation's most formidable unions.

Higher education forces looked to establish and maintain their place within that union. Victories in collective bargaining or representation elections in the 1970s and early 1980s peppered the pages of the *Higher Education Advocate*, the newsletter of the NFA and the National Society of Professors, another group set up by NEA to represent the interests of college faculty. Readers learned, for example, of the struggle of the City University of New York faculty, then jointly affiliated with AFT and NEA, to negotiate a satisfactory new contract in fall 1973, and of successful developments in the Minnesota two-year college system.³⁹ A year later they learned of the NEA's successful campaign—in partnership with AAUP—to replace AFT as bargaining agent for faculty at the University of Hawaii in 1974.⁴⁰ This venture, and other attempts at cooperation with AAUP, and occasionally with AFT, showed that NEA would collaborate as needed to organize college faculty. It often succeeded, particularly at two-year colleges. Higher education victories were a small, but important, part of the NEA's monumental membership growth to more than two million members by 1990.

Higher education activists were a force within the NEA after its reorganization in 1972. Gaining influence in the association's central governing and policy councils, these activists knew, helped to secure and maintain their place within NEA. Higher education delegates to the 1972 NEA convention formed a caucus that tripled in membership in a year. The

convention established a Higher Education Task Force to develop comprehensive plans for future organizing.⁴¹

During the 1970s and early 1980s, NEA's commitment to an educational profession and a client orientation diminished. Within higher education, a budding service-oriented faculty union could embrace policy issues such as academic freedom, tenure, and fair dismissal. But the association had to sharpen its political lobbying skills in states where collective bargaining for public employees was illegal—primarily in the South and parts of the West—to pursue the interests of its teacher members. NEA's higher education segment pursued this agenda with some success. The Alabama Education Association and its higher education unit, for example, made significant gains in the state legislature in 1978. This legislature, like most southern and western state legislatures, would not pass a collective bargaining law, but it responded positively to lobbying for salary increases and to protecting the tenure rights of faculty, especially within the state's community college system. Alabama was firmly in the NEA camp, despite the collective bargaining ban. The state association reported 93 percent membership among eligible K-12 teachers and an 85 percent rate among eligible two-year college teachers.

NEA's Alabama affiliate successfully pursued member interests through assiduous, effective lobbying.⁴² NEA had conducted similar lobbying activities at the state and federal levels for many decades, but its political activities assumed a new character during the collective bargaining revolution. In the 1970s, NEA formalized its political activities, while permitting members to make direct financial contributions, by creating national and state political action committees. NEA endorsed a candidate for the first time in the 1976 presidential election. The victory of Jimmy Carter, a Democrat from Georgia, after this landmark endorsement brought education into the highest circles of the federal government. Establishment of a cabinet-level United States Department of Education fulfilled Carter's promise to NEA in the 1976 campaign, and realized a 50-year association goal.⁴³ NEA kept NEA-affiliated higher education faculty aware of its commitment to Carter, and often succeeded in legislative lobbying during his tenure, such as on the Higher Education Act amendments of 1980.⁴⁴

HIGHER EDUCATION AND NEA: 1984–2007

Republican Ronald Reagan of California handily defeated Carter in the 1980 election. The resulting

change in political climate in Washington and in many states and localities slowly but significantly altered NEA's efforts in higher education. The result: an NEA that first recovered its older educational policy orientation in higher education (and in K-12), and then placed that orientation alongside—and often at the service of—its focus on collective bargaining and faculty representation.

Ronald Reagan's education agenda pointed directly at the NEA. His platform included abolition of the Department of Education, formal prayer in the public schools, and tuition tax credits for parents of children in private schools. NEA fended off this platform, but its success came at a price: playing defense on many national and state issues. Reagan's attack on public education and on NEA, symbolized by *A Nation at Risk* (1983), continues into the early 21st century.⁴⁵ The new right education agenda includes raising academic achievement through standardized testing and pursuing educational vouchers allowing public funds to go to children attending private schools. Reagan and his successors depicted NEA as the major obstacle to what they considered to be these needed educational reforms.⁴⁶

The new right mischaracterized NEA as a union uninterested in anything other than teacher benefits. The association—a crucible for educational improvement for almost its entire history—considered educational improvement when it became a union through its Instructional and Professional Development Division (IPD). In 1980, a month after Reagan's election, the chair of the NEA's Higher Education Council noted that IPD's "Profiles of Excellence" project included teacher education, higher education governance, and academic freedom.⁴⁷ Yet that thrust failed to dent the public (and even professional) image that NEA only sought the material welfare of its members. NEA refocused on counteracting conservative political attacks that it neglected educational quality and on establishing its role in solving the problems of American education.⁴⁸

Another key contributor to NEA's shift began before the conservative assault: the American economic downturn during the 1970s. American politicians and the public failed to remedy the concomitant downturn in the higher education sector, even when the nation's economy improved. The enormous economic pressure experienced by higher education faculty and their institutions in the last quarter of the 20th century has hardly abated. Faculty salaries failed

to keep up with inflation, while colleges and universities tightened tenure and promotion policies. Legislators, counting only classroom contact hours per week, concluded that faculty members were notoriously under-worked. Boards of trustees and university administrators wished to solve fiscal difficulties by employing more part-time and temporary faculty—a strategy that reduced the ranks of colleagues with full personnel benefits and, more important, with full-time institutional commitments.

NEA embarked on a serious self-examination in the early 1980s. The goal: a productive response to the economic and political problems plaguing its members and their schools and colleges. That self-examination resulted in two new higher education publications: the *NEA Almanac of Higher Education*, and *Thought & Action*, a new higher education journal, both begun in 1984. The *NEA Higher Education Advocate* continued to concentrate on collective bargaining and political action.

How did these publications contribute to a revived professional agenda? “You have before you the first issue of...a publication that I believe will soon become the authoritative source book for higher education.” This comment, by NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell, introduced The *NEA 1984 Almanac of Higher Education*.⁴⁹ An evaluation, Futrell noted, revealed member interest in learning the basic facts about higher education. The *Almanac* divided its rendering of these facts into seven chapters. The first chapter, “A Profile of Higher Education,” described the immense American higher education enterprise via statistical data gleaned from government reports. The profile’s opening page announced the major theme: “Higher Education: The Go-Go Years are Gone.”

After describing the enormous increases in enrollments, expenditures, and graduate education of the 1960s and 1970s, the profile declared, “Today, four years into the 80s, the phenomenally rapid expansion of higher education in the United States is history. Higher education has entered a new era of stability, at least for the immediate future.” Some characteristics of this era, the *Almanac* added, were not good news for faculty. The profile detailed “The Part-Time Faculty Explosion,” noting a modest increase in full-time faculty ranks from 1970 to 1980, while the number of part-time faculty more than doubled.⁵⁰

Two other *Almanac* chapters documented a pause in, if not a cessation of, good times. A chapter on

government and higher education detailed the federal programs and agencies supporting higher education, and outlined NEA’s lobbying agenda, especially repelling the threat to existing programs posed by the upcoming renewal of the Higher Education Act. Another chapter informed readers of the many positive court decisions relating to the place of women and minorities in higher education. But the article also warned of the diminution, if not the cessation, of activity by many government agencies charged with maintaining human and civil rights.⁵¹ Other chapters profiled the profession of college teaching, discussed salaries, detailed the recent successes of collective bargaining in higher education, and described the workings of NEA and its higher education unit.

Subsequent issues altered the proportion of data and analysis. The 1987 *Almanac*, emphasizing data over thematic interpretation, replaced the seven chapters with four major sections. The first section, “The Academy: A Statistical Profile,” contained 20 datasets on enrollments, degrees granted, test scores, state and federal government appropriations, salaries, and endowments. The introduction to each subsection presented a brief thematic or interpretive emphasis. Other sections reviewed the year and described NEA’s role in higher education. A resources and references section listed recent books and relevant journals, higher education legislation, grants, academic and professional meetings, journals, and accrediting bodies.⁵² This emphasis on statistics and relative de-emphasis on data interpretation continued into the first half of the 1990s, though an introduction to the 1989 *Almanac* contained data analyses, while noting NEA’s success in obtaining federal funding, and in pension protection and civil rights.⁵³

The introduction to the *Almanac* for 1993 indicated a notable addition, “the first comprehensive ‘NEA Faculty Salary Report.’” Based on data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, the report analyzed salaries by faculty rank and by type of institution, and noted changes in salaries over time. The record, concluded the report, “suggests full-time faculty are responsible for more and being paid less than was the case 20 years ago.” “Salaries,” the report added, “are eroding as the nation prepares for a wave of faculty retirements.”⁵⁴ Sections comparing salaries in bargaining and non-bargaining states and institutions reinforced this interpretive stance. The sections on state appropriations and on federal spending documented “the worst higher education fiscal crisis of

the last 50 years, a crisis that the federal government...is so far inadequately addressing."

The interpretive stance and accompanying emphasis on NEA advocacy goals had thus made a strong comeback even before a substantial shift in format in 1994. The size of this version doubled, and it featured a more accessible typeface and column style. For a decade, the "Overview" noted, the *Almanac* focused on compiling statistics and other reference material to help faculty understand their occupation and its place in their colleges and universities. Reader reactions indicated its limits: without accompanying analyses, readers learned little that was geared to their occupational lives.⁵⁵

The 1994 *Almanac* remedied this omission by offering "original essays on the conditions of academic life, directed towards faculty members, administrative staff, and support staff." Taken together, the essays pointed to one conclusion: "Economic, political, and demographic changes have combined to make our jobs more difficult, the rewards slimmer."⁵⁶ Salary increases had not kept up with inflation, reductions in force characterized many academic settings, and governing bodies and administrators ignored future personnel needs and concentrated on intensifying the work demands of current faculty. The new *Almanac* would lay bare and interpret these problems so that readers might work to improve "the conditions of academic life, for themselves, their students, and their concerned publics."⁵⁷

The NEA higher education effort had now come full circle. After becoming a union, NEA deemphasized the focus on ameliorating current problems that characterized AHE. In the 1990s, NEA decided to confront those problems directly. But now faculty could play a significant role in their amelioration through collective bargaining and other means of advocacy.

The 1994 *Almanac* included original contributions by noted scholars of higher education on these topics: salaries; workload and productivity; assessing teaching, research and service; trends in bargaining; state policy and finance; benefits and retirement; and administrative staff issues. The salary discussion was in two parts, an original essay on salaries, copiously illustrated with graphs and tables followed at the end of the *Almanac* by a detailed presentation of all the data supporting the earlier essay. Since 1994, *Almanac* essays have occasionally shifted focus. The *Almanac* also occasionally replaced one topic with another. But

the 2006 edition bears a strong resemblance to its predecessors. In 2006, essays discussed salaries, internationalization, finance, attacks on the right to bargain, contingent faculty, workload, benefits and retirement, and ESPs (educational support professionals). All essays continued topics addressed in 1994, save for internationalization and contingent faculty.⁵⁸

As previously noted, NEA inaugurated *Thought & Action*, a semiannual journal of higher education, in 1984. A review panel—composed of selected faculty members of NEA higher education affiliates—oversaw the choice of topics and articles. These panelists wished to speak to, and for, all faculty members in their affiliates. *Thought and Action* was a faculty journal published by faculty for faculty interested in the analysis and improvement of their profession.

Faculty from economics, English, education, philosophy, social science, sociology, and speech and theater made up the review panel for the first issues of the journal. These faculty members represented community colleges in California, Hawaii, and St. Louis, Missouri; regional universities in California, Minnesota, and Ohio; a historically black public college in Georgia, and a rapidly developing state university in New England. This distribution of fields, locations, and institutional type roughly characterized the membership in the NEA higher education ranks.

The inaugural issue identified three key sets of issues: maintaining and increasing gender, racial, and ethnic diversity among students and faculty members; vigorously defending equality of opportunity; and protecting faculty against administrative and political assaults on their working conditions.⁵⁹ The first issue, titled "Research and the Academy," contained 24 articles organized under five headings: "The Corporation on Campus: Risks and Problems," "The Corporation on Campus: Possibilities and Benefits," "Public Policy and Public Interest," "Faculty at Work," and "Views from Abroad."⁶⁰

Themed issues were the norm for *Thought & Action*. The 1980s themes included bargaining, women's studies, and sexual harassment. Issues from the 1990s included curriculum and teaching, academic publishing, the tenure process, technology, and the future of higher education. The journal published essays on women, minorities, racism, and ethnicity even in the occasional eclectic issue.⁶¹ Almost every issue contained book reviews.

"Higher Education and the New Unionism," a 1997 article by NEA president Bob Chase showed

how new—education reform-oriented—unionism applied to higher education.⁶² Chase attempted to refashion NEA into a professional union that promoted occupational improvement and institutional reform in the interest of student achievement. This agenda was no great leap in the higher education sector where, as we have seen, instruction, technology, and policy complemented a dedication to occupational improvement. *Thought & Action* easily assimilated Chase's commitment to quality, teaching, and educational reform; subsequent issues concentrated on specific aspects of this agenda, such as distance learning and adjunct faculty.

Thought & Action underwent a face-lift in fall 2005, its 21st year. The publication moved from semiannual to annual appearance, and the number of articles, the size, and the number of pages all increased. The typeface changed for easier readability. The issue included a special focus—a section omitted in the recent past—titled “Higher Education and the National Security State.” The generally critical, but not reflexively negative, section focused on threats to academic freedom and the established conduct of higher education posed by the ideological and legal sanctions coming after the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Noam Chomsky, the famous linguist and social critic, and Ellen Schrecker, a noted historian of academic freedom, wrote the lead articles. Schrecker worried about a new McCarthyism on campus, but Chomsky's less pessimistic stance stressed the commitment of many academics to maintaining institutional freedom and the openness of the public to critical ideas. Chomsky was especially optimistic about the intellectual currents within the sciences, seeing a distinct possibility of critical insights and action in relation to the nation's political powers. Other contributors expressed greater pessimism, but all wished to combat the threats to academic freedom that they saw on the horizon.

Two articles examined how the post-9/11 climate influenced instruction in history and chemistry. The chemistry essay called for instructors to avoid self-censorship in the wake of 9/11; it did not focus on an external political threat of control of chemistry instruction or research. Another article showed how administrators at the University of South Florida reacted to the circumstances surrounding an Arab professor of computer science and Islamic activist, who was eventually arrested as a terrorist accomplice.⁶³

Four of the first seven articles in the remodeled *Thought & Action* focused on teaching. The three others focused on productivity in academe, racism in a faculty search at a California state university, and academic freedom in the 21st century. This stress on teaching and the diversity of the other topics testifies to the journal's ongoing commitment to professional and institutional improvement. The announced focus of the 2006 issue on the academy as a workplace indicated continued emphasis on faculty careers.

What can one conclude from this content analysis of *Thought & Action*? The cosmetic changes and the new format did not hide the journal's fundamental continuities. The journal's shift from a stress on occupational interest to institutional reform represented a pendulum movement or a shift of emphasis, not a seismic shift in content. A wide-ranging publication devoted to the welfare of faculty union members and to improving their professional performance did not have to choose between two legitimate themes.

The changes in the *Almanac of Higher Education* since its inception in 1984 also testify to the need for information on, and interpretation of, the conditions in American higher education in the interests of occupational and institutional improvement. Both publications, especially in the last decade, significantly added to the focus on organizing, bargaining, and succeeding in that arena that characterized the NEA higher education effort just after unionization. The mix is never constant and often needs adjustment. But a mix is necessary for NEA, or any other professional union, to fulfill the needs of its members.

CONCLUSION

This article examined NEA's 150-year involvement in higher education. NEA's history is remarkable first for its continuity—but also for its discontinuity. The change to a teachers' union after 1972 is perhaps the most important event in this history. NEA's relationship to higher education shows the same continuity and discontinuity. Again, 1972 was the turning point; NEA subsequently became a powerful representative of higher education faculty—and for schoolteachers—by pursuing their interests through collective bargaining.

Neither faculty representation nor collective bargaining characterized NEA activities in higher education before 1972. Instead NEA remained committed to the educational profession, to improving the educational enterprise, and to including higher education

in that profession and enterprise. A consciousness that higher education was a distinct, but not separate, part of the educational enterprise increasingly characterized NEA higher education participants from 1920 through 1972.

Between 1972 and 1984, NEA's higher education activists pursued unionism, while overlooking most other issues. Higher education thus shared the orientation, values, single-mindedness, and commitments of the larger association. After 1984, higher education added professional concerns to the union agenda of occupational improvement—first tentatively and then determinedly. In the 1990s, as NEA's "new unionism" championed educational reform, the improvement of higher education came to the fore. NEA and its higher education sector now seek to blend productively the occupational and educational improvement agendas.

Similar agendas permitted the tension between higher education and the larger NEA to wane. The tension does not animate the larger association or its higher education participants in 2007. Given the current anti-union climate, one can only hope that NEA and its higher education bodies can realize their twin goals of occupational and educational improvement. Such realization would yield a healthier occupation for its practitioners and a more productive institutional environment within which they can work. These are surely worthy goals.

NOTES

¹ Wesley, 1957, 22.

² Keck.

³ Wesley, 1957, 24.

⁴ Urban and Wagoner, 2004, 237-40.

⁵ Wesley, 1957, 48, 288.

⁶ Ibid., 25; Keck.

⁷ Wesley, 1957, 26-45.

⁸ Ibid., 72. Only in the 20th century, when public schoolmen diversified the secondary curriculum by adding vocational studies to academic pursuits, did the relationship between secondary and higher education become problematic.

⁹ Wesley, 1957, 104.

¹⁰ Ibid. The national university was a long-standing objective of the Department. Box 1847 of the NEA archives contains documents relating to the unsuccessful quest for this objective. The box is accessible through NEA headquarters in Washington.

¹¹ Wesley, 1957, 330.

¹² Urban, 1982.

¹³ Ibid., chapter 6; Rousmaniere, 2005.

¹⁴ Urban, 2000.

¹⁵ Wesley, 1957, 397; Keck.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "History of the National Conference on Higher Education."

¹⁸ National Education Association, *Current Problems in Higher Education*, 1947.

¹⁹ The NEA archives contains the proceedings of the National Conference on Higher Education from 1946 to 1967, except for the first year (boxes 1848 and 1849).

²⁰ National Education Association, *Current Issues in Higher Education*, 1952.

²¹ National Education Association, *Current Issues in Higher Education: Critical Decisions in Higher Education*, 1963, vi.

²² National Education Association, *Current Issues in Higher Education: Pressures and Priorities in Higher Education*, 1965, iv.

²³ National Education Association, *So they say about Higher Education*, (March, 1953). The NEA archives contains a complete run of this publication (box 1847).

²⁴ Urban, 1997.

²⁵ National Education Association, *So they say about Higher Education*, November, 1958.

²⁶ Ibid., Winter, 1960-61.

²⁷ National Education Association, Educational Policies Commission, 1937.

²⁸ Ibid., 1940, 1941, and 1944. On EPC, see Urban, Fall, 2005.

²⁹ Urban, Fall 2005.

³⁰ National Education Association, *Proceedings of the Educational Policies Commission*, Thirty-Sixth Meeting, October 5-7, 1950 and Forty-First Meeting, March 26-28, 1953. The NEA archives contains the proceedings of all EPC meetings.

³¹ National Education Association, Educational Policies Commission, 1957.

³² Jorgensen, 1957, Lieberman, 1956, and Lieberman, 1957.

³³ Urban, 2000, Murphy, 1990.

³⁴ Bogen, 1970.

³⁵ Keck.

³⁶ Discussion of general aid to public schools only surfaced within EPC in the late 1950s. The issue became divisive as the group moved to more flexible positions than NEA on categorical aid and on aid to private schools.

³⁷ Keck.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ National Education Association, "CUNY Faculty Stand Firm," and "Minn. Junior College Teachers Bargain Landmark Pact." This publication—printed on newsprint and looking much like a newspaper—was the preeminent

publication of NEA in higher education in the 1970s and early 1980s. It modified its name twice in the period from *Higher Education Advocate* to *NEA Higher Education Advocate* and then to *nea advocate: a publication for NEA members in higher education*. The NEA archives contains a complete run of the publication (box 1849).

⁴⁰ National Education Association, "AFT Ousted in Hawaii: Associations Win Overwhelming Victory."

⁴¹ National Education Association, "Higher Education Caucus Notes," 1973.

⁴² National Education Association, "Alabama faculty taste a new strength."

⁴³ Urban, 2000.

⁴⁴ National Education Association, "60 billion on horizon: higher education act signed into law."

⁴⁵ National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983.

⁴⁶ Urban and Wagoner , 2004, chapter 12.

⁴⁷ National Education Association, "NEA Plans 'Profiles of Excellence,'" 3.

⁴⁸ Urban, 2000; Urban, 1997.

⁴⁹ National Education Association, *The NEA 1984 Almanac of Higher Education*, 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 5, 6.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² National Education Association, *The NEA 1987 Almanac of Higher Education*.

⁵³ National Education Association, *The NEA 1989 Almanac of Higher Education*, 3-4.

⁵⁴ National Education Association, *The NEA 1993 Almanac of Higher Education*, 37.

⁵⁵ National Education Association, *The NEA 1994 Almanac of Higher Education*, 5.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ National Education Association, *The NEA 2006 Almanac of Higher Education*.

⁵⁹ National Education Association, *Thought & Action*, 1984, 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 3-4.

⁶¹ For example, *Thought & Action*, 1994, contained articles on women's adult development, racism, ethnic fraud, American Indian faculty, and academic women.

⁶² Chase, 1997.

⁶³ National Education Association, *Thought & Action*, 2005.

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