

Overview

By Mark F. Smith

Mark F. Smith is an organizational specialist—higher education for the National Education Association. A coordinator of NEA’s higher education program since March, 2006, he works with state affiliates and locals to advance the interests of college and university faculty and staff and to carry out the goals of the association.

Higher education has undergone many transformations over the years. One scholar characterizes the history of American higher education as “the growth of multipurpose institutions which continue to add functions and responsibilities without disregarding older commitments.”¹ The growth of professional education, the development of community and technical college systems, the explosion of enrollments, and the commercialization of research confirm this characterization. The *NEA 2008 Almanac of Higher Education* examines the implications of these changes on the structure of academic employment.

In “Liberal Education Takes a New Turn,” Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, examines the “conflicted and often contradictory” perspectives on contemporary liberal education. The traditional approach emphasizes student coursework. Schneider criticizes reform efforts calling for a marketable focus on job readiness.

She instead suggests a developmental approach to learning that emphasizes habits

of mind, breadth of perspective, and capabilities. This approach integrates liberal education values with the practical focus of professional education.

In “Higher Education Funding: On the Way Up, But for How Long?” William Zumeta notes a third straight year of increased state support. Yet, danger signs threaten the longer-term outlook. Some states face budget shortfalls, and most face structural deficits. These deficits come on top of the historical decline in state commitment to higher education: “In inflation-adjusted per student terms, state and local higher education funding was actually lower in FY 2006, at \$6,325, than it was in 1980 (\$6,517).” Zumeta describes the impact on access of resulting tuition increases.

Turning to bread and butter issues, the average salary for faculty on 9/10-month contracts in FY 2006–07 was \$68,514, up 3.6 percent. But, Susan Clery and Barry Christopher report in “Faculty Salaries: 2006–2007,” this increase masks disparities along gender lines, between institutions, and among specialties. The growing salary gap between full and assistant professors is also

disturbing. This report is largely based on data for full-time faculty; the situation would appear much bleaker if the study included complete data on contingent faculty. On a positive note, faculty members at institutions with bargaining agreements still earn more than their colleagues without bargaining (\$67,855 to \$64,580).

Next, Valerie Martin Conley examines the baby boomers' impact on the Social Security system, and the effects on the benefits provided to younger employees in "Retirement and Benefits: Shifting Responsibilities." Conley then examines the shift from institutional to employee responsibility for costs, especially the pronounced decline in the share of health insurance costs borne by colleges. A move from defined benefit to defined contribution pension plans, she adds, protects portability while shifting the risk on return to the employee.

In "Workload and Productivity: Strategic Views of Unionized Ethnic-Minority Faculty," Henry Lee Allen examines the views of unionized ethnic-minority faculty on the conditions of academic work. These colleagues have revitalized discussions about workload, job stress, research, tenure, and community engagement. "Unions matter, but they could matter more," Allen concludes. He calls for studies that emphasize the humanity of faculty life.

Christine Maitland and Gary Rhoades also focus on the restructuring of academic employment in "Bargaining for Full-time, Non-Tenure Track Faculty: Best Practices." Rather than focus on part-time contingent faculty, Maitland and Rhoades provide "professional terms and conditions for full-time, non-tenure faculty." No institution has an ideal package, but Maitland and Rhoades identify strong language covering salaries and benefits, employment categories, and processes of appointment, evaluation, renewal, and termination.

Gregory M. Saltzman examines a different job security issue in "Dismissals, Layoffs, and Tenure Denials in Colleges and Universities:" the employment doctrines at play in higher

education, and the level of protection each doctrine provides to employees. Saltzman then describes how the "growth of non-tenure track faculty appointments erodes the protections provided by tenure."

In "ESP Benefits and Job Satisfaction: An Update," Vicki J. Rosser describes the results of NEA's 2007 survey of higher education ESPs. The survey focused on satisfaction with benefits, job status, and career plans. ESPs felt satisfied despite challenges, especially a lack of professional development and promotional opportunities. Underlying their responses: worry about the outsourcing of jobs.

The *NEA Almanac* includes a CD-ROM containing faculty salary data by institution for 2006–07, and articles from previous *NEA Almanacs* and *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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We express our condolences to the family of Marion Clayton, who passed away in summer 2007. Marion, along with Carl Luty, edited the first and second issues of the *NEA Almanac of Higher Education* in 1984 and 1985. Her colleagues will long remember her commitment to her family, her church, and to NEA.

NOTES

¹ Rothblatt, 1997, 27.

REFERENCES

Rothblatt, S. *The Modern University and its Discontents: The Fate of Newman's Legacies in Britain and America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.