

Overview

The fall 2000 issue of *Thought & Action*—the journal’s first retrospective issue in its 16 year history—comes at a time when the entire academic community faces an unprecedented challenge to the meaning and purpose of higher education.

In preparing this issue on the role of faculty in the higher education enterprise, we found that *Thought & Action*’s many years of thoughtful, passionate, and often enlightened discussion lead to an inescapable conclusion: The professoriate must change.

Our hope is that this collection of articles might serve as a springboard for an urgently needed movement of thought and action by the nation’s professoriate. Without such a self-determined transformation, the professoriate may be soon reduced to a profession in name only.

Averting this sad finale currently rushing towards us all requires a genuine, systemic change of the professoriate’s nature and condition—a re-definition of the profession—that we hope this issue of *Thought & Action* will serve as a catalyst for.

The formidable pressures challenging the professoriate are many:

- Threats to tenure and academic freedom.

- A for-profit consumerism that controls and defines the purpose of higher education.
- Dwindling numbers of full-time faculty, separated from dramatically increasing numbers of exploited part-time faculty.
- An increasing loss of control over determining the professoriate’s role in society.

A disabling internal fragmentation within an already weak profession only amplifies these problems.

The more “comfortable” faculty members often choose to duck these larger issues by cloaking themselves in entrepreneurial individualism or partisan political rhetoric.

All the while, the profession as a whole decays from within as it is relentlessly attacked from the outside. A powerless national faculty consisting of some very comfortable, well-paid “employees” and many more poorly paid “employees” doesn’t bode well for the future of the academy, the education of our students, or the quality of civilization.

Our mutual fate is sealed. No matter how comfortable your current niche, a profession without power and autonomy is no profession at all. The central question: Will enough faculty be sufficiently alarmed and care deeply enough

about their larger responsibility in the creation of the future to change from within—to transform?

This special issue of *Thought & Action* begins to address this challenge by reviewing the past, assessing the present, and proposing action for the future.

These journal articles from 1984 to the present, taken together, offer a substantial analysis of the faculty role within the complex culture of higher education over the past decade-and-a-half. The selections survey the dynamics that shape both the character of the professoriate and our institutions of higher learning.

Included are discussions of the corporate takeover of higher education, as well as of issues of academic freedom and faculty culture.

In the pages that follow, wherever possible, we also include authors' postscripts after the original article.

Time is running out. For all faculty, irrespective of individual status or discipline, the achievement of some workable degree of national unity and transformation are compelling matters for immediate action.

The professoriate can be like the rudder on a ship. A rudder, small in comparison to the main, can determine the direction of the whole. Unfortunately, at the moment, faculty provide little direction, a loss not only to a tattered profession but, even more importantly, to the whole of society.

Inescapable ethical questions remain to be faced by the professoriate, questions about our responsibility to democracy and the education of students.

These questions confront every single faculty member. Any effective

solutions will have to be achieved through discourse, representation, and consensus—in a process that must rise above discipline, personal politics, and academic deals.

With this issue of *Thought & Action*, we launch an extended discussion upon how to build a more nationally unified, self-determining, and powerful professoriate, a faculty that should be the driving force in ensuring the delivery of a self-actualizing education to all members of society.

In opening this national dialogue on faculty transformation, we invite readers to submit articles to *Thought & Action* on the most profound questions confronting educators. Contributors may wish to explore methods for transcending the overly discipline-driven faculty culture of today in search of new unifying values as well as academic and political power.

Certainly, in light of the commercialization of higher education, there is also much to be said about training versus education and what the aims of higher education ought to be.

Articles, in addition, might also deal with the enormous political gains higher education faculty can make by taking the logical and ultimately professional step of joining in common cause with our K-12 colleagues.

The time for Thought, Action, and Transformation is now! Inaction will reverberate adversely across the face of the future. Please contribute to the process of change by submitting your ideas soon. ■

— Jim Sullivan
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