

## AN OVERVIEW

**A**s *Thought & Action, the NEA Higher Education Journal* enters its 20th year, we find that our authors and, we hope, our readers are as passionately concerned about the ideals upon which the journal was founded as they ever were. Back in 1984, *Thought & Action's* founders brought the journal to life to defend the profession and promote the values at the heart of the academy at a time when they perceived the profession to be under siege.

For 20 years, the journal has tried to do this. During those years, the academy has changed and *Thought & Action* has changed. But some things remain inviolable, among them the belief in the academy's tradition of tolerance, democracy, and the search for truth—and that educating our students is a sacred trust that goes far beyond equipping them for the ephemeral needs of a particular industry at a particular time in history.

Stephen Gencarella Olbrys, this year's NEA Excellence in the Academy Democracy in Higher Education Award winner, argues for the importance of democracy as "a way of living and a way of communicating with others" that "requires a respect for the delicate balance between individual autonomy and civic community ... and warrants a distrust of centralized authority and longstanding power." What distinguishes Olbrys' article from the rhetorical flourishes of politicians of all stripes, and what makes his approach to teaching and his award-winning article relevant to the professoriate, is his imperative that this approach to democracy be modeled in the classroom if we are to fully educate our students.

Our Excellence in the Academy Art of Teaching Award winner, Bruce A.

Kimball, also writes about courage in teaching. His article, “Christopher Langdell: The Case of an ‘Abomination’ in Teaching Practice,” describes the obstacles overcome by the 19th century Harvard law professor who first developed the now widely used case method of teaching. The hallmark of the case method: “Langdell maintained that students should form their own judgments and that their opinions deserve no less scrutiny than distinguished authorities.”

The “problems” and “joys” of teaching also concern Linda C. Hodges, who, in her article “‘The Problem’ as Metaphor in Teaching,” suggests that those seeking to improve their classroom performance approach the scholarship of teaching and learning as an exercise in problem solving. In her article, “Putting the Heart Before the Course: Passion vs. Planning,” Diane Andrews Henningfeld honestly evaluates her own approach to teaching when she finds that in one course too much planning has stifled the passion she brings to teaching. J.D. Scrimgeour, in “An Appreciation” writes of yet another courageous and influential teacher who was willing to admit that he didn’t know all the answers and willing also to “worry” right along with a student whose paper wasn’t going well. Rounding out our section on Quality in Instruction, Ed Hara and Brenda Haney in “Finding Teaching: A Lesson in Collaboration,” describe a teacher and student learning from one another as they complete a writing project.

In our next section, Issues in the Profession, Nasrin Fatima and Michael B. Paulsen present empirical data demonstrating the efficacy of public funding of public higher education. Their conclusion: A state’s investment in higher education has a direct positive effect on subsequent growth in state workforce productivity. It’s an article you might want to take along the next time you go to lobby your state legislator—or even to argue with your next door neighbor.

Also on the policy side, James T. Minor provides the results of his study of faculty and administrator attitudes toward faculty senates. In his article, “Aliens, Traitors, and Elitists: University Values and the Faculty,” Jack Russell Weinstein examines the academy’s traditional role and values in an era of relativism, when popular culture disdains intellectual activity. What can we do, he asks, “when knowledge has become something that can be evaluated without knowledge”? Finally, Mikyong Minsun Kim presents the findings of her study of African-American students in Historically Black Colleges and Universities compared with those in Historically White Colleges and Universities. The findings—and the experiences of students—as you might expect are eye opening.

As usual, this issue contains reviews of recent books we think are of interest to our readers and a lively exchange of views in our Letters to the Editors pages. We encourage you to contact us with your thoughts on the topics raised here and your own writings on topics you think would be of interest to our readers.

—*Con Lehane, Editor*