

Overview

After two years on the *Thought & Action* Review Panel, I've become aware of the high level of stimulating discourse that can take place when higher education faculty and staff have an opportunity to express their views.

I ask myself: What would happen in higher education if, on a daily basis, we clicked into several Web sites or other cyberspace or media outlets to find out the latest developments around some of the issues we confront in higher education?

The answer, I think, is that we would be talking, debating, collaborating, and creating viable solutions to the myriad problems and opportunities as they arise in our educational community.

This is what college communities historically have done in their academic senates but are doing less and less frequently since the New Owners came in.

The New Owners are the corporations and politicians who think the faculty has been doing it wrong all these years. These New Owners have stepped in to show us the "correct" way to provide an education, neatly ignoring in the process that our cumbersome and unwieldy ways created a postsecondary education system that's the envy of the world.

Those of us on the *Thought &*

Action Review Panel haven't yet created the cyberspace avenues to facilitate a nationwide, ongoing dialogue to shape the future of higher education, but we're working on it.

In the meantime, if any of the topics addressed in this issue of *Thought & Action* pique your interest, we'd like to invite you to respond—and we're providing a number of ways for you to do it.

For instance, the issue of part-time employment in higher education—especially the relationship between adjunct and tenure-track faculty—requires considerably more serious discussion than has taken place so far on our campuses.

In this issue, we hear from adjunct faculty themselves. They have much to lament about their use and misuse on our campuses, and, in these pages, they reach out to their more securely employed colleagues.

Their message: The overreliance on adjunct faculty is not only a problem for the part-timers. It's a threat to the stability of the full-time academic workforce, students, and the integrity of higher education.

As you are reading this, NEA higher ed leaders are wrestling with a redefinition of our Association's policies on adjunct employment. They need to hear from you.

Send your comments, observa-

tions, proposals, or questions to *Thought & Action* editor Con Lehane at clehane@nea.org. He'll pass them along to the NEA committee that's reviewing NEA's policies on temporary and part-time employment in higher education.

We welcome your thoughts and comments on other topics, as well. Our articles and commentaries range in length from under 2,000 words to almost 5,000. Some of the pieces we publish are empirical studies. But you'll also find ruminations like this issue's essay from J.W. Powell, a philosopher who wants to make sure we in the academy know what education is for before we get too involved in trying to become more productive at it.

We also feature poet Philip Brady's reflections also. He doesn't want to sacrifice the life of the mind at the alter of expediency.

"We have a responsibility to follow, with passion, our quirky obsessions," Brady writes, "to live untrammelled intellectual lives, which validate our time, not our salaries."

For this issue, an agit-prop play replaces our usual dialogue section. We'd like to know what you think about this approach and other alternative ways of looking at life in academe.

At the heart of all of our endeavors is the education of our

students. We need to understand who they are, and we need to continually examine and adapt our teaching strategies to ensure that they learn.

Inspired by the belief that our members and their colleagues on the nation's campuses and in the nation's classrooms have the answers to the most vexing questions about how to educate our students, NEA has introduced the NEA Excellence in the Academy awards.

The spring 1999 issue of *Thought & Action* will feature the articles by the first award winners. And we're already accepting entries for next year's awards. The next deadline is September 30, 1999. Please see the ad on page 143 for details about this unique competition.

Finally, we hope that you will find a diversity of opinion in *Thought & Action*. We couldn't possibly agree with all of the opinions expressed in these articles, nor would we expect that you would.

If you think your ideas are not given adequate treatment in these pages, the remedy is to write and tell us. Vigorous, civil, and intelligent discourse is the lifeblood of this journal. ■

— Beryle I. Baker
Thought & Action Review Panel