

# Introduction

*By Christine Maitland*

*E*conomists predict that knowledge workers--those who learn their living sharing information and solving problems--will constitute the majority of the American workforce by the year 2010.

*Educators are the single largest group of knowledge workers in organized labor. Interestingly, another industry that has a large percentage of knowledge workers who are unionized is the entertainment industry.*

*Seemingly strange bedfellows, educators and entertainers face a good many common concerns at the bargaining table. Issues of intellectual property, for instance, increasingly important in higher education, are familiar to entertainers.*

*These intellectual property concerns are the byproducts of technology, as the history of the entertainment industry makes clear. Before a means for recording a performance existed, there was little concern about protecting performers' rights.*

*Then inventors like Thomas Edison produced motion pictures and the phonograph record, and it suddenly became possible to record a work and play it again in locations far away.*

*Performers, in response to this development, unionized to protect their rights when their work was reused, and a long struggle across the decades ensued over the payment of residuals.*

*In much the same way, developments in technology are impacting education. Technology makes it possible to videotape faculty or put their work put on a Web site for use in other locations at other times. College and university administrators are increasingly laying claim to the faculty's intellectual work.*

*The stock and trade of knowledge workers, educators included, are products of the mind. This reality presents unique challenges to unions that represent knowledge workers.*

*To address this challenge,*

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Thought & Action has invited *three scholars who have studied unions of knowledge workers to present their thoughts on the future of NEA's higher education unionism.*

*The question we asked them to address: How can we change our unions to represent faculty and staff in an environment that is being changed by technology?*

*This question was the focus of discussion at NEA's 1999 Critical Issues Seminar. At this annual seminar, 35 leaders from NEA locals around the country meet to dialogue on a topic of vital interest to higher*

*education. This year's topic: Knowledge Workers and the New Unionism. The discussion begun there is continued here.*

*While this symposium provides a thought-provoking analysis of the issues, the questions raised here are far from settled. They must be discussed and debated on our campuses and in national forums such as Thought & Action and the Critical Issues seminars. The future of our Association -- and the future of higher education itself -- depend on the answers we arrive at.*