

Overview

by *Harold S. Wechsler*

Harold S. Wechsler is a professor of education at the Margaret S. Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development, University of Rochester.

A former editor of NEA higher education publications, Wechsler has published books and articles on student access to higher education and on education for business and for teaching.

Wechsler is currently writing on efforts to reduce racial and ethnic prejudice on college campuses and on the history of methods of college admission.

“In knowledge-driven organizations, where knowledge is the end as well as the means,” writes sociologist Burton Clark, “a fragmented but intense professionalism is the only effective guarantor of standards.” Neither state officials nor central administrators can offer guarantees, he adds. “They are too remote from the laboratory and classroom, too lacking in control of subject to effect useful control over persons.”

External authorities continually try to exercise control, despite such admonishments. “Failing to grasp the logic of the profession, indeed the very requirements of an effective modern system of higher education,” adds Clark, “narrow management attempts to substitute the nuts and bolts of bureaucratic regulation.”¹ The *NEA 1999 Almanac of Higher Education* features a report by Henry L. Allen on one current attempt: the move by many states to set performance measures and to link these measures to budgetary allocations.

Many states, says Allen, use performance measures to assess faculty workload and productivity; 14 states link allocations to performance. “Workload and Productivity in an Era of Performance Measures” explores the growing reliance on these measures, assesses the validity of indicators used to measure faculty performance, notes the scholarly objections to their use, and examines the prospects for the growth of the movement. At a time when more states are adopting performance measures, Allen concludes, “Professors ... must battle for fairness in the indicators, for equity when the indicators are linked to compensation, and for public trust and political sympathy.”

Among other highlights from the *NEA 1999 Almanac*: The average salary for faculty members in 1997-98, report John B. Lee and Robert T. Harmon, in “Faculty Salaries, 1997-98,” increased by 2.9 percent to \$52,481, down from the 3.1 percent increase reported for 1996-97. But this average salary increase beat the 1.8 inflation rate by 1.1 percent, up from last year’s 0.2 percent. Faculty purchasing power increased by 0.3 percent over 1972-73, the prior peak year, corrected for inflation.

How are the demographics of the community college faculty workforce changing? One major change, notes James C. Palmer, an authority on community colleges, is the rapid growth of part-time faculty members. “Part-Time Faculty At Community Colleges: A

National Profile” traces the reasons why the proportion of part-timers in the community college faculty workforce grew from 38 percent to 64 percent between 1963 and 1995. The essay also outlines the demographic composition of this segment and discusses the conditions of work. Palmer, citing data from *The 1993 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty*, notes the growing number of “reluctant part-timers.” Just under half of all part-time community college faculty, he notes, accepted their positions because full-time posts were not available. Finally, Palmer speculates on the academic consequences of relying on “contingents” and “reluctants” for the majority of freshmen who begin postsecondary studies at community colleges.

The late 1990s, notes William Zumeta in “Fiscal Prospects for Higher Education: 1999,” show a modest increase in the proportion of aggregate state appropriations going to higher education. Tuition and fee increases at state colleges and universities moderated last year, Zumeta adds, while state and private student grants grew to \$3.19 billion, a 62 percent increase over five years. Zumeta, like Allen, notes the increased use of performance indicators, adding that states imposed more conditions on funding at a time when higher education’s share of state appropriations declined.

Jay Chronister, in “Benefits and Retirement in a Decade of Change,” examines the effect of two changes in the composition of the faculty on benefits: the rising proportion of full-time nontenure track faculty and the increase in the average age of the tenured faculty. Benefits expenditures, he notes, have stabilized, largely because of medical cost containment measures. Chronister also completes his discussion of work-family issues, begun in the *NEA 1998 Almanac*, by examining wellness initiatives,

employee assistance programs (EAPs), counseling services, and work schedule modifications.

What do we know about the 767,069 higher education support staff? Linda K. Johnsrud, an authority on personnel issues in higher education, reports on support staff demographics and the attitudes of these workers towards their conditions of employment in “The Worklife Issues of Higher Education Support Personnel.” Using data from a specially commissioned NEA study, she notes the highest levels of support staff satisfaction with health and safety, the kind and amount of work done, job security, and personal fulfillment, and lowest levels for wages and chances for promotion.

NEA continues to keep its higher education members informed about the conditions of academic work, new methods of teaching, and federal and state policies. A Web site (www.nea.org) and reports from the NEA Higher Education Center complement the NEA publications program: *The NEA Almanac of Higher Education, Thought & Action*, and the *NEA Higher Education Advocate*. Please send your comments and suggestions to Cornelius Lehane, editor of NEA higher education publications: Clehane@nea.org.

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NOTE

¹ Burton R. Clark. *The Academic Life: Small Worlds, Different Worlds*. Princeton, N.J.: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1987: 268, 275.