

Public Higher Education and Productivity: A Faculty Voice

A Statement on Productivity from the Leaders of the Faculty Senates and Faculty Unions of The State University of New York and The California State University

The American public and most elected officials are devoted to higher education and especially to public higher education, which accounts for 78 percent of all enrollments and many of our most important centers of advanced learning and research. They accept higher education's indispensable role in creating and transmitting knowledge on which our social, cultural, and economic well-being depends. They understand the critical role of higher education in maximizing the opportunity of every individual to achieve his or her potential. They are generally satisfied with their higher educational experience. Indeed, they are proud that American higher education is the envy of the world and one of our leading exports.

In recent years, both public and private higher education, however, have come under mounting criticism from politicians, influential citizens, and even from some within the academy. As opposed to the general public, critics allege that standards are too low, the curriculum not rigorous, research overemphasized, and the entire enterprise not as productive and accountable as it should be.

Often the faculty is the object of this criticism; not the governing boards, the administrators, or the public officials who share responsibility for the stewardship of public higher education. Faculty are perceived to be preoccupied with research to the neglect of teaching, resistant to change, indifferent to the fiscal dilemma of the public sector, and distracted with job security under the cover of academic freedom. On the overarching public policy issue of productivity,¹ the faculty are treated by many, even from within the colleges and

¹ The "productivity" of the faculty is the efficiency with which the faculty perform their multiple responsibilities--or, in corporate parlance, "produce" their multiple outputs of: (a) *learning*, the product of teaching; (b) *knowledge and scholarship*, the product of research and other scholarly activities; (c) *institutional, community, and professional well-being*, the products of shared governance, community service and professional activities. (From "Faculty Productivity and Accountability," CSU Academic Senate, May 1996.)

universities, not only as the principal problem, but as the principal barrier to most solutions.

Much of the criticism emanates from a serious misunderstanding about what faculty actually *do*. Some of the contemporary "faculty bashing" may also result from a much wider and more serious political assault against all public employees and against the public sector generally. Some of the allegations of low academic standards and unacceptably high attrition may be part of a social weariness and distrust with and distrust of public institutions. But we address in this statement the misperception of faculty as the core of the so-called productivity problem and the barrier to effective solutions.

"We" are elected faculty representatives of the State University of New York and the California State University systems, working with a former chancellor, now faculty and union member, of the SUNY System.² We represent the faculty both in its traditional governance capacity, as institutionalized in faculty senates, and in its collective bargaining capacity, legally responsible for representing the faculty in negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment. In these two capacities, we represent more than 30,000 faculty of the two largest systems of higher education in the world.

We believe our public colleges and universities are demonstrably productive, and in recent years have become even more so, but not without some losses in the number and variety of programs. We and the faculty we represent are adamantly unapologetic about our universities, our institutions of governance and collective bargaining, and the integrity of our professional colleagues. Quite contrary to popular misconception:

² The SUNY System is composed of 29 state-operated campuses plus 30 locally-owned community colleges and the statutory colleges of the private Cornell and Alfred universities. The state-operated units, the faculty of which we represent and are speaking for in this document (the community colleges are separately represented, both for governance and for collective bargaining) include the State University's research universities, comprehensive colleges, two-year technical colleges, stand-alone health centers, and specialized colleges. The California State University System contains California's comprehensive institutions, providing baccalaureate through master's degrees. California's research universities, providing education through the Ph.D. and advanced professional degrees, comprise the separately-governed University of California System, while California's community colleges comprise yet a third, loosely coordinated, system.

- We recognize that what we teach, what we research, and how we teach and create knowledge must continually change in light of new social needs, new knowledge, new perspectives on teaching and learning, and new standards.
- We accept that the missions of our institutions, and therefore the responsibilities of the faculty, while differing both institutionally and individually, are to serve society by advancing and transmitting knowledge.
- We will continue to participate constructively in responding to changing political and economic circumstances, including putting forth thoughtful proposals to restructure teaching and learning to serve better our students and the larger society.

As faculty, we are ready and able to address the economic, demographic, political, and other challenges confronting the academic community. Indeed, meaningful solutions to these challenges are only likely with our full participation. *To this end, we propose the following seven principles:*

<p>Public higher education must become more productive by continuing to improve quality, recognizing that public needs and expectations will likely exceed that which can be provided with the funding available.</p>
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In an educational institution, productivity must include the quality of teaching, the quality of scholarship, and the nature and quality of public service provided. Greater productivity does not mean simply “cheaper.” It means more quality per dollar spent: in terms of student learning, faculty innovation and scholarship, and service to society. But at least for the foreseeable future, and for whatever combination of reasons, there will likely be insufficient public revenues to enable us to teach all of the students, do all of the scholarship, and perform all the service that society is asking of us with the prevailing teaching loads and class sizes, and with the current expectations regarding the quality of education and appropriate mix of faculty time.

Part of our response as faculty to the productivity imperative has been to do more with our resources. Equally important are our obligations to be clear and straightforward in explaining what must be curtailed if state policymakers or governing boards impose further cuts or establish priorities, and to participate in the shaping of these priorities.

Increasing productivity must focus more on strengthening outcomes such as student learning rather than on cheapening inputs such as expenditures on faculty.

Advances in productivity cannot come simply through cost-cutting measures that increase class sizes and course loads while standards for students, the academic calendar, expectations for research and service, and requirements for continuing appointment stay the same. The faculty's concern with quality and a focus on teaching and learning in a changing environment will require changes in how faculty go about their business of teaching. These changes are by no means obvious or elementary. To increase the productivity of learning, the faculty must:

- re-examine teaching strategies and the curriculum with the explicit goal of clarifying learning objectives;
- participate in K-12 educational reform, being cognizant of its implications for higher education, providing clear statements of what entering students need to know and be able to do for academic success, and engaging with secondary schools to strengthen college-level learning during high school;
- use newer technologies that can assist in achieving productivity gains consistent with learning objectives and our changing curricula and pedagogy; and
- address inefficiencies of student learning, strengthening the work ethic and lessening the “downtime” in the students’ learning day, week and year.

Governing boards, academic administration, and faculty governance bodies need to be clear about the mix of expectations on the faculty for *teaching*, *scholarship* and *service*, and must provide support and rewards accordingly, including compensation and promotions.

It is appropriate that all faculty be expected to remain current in their scholarship *and* teach effectively *and* participate in service to their institution and community. But the mix of time, attention and achievement among the professional obligations of teaching, scholarship and service should vary: by type or mission of institution, among faculty members at an institution, and frequently over the course of an individual faculty member's career.

Scholarship takes diverse forms, including research, which generally culminates in publication; preparation of new instructional materials; exhibitions in juried shows and artistic commissions; and presentations at and significant participation in scholarly conferences and societies. Faculty who are hired in substantial measure to produce new knowledge or significant creative works must be given appropriate time and support to achieve this end and then need to be held accountable for the level of their success, as measured primarily by recognition from their peers.

Teaching is also diverse, encompassing traditional pedagogy, distance and technology-based learning and instruction, the direction of dissertations and other forms of individualized instruction, the guidance of collaborative learning, and all forms of student advising. Faculty hired primarily to teach are expected to devote less of their time making original contributions to their fields and, therefore, need to be judged accordingly for rewards, recognition, and continued employment.

Service also takes many forms. Service to the institution includes participating on departmental, school and institutional committees; holding office and otherwise participating in faculty senates and unions; mentoring colleagues; and contributing in other ways to the educational quality of the institution.

Service to the profession includes participating in scholarly conferences and societies and in peer reviews of manuscripts and proposals. Service to the community includes participating on school boards and other community action groups, providing *pro bono* expertise, and other forms of community volunteer work.

This principle is complicated by the inescapable fact that rewards and recognition in academia are skewed toward research and other forms of scholarship. Recognition by peers, professional opportunity and mobility, chances for tenure and promotion, the rewards of salary and other perquisites, and greater freedom in use of time are usually given for success in scholarship rather than teaching. To the degree that we want to increase the time and attention given to teaching (including advising, new course preparation, independent study, and graduate thesis and dissertation mentoring), we must all support changes in the reward and recognition system.

Faculty accomplishments in teaching, scholarship and service need to be evaluated at regular intervals.

The primary purpose of an evaluation of faculty is to recognize performance and, where necessary, to strengthen it. These evaluations should be by our departmental colleagues and our students with regard to the expectations of teaching, advising, and student mentoring; by our peers with regard to the expectations of scholarly contributions to, and growth in, our respective fields; and by our institutional colleagues and, where appropriate, by members of the community with regard to the expectations of service.

Evaluations should be guided by:

- the development of clear expectations for faculty, mutually agreed to, both before and after tenure;
- the evaluation of all faculty at stated periodic intervals in accord with these expectations;
- opportunities for constructive peer evaluations separate from personnel actions as part of faculty development programs; and
- education and training for department chairs and deans in effective ways of evaluating and assisting all faculty.

Tenure is an assurance of academic quality and institutional integrity. It is not a barrier to academic productivity or to responsible management.³

No aspect of academic life is as difficult to explain to the outsider as tenure. Some expectation of continuous employment after a rigorous probationary period -- like tenure -- is important to the creativity and intellectual vigor of most professions. Academic tenure is widely, although mistakenly, perceived by those outside the academy to mean a lifetime of guaranteed employment with no accountability other than professional integrity and peer pressure. Tenure also has its critics within the academy. Some academic officers and members of governing boards mistakenly believe tenure to be such an iron-clad guarantee of employment that they are increasingly unwilling to grant it, turning instead to part-time or adjunct positions with low pay and no security, or terminating assistant professors under the guise of "tenure quotas," to the great disadvantage and increasing stress of our junior colleagues.³

³ Only some 37% of faculty nationwide are tenured (*Academe*, March-April 1996). Any assurance of academic freedom or job security to the 63% who are untenured relies on collective bargaining contracts or the university governance policies and procedures.

The principle of academic freedom -- that is, protection against loss of livelihood or the ability to teach because of unpopular views -- must not be compromised. Neither should other principles such as due process in discipline or disputes, or the importance of seniority in the event of necessary retrenchment or program discontinuation.

But much of the concern that governing boards and academic officers have about tenure is of their own making: the failure to place clear and rigorous expectations on tenured faculty; the failure to evaluate on the basis of such expectations; and the failure to act on those occasions, however infrequent, when a faculty member, even with tenure, performs clearly and consistently below those reasonable expectations.

Any examination of faculty productivity must address those few individuals whose performance falls clearly short of the reasonable expectations of colleagues, students, and the public.

In any organization, there will be a range of individual productivity, depending very much on the criteria of success being used. At the high end of this range will be colleagues of astonishing ability, energy and accomplishment. At the low end of this range may be colleagues whose performance falls short of reasonable expectations. It is the responsibility, and in the self-interest, of both faculty and management to remedy any such situation with counseling, with assistance, with new assignments and, if necessary, with progressive discipline.

We commend those collective bargaining agreements and faculty governance policies that incorporate progressive discipline. One of the most common failures of academic management is the failure to investigate fairly and recommend appropriate remedies in a timely manner for clear cases of faculty misconduct, ineptitude, or declining standards of quality of work product. This failure reflects poorly on higher education and places additional stress on the remaining faculty, who must carry the greater departmental loads and otherwise make up for the lost productivity of a few colleagues. It is incumbent on management and faculty alike to address any such matters decisively, sensitively, and with regard for fairness and due process.

Faculty can be most productive only when they participate in establishing the activities and values supported by their institutions.

All colleges and universities must continuously change and improve. Deciding and articulating which activities will best fulfill the mission of an institution are the joint responsibilities of faculty, administration and the governing board. Improvement requires allocating existing resources according to clearly articulated priorities and consistent with the values and mission of the academy and the institution. Reallocation of resources to encourage necessary change and regular improvement is best done by adherence to accepted principles of academic governance and collective bargaining. Faculty will certainly resist reallocation decisions that have been made with apparent disregard for their academic principles and values. Faculty expect these decisions to be made with intelligence, courage and sensitivity, and in accord with clearly stated institutional missions and goals.

Our mission as faculty in public higher education is to serve both the public and our profession. We endorse:

- A commitment to our students' education to learn and grow in the society and economy of the 21st century.
- A commitment to responsive and accountable institutions.
- A commitment to education as the foundation of democratic citizenship.

In conclusion, we recognize the dangers in the misapplication of the corporate model of productivity to the academic enterprise of teaching, learning, scholarship and service. But we accept the likelihood of having to do what we have been charged to do with fewer public resources than we once knew. As a "voice" of faculty who must face this challenge, we offer these seven principles and reiterate our commitment to the noble mission of public higher education.

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