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# The Academic Workplace (Spring 2004): Class in the Academy

New England Resource Center for Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston

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# THE ACADEMIC WORKPLACE



NERCHE New England Resource Center for Higher Education

## Class in the Academy

By Susan E. Borrego, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, University Of Arkansas

...the uncool subject is class. It's the subject that makes us all tense, nervous, uncertain about where we stand." bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters*

## Hidden Diversity

Many Americans believe we live in a classless society. In fact most have been taught that talking about class is bad manners. Illuminating the realities of class distinctions threatens the ideal of the American dream and the ideology of equal opportunity. Pulling oneself up by the bootstraps is purported to be the "American way," yet the belief that we can all rise above our circumstances with determination and hard work does not recognize the power that class has in shaping individual lives and opportunities.

Sociologists and economists disagree about the definition of class and offer contradictory opinions over the degree to which class matters, if it matters at all, in contemporary American society. Traditional class-based scholarship has been primarily concerned with people's relationship to the means of production or with stratification theories, but has seldom explored people's lived experience.

Class as it relates to identity is complicated and difficult to nail down because it intersects with other variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and geography. According to Janet Zandy, class is an "aspect of shared economic circumstances and shared social and cultural practices in relation to positions

of power..." (1996, p. 8). Put another way, class origins have an impact on an individual's social circles, experiences, and connections—sometimes referred to as cultural capital—and can determine access to opportunity and power. Even when working-class people do acquire money or education—indicators of socioeconomic status—they often have limited access to power because they don't know the right people or have the right connections, or they don't understand the nuances of the game. In effect, their cultural capital has little utility outside of their own circles.

Poor and working-class students find that their cultural capital is of little use to them once they enter a college or university. At the same time, for each advantage that the institution offers them, it seems to erect a barrier that marginalizes them and in the worst case, impedes opportunity through embedded middle- and upper middle-class values, expressed overtly or tacitly. It's a bitter paradox that the academy—sometimes referred to as a "social leveler"—neutralizes its own efforts, however unintentionally, to provide opportunities to all of its students.

## Working-Class Students: Their Struggles

The demographics of campuses across the country are changing rapidly. According to the College Board (2001), more working-class students than ever before are enrolling in colleges and universities. In spite of their increasing numbers, these students continue to feel ambivalent, different, and marginalized on campus.

Several narrative works describe the experiences of both working-class students and faculty in the academy: *Strangers in Paradise* (Ryan & Sackrey, 1996), *This Fine Place So Far From Home* (Dews & Law, 1995), *Working-Class Women in the Academy* (Torkarczyk & Fay, 1993), and most recently, *Teaching Working-Class* (Linkon, 1999). Many working-class students choose a college on the basis of proximity and cost. They look for a place that can provide employment opportunities to help them support family at home while attending school. They often choose majors because they are expedient. For students holding down jobs to support dependants, travel abroad is not an option. Many poor and working-class students focus on graduating and getting a job, and rarely take part in conversations about graduate school. When they do consider graduate work, they may choose programs based on the same criteria that they used in mapping out their undergraduate education, seeking out scholarships or internships or an opportunity to work and attend classes in an effort to find the thing they can *reasonably* do. Too often they aren't given advice about how to

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The New England Resource Center for Higher Education at UMass Boston is devoted to strengthening higher education's contributions to society through collaboration. It does this by working on a continuing basis with colleges and universities in New England through think tanks, consultation, workshops, conferences, research, and action projects.

# LETTER FROM NERCHE

Change has been the steady state of higher education during the sixteen years of NERCHE's existence. The hard fiscal times that decimated institutional coffers in the 1980s have given way to even harder times, especially in terms of public support. Doing more with less—what was once thought of as a solution to a tough but temporary situation—has become now a way of life that is likely to continue indefinitely.

Nearly a decade ago, attacks on the academy and its liberal disposition—misunderstood as a political predilection rather than as broadminded and tolerant—began with affirmative action the most notable target. Jobs at “political correctness” have since been transformed into orchestrated assaults on programs designed to level the playing field for groups that society has failed. The recent University of Michigan decisions and calls for “intellectual diversity”, gratuitous in these conservative times, heralded a more mean-spirited atmosphere for colleges and universities. Some of the loudest demands for public accountability were buoyed by the wrongheaded assumption that institutions of higher education operated as fiscal free-for-alls and produced shoddy products through dubious means.

For the most part, the academy has favored thoughtful response over reactionary rhetoric to answer the demands of external constituents and has been able to disentangle political attack from reasonable requests for more transparency and accountability.

Leaders who take part in our think tanks regularly share myriad instances of how New England colleges and universities are changing how they work to respond to meaningful questions about accountability.

For example, while the research culture still dominates higher education, fewer institutions are electing to fashion themselves after the elites. Deans and provosts report that they are actively recruiting well-rounded faculty who have acquired teaching skills through participation in one of the growing number of programs such as Preparing Future Faculty. Once hired, these faculty continue to receive encouragement through rewards and incentives that support teaching and learning.

Add to that, administrators are facilitating thoughtful curriculum design with adequate resources and released time, and appropriate faculty development and mentoring. Faculty engaged in assessment are able to think explicitly about the connections between teaching and learning. Administrators and faculty work together to re-formulate program assessment as a means for an institution to understand its curriculum in ways that can then be communicated to constituents such as students and parents.

As student demographics change, the emphasis on collaboration grows, and divisions between academic affairs and administration diminish, the scope of faculty work has broadened considerably. Some institutions are working toward abandoning the one-size-fits-all approach to faculty evaluation, in which faculty are expected to be equally skilled in all areas, and plan to evaluate departments as a whole on how they manage teaching, research, and service, as well as how they meet student outcome goals through a variety of means.

The public discussion about tenure has been lopsided with critics largely dismissing it as an anachronism designed to burden institutions with an expensive but mediocre workforce with no incentive to improve. In this post-9-11 atmosphere of heightened

uncertainty, more and more academic work is being compromised by heavy-handed federal policies in the name of Homeland Security. Protection of academic freedom is more critical now than ever before, yet there are few countervailing forces to the pressures exerted by Trustees and legislators to eliminate it. Deans, associate deans, and provosts in our think tanks are currently developing ways to streamline and clarify evaluation methods so that faculty unable to meet rigorous tenure standards are counseled out of the process at the end of the first year. They are also revamping promotion and tenure guidelines to remove the kinds of ambiguity that frustrate both faculty and tenure critics alike.

This is not to say that all is well in the academy, as there will always be challenges delivered by external constituents as well as those of our own making.

One of the disturbing trends is the fierce competition among far too many institutions for one segment of the population of students—those who can pay the full cost of their education and therefore have many institutions from which to choose—to offset costs for needier students. A dangerously competitive game in such a narrow market can only result in putting more institutions at risk.

Another is the downward shift of students who can no longer afford higher-priced private institutions into state and community colleges, reducing access for students for whom the public system may be the only choice. This is especially troubling because a college education has become a necessary ticket to a richer opportunities and the prospect of a better life.

This issue of the newsletter concerns itself with the contested issue of social class. **Jim Stakenas's**, in his review of *How Class Works* by Stanley Aronowitz, identifies education as one of the catalysts to social mobility in this country. Clearly higher education plays a profound role in multiplying the chances for poor and working-class students to break free of economic constraints. But far too many colleges and universities have failed to examine the ways in which they impede the success of these students. Feature writer, **Sue Borrego**, invites the academy to undertake this long-overdue self-assessment by questioning the middle- and upper-middle-class values that underpin its organizational structures and educational processes and unwittingly undermine the success of poor and working-class students.

Very few colleges and universities can operate like walled cities any more. Too many stakeholders with legitimate concerns are invested in the enterprise. Indeed, the civic engagement movement that swept the academy in recent years has made it a goal to tear down those walls, reaching out while inviting the community in. Many of our think tank discussions this year were dedicated to finding ways to articulate the work of the academy to outside constituents. It's now time to let the public see what truly goes on.

*Sharon Singleton*



Sharon Singleton, Editor

proceed strategically, weighing one master's program against another with an eye toward a terminal degree. And they don't know to ask.

Common themes emerge in the literature about other unspoken cultural rules that these students unwittingly break, such as having the wrong clothes, language, or experience—coming from the wrong high schools and being unable to understand the college world and its implicit social rules. Working-class people tell of learning after the fact that many of the explicit rules of the academy can be negotiated if you know the right people or process. They describe waiting in line, metaphorically and literally, as their classmates pass them by, realizing that some of these rules are merely technicalities.

Many working-class students, particularly those who attend private schools that enroll traditional-age students, realize how different their lives are from their peers. Typically these students report a painful awareness of the ways in which they were made to feel they did not measure up. From arriving at institutional events underdressed to being criticized by peers for speaking too bluntly or gesticulating too emphatically, many describe feeling invisible or out of place. Eventually these students understand their difference, that they and their culture are not represented or valued in the academy. And when they do finally realize the difference is class based, they tend to remain silent about their backgrounds while trying to navigate both the world of their origins and that of the academy.

One of the more troubling consequences of this isolated journey is that many poor and working-class students end up feeling stranded in the no-man's land between their home and the world of the academy. They often retreat from those who love and support them at home only to discover they never feel like full participants in the academy. This "border living" (Rendon, 1996) leaves them bereft of strong and necessary social supports.

## The Academy: Silent and Slow to Respond

Higher education is essentially silent about its own class culture and entrenched middle- and upper-class norms, not because of any intention to exclude, but because it has always operated in that way. But in failing to examine the fundamental assumptions behind its educational practices and organizational structures, it is failing many of the students who now pass through its doors. Even as campuses have

*Poor and working-class students find that their cultural capital is of little use to them once they enter a college or university.*

begun to spend a great deal of time and resources on issues of diversity, the ways in which class affects students in the academy are essentially left untouched.

Today, in spite of a plethora of diversity programs, few schools are exploring the impact of class on students. Class is mostly invisible in conference presentations and in many books on diversity issues. The academy has been slow in responding to the needs of working-class students and slow in assessing the class-biased systems of the institution itself. But the silence that surrounds class issues is neither necessary nor educationally sound.

## Removing the Shroud of Silence

For the past several years I have been presenting workshops about class issues on college and university campuses, and I've been surprised by numerous faculty, students, and staff who attend. Most are people who have grown up poor or working class and have never talked publicly about their class status, not to mention the effects of class in the academy. But once they begin to describe their experiences the conversations take off, easily tearing open the shroud of silence that blankets the issue.

A parallel phenomenon takes place in classrooms when the topic of class is placed front and center. A sociologist explained to me that she had been teaching about class issues for twenty years but had never considered how class heritage shaped individuals' lives and experiences. After participating in a workshop exploring class issues, she began to look for materials and methods that would help her teach about expanded concepts of class. She first took inventory of her own preconceived notions about her students and developed ways to bring their experiences into her teaching. She described being surprised by the resistance of some of her students to hearing that class had real impacts on people's lives today and by the richness of the discussion that followed once that resistance was overcome. Another faculty colleague began incorporating class-based experiences in her graduate courses and witnessed a similarly powerful surge of student engagement in the classroom discussions. These conversations are not easy and can at times turn volatile, because the ideas and concepts that arise collide with both careless assumptions and deep-seated beliefs. But carefully managed, they are a tool for profound learning for all students.

## Instituting Change in the Academy

As the demographics of those attending college continue to shift, the inherent biases of organizational structures come to light. Sometimes well-intentioned efforts to help students overcome barriers inadvertently reinforce a notion of disadvantage, stigmatizing the very group of students that programs were designed to assist. London (1992) describes programs that help nontraditional students to overcome "cultural barriers." While there are aspects of this approach that are important, it does not embrace the culture, knowledge, and experience that working-class students bring with them to the academy. In order to more wholly embrace the diversity working-class students bring, we must examine our own programs and activities. It is essential in this pursuit to first draw working-class culture out from

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## Reversing the Telescope: Community Development From Within

With funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, NERCHE is continuing its work to foster the concept of supporting the community within—the lowest-paid campus workers—with programs and services. In April **Cathy Burack**, NERCHE Senior Associate, **Barbara Canyes**, Director of Massachusetts Campus Compact, and **David Maurrasse** of The Annie E. Casey Foundation presented the results of the project to date and solicited input from the audience at the annual meeting of the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) in San Diego.

In May NERCHE held a meeting in Washington, DC, with national stakeholders from such organizations as AAHE, Campus Compact, and the American Association of Community Colleges to discuss the supports and barriers to enacting programs for low-paid workers on their campuses and to determine the position of this issue on the agenda of each organization.

This summer NERCHE will release a final project report and other written materials from the project.

## Informing Policy with Practice

NERCHE's commitment to facilitate issue analysis and proposals for change is at the core of our Informing Policy with Practice project, funded by The Ford Foundation. This year our think tanks have dedicated some of their discussions to elements of the Higher Education Act, which is up for reauthorization in September 2004, that could affect their campuses. See the **Think Tank** section of this newsletter for reports on these meetings. In May NERCHE will bring together think tank members and their guests for a session on the impacts of the HEA on students in the region. **Clare Cotton**, President of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, Massachusetts, and a policymaker in the field of student financial assistance, will lead the discussion at this All-Think-Tank event held at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Please visit our web site ([www.nerche.org](http://www.nerche.org)) to read more about this project and, especially, the HEA web page with relevant information and updates on the reauthorization.

## New England New Presidents Network

With funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and under the direction of **Glenn Gabbard**, NERCHE continues to develop its work to support new college presidents in the New England region. Based on the results of its exhaustive feasibility study and initial efforts to assist incoming first-time presidents, NERCHE is redesigning a model for mentoring and giving technical assistance which will target key institutions in the region. In addition, the project maintains a database of information on initiatives for new presidents and is tracking executive searches in the area. NERCHE's senior advisors have been instrumental in keeping the project moving forward.

# All-Think-Tank Event

## The Reauthorization of The Higher Education Act and Its Impact on Students in New England

Aiming to broaden opportunities for quality higher education, the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 is currently under review and subject to changes that could have a direct impact on institutional operations and decision-making. Even minor adjustments in the Act can affect how institutions set tuition and how they are held accountable to external constituents. For students, these changes may be felt in such critical areas as financial aid and may have implications for traditionally underrepresented groups and their access to higher education.

An experienced policymaker in the field of student financial assistance, **Clare Cotton**, President of the Association of

Independent Colleges and Universities, Massachusetts, will lead us in a discussion about the implications of the reauthorization of the HEA for New England campuses and the students they serve. Please join us for this timely conversation.

**Wednesday, May 19, 2004**

**5:30 pm – 8:30 pm**

**College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA**

**Hogan Campus Center**

### NERCHE *Briefs*

The *Briefs* distill policy implications from the collaborative work of members of NERCHE's ongoing think tanks for administrators and faculty in the New England region, as well as from NERCHE projects. With support from the Ford Foundation, NERCHE disseminates these pieces to an audience of legislators, college and university presidents and system heads, heads of higher education associations and State Higher Education Officers, and media contacts. The *Briefs* are designed to add critical information and essential voices to the policy decisions that leaders in higher education make. A listing of *Briefs* published to date follows. A complete set of *Briefs* can be downloaded from the NERCHE web site ([www.nerche.org](http://www.nerche.org)).

January 2000	<b>The Technology Challenge on Campus from the Perspective of Chief Academic Officers</b>
April 2000	<b>Benchmarking from the Perspective of Chief Financial Officers</b>
July 2000	<b>Making Assessment Work</b>
January 2001	<b>Department Chairs Discuss Post-Tenure Review</b>
February 2001	<b>For Funders of Multi-Institutional Collaborations in Higher Education: Support Partnership Building</b>
March 2001	<b>The Merit Aid Question: How Can We Attract Promising Students While Preserving Educational Opportunity for All?</b>
May 2001	<b>Preparing for the Next Wave of Faculty</b>
May 2001	<b>Graduate Preparation for Student Affairs Staff: What's Needed from the Perspective of Chief Student Affairs Officers</b>
October 2001	<b>Practices and Policies for Dealing with Students with Mental Health Issues</b>
November 2001	<b>Lessons on Supporting Change Through Multi-Institutional Projects</b>
January 2002	<b>Partnering for Accountability: The Role of the Chief Financial Officer at an Academic Institution</b>
March 2002	<b>Global Citizenship: A Role for Higher Education</b>
May 2002	<b>The Critical Connection: Department Chairs' and Associate Deans' Strategies for Involving Faculty in Outcomes Assessment</b>
September 2002	<b>Managing Risk</b>
November 2002	<b>Developing Students: Associate Deans Weigh In</b>
May 2003	<b>In Search of Equity: An Institutional Response</b>
May 2003	<b>New Faculty: A Catalyst for Change</b>

the shadows and address it as a legitimate way of life in higher education and society beyond. Working-class students (as well as a host of other academic immigrants) have to overcome the sense that there is no place for them in the academy, or that they have nothing to offer the educational environment before they can begin to act as agents in their own academic experience.

Sherry Linkon (1999) argues:

*...an impetus for considering class culture is to provide a space for working-class people to make sense of their experience, to learn to negotiate the contradictory nature of their working-class life and the relative privilege of the academy, and to find ways to maintain their class culture and not become assimilated as they attempt to work in the academy—to find a way to resist the denial of working-class identity and consciousness...to use working-class knowledge to produce culture and to claim a place as a public intellectual. (p. 7)*

It is important to explore class in the context of multiple identities and to examine the complex intersections of individual's lives (Rothenberg, 2001). We must recognize that class is interwoven with all other forms of difference, or we run the risk of making class a one-dimensional issue and marginalizing other aspects of individual identity. Helping students develop an understanding of the implications and intersections of class and other socially constructed

identities will assist them in making more informed choices about how they choose to live in relationship to the academy.

The goal should not be to idealize working-class people or their lives, but to illuminate them in order to develop academic environments that are more inclusive.

**A New Scholarship of Class.** A growing body of research demonstrates that the educational experience of non-traditional students suffers if

*The academy has been slow in responding to the needs of working-class students and slow in assessing the class-biased systems of the institution itself.*

the experiences of those students are invisible in theoretical and programmatic frames. While aspects of class have historically been addressed in labor studies or sociology and are sometimes used as indicators in the psychological literature, there is little scholarship on the impact of class status on identity development.

Twenty-five years ago there were no Women's Studies, Asian or African American Studies, or Gay/Lesbian Studies. Though cultural equality still remains distant for these groups, they have challenged the academy's conceptual frameworks and methods, creating new questions, methods, and practices. These programs have also made space for such groups to integrate their own values and identities with their educational process and provide useful models for a

new scholarship of class.

**Examining Institutional Policies and Practices.** For the most part the role that class plays in the construction of knowledge, pedagogy, and other educational activities is not analyzed or discussed on a campus-wide basis. Many institutions have not explored how institutional policies and practices privilege some students and not others.

Examining the real differences in opportunity, expectations,

reviewed to make certain they provide access rather than reinforce inferiority. Focusing on student "deficits" reinforces students' outsider status.

Transition programs that truly assist working-class students include explanations about the different culture of higher education and activities designed to weave their pre-college lives into the transition.

**Identity Transformation.**

Many students undergo a change in self-assessment and identity during their undergraduate years. For poor and working-class students, this process can be arduous, especially if they lose critical social connections. They may need help in developing the skills to negotiate both their home world and the academy, and to move back and forth between them. Campuses can assist students by developing participatory activities in which students can explore the reality of "border living" and identify strategies to assist them in moving between both worlds without losing either one.

**Mentoring.** Programs for first generation or economically disadvantaged students are traditionally persistence-based and do not examine the ways in which working-class students are being advised about opportunities in higher education. These students need to learn how to make informed educational decisions that will have a bearing on their future choices, whether that means a career after graduation or graduate work.

Networking as a conscious act is a result of cultural capital. As discussed earlier, working-class students often lack the kind of cultural capital

and treatment faced by working-class students would benefit the entire campus. A careful look at student programs can be a good starting point. For example, leadership opportunities tend to be geared toward students with prior leadership experience. Outreach to working-class students, with little or no history of such opportunities, is one way to interrupt the cycle.

## Preparing Working-Class Students for Success

Transition Programs. Poor and working-class students need help learning the aspects of higher education that will position them for success in undergraduate school and beyond. Orientation and transition programs should be

## The Community College Student Success Think Tank

Most of us in higher education are facing increasing pressures for productivity today. We see this particularly in accountability and accreditation standards that ask us to document student outcomes. There has been a flurry of activity to measure and report student satisfaction, learning, academic progress, degree attainment, and job preparedness. As a result, we have seen an accumulation of measures, data, and reports for the purpose of communicating with external constituents who want to see “results.” There is also now the burden to make sense of it all—to generate knowledge about how to improve the rates at which students achieve their goals. To that end, notions are also emerging of “data-driven” decision-making, collaborative inquiry, and institutional transformation.

As part of The Community College Student Success Project, headed by **Alicia Dowd**, Assistant Professor in UMass Boston’s Higher Education Administration Program, NERCHE has developed a think tank for community college administrators. The

Community College Student Success Project, funded by Lumina Foundation for Education, is a year-long national initiative designed to support administrators in the task of meaningful data interpretation. The Community College Student Success Think Tank, launched this spring and facilitated by **Glenn Gabbard**, NERCHE’s Associate Director, consists of individuals with responsibilities for Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and institutional research who have a shared responsibility for understanding the factors that influence student achievement. The group will meet five times over the 2004 and 2005 academic years and will consider such issues as what administrators and institutional researchers need to know and do to collect data that will meaningfully inform institutional practices affecting student achievement at their institutions, and how administrators and institutional researchers can shape accreditation and accountability standards to promote institutional effectiveness. Recommendations from the think tank will inform the work of the project.

For more information about The Community College Student Success Project, call Eleanor Leonard at 617-287-7660 or email [eleanor.leonard@umb.edu](mailto:eleanor.leonard@umb.edu).

## FEATURE ARTICLE

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necessary to claim the opportunities readily available to students from middle- and upper middle-class backgrounds. It is crucial that mentoring help poor and working-class students understand the importance of networking and cultivating professional relationships. And it should help them acquire skills to do this.

### Conclusion

Understanding class bias and exploring the ways our perceptions, expectations, and practices, both institutional and personal, are shaped by assumptions about class will assist us in better understanding ourselves and others, and the ways in which we have

been privileged. Working-class student perspectives offer another lens for viewing the world, one that is crucial to the development of a learning community. The process of challenging embedded class assumptions and norms must be ongoing, for the entire university community.



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**Suggestions for additional readings can be found on our web site ([www.nerche.org](http://www.nerche.org)).**



*One of NERCHE's hallmarks is its think tanks for faculty and administrators from New England colleges and universities. Think tanks meet five times a year for intense discussion of the most pressing issues facing higher education. For a complete list of think tank members and their institutions, see NERCHE's web site ([www.nerche.org](http://www.nerche.org)).*

***Jeff Apfel** of the Chief Financial Officers Think Tank was a member of a panel discussing new approaches to endowment management as part of a Grant Thornton breakfast series in February.*

*In March **David Healy** and **Larry Ladd** of the Chief Financial Officers Think Tank appeared on a panel addressing endowment management at the EACUBO Annual Workshop in Boston.*

## Associate Deans Think Tank

In an era of increased institutional accountability, student retention rates have become an important way to measure the success of an institution. Campuses are evaluated in accordance with their ability to maintain or improve upon their student retention rates and often are funded accordingly. Yet retention is a particularly faulty assessment tool for defining institutional success because of the non-traditional nature of the student population on many campuses and the programs these institutions are called upon to offer. **James Lee** of Stonehill College facilitated a discussion that challenged the accepted link between high retention rates and a successful learning community at the December meeting of the Associate Deans Think Tank.

While student attrition is often perceived as a negative reflection on the institution, there are many positive reasons why students leave a campus. The received wisdom, however, is that if students are content, they will continue to study at the campus. For this reason, retention rates are often seen as a measurement of a campus's ability to provide for the needs of students. Yet for most traditional-age students, the college experience can be equal parts identity and intellectual maturation. As students explore life on campus, they begin to get a better sense of themselves, assess their needs in relation to what is offered by the campus, and make decisions about the appropriateness of the setting. Providing this forum for reflection and self-appraisal is an invaluable way that institutions can be seen as successful, regardless of what the retention rates might indicate.

The complexities of campus life are such that an institution's success should not be based solely on retention rates. Of course campuses need to be concerned when students drop out for reasons that are under the direct control of the institution. It is important, however, that colleges and universities work together to redefine their own definitions of success and offer new measurement tools to assess campus life.

Future meetings of the Associate Deans Think Tank will focus on faculty governance and students transitioning out of college.

## Student Affairs Think Tank

Student Affairs is often held up as a quintessential learning organization, yet as the pace of work increases it becomes more difficult to find time to be the reflective practitioners that learning organizations call for. Deliberate learning requires a commitment of time and an imposition of structure. In December **Carolyn Locke** of the Massachusetts General Institute for Health Professions facilitated a discussion at the Student Affairs Think Tank on creating learning organizations.

Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs) can create the conditions that enable staff to operate as a learning organization on an ongoing basis, rather than assuming that mode only after a triggering event such as a crisis. Leadership plays a pivotal role in any type of learning organization. Skilled leaders, such as CSAOs, can slow the tempo of the workplace and provide the context and framework to help people think collectively. They can tap into existing resources and energies

and when necessary introduce new theories to challenge or augment the status quo.

Some CSAOs encourage their staff to talk regularly with security guards and janitors—people who have ongoing contact with students—to gain new perspectives and inform their thinking about their own work. The CSAOs also have directors give informal talks about their work to the entire staff to generate broader conversations about the work of the division on campus.

With more staff collaborating with other campus constituents, such as Academic Affairs, the need for learning organizations extends beyond Student Affairs. Well-run committees can be effective vehicles for such learning to occur, particularly when participants view each other as sources of feedback and partnership.

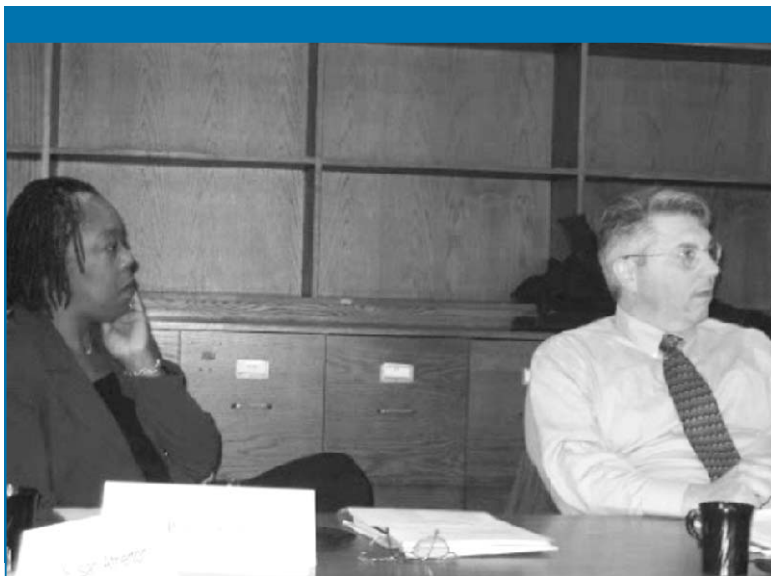
At an upcoming meeting, the Student Affairs Think Tank will meet jointly with the Academic Affairs Think Tank to discuss the role of higher education as a social leveler.

## Academic Affairs Think Tank

Over the past two decades the role of faculty has changed dramatically, especially as it is interpreted by various stakeholders in higher education, from parents and students to trustees, legislators, and the media. With the focus on accountability comes the opportunity to untangle mixed messages and clarify educational purposes. In February **Syd Barnes** of New Hampshire Community Technical College and **Cynthia Patterson** of Fisher College led the Academic Affairs Think Tank in a discussion of faculty accountability.

Faculty are being asked to work differently. As more is learned about strategies for educational success, faculty may be asked to shift the emphasis of their work. That being the case, expectations must be clearly defined. Advising is an especially critical component to student learning, and that focus must be reflected in faculty reward structures and evaluation systems. If the expectation is that faculty will participate on institution-wide

contradictory demands for accountability from external constituents, faculty see themselves as the ultimate targets. Program assessment is here to stay and, when done thoughtfully, can promote sound educational goals and enhance program effectiveness. In the end, faculty will have to incorporate assessment into their work. It is the CAO's job to find creative ways to involve faculty in the inevitable. Something as simple as offering



*Albie Johnson, Wheelock College and Gerald Lorentz, Mass Bay Community College, of the Associate Deans Think Tank.*

teams, then that must be acknowledged as part of the workload. Some institutions are looking at innovative ways to cover the broader territory of faculty work by focusing on the department rather than its faculty. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach to faculty workload with each individual expected to be highly qualified in all areas, the department, through its mix of individual strengths and talents, meets the responsibilities.

Even though administrators feel under siege by a barrage of sometimes

small grants to assist faculty with including clearly stated outcomes in the syllabus can go a long way toward drawing faculty into the center of the process.

In future meetings, the Academic Affairs Think Tank will talk about the purposes and effects of higher education and, in a joint meeting with the Student Affairs Think Tank, higher education as a social leveler.

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## Chief Financial Officers Think Tank

Since the 1980s there has been nationwide interest in making higher education accountable. Initially, the focus was on using assessment for institutional improvement. In the 1990s came the external press for accountability and a shift from private improvement to public policy goals. Common data sets were favored for comparisons, even though institutions varied greatly. By the mid-90s over half the states had issued a report on higher education that emphasized outputs and outcomes. In December, **Jan Napora** of Salem State College and **Rick Wallick** of Wheaton College led the Chief Financial Officers Think Tank in a discussion of performance reporting.

Currently, too many institutional resources are tied up in responding to demands from external sources for data. Colleges and universities are now responsible to a number of internal and external audiences and must find ways to convey information clearly and concisely. A good place to start is with a clear definition of the issues, especially if their meaning has changed over time. Framing issues for the Board of Trustees can help shape its expectations. For example, twenty years ago financial aid was categorized as an expense, while now it is a discount and a strategic piece of planning.

To make reporting meaningful at the campus level, a collective effort involving faculty, administrators, and students is useful in determining measures of the institution and will undoubtedly lead to rich discussions

about the mission and goals of the institution. Chief Financial Officers can help the process along by limiting the number of indicators in use and keeping the focus on those that will advance institutional goals. One of the challenges that higher education leaders face is finding ways to meaningfully interpret data to a public that for the last decade has viewed higher education in a particularly harsh light. These kinds of targeted discussions can suggest approaches to take with some of higher education's more hardnosed critics when it comes to talking about data limitations, such as the unquantifiable elements of teaching and learning.

## Deans Think Tank

Recently, colleges and universities have developed much more complicated relationships with their external constituents. No longer simply curious about life on campus, the public now voices fervent opinions about the enterprise and makes demands on colleges and universities that affect campus action, policy, and decision-making in significant ways. This involvement becomes particularly problematic when external stakeholders do not understand the culture of the campus or appreciate the commitment that higher education has to collaboration, collective decision-making, and internal dissent. Representing these institutional values to the external world is a daunting task. At the January meeting of the Deans Think Tank, **Robert Martin** of Westfield State and **Maureen McGarry** of Community College of Rhode Island facilitated a discussion about how Deans can play an active role in communicating the academic experience to people outside the academy.

Deans can be effective in ensuring that information shared with external stakeholders is accurate, current, and reflective of campus values—whether this means communicating with constituents directly or indirectly by supporting other institutional means of communicating. Also, by drawing upon staff, students, the parent community, and informal advisory boards, deans are equipped to provide comprehensive insight on community issues to campus colleagues. Deans can also open a window into the core of the academic experience by supporting and showcasing faculty work, especially work that reaches into the public sphere, such as partnerships with Trustees and community members, participation of faculty on nonacademic committees, and academic expertise used to help solve community dilemmas.

Representing the institution as a unified voice to the public is especially problematic, because of the academy's deeply held value of dissent and the protracted process that supports it. Conveying this intangible value that pushes knowledge, understanding, and community to a greater place is difficult but essential when representing the academy to the external world.

Public interest in the academy is not likely to disappear. External scrutiny can be valuable, however, as a mechanism for self-assessment and institutional advancement. In order to capitalize on this phenomenon, however, we need to ensure that the public understands the mission and core of the institution so that we can work with, not against one another.

At future meetings the Deans Think Tank will discuss faculty accountability and faculty governance.

## Multicultural Affairs Think Tank

The field of multicultural affairs has undergone many changes, challenges, and advancements since its inception. Begun as a campus-based social movement committed to diversity, multicultural affairs is now a specialized area increasingly incorporated into both the curriculum and co-curriculum on most campuses. In a discussion led by **Thomas Gaines** of Johnson & Wales University in December, members of the Multicultural Affairs Think Tank continued their efforts to explore the policies and practices that distinguish their work, with an eye toward developing clear professional standards and outcomes.

The boundary-spanning work of multicultural affairs professionals is challenged by the organizational structures common to institutions of higher education and the persistent divide between student and academic affairs. Furthermore, because professional responsibilities are vaguely understood and may vary from setting to setting,

and because outcomes have not been defined, Multicultural Affairs professionals have found it difficult to gain a strong foothold in the academy. Although they have responsibility for areas beyond Multicultural Affairs and are thus involved in a variety of campus matters, the ambiguity of their roles and purposes has also created barriers for developing the profession.

In order to advance the profession, campus diversity leaders must first define a set of overarching standards for the profession and also define the outcomes that will be expected from multicultural affairs programs. These outcomes might include ensuring that members of the campus community have:

- cultural competencies and perspective-taking skills
- a voice in making and implementing policy
- a complex understanding about how power is created, used, or diffused in the organization
- skills to facilitate change in the institutional culture

An agreed-upon set of outcomes can form the foundation of an organizational mission statement and can inform the professional responsibilities of the Multicultural Affairs profession.

Clearly articulated standards and outcomes will also translate into more effective training and development for new professionals and clearer career paths for those more senior. Such standards and outcomes will provide better tools to measure program performance. They will also enable Multicultural Affairs professionals, whose function is to build links across organizational divides, to integrate fully into the academy.

Future meetings will continue to explore this profession and include topics on educating campus communities about white privilege, the importance of inter-ethnic collaboration and communication, and building structures for managing “teachable moments.”



Reviewed by James A. Stakenas

## How Class Works

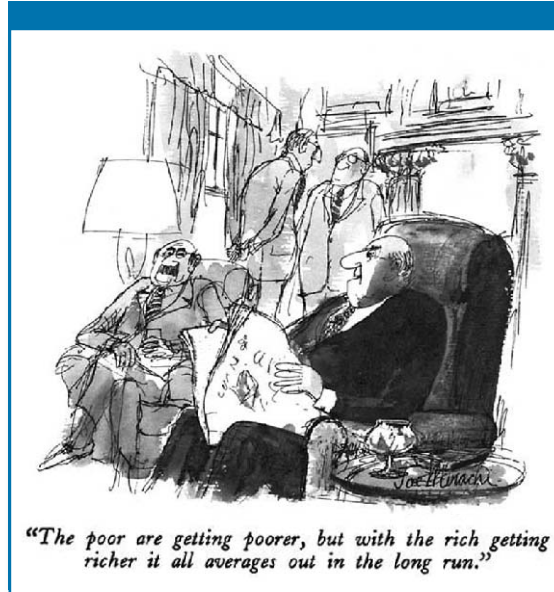
Stanley Aronowitz. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. (2003). 263 pp.

In America, opportunities for upward social migration are accounted for by a numerous variables, ranging from the availability of quality education to struggle and hard work. Fortuitousness is of considerable importance to this mobility. Americans live in America, where we are historically advantaged over more class-bound Europeans because of an abundance of natural resources, an expansive territory with natural borders, and an absence of feudal traditions.

Yet Stanley Aronowitz, in his brilliantly argued book, *How Class Works*, points out that less than one-third of Americans progress to the next economic social class, or at best arrive at some financial stability. While he concedes that “one in three is not bad odds” (15), this fact raises important questions about the role of class in a society in which he claims “class denial is woven into the fabric of American life” (15).

There are enough rags-to-riches stories to keep the promise of personal success alive—despite the odds and even though according to Aronowitz, there will always be haves and have-nots. Class distinctions persist, with the lion’s share of this nation’s money and property held by the upper class. In the workplace, corporate reward structures perpetuate inequities by making stock options available to top-level executives, though not to shop-floor workers. Conditions such as these, he argues, make class struggle inevitable.

To be sure, unions have done much over the years to increase wages and improve working conditions. Aronowitz offers an impressive survey of the interplay of union actions and historical and/or political circumstances, each influencing the other over time. His accounts of Reagan firing air traffic controllers or Clinton supporting NAFTA, however, are particularly thought provoking in that



“The poor are getting poorer, but with the rich getting richer it all averages out in the long run.”

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they highlight the kinds of forces that affect workers but that workers have little or no control over.

Indeed, unions themselves have changed with changed times. In his chapter titled, “New Social Movements and Class,” Aronowitz distinguishes between the former *raison d’être* of the union, when “saving jobs was the first priority” (160), and its current role in the workplace. No longer shop-floor advocates, contemporary unions function as a kind of human resources industry, responsible for heading negotiations on issues of pay and work conditions and for organizing member services. In an especially ironic twist, it is union leaders who now enjoy the most job security.

But we live in an era of cutbacks and layoffs, and those who are employed shoulder more and more work while wages remain fairly level. Why isn’t the American worker responding? Aronowitz offers a theory that we are victims of our daily circumstances, including two-family incomes, daycare, long commutes, and the convenience of extended shopping hours which when bundled together eat up our

time, attention, and energy, leaving little behind to devote to facing down the inequities of difficult work environments.

In a chapter entitled, “Ecology and Class,” he juxtaposes global capitalism with human rights-based politics and states:

*The question has become whether, and how, the human species can reproduce itself under conditions in which its most developed forms of the production of knowledge and of material goods pose a threat to its own species and to many others as well. (173)*

After briefly reviewing current research on the deterioration of our environment, he poses an ominous series of questions that suggest that no one, regardless of class, can escape the negative impact of global capitalism on the environment—sounding a warning that reaches beyond the shop floor or the cubicle or even the campus walls.

*How Class Works* is an inspired discussion of social relationships seen through class structures and filtered by labor, environmental, and political issues. When I finished the book I ultimately realized the poignancy of the cover artwork. The book cover is brown with black print that decreases in size as one reads through the three words of the title. The bottom of the cover is a picture of striking workers, but their faces and their lettered placards are in shadows. The class struggles described in the book seem faceless, and solutions to the problems are not clear.



James A. Stakenas

# The Ernest A. Lynton Award for Faculty Professional Service & Academic Outreach

## 2004 Award Winner and Honorable Mentions

For eight years, NERCHE has presented the Lynton Award to exceptional faculty from every institutional type and location and from a broad range of departments and disciplines. Equally diverse is the scope of activities in which these faculty are involved. Beyond the innovative ways in which they are engaged in their communities, the nominees are impressive because of the clear connection between that engagement and the involvement of their students. They enhance and deepen their understanding of their fields and therefore their teaching. They embody this connection, extending their own knowledge to enhance the lives of others in our society and to motivate both students and peers to follow their lead. These faculty members not only serve the community outside academe, but also have a lasting impact on their institutions.

This year's winner, **Richard Eberst**, exemplifies all of these achievements. Richard is the founding director of Community-University Partnerships (CUP) at California State University in San Bernardino and professor and former chairperson of the Health Science and Human Ecology Department.

During a career that spans over 30 years, Richard has continually demonstrated a deep commitment to the scholarship of engagement by uniting his disciplinary expertise with community outreach, benefiting both his students and the local service areas. Early in his career he recognized the value of having students integrate academic work with community needs and is now working to institutionalize this approach across the CSUSB campus, including incorporating community engagement into the strategic plan. Furthermore, he has been instrumental in institutionalizing community-based learning across the entire California State University system.

As the founding director of CUP, he developed and advanced community

engagement efforts and partnerships across all five divisions of the University, greatly increasing the number of CSUSB faculty and students who are making a difference in the San Bernardino community and across the region. His "Focus 92411" initiative has involved community hospitals, public health departments, and a variety of local community organizations to improve the quality of life for residents in that area. Among his accomplishments is the development of other community partnerships, including the Vital Communities Dialogue Partnership, the 40th Street Neighborhood Regeneration Partnership, the African-American Health Initiative, the Community Benefits Collaborative, and the PAL Center Partnership.

### Honorable Mentions

**Bunyan Bryant** is the founding director of the Environmental Justice Initiative at the University of Michigan in the School of Natural Resources and Environment. He has been involved in linking advocacy and activism with social justice on campus

and within the community, especially on issues of environmental justice and organizational advocacy.

**Marybeth Lima** is an associate professor in the Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering at Louisiana State University. She collaborates with her students, public school teachers in Baton Rouge, and community partners to design and build public school playgrounds that are safe and accessible for physically challenged children.

**Shirley Tang** is an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston and holds an unprecedented joint appointment in American Studies and Asian-American Studies. She has rich experience working with immigrant and refugee communities, organizing advocacy efforts, and leading collaborative research projects in the Boston area.

For more information about the winners, visit our web site ([www.nerche.org](http://www.nerche.org)).



*Lynton Award winner Richard Eberst and NERCHE Interim Director Dwight Giles at the AAHE Annual Conference in April.*

## New Leadership

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We are delighted to announce the appointment of our new Associate Director, **Glenn Gabbard**, who comes to NERCHE as a seasoned administrator with experience developing and leading projects in community college, university, and nonprofit settings. Throughout his work as a faculty member, department chair, dean, and director of national change initiatives, Glenn has focused on forging stronger collaborative efforts within and across institutions that serve underserved individuals. His areas of interest include developmental education in multicultural settings, seamless linkages between public schools and higher education, inclusive policy and practices related to individuals with disabilities, and the skills and knowledge required for transforming colleges and universities. Glenn holds a BA in English from Sonoma State University, an MA in linguistics from the American University, and an EdD in higher education from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. His doctoral work focused on how organizational practices change as a result of professional development partnerships between public schools and institutions of higher learning. He has served as a fellow with the American Council on Education.

## News From the Doctoral Program

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The Doctoral Program in Higher Education Administration offers a four-year sequence of courses, field-based research and dissertation work focused in urban higher education, and is designed for New England working professionals.

**Jay R. Dee**, assistant professor, was one of eight scholars selected to participate in a June 2004 national seminar on higher education governance and decision making. The seminar is sponsored by the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California. Jay's paper provides insights on faculty-led organizational change.

In March, **Linda Eisenmann**, professor, presented "Women and Postsecondary Education in the Post-WWII United States: Expectations and Behavior" as part of an international symposium at the European Social Science History Conference in Berlin. Linda and doctoral student Ralph Kidder jointly presented "Exploring Women's Postwar Experience in the Urban University Setting: Testing the Framework of Higher Education's 'Incidental Students'" at the April meeting of the American Educational Research Association in San Diego.

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## Congratulations

Multicultural Affairs Think Tank member **Gail Bouknight-Davis**, former Associate Director of the Multicultural Center at Williams College, is now the Center's Director.

Student Affairs Think Tank member **Maureen Keefe** is now the Vice President for Student Affairs at the Wentworth Institute of Technology, where she was formerly Dean of Students.

Academic Affairs Think Tank member **Jane Larkin**, former Director of Faculty Services at the Boston Architectural Center is now the Director of Continuing Education.

Former Student Affairs Think Tank member **Paul Raverta** is serving as the Interim President of Holyoke Community College, where he held the position of Vice President for Student Development.

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Fall 1999

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Deborah Hirsch and Ernest A. Lynton  
*Bridging Two Worlds: Professional Service and Service Learning*  
Fall 1995

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*Does Service Learning Have a Future?*  
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# NERCHE MONOGRAPH

This winter, NERCHE published *Project Engage: A Partnership Approach to Student Learning*, a compilation of lessons learned from our project that supported teams of faculty, students, and community members in community-based research. The monograph is available on our website, ([www.nerche.org](http://www.nerche.org)).



# THE LAST WORD

*You will never change everyone's mind. The real challenge is to push people to question what it is they have their mind set on.*

– Multicultural Affairs Think Tank

*For a great number of students, employment is an aspect of their day-to-day lives, and keeping work separate from education is not only impossible, it may even be bad pedagogy.*

– Academic Affairs Think Tank

*Advising provides students with the opportunity to finally understand and interpret the undergraduate experience.*

– Associate Deans Think Tank

*The values that guide the work of the internal campus community and those that shape the expectations of external stakeholders are in direct conflict.*

*Internally, campuses value dissenting voices. Externally, we are continually asked to speak with a single voice and present easy answers to some of the most complicated questions.*

– Deans Think Tank

*In order to help students create knowledge out of a world with an excess of information, skills required for classroom work must be balanced with an ability to translate this work into life beyond the classroom.*

– Student Affairs Think Tank

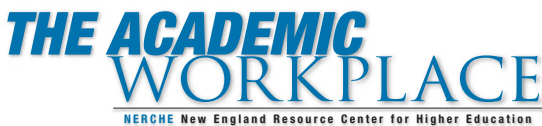
*Indicators are successful when they are related to policy goals and they encourage improvement rather than threaten punishment.*

– Chief Financial Officers Think Tank

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