

Editor's Note

BY MITCHELL VOGEL

Welcome! It is our hope that this inaugural issue of *American Academic* will make a constructive contribution to the lively and often contentious debates taking place in academic and policy-making circles about the major issues facing higher education in today's changing world.

The title of our first issue is *Academic Values, Market Values: The Shifting Balance*. Before we begin, however, please allow me to say a word about our own organization, the American Federation of Teachers, and what has led us to initiate a journal on academic policy. AFT became involved in higher education almost immediately after the union was formed—our first higher education local was chartered in 1918. Our commitment to higher education has grown to the point where AFT now represents more college and university faculty and professional staff than any other union in the nation.

The union concentrates on advancing professional treatment and sound educational practice. This focus is reflected in AFT's record at the bargaining table and in its legislative advocacy and intellectual activity. Among the issues to which we've devoted the most attention are tenure, academic freedom and shared governance; technology and distance education; and accountability and assessment. Perhaps most important in recent years is our continuing effort to help reverse the academic staffing crisis—a crisis characterized by the loss of full-time tenure-track faculty and the overuse and exploitation of part-time/adjunct faculty, full-time non-tenure-track faculty and graduate employees.

This commitment to supporting these principles in our nation's colleges and universities virtually defines higher education unionism. I am reminded of a poll taken by a major research organization of members of my local union a

few years ago. (I was president of one of the largest university unions for over 17 years.) This poll asked my members to identify the most important thing the union could do for them. The overwhelming response was “Provide support for the university.” This was chosen ahead of “Provide higher salaries and fringe benefits.” Our members have always been concerned with their institution’s future. They advocate greater power for faculty and staff because they feel faculty and staff are best suited to make the most appropriate education-related decisions.

The initiation of this journal, *American Academic*, is a natural outgrowth and extension of these efforts. Academic workers are trained to think dialectically. The scientific method, which was stressed in the vast majority of our disciplines, requires an open exploration of differing viewpoints leading to the hope of new agreements, new viewpoints for future dialectical disagreements, and more importantly, new theories. Readers of this first issue of *American Academic*, seeking this kind of intellectual inquiry, will not be disappointed. We have tried in this issue, and will continue in future issues, to choose topics that are critical to the future of American higher education and to provide the reader with articles from authors representing diverse disciplines, viewpoints and philosophies.

This year, *American Academic* focuses on an issue that is arousing a great deal of discussion, controversy and concern—the growing influence of market forces and commercial considerations in shaping what happens in our colleges and universities. Many, if not most, of the faculty we represent tell us there is a trend at their institutions toward expanding job-oriented coursework and cutting back on courses that have academic value but may not attract the largest numbers of students and outside support. Faculty members see their institutions expanding externally funded, applied research and diminishing support for research that lacks commercial value.

They also see their institutions replacing full-time, tenured faculty positions with low-paid contingent faculty (part-time and full-time non-tenure-track) with little or no job security and questionable academic freedom. They see college trustees, managers and elected officials exerting greater oversight and control of decision making, bypassing the practice of shared governance. Put all together, this perception is often given the label of commercialization or corporatization.

This is not to say that all academic professionals see these trends identically, and we certainly do not mean to say that the broader community (i.e., academic administrators, trustees, elected officials, students and the general public) has a common view about the nature of the trends or the overall benefits and problems arising from them. An excellent example of the gulf in perspectives that can arise is offered by Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Jane Smiley who began a chapter (The Common Wisdom) in her novel *MOO* by describing the views of various stakeholders of a public university.

“It was well known among the citizens of the state that the university had pots of money and that there were highly paid faculty members in every department who had once taught Marxism and now taught something called deconstructionism which is only Marxism gone underground in preparation for emergence at a time of national weakness.

It was well known among the legislators that the faculty as a whole was determined to undermine the moral and commercial well-being of the state, and that supporting a large and nationally famous university with state monies was exactly analogous to raising a nest of vipers in your own bed.

It was well known among the faculty that the governor and the state legislature had lost interest in education some twenty years before and that it was only a matter of time before all classes would be taught as lectures, all exams given as computer-graded multiple choice, all subscriptions to professional journals at the library stopped, all research time given up to committee work and administrative red tape....”

Since those with an interest in the university hold few perceptions in common, it is not surprising that discussions over the appropriate balance between academic and market values are generating a lot of heat. What *American Academic* hopes is that in this and subsequent issues illumination will accompany that heat. This illumination should lead the way to further discourse and study. Not surprisingly, this issue cannot provide the definitive answer either to what the problem is or how to address it. But *American Academic* does intend to provide serious, varying analyses that will enable readers and policy makers to face

complicated questions with a broader perspective. It is our hope that the journal and its articles will serve as a catalyst for further analytical study of the impact of commercial practices in higher education.

In the introduction that immediately follows this article, William Scheuerman—the chair of AFT’s higher education program and policy council, and president of United University Professions (UUP) at the State University of New York—and his associate Thomas Kriger, introduce us to the concept of corporatization and how it is impacting the academic community. They offer a way to define corporatization as well as distinguish between its beneficial effects and its dangerous incursions. John Lee and Sue Clery offer an exploration of market trends in higher education based on extensive data about funding, programs and students. Frank Donoghue provides a valuable historical analysis. He argues that the impact of the market is not a new “crisis” but a continuation of a constant pull and tug that dates back to the founding of our higher education system.

Other authors, notably Rhoades and Slaughter, Soley and Bonewits, and Bok (as described by Meisenhelder) state that, despite its antecedents, a crisis does exist today. They point to a number of trends that they contend are having a negative effect on the structure and operations of the academy. Among these trends are changes in public financing, corporate involvement in university research and the university’s quest for profits, as well as changes in the academic labor force and in copyright issues. These are all indicators, according to these authors, that the academy is changing and not for the better.

Newman and Couturier and Galston take a different approach. In their view, the impact of the market on the academy is neither inherently positive nor negative. It is a fact of life. For example, consumer preferences should properly be taken into account when devising curriculum and other educational programs. These authors point to some positive aspects of commercialization in higher education. At the same time, they argue that colleges and universities should seek ways in which the market can strengthen the academy, not weaken it.

We have also provided three articles from authors describing their own disciplines and academic focus. Strickland points to the impact of the market upon the field of composition studies, arguing for a new perspective on the relationship between composition studies faculty and the largely part-time/adjunct

faculty corps they supervise. Hertenstein and Regier describe changing crises in labor studies and university presses, respectively. All three of these authors express extreme trepidation about the incursion of the market into their fields and indicate changes their departments should make because of these incursions.

What ever your view of these issues, it is our hope that you will gain valuable perspective by reading this inaugural issue. Having said that, I believe what we've laid out in this issue is only the beginning of where scholarship should go in examining this phenomenon. In the time ahead, I am hoping that scholars will try to reach a more academically rigorous understanding of what is actually happening in the academy and how what is happening today differs from what has happened historically. Comprehensive studies of the relationships between other public institutions, such as hospitals, public K-12 schools, government itself and welfare agencies with their external power structures have led to greater understandings of these institutions. Similar studies of higher education would produce a better understanding of our colleges and universities.

These can be followed by a vigorous and lively effort to generate more comprehensive prescriptions about what should be done. These prescriptions should *not* focus on how to keep the outside world out of the academy or how to make the academy more efficient where appropriate. They *should* focus on how policy makers and scholars working together can build on traditional strengths and adapt to the new needs of our nation's colleges and universities.

We are approaching the 2005 theme of *American Academic* with the same intention in mind. The 2005 theme is "Success in Higher Education"—how to define it, how to bring it about, how to know we've achieved it and who gets to decide. These questions have become critical in light of the recent movement to impose outside, often quantitative "output" requirements on higher education under the banner of accountability. In our 2005 issue, we hope to inform public opinion on the twin issues of accountability and success by exploring an array of ideas and viewpoints from academics, outside researchers and policymakers.

As editor, I will be most interested to have your views on the current issue and also to discuss ideas you may have, or contributions you may want to make to the next issue. I can be reached through the AFT address on this publication. And let me start as I began with a warm welcome to this new AFT effort.

