

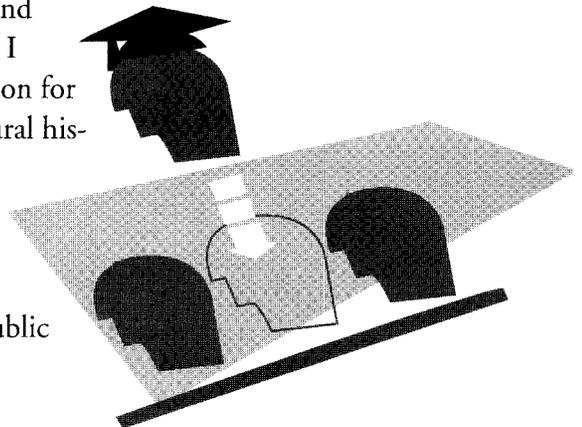
PROLES, ENTREPRENEURS, OR PUBLIC SCHOLARS?

By Mary B. Stanley

This January as I was preparing to write this piece, I was delighted to discover that Gary Trudeau was rerunning as a “Doonesbury” flashback, his series on the state of working conditions in higher education. Few faculty who saw the series can forget the strip where faculty are positioned as migrant day laborers, waiting to hop on the back of an open truck while a bull-horned dean, “boss man,” calls out needed academic specialties to the response of “I’ll work for food.” Seeing it again I was reminded that a good political cartoonist (in my community the morning paper runs “Doonesbury” on its editorial page) is among the best public scholars we have. Indeed, I thought that my entire article could be a commentary on Trudeau’s strips on the state of higher education.

Instead, as an introduction to my argument, I will begin by unpacking one aspect of that series, Trudeau’s depiction of faculty as increasingly being treated as serfs. I’ll leave most of the academic turf explored by Trudeau untouched.

My argument is fairly simple. I am claiming that because of institutional and macroeconomic changes, faculty in higher education are positioned either to fall into the category of what Marx termed the proletariat or to rise (although some would say also fall) into that of entrepreneur. This is in part the result of the increasing inability of faculty in the academic disciplines to use the logic, rhetoric, and practices of professional expertise to maintain autonomy over the conditions and ends of their labor. And, finally, I will argue that the default position for faculty at this point in our cultural history (although some, including myself, would say the preferred and actively sought alternative) is to reenter public space and reconnect with the public as public scholars.



Serfs and Proles

Although serfs conjure up images of feudal and the proletariat at capitalist exploitation, serf and proletariat are similar in that both are assumed to be acting not for their own purposes and ends, but at the will of another. Serfs may have had their feast days and folkways, the proletariat their glimmers of solidarity but few in 1998 would celebrate the status of, or seek work that signifies membership in either. No one eagerly takes the “road to serfdom” nor wants a job defined as working for chump change or for idiots. And yet the conditions of work in 1998 present many people with proletarian powerlessness untempered by older notions of feudal obligation, e.g., residual welfare capitalist assumptions regarding loyal workers, security of work, pension commitments, and company towns. Further, now that we have also rejected the serfdom of state welfare — for those on the Right the manor without the tilled fields — we have created the conditions of an increasingly “free” labor that by virtue of its individualism, precariousness, and isolation seems incapable of creating community, collective resistance, or even perhaps public life.

The only alternative vision of work popularly available remains the carrot of capitalism. This vision is found in the assurance that we can all become individual entrepreneurs and even, having been told that we must now “build our own rocks,” finance capitalists. Serfdom of several sorts is no longer an option. Nor does professional status necessarily guarantee dignified, stable work or autonomy regarding the purpose of one’s labor. Becoming an entrepreneur, an “independent contractor,” our competencies and skills seemingly upgraded daily, appears the only way out and up. We had better retool, innovate, and self-capitalize.

The specter of a vast army of downsized, temporary, part-time, outsourced “individual contractors” waiting to jump onto the flatbed truck is enough to discipline even the most critical and thoughtful worker. Regardless of economic indicators, changes in the underlying social contract between workers and management, citizens and politicians, citizens and citizens, professionals and client/consumers are interpreted by many people as meaning that they are on their own.

So what of the Trudeau strips on higher education? First, I would disagree with Trudeau that the term for faculty under present conditions is, as he uses in the strip, “serfs.” Migrant labor-

ers, yes, but not serfs. Serfs at least were presumed to be part of a nexus of medieval obligation and reciprocity. Yes, they were terribly exploited and involuntarily wedded to the land, hardly a model of the good life as we conceive it now, but they did have a secure place in the social order. They were not rootless, ready to leave kin and community to keep pace with a “no guarantees” labor market.

I think the more accurate reading of Trudeau would be to say that he is presenting faculty as “proles.” Regardless of the term he uses, faculty are shown as sharing the same fate as all marginally employed people in a capitalist order. For faculty in higher education it is a grim vision of a future where faculty wander outside community and institutional/disciplinary hometowns, funny but chilling.

However, and here is the rub, for those not in higher education, an unsympathetic reading of faculty’s fate in the Trudeau strip would be that finally even faculty, those cosseted, narcissistic, jargon-making hothouse woolly heads will have to face the discipline of the new global market, the “you’re on your own” world, without the buffer of tenure.

The resentment against tenure is not surprising. To many people, faculty members and welfare moms may well appear to share the same self-indulgent life-style. To them welfare mothers presume that they can define the nature of their labor, e.g., they bear and raise children at will. Supposedly such welfare recipients, unlike most wage workers, also decide for themselves the conditions of that work, stereotypically filling their days with soap operas, steaks, and drugs/liquor. And of course “we” subsidized them to do it.

Ditto faculty, with appropriate substitutions, e.g., opera for soap operas, filet mignon with béarnaise sauce on research junkets for steak on food stamps, and fine Merlots as against beer and corner drugs. Unlike the near inhuman status of feudal serfs, today’s coddled serfs, so the argument goes, become “welfare queens” and cultural prima donnas (a.k.a. tenured faculty) while the rest of the working world has to scramble so as not to tumble into the reserve army of the partially or temporarily employed. It follows to many that both welfare *and* tenure should be eliminated. Everyone should stand equally unprotected until the market reveals her or his worth.

Furthermore, in a society where education — and reeducation/retraining forever and ever, amen — is being sold as the

“. . . faculty members and welfare moms may well appear to share the same self-indulgent life-style.”

magic bullet that will empower individuals to slay the dragon of an unpredictable and seemingly ever-changing labor market, it is not surprising that the conveyors of that magic will increasingly be found wanting. Education in a liberal capitalist society has long been the device to square the circle in an economic order that suspiciously seems to guarantee perpetual privilege to some sectors of society or to a few parvenu “winners,” while most people feel the bounce and sway of capitalism’s creative destruction and attendant class inequality. It might be noted that President Clinton’s State of the Union message included a straightforward reiteration of education as the magic bullet in a global economy theme. What was notable was his total silence regarding what other ends education might serve.

Adding insult to injury is the thought that those same tenured faculty have the authority to sign off on or certify our newly acquired skills. Further annoying is the awareness that the acquisition of those skills and knowledge was not for its own sake or that of the student but to provide that modicum of illusive security in an ever-changeable job market. And finally, perhaps most annoying, is that in higher education and perhaps increasingly at lower levels as well, you have to pay top dollar to acquire those skills *and* seemingly be bored to death in the process.

It is not surprising then that the 1997 annual survey of college freshmen reveals that almost 75 percent of college freshmen chose being financially well-off as the essential goal of their education as against using education to develop a philosophy of life. The reverse of three decades ago. Not surprising as well that students who claimed to have been frequently bored in class in high school hit a record high of 36 percent. Yet in spite of a legacy of boredom with education, a record high percentage of students also said they aspire to receive a master’s degree.

Education as means and not end does not bode well for its providers. And yet there is an irony regarding the very authority of faculty to certify. In the effort to professionalize the mind and certify knowledge, faculty in higher education may have inadvertently undermined the very idea of education as a transcendent public value, a good in itself broadly valued and needed in a democracy, not simply a commodity with an unproven track record or a rarefied gift that few students recognize. In a capitalist society, the very process of professionalizing the mind created a barrier against

“... 75 percent of college freshmen chose being financially well-off as the essential goal of their education.”

the proletarianization of faculty. The effort to dignify the labor of scholars and to create a community of critical inquiry free from political and market pressures may have had unintended consequences but it was a worthy goal.

Solidarity has been used by both workers and those aspiring to the middle class to create conditions of stable dignified work. For working people, unions came to institutionalize this quest for fair treatment, just compensation, and collective control over the conditions of labor. For the middle class and those aspiring to become middle class, professionalism has been a preferred strategy. Notwithstanding efforts at unionization, faculty in higher education have taken the professionalization route.

The question is whether professionalism in the present institutional and macroeconomic context is able to sustain this autonomy. I believe that it cannot. The project of professionalization has always been difficult. The logic of capitalism is both in theory antimonopolistic (anyone should be able to practice, let the buyer beware) and in practice forever seeking to deskill or replace workers with smart machines or other laborsaving processes including relocating production outside the United States and buying cheap “brain power” abroad regardless of attempts by professional organizations and professionals to monopolize or certify expertise.

At present, market values are increasingly dominant in all areas of life and in all institutional sectors. Professionals, particularly faculty in higher education, need allies in the project of using democratic traditions, values, and practices to challenge, limit, and restore the balance between the capitalist and democratic dimensions of our political culture both for their own sakes as dignified workers but also to restore substance to our collective democratic aspirations.

Academic Capitalism: Faculty as Entrepreneurs

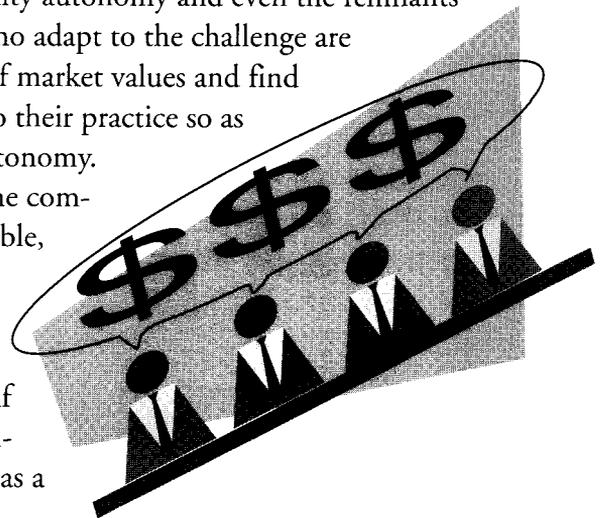
Sheila Slaughter and Larry L. Leslie in their newly published work *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies, and the Entrepreneurial University*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1997) argue that many faculty from 1980 on have, for a variety of reasons, joined the charge into the marketplace. The authors’ research in four countries (Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and the United States) reveals the impact of commercial values on academic life. Administrators, particularly in public institutions facing retrench-

ment in public funding, have been forced to rely on increased tuition (fostering the shift from student as student to student as consumer), closer linkages with commerce and industry for purposes of “training” their work force, and/or the encouragement of faculty pursuit of basic or applied research, often in partnership with commercial interests, which might generate revenue or result in marketable products and patents. The authors claim that the combined impacts of the above are transforming internal governance, disciplinary autonomy, undergraduate and graduate teaching, the nature of “truth seeking,” the distinction between basic and applied research, the nature of the academic community, the purposes and values of higher education, the stratification of institutions of higher education, and the relationship between the liberal arts and professional schools. In short, they affect almost every aspect of academic life.

Some faculty easily snap to market values like iron filings to a magnet. Resistance is hard. By citing Slaughter and Leslie, I am not implying that there was a golden age (except maybe the earliest years of Harvard!) when higher education was purely about the disinterested pursuit of public service and truth. Indeed by the turn of the century, critics of higher education, such as Thorstein Veblen and Upton Sinclair, frequently linked its corruptions to its presumed dominance by commercial values. The question is, Are there limits to such dominance?

Slaughter and Leslie include in their analysis, best and worst cases. There is room for faculty autonomy and even the remnants of the liberal arts. Faculty who adapt to the challenge are those who accept the logic of market values and find ways to adapt those values to their practice so as to restore some degree of autonomy. Faculty must learn to play the commercial game, to sit at the table, so to speak, and accept that faculty research may have to adjust to commercial realities while maintaining (if lucky and if at the right institution) university affiliation as a break against the contingent work force and time limited projects colonizing the world of pro-

“Faculty must learn to play the commercial game.”



fessional work beyond the academy.

Slaughter and Leslie conclude their work with a series of recommendations. They are not the ones I would choose. Their goal seems to be to find mechanisms to empower students as consumers so that they are not shortchanged as faculty rush to those research-oriented institutes and centers where the pay is high and teaching loads limited. They do tip their hat to democratic values that might be compromised as institutional governance accommodates to an increasingly commercial environment and suggest that there might be ways to enhance those academic projects that relate to the public and public services. However, they are not concerned with the role of faculty as public scholars, engaging the public in a conversation concerning the role of higher education in a democracy or indeed engaging the public in a conversation about the very macroeconomic forces and processes they track and study.

Public Scholars: Another Possibility

The nature of the relationship between the “ivory tower” and the larger commonwealth remains contested. If market values, assumptions, and practices have come to dominate all institutions, including higher education, what role have academics played in furthering them or at least not resisting the triumph of the market as the public philosophy of our times? Russell Jacoby in his 1987 work, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*, argues that from the sixties on academics themselves retreated from public space, abandoning a culture that might have qualified the ascendance of market thinking and discourse. Happily mired in professional rituals, practices, and status making, contemporary academics have ceased to cultivate a conversation with the public that Jacoby claims earlier intellectuals understood to be at the heart of the arts and science professions in a democracy. Further, although many contemporary academics were, and are, infused with theoretical and emotional distaste for market values and ideology, indeed challenge(d) the very dominance of both, to Jacoby they sang to their own choirs and preached to their own converts, never deeply engaging the public in fundamental constitutive conversations about the economy, society, or politics and policy. Although Jacoby’s book is now 11 years old, I doubt he would

be surprised by the transformations in higher education described by Slaughter and Leslie.

The professionalization project including the hyperspecialization discussed by Jacoby is not fundamentally a democratic project. Obviously, one aspect of academic professionalization was, and continues to be, to undermine popular confidence in the “lay” mind through the creation of professional status and a monopoly of expertise. Particularly now when even professional expertise quickly loses its cachet, the intellectual professions may find it ever more important to nurture the belief that knowledge work is hard, unsuitable, or genetically impossible for the masses and should therefore be baptized with whatever power and privilege still remains attached to the concept of expertise.

Jacoby knows that the project of intellectual criticism, the hard work of making a public case against a powerful political and economic order is not easy. He is fully aware that the costs for academics have always been high and that professionalization allows(ed) one the space to be as critical and truth-seeking as is (was) possible. Jacoby writing 11 years ago did not perhaps recognize that the challenge to tenure, shifts in resource allocation, and the increasing dominance of commercial values in higher education would shrink that space considerably. Today’s “tenured radicals,” so maligned by the cultural right, may well be the last unusually privileged cohort of academics before faculty become the contingent work force of the university of the future.

How then to constitute that conversation with the public, which might contribute to the democracy project *and* save the truth-seeking humanistic tradition that some at least have found an essential and irreplaceable component of higher education? How to reimagine tenure as the prerequisite for both truth-seeking *and* truth-speaking as well as a model of secure, dignified employment?

Faculty in higher education are socially, politically, and economically situated such that they must as individuals, and perhaps collectively as well, take a stand on the nature and future of academic life. The positions available to faculty are shaped by the vast structural changes that accompany late capitalism. The one most feared is perhaps that of faculty as a powerless, contingent work force; experts without power, position, or security of

“Today’s ‘tenured radicals’ may well be the last unusually privileged cohort of academics before faculty become the contingent work force of the university of the future.”

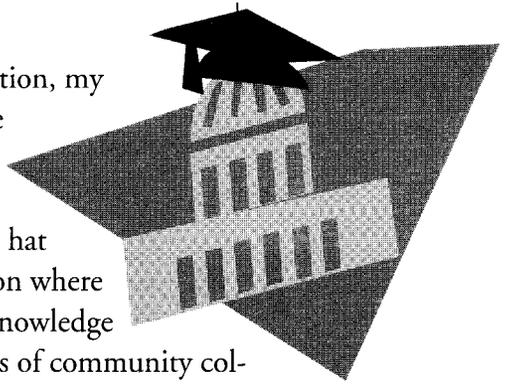
tenure, always on the move, their competencies on their backs and in their laptops; competencies quickly outmoded.

Another option, faculty as entrepreneurs, may seem to many to be exciting. Perhaps young people presently embarking on a career in the academic professions and socialized to market values without the buffer of older traditions of learning might come to view tenure as indeed breeding dependency, sloth, and decadency if not simply generative of much deadwood. Ambition and competition have always been part of professional life in the United States. The professional ethos of service and altruism may be transformed by a cash-value, bottom-line view of knowledge.

This is not to say the liberal arts tradition will disappear. It may morph from a view of itself as the repository of humane aspirations, continually revitalizing democracy, into a vision of the liberal arts as fully compatible with the trends discussed above. As Slaughter and Leslie argue, the sciences are being pulled ever more tightly into the circle of commercial values and practices. As for the humanities, they may increasingly be perceived as good “training” for participation in high-quality leisure activities. In a culturally ironic age, the humanities provide a deep reservoir of sophisticated in-group images and allusions shared among those employed in hip, esthetically driven industries such as entertainment, pop art/culture and advertising/public relations. Cultural manipulation will surely be a growth industry and those who presently labor in that shop are already accustomed to flexible and fluid working conditions. There have always been aspects of higher education that were more resonant with the maintenance of a cultural elite and the commodification of culture than with the democratization of that culture.

And the social sciences? The state’s continual interest in social control (the boom in criminology majors at the undergraduate level cannot be ignored) and the corporate need for ever more sophisticated models for how to manage a fragmented, anomic, multicultural, and global work force suggest that the social sciences will have a role in academic capitalism. Further the social sciences, as the humanities, are even now contributing theoretical orientations and methodological sophistication to the project of capital (dis)investment, risk analysis, and cultural commodification.

For some in higher education, my implied concerns regarding the impact of a globalized economy and market values on higher education are either old hat or a great comfort depending on where one labors in the vineyard of knowledge workers. Faculty and presidents of community colleges and midrange four-year or research institutions may well believe that their institutions *have* engaged the public when they provide those skill-based courses and curricula that seem responsive to the demands of the labor market or collaborate with the business sector to provide a vision of their surrounding community attuned to business concerns and enticing to investment capital. The “forces” of global capitalism can easily become like the weather, something communities and institutions must accept and accommodate to rather than critically assess, challenge, or help constitute. In this regard, I have used the term market values rather than market “forces” throughout this paper because I am making an argument for thinking of the economy not as something outside the agency and normative order of human beings. From my perspective it is not a force of nature like thunderclouds in the distance. Rather, a market economy is constituted by human beings through political processes and sustained or resisted through the daily practices and values of institutions. For those in higher education, a fundamentally democratic and constitutive question such as, What is an economy for? may not be asked by communities who have adopted a view of a market economy as essentially functioning separate from political life. Nor will faculty who ask such questions be viewed as allies or friends if the language of the market, as against the older language of political economy, becomes the only discourse of public imagination.



“A market economy is constituted by human beings through political processes and sustained or resisted through the daily practices and values of institutions.”

On the other hand, elite research institutions may well have cadres of faculty asking profound questions of deep public concern. However, faculty and administrators may avoid engagement with the public for a variety of reasons. The fear of compromising the integrity of frontier research that would be required by the effort to translate it for the layperson, the honest concern that faculty expertise will swamp tentative efforts on the part of citizens to

participate in public reflection and action, the concern that the deal struck with the public in the professionalization contract (we will not use our expertise outside carefully circumscribed professional limits because you, the public, may not be able to judge the veracity of our claims) might be broken, and the general academic disposition to avoid contaminating theory with practice, all may work against faculty engaging the public.

Yet, there are faculty who believe in the role of public intellectual and there are administrators who may wish they could transcend the tedium of Total Quality Management (TQM) with its interminable meetings, assessment models more appropriate to product standardization than student transformation, and budgeting practices more suitable to corporate divisions than academic departments and schools.

All faculty are citizens with a dual calling, one to their academic profession, the other to the democratic polity within which they labor. As such, they are public scholars whether they like it or not. It was the democratic project after all, begun in conversations between enlightenment elites and regular citizens, that justified a revolution and ultimately made space for the clash of ideas and the pursuit of truth. In time, that same combination of grassroot theorizing and action plus “high” ideas opened up public space for women, African-Americans, working people, and even those in poverty.

To defend their autonomy as critical thinkers, faculty must convince the public that critical inquiry is a common democratic practice not a rarefied skill, and that critical inquiry, as against training for the new global employment market, is a significant part of the mission of higher education and a self-renewing gift to the polity.

This task may not be as difficult as it seems. For one thing, the public is out there already. At times it is more shaped and obvious than at other times but it is ever ready to talk. Without a belief in a competent public prepared to be engaged, our jury system would be both impossible and illegitimate as a vehicle of justice. Furthermore, the public is composed of individuals who are already theorizing and grappling with the complexity of social, economic, and community life. Everyone, to some degree, must theorize if only to make sense out of daily experi-

ence. If market values and institutions finally do swamp democratic values and practices, providing the only model of self, society, state, and good life available to people, all that energy and brain power will be spent strategizing about individual stock portfolios, choosing among ever more confusing commodities (selecting telephone service, banks, and health care already takes up a good portion of the active mind) and escaping from collective responsibility into private enclaves.

In short, the public needs allies to help them resist what they already know to be an incomplete picture of the human condition and the human soul. Where better to find such allies than among those who, at some point, embraced a tradition more complex and richer than our present commercial culture seems to provide?

Faculty working in the fields of service-learning and action research have already attempted to build such alliances with the public. Both service-learning and action research have enlivened the debate over the proper role of scholars in a democracy. Both have called into question the self-evident nature of “objectivity” and the meaning of research, ideas, and scholarship in democratic life. Both are easily pulled into the marketplace. Service-learning is institutionally supported if it helps students get jobs. Action research seems fine in a business school.

Conclusion

Faculty cannot ignore the possibility that market values and practices are reflective of an ideological orientation ever more swiftly marching toward Zion. What better way for academics to convince the public that the crisis of higher education is more than simply its cost to individual families, than to remind them of the democratic ideals faculty share with them: the desire for decent, stable work, a collective commitment to creating the material conditions for a flourishing life for all citizens, a serious inquiry into the limits and benefits of the market, a sense of community and belonging that places citizens in time and space, an understanding of civic rights and responsibilities that is based on a thoughtful analysis of the tensions between human agency and social structure, a fundamental sense of fair play and decency, the belief that regular citizens have the capacity for self-governance?

Students themselves are ready for such a conversation. This March, college students across the United States and Canada held

“teach-ins” that aimed “to challenge the increasing involvement of corporations in higher education.”

Democratic values make certain demands on individuals and institutions just as commercial/market ones do. As deeply as we are members of a capitalist society, we are members of a democratic polity that is not finally reducible to market values. The democratic disposition and values have served academics well as long as academics have served and nurtured them in turn. Nurtured them in their students, in their skeptical stance toward truth, in the pleasure they have taken in their use of the mind, in the myth and sometimes reality, of community and collegiality. Every academic must confront the impact of market ideology on their thought, their practice, and the future of the academic professions. I hardly think the danger right now is that such reflection and concomitant action will lead to Soviet-style science or socialist realism in art. Rather, it might lead to a democracy a little bit more worthy of its espoused ideals. Whether all academics become in part public scholars or some academics begin to develop an expertise in this new role, developing a theoretical understanding of what functions such an office might actually entail, can only be guessed. There may well be faculty whose practice already places them in the category of public scholar. My preference is that all academics, indeed all intellectuals, wherever they are, in taxicabs or at Harvard, ask what democracy demands of those who decide, to use that quaint old phrase, to pursue the life of the mind.

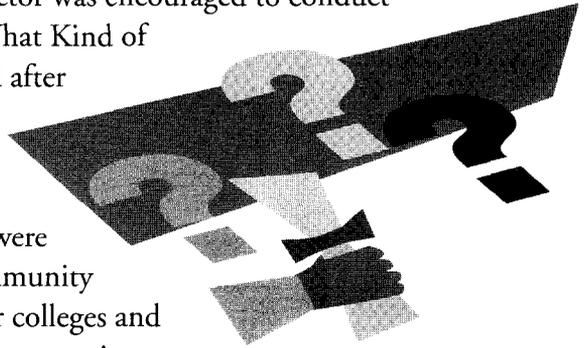
HIGHER EDUCATION: TEACHING AND THE DELIBERATIVE PROCESS

By Susanna Finnell

You may recall the Pew Charitable Trust's report, "Dancing with Change." That report caught many of us at the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) off guard with its strident accusation that higher education was out of touch with the needs of corporate America. It prompted us to look inward. How could we be so wrong? Why was the public so dissatisfied with higher education?

The Kettering Foundation, the National Issues Forums concept, and Bill Gwin's leadership led to a series of conversations with the public to explore issues of higher education. Our goal was not to promote a particular point of view, but to give people an opportunity to deliberate on the subject.

Every Honors director was encouraged to conduct forums on the topic "What Kind of Education Do We Need after High School?" Nearly 700 people took part in the forum series. Three-fourths of them were Honors students at community colleges and at four-year colleges and universities. These forums were important in themselves because they allowed people to formulate more informed opinions on this topic. Collectively, however, the forums gave NCHC the raw material to produce a report, published in September, that offers insight into public attitudes toward higher education.



What were the results of these conversations? The participants agreed on several important points:

1. Higher education in the U.S. must achieve two seemingly