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The Year in Higher Education: Faculty of the Future

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FACULTY OF THE FUTURE

Faculty of the future. This higher education issue is on the “front burner” of challenges that must be addressed creatively by college presidents across the country.

We'll start with **what's new** this century.

Educators know that the demand for a college education continues to rise as more and more jobs are knowledge-based in the global economy.

When we educate a student in Buffalo, it is not only to prepare that student to compete with a student from Baltimore or Boston, but also to compete with one who is from Bombay or Beijing.

What's new about what's new? Due to this increasing demand for higher education, the career of university or college professor continues to offer great employment opportunity in our sector of the economy – higher education – which, in turn, fuels every other sector with human resource talent.

Add to this demand the goal of expanding access for groups that had been underserved in the past, and you have a perfect storm of exploding demand at a time when a large percentage of college faculty, i.e. the baby boomers, is expected to retire in the next decade.

Many researchers are predicting a diminished supply of available faculty to teach the increasing student population.

In 1994, there were 838,000 faculty members employed in American colleges and universities. In 2004, that number expanded to 1.2 million.

Continued growth in employment opportunities for post-secondary educators is projected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

What else is new? Public colleges and universities will be challenged in meeting both the demand of the global economy for a knowledge-based workforce and the demand of families nationwide for access to the opportunities represented by higher education.

The higher education industry must grow by adding faculty, curricula, applied learning opportunities, and other key elements of a high quality educational experience.

What's new about what's new? The curriculum reform movement in the United States has advanced sufficiently so that there is presently a new generation of college

professors, with new pedagogies and new models of delivery that are more interdisciplinary, more technological, and more inquiry and research-based.

Faculty are expected to not simply teach facts, but to teach critical thinking skills and to foster a love of lifelong learning.

Faculty understand that, due to the global economy and the rapid pace at which the world is changing, they are preparing students for jobs and careers that will also continue to change.

To gain some insight about these new expectations, faculty must be encouraged to travel, and not just to Europe.

Africa, South America, and Asia must be destinations for learning and professional growth. Faculty must develop an understanding of where both natural and human resources are being developed in this century.

Perhaps the ultimate challenge is, “How do you prepare students for a future that none of us can predict?” How do we answer the question, “What will be their internet?”

The TIAA-CREF Institute, Series on Higher Education, recently published a book titled, “Recruitment, Retention and Retirement in Higher Education.” It addresses the challenges around building and managing the faculty of the future.

Following is a quote from the chapter “Filling the gap: finding and keeping faculty for the university of the future,” written by Molly Corbett Broad. “. . . We are facing a boom in the demand for education and training, as well as the need to rethink the way in which that education is delivered. . . universities are being viewed as major economic resources to an extent never witnessed before.”

This author goes on to say, well beyond retirements in higher education as just one sector of the economy, “The ‘graying of America’ and the baby-boomer retirements that accompany it will have a major impact on workforce preparedness. In fact, we are arguably on the verge of a critical shortage of workers with college-level skills.”

This shortage is most acute in the STEM areas – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. According to a chapter titled “The changing nature of faculty employment,” written by Ronald G. Ehrenberg and Liang Zhang in the same book I cited earlier, the proportion of Ph.D.’s granted by US universities has been falling over a long period of time. In some science and engineering fields, the proportion of Ph.D.’s granted to US citizens is now well under 50 percent.

A national report—titled “Rising Above the Gathering Storm”—cites the following statistics: In South Korea, 38 percent of undergraduates obtain their degrees in natural science or engineering. In France, the figure is 47 percent, and in China, 50 percent.

In the United States, the corresponding percentage is 15.

Another dynamic involves the number of women “in the pipeline,” so to speak, who are expected to obtain their Ph.D.’s.

The Wall Street Journal reported that in the March 30, 2007 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, research done by Robert Drago, a professor of labor and women’s studies at Pennsylvania State University, indicates that female faculty members are far more likely than men to be in adjunct teaching roles, which rarely lead to tenured positions, the gold standard of academia.

This same study revealed that women in adjunct-type roles worked part-time, a path, Drago says, many undoubtedly have chosen to make time for family.

This conundrum requires universities and colleges to think “outside the box” in recruiting and retaining faculty.

Drago went on to suggest that an answer might lie in a new system, perhaps a “half-time tenure track,” which several colleges have adopted to help working parents avoid the long hours of traditional academics while still enabling them to teach and conduct high-quality research.

So, the **what’s new** may be the large numbers of baby-boomer retirements and the increasing numbers of women faculty on college campuses.

Given the demand posed by both increasing access and increasing demand from the global economy, the **what’s new about what’s new** is that many colleges and universities will have to rethink how well the traditional tenure track serves their institutions in the 21st century.

In the alternative, if the tenure track does not become more flexible, are institutions of higher learning relegating members of the faculty of the future – many of whom are women – to the position of second class faculty on college campuses?