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Increased Pay, Diminished Stature

It is interesting to try to anticipate how collective bargaining will affect the judging of faculty performance. The proper basis for judgment should, of course, be the faculty's educational objectives and the extent to which those objectives are achieved. The trouble with this proposition, however, is that no one knows how to measure with any satisfactory degree of completeness or accuracy what really happens to different kinds of students as a direct consequence of their experience at different kinds of institutions of higher education.

Given this lack of complete and accurate criteria, substitutes appear. The faculty has traditionally fallen back on a number of strongly held beliefs: small classes are usually more effective than large ones; although many entrants do not graduate, students should have the right to test themselves, and this right is now being granted to a number of high-risk applicants; in a university, teaching and scholarly inquiry reinforce each other; and basic to these and other values is the position that educational decisions should be based on the informed judgment of the faculty.

State legislators, state boards of higher education, and other external critics often use different criteria. They ask for records of classroom usage, faculty contact hours, faculty-student ratios, the percentage of entrants who graduate, or other statistics concerning the academic process.

Thus both sides create substitutes for the missing measures of how well a university or college achieves the objectives that belong at the top of its agenda. Of the two, the faculty position is better, for it focuses on educational values. But the external demands come from those who control funds and who are likely to continue to insist on performance measures, efficiency of process, and even cost-benefit analyses.

Because these measures are expressed in concrete terms, they appear to be easy to evaluate, and thus appropriate to use in making budget decisions or in dealing with faculty bargaining agents. But bargaining over the conditions of academic work undermines the hard-won principle that faculty need freedom from external control—not for personal benefit, but in order that, as persons educated for and dedicated to the search for truth, they may best fulfill their obligations to students and society. While not forgetting the right to a fair wage and, after a reasonable probationary period, to tenure, this principle of academic freedom can be defended only if faculty conduct themselves for the common good and not for their private benefit, and if they are held accountable for the extent to which they fulfill their educational and scholarly obligations to students and society.

These fundamental matters cannot be negotiated at the bargaining table. What can be dealt with in collective bargaining is what can be objectively measured: dollars, of course, but also time, contact hours, or teaching arrangements. Thus the advocates of collective bargaining become allies of the external critics in emphasizing the details of process rather than the effectiveness of outcome. Two results seem inevitable: increased emphasis on an important but secondary set of variables concerning a university's performance; and a weakening of internal control over academic matters, for experience so far seems to indicate that the bargaining table for public institutions tends to move from the individual campus to the state capital. If the bargaining brings higher pay, some members of the faculty will consider the exchange a good one, but the stature of the professoriate will have been diminished by the process.—DAEL WOLFLE, *Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Washington, Seattle 98105*