

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

A TWELVE-STEP PROGRAM FOR ACADEMIA

Let me begin with a riddle for higher education in the 1990s: In three letters, what is the name of a lengthy and expensive cultural enhancement program for term employees in the academy—employees, in other words, who have been hired for a fixed term and no longer? Stumped? Perhaps, like many Americans, just bored? Or, like most of the higher education community, eager to change the subject? The key part of the riddle again: *a cultural enhancement program for term employees*. The answer: the Ph.D.

It is true that a few of these term employees will be selected for permanent academic jobs. Not necessarily the best and the brightest of them either, though some of the most talented will succeed. But for the most part, a patchwork of local cultural and political forces will operate—with a logic that no outsider

could possibly grasp—to select candidates for tenure-track jobs. The academic job market is, in a sense, like a lottery, though one whose rules grow out of the dynamics of local power and folly.¹ Nothing, for example, in the self-image of academia would suggest that departments should avoid hiring the most intellectually innovative candidates from a field of applicants, but they often do, sometimes because they are threatened by them, sometimes because no one on the search committee is well enough informed to have a clue about the quality of the candidates.

Wait a minute, cry the self-appointed angels of the faculty, momentarily distracted from reciting a litany of eternal cultural truths, those aren't term employees; those are graduate students. We are off to a bad start. We are trying to pose this riddle to a faculty audience already offended at the idea that graduate education is professional training, rather than an initiation into transcendent mysteries. Graduate education, they might argue, is the means by which our most sacred secular knowledge passes from one generation to the next. After all, as the up and coming president of a major national disciplinary organization declared at a dinner party recently, "We're not running dental schools!" Indeed not. Young dentists-to-be might be a lot harder than graduate students to deceive, intimidate, and exploit.

Is this what higher education has come to? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. Before most of our graduate students were born, back in the 1960s, you never thought about future employment in the midst of graduate school. Back then, in a seller's market that will never return (except for groups or specializations that are in short supply), department heads sometimes traveled around the country seeking out job candidates. Back then, all the petty abuses of graduate study receded into memory as a new job and a different status loomed. A distinguished scholar who received his degree even earlier, in the late 1950s, told me he remembered everyone getting a job, including those he was convinced weren't very good. Now, some believe the best students succeed, but that is not always the case. For the large number of academics who believe we can ignore present conditions until better times return, it is past time to state the obvious: the good times are over.

As I argued in the last chapter, the problem with graduate study now—in a long-term environment where jobs for new Ph.D.s are the exception rather than the rule—is that apprenticeship has turned into exploitation. Let me expand the claim here: when apprenticeship leads to no future it becomes not only unethical but also pathological. Apprenticeship with no future is servitude. For then the abuses of hierarchy and status have no compensatory and canceling structure. Without a viable job market, Ph.D. programs have only one economic rationale—they are a source of cheap instructional labor for universities.

In my own department, “teaching assistants” for the most part design their own syllabi, conduct all classes, and grade all assignments. Many of them, moreover, do absolutely splendid work—dedicated, impassioned, innovative work. They often deliver much better teaching than permanent faculty would in beginning courses, especially courses like composition and beginning language instruction that have notoriously high burnout rates.

To think of replacing such a labor pool is unpleasant, perhaps impossible, and certainly pedagogically ill-advised. The alternative most appealing to some politicians would be to assign the courses to existing faculty, who would then teach *six* courses per semester, approximately the pattern in high school teaching. Responsibilities for those courses would include grading roughly 1,200 composition papers a year. At that point there would be no time for faculty to read enough to keep up with their field, let alone do any research of their own. Of course many cultural conservatives would rather the humanities had no field to keep up with; the humanities, they feel, should serve an unchanging, unquestioned heritage that is simply transmitted from generation to generation. In any case, these “solutions” hold little appeal for universities.

The alternative most often chosen is the part-time employee. They can, true enough, often be paid even less than graduate students for the teaching they do. Community members can sometimes be paid half as much or less per course, but they often have less institutional loyalty, and less current knowledge of the discipline. Graduate students, on the other hand, are likely to be up-to-date and likely to believe they have something to lose from a bad job performance. They provide a cheap, dedicated, relatively stable labor pool with enough turnover to assure that their work is of high quality. Moreover, the logic of apprenticeship, however flawed and self-deceiving, is ready-to-hand to convince faculty members they are not exploiting these “trainees”; it is a lot harder to convince yourself you are not exploiting part-timers who may have the same advanced degree and qualifications that you do. Indeed some faculty members avoid meeting the part-timers they employ; they live their professional lives as if their part-time colleagues did not exist. Graduate students, on the other hand, are one’s intellectual progeny; thus they are to some degree to be cherished, not avoided.

Thus, when they were more or less assured of becoming faculty members, graduate teaching assistants’ low pay as apprentices seemed unimportant. Student loans, while burdensome, could be paid off in time on a faculty member’s salary. Now our humanities graduate students—many with an accumulated debt of \$25,000 or more—talk about celebrating their Ph.D. by declaring bankruptcy.²

Meanwhile, the discrepancy between faculty members’ high cultural murmurings and the reality of looming unemployment on the street makes graduate

study increasingly embittered for graduate students and increasingly conflicted for all involved. Those who complete the Ph.D. enter into a job search that is brutal and demeaning for all except a few. And it may go on forever. For those who do not simply give up, five or six years of post-Ph.D. job searching is commonplace. Still longer searches are not unusual. One long-term job candidate, now a tenured colleague at another school in Illinois, became a faculty member eighteen years after receiving his Ph.D. Few of us could search that long without going mad. Most just give up. One of our recent Ph.D.s lived with his wife for a year in a tin cow shed on the Texas border. Unemployed, they lived off the land. Though they still have dreams, their main ambition was for running water.

LEPERS IN THE ACROPOLIS

Neither those who persist and persist and eventually succeed, nor those who persist and fail, persist and fail, persist and fail again, leave the experience unchanged. Yet no professional organization I know of cares to find out the human consequences of a half decade or more of such professional hazing. The long-term job seekers of the academy are like lepers in the acropolis—a distraction, a betrayal, a burden, a mirror that offers us an image of ourselves we do not want to see. One speaks of them to cast them out of mind. How many of them, we need to ask, think of themselves in the same way, speak of themselves for the same reason, to relieve themselves of self-awareness?

Meanwhile, all who teach undergraduates with passion and intelligence are, almost inescapably, recruiters for the discipline. To teach with affection for one's subject matter, to praise students for doing good work, is potentially to draw students into graduate study in the field. And all of us who teach at institutions with large graduate programs benefit from having someone else teach less attractive introductory courses. With the institutional dependence on cheap labor now a structural necessity and the personal gain for faculty members from this structure unavoidable, complicity with the system is universal. There is one nasty solution to this problem—to give up mass higher education for the poor and the middle classes and make it instead an option only for children of wealthy parents. Some conservatives find that alternative attractive; it would return higher education to the race and class it originally served.

Yet without graduate students there would be no teachers of future generations and no young faculty to carry on research traditions. Of course, if we are only giving a full-scale post-secondary education (as opposed to instrumental job training) to a small subset of those generations, then we do not need so many future faculty members. As for research, no doubt some believe industry could fund the only research that matters, applied technological research with

an immediate commercial payoff. Many of us realize how short-sighted that is, but much of the public does not. The humanities in particular has done little to help the public understand the need for continuing research. It is thus especially vulnerable—first to arguments that teaching should replace released (or assigned) time for research, and, second, to arguments that technological innovation can make teachers of an immutable tradition obsolete. Indeed, as CD-ROM and other computer technologies improve over the next years and more complex prepackaged courses gradually become available, technology will begin to place even more downward pressure on the depressed academic job market. CD-ROMs may actually be the first technology to hold real promise of eliminating teaching jobs.

This inherently unstable system survives at present because undergraduates continue to apply to many graduate programs in large numbers, despite the depressed job market and despite journalistic attacks on some disciplines. Yet many people, we need to realize, enter graduate school without clear career goals. They come to study literature, music, art, history, physics, philosophy, mathematics, or anthropology because they like doing so and because they cannot yet see themselves in a full-time job outside academia. Many never actually envision themselves at the front of a classroom until their departments put them there. But both those graduate students who only do research and those who also devote substantial time to teaching acquire serious career aspirations in the course of their doctoral studies. In fact they acquire an identity they did not have at the outset. These commitments can become very deep. We are, after all, talking about six to eight years of teaching and research while working for the Ph.D. For many, temporary jobs after the Ph.D. add more years to the pre-tenure-track full-time teaching and research; the total time can be twelve years or more. At that point, or earlier, some lose even their part-time or temporary jobs; then those unemployed academics feel less like trainees who haven't made the grade than like seasoned professionals arbitrarily fired in mid-career. Indeed, some have publications and teaching awards to prove they *have* made the grade. Then suddenly, in their thirties, they are cut off from a field they have inhabited for a decade or more. And they have to invent an alternative future they have not even imagined, let alone one for which they have trained. For faculty members denied tenure there may at least be some rational explanation for the shock. For the failed job candidate, especially those whose achievements are real and whose further promise and potential are confirmed by faculty advisers and journal editors, no reasonable explanation comes to mind. Their life suddenly becomes incomprehensible.

The appallingly insensitive response some senior faculty members have made to this crisis is, unfortunately, well exemplified by the public statements some

leaders of disciplinary organizations have recently seen fit to make. In “The Job Market and Survival,” a brief comment that Modern Language Association president Sander Gilman published in the newsletter issued by the organization’s graduate student caucus, the self-congratulatory focus is on telling everyone what a wonderful organization the MLA is. Its “big umbrella . . . welcomes” everyone; graduate students are “simply younger colleagues.” Consolation for unsettled tenured faculty, on the other hand, was the apparent focus of a presentation Sandra Gilbert, then soon to be president of the MLA, made at Iowa City, at an Association of Departments of English conference in June of 1995. The problem, she suggested, is not with the job market but with graduate student and faculty attitudes. Studying a discipline intensively animates your soul; you should be grateful for the opportunity. As for the chance to teach rhetoric for a few years, she argued, graduate teaching assistants should think of it like a stint in the Peace Corps: it makes the world a better place; do not expect it to lead to a permanent job; feel fulfilled by the experience and then get on with the rest of your life. Of course teaching assistants are not bringing an unfamiliar skill to a foreign country. They are sparing Sandra Gilbert and other tenured faculty from a teaching responsibility that would otherwise fall to them. What *life* is it that—shall we call them Gilbert’s “Composition Corps” volunteers—are supposed to return to after twelve years in the field? Gilbert’s ideology would seem more fitting were it embodied by the archetypal dead white male of the canon debates, rather than by one of our leading feminist critics. Gilman, notably, has often been cast of late as a defender of the oppressed, but apparently underpaid graduate students or adjunct teachers with no future are either not oppressed or inequities are easy to overlook or under-value when you are complicit in them.

Having been treated to reactionary humanism (in the person of Sandra Gilbert) chastising graduate students to improve their souls, we now have the benighted Left (in the persons of Jim Neilson and Gregory Meyerson) urging them to improve their politics. “A graduate education in the humanities may equally be a political education,” they write, “a means by which students learn to read the historical, social, and economic truths hidden and distorted by capitalist culture” (271). So what are these Ph.D.s without academic employment to do? Humanists want to maintain large graduate programs to keep heaven peopled with sensitive souls, while some Leftists apparently imagine that corporate America will be staffed with the newly minted untenurable radicals who cannot get faculty jobs. That’s all well and good, but I don’t encounter any unemployed Ph.D.s savoring their very personal lesson about capitalism—their entry into the jobless future. The self-satisfied promotion by academics of a long-term research degree as a preparation for writing ad copy or working in K-

Mart is at best cruel and unusual punishment for its victims. About a politically and culturally consciousness-raising master's degree I have no problem; as I will argue, it's a place for warranted expansion. Doctoral programs are not. I say that with no little sense of loss, since I am deeply invested in working with doctoral students, but I also know the present system is brutal and unacceptable. One can imagine, say, a two-year M.A. in "rhetoric and cultural politics" combined with training in being a union organizer; a graduate of such a program might feel culturally enriched and empowered. A Ph.D. who has to give up both teaching and research will not.

But such are the contradictions of subjectivity when people feel their privileges threatened. Such too are the perils of an academic star system that has rewarded careerism as though it were a selfless intellectual quest; we will encounter this sort of disjunction repeatedly in years to come, as we turn to our supposed academic leaders in a time of crisis and discover they have little sense of solidarity with the profession as a whole. As with the progressive scholars at Yale who had no patience with graduate students asserting their rights, the values faculty members promote in their research may have no bearing on their daily lives. Meanwhile, one may contemplate the result Gilbert's claims would have were they more honestly translated into the language of a recruitment brochure: "Come and teach marginally literate business majors how to write! Help students increase their earning power! Loans available to help cover your expenses! Good job performance ratings will have no effect on plans to terminate your employment!"

As for real recruitment brochures, suffice it to say that it is disingenuous and dishonorable to claim that warnings to prospective graduate students about the job market are sufficient, that such warnings take faculty and institutions morally off the hook. The undergraduate senior can easily dismiss warnings about a career to which he or she is still quite uncommitted. The commitment comes later, the career seduction comes later, identity formation comes later. It is with a certain corrupt relief that faculty and administrators note they can post job warnings and still lure applicants into the labor pool. That they can do so is hardly surprising, since applicants are focused on studying subject matter, not planning careers. Meanwhile, the income from graduate teaching seems to an undergraduate like enough to get by on. The package is appealing, its eventual psychological cost often at once large and unimaginable. Nonetheless, the pool of applicants will eventually decline once those who teach undergraduates really hear the job market's blunt message: there is no future in the Ph.D. The message will not in any way mean what it means to graduate students whose careers are cut off in mid-stream—the reality for new Ph.D.s with six or more years of teaching experience. To undergraduates the message will instead be partly sym-

bolic, vaguely invoking disaster or impossibility, and partly incomprehensible. But the symbolism will be negative and it will be decisive for some.

Meanwhile the contradictions in the present system, with its high ideals and brutal consequences, make life structurally schizophrenic for some. Consider, for example, the strains and rewards of directing a graduate program. Ecstatic at bringing brilliant students into the program and seeing them develop into fine scholars and teachers, graduate program directors then face a sense of guilt and despair when those same students fail to get jobs. Imagine, furthermore, what it feels like to see some of your faculty colleagues write brief, lazy, and indifferent letters of recommendation in this context. It is hard to imagine that this system can sustain itself indefinitely.

Some parents of undergraduates, on the other hand, especially those who resent having their children taught by teaching assistants, might welcome the widespread collapse of graduate programs. After all, they think they are paying for professorial teaching. And the crude, widespread reputation of teaching assistants—again fueled by the media—is of people who do not care and who do not speak English. That is certainly not the world I know—the world of teaching assistants in fields like history, philosophy, and English—where dedicated young professionals deliver the best possible teaching at the lowest possible cost. In many cases senior faculty would deliver an inferior product. Although, for example, I have taught composition and enjoyed it, I would now find it demoralizing and intolerable to have to grade hundreds of composition papers each semester. There is no way I could do it as carefully and thoroughly as my graduate students do. So what is to be done?

Well, one valid argument is that there is no oversupply of new Ph.D.s. What the country lacks is the will to pay their salaries. As the need for a more highly skilled work force increases, while secondary education in many cities remains in a state of near collapse, further education for high school graduates is an increasingly urgent social need. We are simply less willing to pay for it, less willing, more broadly, to see collective goals and values like mass higher education as meaningful. For too long we have assumed such values were immutable laws of nature, rather than vulnerable and contingent functions of changing cultural relations. Now, in the wake of our laziness and naiveté, as Ernst Benjamin and my colleague Michael Bérubé and I have pointed out, other social needs have higher priority.³ So the argument that we actually *need* all these new Ph.D.s is politically and economically irrelevant. So what, again, is to be done?

One modest alternative to overproducing Ph.D.s is to expand specialized terminal M.A. programs that are designed to lead to alternative careers. Students in those programs could do some of the teaching that we cannot afford to hire

faculty to do. But effective career-oriented master's programs will take time and ingenuity to devise, and the number of students who can benefit from them may be limited. Not all schools, moreover, will be equally well situated to make the cooperative arrangements with potential employers that could help make such programs successful. Broad solutions to the problems we face, then, will require more varied remedies.

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The first thing faculty members must do is admit their responsibility and recognize their potential to address the problem. In a 1994 presidential column in the *MLA Newsletter*, Patricia Meyer Spacks confidently declared that faculty members could have no influence on public policy toward higher education. Sandra Gilbert took much the same line two years later. But as Linda Pratt recently argued in her essay in *Higher Education under Fire*, that is simply not the case. It may be comforting for Spacks and Gilbert to confess impotence, since that relieves them of responsibility for doing anything, but citizens who are willing to organize and act can influence budgets and policy. Certainly those faculty members who have their own lobbyist in a state capital will be surprised to learn that faculty members are powerless. Second, we need to recognize that the job crisis is a complex problem that needs to be addressed on many fronts. No single "solution" will suffice, nor will all faculty be equal to all the tasks involved. I am writing a book about the problem because that is something I have learned to do. I am not certain, however, that I am the best person to talk with parents or legislators. So people need to be connected with the tasks they are best suited to perform. With all these warnings in mind, then, let me make a series of recommendations about what can be done:

1. WRITE A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS, TEACHING ASSISTANTS, AND PART-TIME OR ADJUNCT FACULTY. If we admit that teaching assistants are not apprentices but rather term employees simultaneously undertaking a rigorous discipline of cultural enrichment, their rights, their rewards, and the expectations we have of them will change. Assuming the job market may remain depressed for years, it is time for a national conversation about the meaning of graduate study under these conditions. Such a conversation might result in something like suggested guidelines for a campus bill of rights for all groups who teach on campus.

For some time permanent faculty have hesitated to press for firm rules and better working conditions for adjunct and part-time faculty for fear that regularizing their status would increase the permanence of these categories of teachers. The hope has always been that these positions were temporary and would eventually be filled by tenure-track faculty. But decades have passed in which

that strategy hasn't worked. So it is now time instead to work to upgrade their salaries and guarantee them grievance procedures and appropriate benefits. If the gap is closed between adjunct and permanent faculty salaries, so the argument goes, we may make adjuncts and part-timers a less appealing hiring category for university administrators. Frankly, I think the end result will most likely be a reduction in starting salaries for all beginning positions, but the abuse of temporary and semipermanent employees has to end. Tenured faculty need to stop ignoring these people and become responsible for all workers on campus. We need a national debate among all in higher education about the ethics and instructional consequences of current and emerging employment practices.

For many reasons disciplinary organizations are unlikely to initiate such a debate. Many of their members would not welcome discussion of these issues, and the organizations themselves seek to please and balance all constituencies. Moreover, the existence of something like a graduate student bill of rights opens the question of how to deal with departments that refuse to honor it. Most disciplinary organizations are more inclined to rationalize and justify department practices rather than police or criticize them. Departments want advocacy, not scrutiny, from their national organization, and faculty members may see the organization's primary role as producing field bibliographies, awards, and providing them with career opportunities, not ethical challenges.

For all these reasons, the best places for honest debates about the future of graduate study may be both individual campuses and multidisciplinary organizations. Small group discussions on campus can take place outside the surveillance of budget-minded administrators. At almost every other level in academia honest discussion risks penalties. At the national level debate needs to take place among people not invested in avoiding the truth. The membership of multidisciplinary organizations is often better informed about the public standing and financial status of higher education than is the membership of most disciplinary organizations.

2. TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND ADJUNCT OR PART-TIME FACULTY SHOULD UNIONIZE. Whatever credibility a national bill of rights for these groups might have, it will never be fully realized on individual campuses until they exercise the power they now hold only in potential. Withholding their teaching services represents a genuine threat to the capacity of many schools to sustain business as usual. Yet even on large campuses heavily dependent on part-time or graduate student teachers, this power will vary. For some schools historically invested in their national prestige, the power to embarrass faculty, administrators, parents, and alumni by protests, work stoppages, and strikes may be significant. Yet administrators at some elite schools, like Yale, seem to take a certain pride in bad publicity. In any case,

withholding instruction alone will not win recognition at most institutions. And it will exert surprisingly little pressure on politicians; for them it is more an opportunity for demagoguery than a political risk. Again, with higher education partially delegitimated in the public sphere, graduate students will be easier to represent as privileged rather than exploited. On some campuses, especially those in small towns and cities where the campus is a major employer, the real power is economic. Effective union organizing on a campus requires a careful analysis of the economic impact of the campus and a major effort to educate and build alliances with all potential allies.

Wielding economic power from a small community, moreover, requires solidarity from faculty and staff. Other unions would need to honor picket lines and refuse campus deliveries, and all employees would need to work together to provoke an economic crisis in the relevant political and geographical area. Interestingly, this can sometimes be done *without* everyone going on strike—by scheduling an economic action immediately after a monthly pay check is received and then withdrawing all savings from state banks and credit unions, refusing to make all mortgage or rent and utility payments, canceling all nonessential services and repairs, and making no purchases from merchants in the state. One might organize group shopping trips to other states for all purchases. In this way certain campuses can potentially get the business community to pressure boards of trustees and legislators to make concessions to a union. So a teaching assistant union that strikes can produce all the beneficial effects of a campus-wide strike *without*, say, faculty and clerical staff striking *if* those other groups are willing to take the economic actions outlined above. Many businesses, financial institutions, and public utilities in smaller communities—including banks, water, gas, electric, and phone companies—maintain surprisingly low cash reserves and are quite dependent on a monthly influx of university income. A properly run strike in such a community simultaneously denies them that income and drains cash reserves. This strategy would not work in New York City but it could work in many college towns. It could work in New Haven or Urbana if the faculty, students, and staff were united. It is certainly past time for faculty to begin thinking about the character of employment throughout the campus community; the front lines for the defense of tenure may, surprisingly enough, prove in retrospect to have been the cafeteria and the electrical shop, not the faculty senate.

In an April 1996 article in *Lingua Franca*, *New Yorker* staff writer Emily Eakin responded to an earlier version of this plan by remarking “here was revolution matter-of-factly laid out in an easy-to-follow, twelve step formula.” My “program for improving graduate student life,” she allowed, “made the grade strike at Yale look like kid stuff” (p. 56). While I am amused to be

characterized as the Bakunin of Urbana, it is also instructively depressing to see a *New Yorker* writer placing these ideas—drawn from the long history of union activism—on the extreme Left of American politics. It gives us a good indication of how much education needs to take place before academia's exploited employees can win public support for the actions they must take to win their rights.

Indeed, just organizing the relevant employees and then winning support from other campus constituencies can present major challenges. Both aims require careful strategic choices. Because graduate student salaries vary so widely from discipline to discipline, it is often best to organize around a set of more universal issues like health insurance, child care, tuition waivers, employment status, retirement credit, and working conditions. Special care also needs to be taken to reach out to undergraduates and win their support. Unfortunately, sympathy for their instructors has not been high among students of the eighties or nineties. So a strike needs to connect with their self-interest. Those undergraduates who understand that they themselves will soon be graduate students may be amenable to becoming better informed about equity issues for T.A.s Others may be reached by making class size a bargaining point. Smaller classes mean more individual attention to students and perhaps a real benefit in terms of the quality and marketability of their education.

Whatever problems tenure-track faculty unionization presents to differential reward systems based on individual merit—especially at research institutions—there are few comparable problems with teaching assistant, adjunct, or part-time faculty unions. In fact I believe graduate students or adjuncts who unionize have much to gain and little to lose but their illusions, their false consciousness, and the myths of professionalism that can make them complicit in their own exploitation. Unionize. To expose the ideology that blocks understanding of the present reality, it is worth repeating a slogan that too many of us find antediluvian and melodramatic: You have nothing to lose but your chains.

3. MAKE TEACHING ASSISTANTS EMPLOYEES. This is the crucial perceptual and legal issue, one often only achievable through group action and unionization. If graduate students are primarily acolytes learning a spiritual discipline, they may have few rights. On the other hand, if they are primarily there to perform an instructional service for which they are paid, then they are primarily employees. If neither identity takes precedence, they still have reason to seek fair recompense and working conditions. Employees may be eligible for retirement benefits, unemployment compensation, and better formal agreements on working conditions. In any case it is time for a clear-headed discussion of this issue, combined with an effort to grant graduate students the best of both worlds.

4. A YEAR'S WORK FOR A YEAR'S WAGE. In my own department most graduate students teach the same load as faculty—four courses a year—but unlike faculty they do not earn enough to live on for twelve months. Many must get second jobs or take out loans to get through the summer. *A Year's Pay for a Year's Work* seems like a good first principle and a good rallying cry for teaching assistants, and part-time or adjunct faculty. Recognizing that graduate student teachers *are* employees being paid for their work makes it more difficult to reject this principle for all these groups.

5. CHALLENGE THE PRIORITY GIVEN TO FACULTY SALARIES. The last thing faculty members want to admit is that they are in competition with graduate students and part-timers for limited resources. I believe it would be better to get this usually hidden conflict out in the open rather than deny its existence, since teaching assistant or adjunct salaries will otherwise always have the lowest priority. A possible moral and political challenge to faculty might be organized with a question something like this: Are you willing to give up all or part of next year's raise to fund a 20 percent salary increase for all teaching assistants earning less than \$14,000 a year?

On my own campus I was recently a member of a college-level financial planning committee that recommended using some vacated faculty salaries to increase the size and number of graduate student fellowships. Many of my English department colleagues felt betrayed by this decision and called a meeting to protest it (and other elements of the committee's report); some criticized my role in the process. Most regained their composure after some discussion, but both the level of their anger and its unreflective character surprised me. Few seemed embarrassed at arguing that increased graduate student support was a bad use of limited resources. Thinking back over the years, however, I recall that an incompetent tenured faculty member was usually considered a tragic figure to be tolerated and nurtured. A teaching assistant with problems is often someone to be fired.

6. URGE COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO HIRE PH.D.S. The claim that new Ph.D.s are only interested in research and not interested in teaching is both false and malicious. For many new Ph.D.s the dissertation represents at once the first and the last major long-term research project they will undertake. In fact, even at research universities many new Ph.D.s are primarily invested in being teachers. Some even gain community college teaching experience while on the market seeking a tenure-track job at a four-year college or university. Since many community colleges are either reluctant or flatly unwilling to hire Ph.D.s for full-time jobs, a valuable human resource that could benefit both community colleges and

Ph.D.-granting institutions is being wasted. The disciplinary immersion and commitment and intellectual focus built into the Ph.D. has pedagogical value at all instructional levels. If universities built working relationships with junior colleges—relationships that should include teaching internships and should honor the pedagogical and political expertise of existing junior college faculty—it should eventually be possible to increase the percentage of Ph.D.s on their faculties. Of course significant numbers of tenure-track junior college appointments will not open up unless those institutions decrease their reliance on part-time faculty. Thus this is obviously not a short-term solution, but the job crisis is not about to disappear. Despite the problems with this scenario, it is worth investigating. It could be one part of a multiple-front strategy for dealing with the job crisis.

7. EXCHANGE POSTDOCTORAL TEACHERS. One of the dangers of the current market is the temptation to establish a permanent class of underpaid and overworked faculty. Solutions that open a new phase of temporary employment—salaried at at least \$25,000 per year for postdoctoral teaching fellows—are risky but preferable to some of the alternatives in place. Moreover, teaching after earning the Ph.D. does somewhat increase marketability. Formal exchange programs—either between two universities or among larger groups of schools—would take some of the anguish and uncertainty out of the current yearly search for a temporary position. Three-year postdocs would give people a somewhat secure base from which to apply for permanent jobs. Although I believe administrators should work hard to create such programs as soon as possible, it is also necessary that such programs, as I shall argue more fully in the next chapter, be strictly limited to schools that have their own doctoral programs in the field and that have significantly reduced those programs in size.

8. CHALLENGE DISCIPLINARY ORGANIZATIONS. As Steven Watt recently pointed out to me, academic disciplinary organizations were eager to be creative and innovative in responding to a Ph.D. shortage in the 1960s. They adjusted requirements and streamlined programs, all to produce more Ph.D.s more quickly. They have been singularly inchoate in the present crisis of oversupply. These organizations often see justifying disciplinary turf and practices as their central mission. Graduate students and part-timers are not their primary constituencies. The logic of the bureaucracies that run the larger organizations is obvious: never offend the membership. Lest anyone have any doubts, remember that the members who count are the permanent faculty. Once again, graduate students, adjuncts, and their precious few allies among the tenured faculty must exert maximum pressure on their disciplines; to be effective, all those deeply con-

cerned about the job crisis must not only act individually but must also gather together to act collectively. Disciplinary organizations must be compelled to direct more of their resources toward examining and intervening in higher education's crisis and less of it toward enhancing their members' careers.

9. FIGHT FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS / EDUCATE THE EDUCATORS. Many AAUP members realize that faculty members can affect both public perceptions and state budgets, but the AAUP does not have enough members, a fact that says less about the AAUP than it does about the benighted social consciousness of most American faculty. Too many faculty members believe members of their discipline are their only relevant professional community. How many of these people can be reeducated I do not know. But I do know we need to intervene in the process that brainwashes each new generation of faculty. Graduate students need to be socialized into a much broader conception of academic citizenship; they need to be trained to take on a wider set of social and political responsibilities. Course segments on the cultural politics of education, for example, need to be part of every graduate curriculum. At key points in every class I teach I now ask students how the general public might respond to the kind of arguments the class is making. How, I add, might those arguments be reformulated to win greater public approval. The time when faculty could ignore the public is over, but we can only train effective academic citizens if reflections on the meaning of citizenship are embedded in a wide spectrum of courses. We face a long-term crisis and new generations of faculty must realize they have a role in the definition and struggle over the country's priorities.

10. CLOSE MARGINAL DOCTORAL PROGRAMS / PREVENT NEW ONES FROM BEING CREATED. The current oversupply of new Ph.D.s cheapens the degree and guarantees that administrators and legislators will undercut salaries and increase work loads. No one who has seen clearly the misery of long-term unsuccessful job candidates would argue that the current system is grounded in decency, professionalism, or sound social policy. The collapse of the job market has made higher education pervasively corrupt. The display of our intellectual commitments lures students to the partial ruin of their lives. Then we tell them professionalism and maturity dictate they should internalize all their anger and anguish.

Although some graduate programs should be smaller, reducing the size of programs across the board until they all become nonfunctional is hardly the best solution. In the end, some ineffective, underutilized, and marginal degree programs should be closed. (Some on the Left, including Jim Neilson and Gregory Meyerson, have argued that this is an elitist and undemocratic suggestion, because it limits "access" to doctoral programs. Broad access is, I believe, a

terribly important issue for the undergraduate degree, as is class, race, and gender diversity in doctoral programs. But simply maintaining huge Ph.D. programs so that thousands of students can feel betrayed when their training comes to nothing is irrational.)⁴ Not every Ph.D. needs, for example, to be granted at every institution in a given state. Moreover, nearby schools might think seriously about offering joint degrees, thereby reducing the need for all subspecializations to be represented in every department. Such joint doctoral programs would also offer professional fulfillment to faculty in areas of declining enrollment, including a number of once-popular foreign languages.

Perhaps worst of all, however, are the continuing efforts to open new doctoral programs in fields already oversupplied with unemployed Ph.D.s. It is hard to believe that such efforts continue in the present crisis, but they do, and both faculty and administrators must be firm in rejecting them. It is important to realize, however, that the cynical constituency for creating new, unneeded, and widely destructive new doctoral programs is more varied than one might think. Sometimes the impulse arises out of the unprincipled greed of departmental faculty. But it is equally likely to come from upper-level administrators who see doctoral programs as a source simultaneously of prestige and cheap labor. In this context I found it quite difficult to recommend active resistance from an assistant professor at another school who asked me how she could discourage her colleagues from starting a Ph.D. in English. The leadership has to come from elsewhere. As a first step, disciplinary organizations in fields oversupplied with Ph.D.s should issue strong statements arguing against the creation of new programs and should distribute those statements to everyone in the higher education community. Such statements would not be binding, but they would sometimes be effective.

The head of a disciplinary organization came running up to me at a 1994 convention yelling that legislators and administrators were using my publications to argue that programs should be closed. So let me state my position clearly. Legislators rarely have the knowledge to judge either a program's quality or its synergistic and service role on a campus. But faculty members do have that knowledge, and some poor-quality and underutilized degree programs, they must realize, deserve to be closed. At some point, across-the-board budget cuts stop making sense. It is time for faculties to take the lead in program evaluation and termination. And it is time for national disciplinary organizations to develop broad and discipline-specific criteria for judging program effectiveness.

11. ENCOURAGE BOTH INEFFECTIVE AND EFFECTIVE FACULTY TO RETIRE AND REHIRE EFFECTIVE ONES PART-TIME. This is the most risky recommendation I am making, because it is readily subject to the sort of abuse the AAUP has long worked to guard

against—politically motivated attacks on tenured faculty. Yet the contrast between some dysfunctional tenured faculty and many multifunctional young Ph.D.s is especially stark and painful in the present crisis. Of course there are not enough incompetent or marginal faculty of retirement age to provide jobs for all unemployed Ph.D.s, but there are enough in some departments—5 to 10 percent—to have some real impact on the crisis.

Both the degree and nature of faculty problems vary considerably. We all know tenured faculty at our own or other institutions who skip a third or more of their classes, continually abuse their students intellectually or sexually, or teach the discipline as it existed twenty years ago because they have not kept up with their fields. Some simply have lost interest in their jobs and now put their energies into other activities. I know a faculty member who was simultaneously a full-time minister for a congregation in a nearby city, another who simultaneously worked forty hours a week in a sales job in a clothing store, a third who seemed to devote all his time to his dog-breeding business. But these are not the very worst stories. Indeed, in some cases higher education takes significant risks to its public image, financial support, and the tenure system in keeping dysfunctional faculty members on staff.

Interestingly enough, many such faculty members are willing, even eager, to retire. Yet one result of long-term bad teaching and intellectual stagnation may be a salary so low that retirement is financially impossible. So colleges and universities need to offer individually designed financial packages that respond to different problems and make retirement feasible. Perhaps one principle colleges and universities could adopt is this: no faculty member with thirty years of service should have to retire on less income than a new assistant professor in the arts or humanities would receive. That states the problem both baldly and realistically, and sets an individual retirement package goal that few are likely to regard as a reward for incompetence. It also acknowledges the real financial risk some underpaid faculty members face at retirement time, while asserting that universities have no business trying to sustain higher disciplinary salaries after retirement for those faculty who have not performed competently. There is no reason why a retired marginal commerce professor should earn more than a retired marginal philosopher. At the same time, national organizations may need to concern themselves with formulating more general principles for individual retirement packages to avoid political abuse of the option.

All that is being offered in most of these packages, it should be clear, is an opportunity to retire at a somewhat higher salary than the faculty member would otherwise be able to achieve. Nonetheless, many faculty will need considerable unpressured time—certainly a number of months—to think through the implications and make a decision. Those whose teaching is adequate should be offered

the opportunity to accept a term contract to teach one course per year after retirement. Of course the combined impact of increased budgetary restraint and the collapsed job market may also lead colleges to confront serious long-term personnel problems they have unprofessionally avoided, like people repeatedly charged with sexual harassment, and in those cases retirement packages should be promoted more aggressively.

At the other end of the spectrum—our most talented faculty who are of retirement age—we need a very different sort of approach: an extensive program to encourage well-qualified faculty to retire but continue teaching and doing research and administration.

All across the country there are distinguished well-paid faculty members who could retire at 70 percent or more of their current take-home pay. At some universities, including Yale, there are faculty who could nearly *double* their income by retiring. Such people have typically participated in more than one retirement plan and have reached an age when actuarial tables grant them a high payout rate. They stay on salary because there is no other way to continue doing the work they love to do. Indeed, in many cases the people most eligible for well-paid retirement are the very people universities do not want to lose. Not only are they valued teachers and scholars; often their long experience in university governance and well-established disciplinary leadership makes them irreplaceable. Many have no wish to retire. Yet at the same time their salaries could be almost entirely shifted to retirement programs. In a surprising number of cases, universities are paying high salaries to people when there is absolutely no reason to do so.

Of course retirement usually carries with it not only a sense of emotional loss and exile but also a loss of prestige, research resources, responsibility, and contact with students and colleagues. We therefore need to create a new category—call it “senior scholar”—for selected faculty who effectively retire on paper only, because they would be rehired soon thereafter and retain all their prior authority. They would continue to teach—most likely on partially or substantially reduced loads according to mutual agreement. Moreover, they would retain all the rights and privileges and most of the responsibilities of full-paid faculty. They would serve on hiring committees, vote on tenure and promotion decisions, direct dissertations, and remain eligible to serve as department heads, deans, and higher administrators. They would have full access to travel and research support. On the other hand, no senior scholar would be required to accept any committee or administrative assignment he or she did not wish to take. They would be paid perhaps 10 to 30 percent of their before-“retirement” income to supplement their retirement benefits.

Some restrictions often apply, but few are insurmountable. Faculty members

generally need to terminate employment before drawing on their annuities. Most faculty on these plans could not retire before age 59½ because of the IRS penalty that would apply, but very few have accumulated enough resources to retire before then anyway. Once rehired, they would either cease making retirement contributions or do so under an entirely new agreement. At my own institution, which participates in a state retirement plan, faculty members can be rehired so long as their combined retirement annuity and postretirement income do not exceed preretirement pay. However, if they are employed at a nonparticipating institution after retirement, there is no restriction on their income. Some institutions require a time period—sometimes as short as two months—to elapse between retirement and rehiring.

To take a hypothetical case, a faculty member at the University of Illinois who retired at age 65 with thirty-five years of service and a salary of \$75,000 would receive an annual retirement income of about \$52,000. If the university rehired that faculty member for, say, \$18,000, even for half-time teaching, it would be able to hire a full-time junior faculty member with the money saved and have significantly more benefit from the resources allocated to both people, along with money left over. On this basis, for every two senior scholars retired and rehired, one could hire *three* new faculty members in the arts, humanities, or social sciences.

Because the people targeted for such an agreement would include some of our most highly paid and accomplished faculty, the financial benefit from each person converted to a senior scholar could be substantial. In fact there are significant numbers of such potentially convertible appointments where colleges and universities could save as much as \$50,000 per faculty member. In some cases—where people of retirement age are paid \$150,000 or more—the savings would be much greater.

In order for senior scholars to retain their existing power, influence, prestige, and responsibilities, some institutions would have to make basic changes in their governing statutes or charters. But sometimes much less effort would be required. At the University of Illinois, for example, departments could extend voting rights to emeritus faculty who are still employed as teachers simply by changing their departmental bylaws, a process that would often take only a few months. Other institutions would have to adjust the program to match retirement rules or change the rules themselves. Is it worth the effort? Well, there are institutions that could reap an immediate benefit of several million dollars for new faculty appointments. Moreover, unlike most other proposals for dealing with the fiscal crisis, everyone involved would benefit from this program. There are no victims and no losers.

If what I have just said is to be true, however, it is important that senior

scholar appointments be available to faculty in all disciplines. I have in mind that these positions would be selective, that they would be offered to high-quality teachers and scholars, not to every retiring faculty member. My aim is not to create a universal benefit but rather to offer productive faculty a way of retiring before they otherwise would, while continuing to serve their own or other institutions. But it would be educationally indefensible and morally reprehensible to offer such appointments only to income-producing disciplines, whether those with access to outside grants or those with wealthy alumni. The arts, humanities, and interpretive social sciences must be eligible for an equal share of these positions.

But what does such a senior scholar gain? Some would have reduced teaching loads and more time for research. All would gain greater flexibility in accepting or refusing assignments. All should be free to take unpaid leave whenever they wish. Some senior scholar appointments could be permanent; others could be for terms of five or ten years.

The only thing senior scholars would lose is their annual salary increase. But in fact some academics are already at a tax bracket where salary increases carry no significant material benefit. At best symbolic, at worst some salary increases satisfy greed and ego alone. In declaring themselves beyond such concerns, senior scholars would gain a certain respect and a certain ethical authority. No longer significantly dependent on their institutions for their income, they would be partly beyond temptation or coercion. Far from being marginalized, they might be uniquely valued sources of disinterested advice and service.

At its crudest level, this is a proposal for creative cost-shifting—effectively moving salaries from annual budgets to retirement accounts. But it would make it possible to increase the size of the faculty in the best possible way—by retaining the most experienced people while also reinvigorating the professoriate from below.

Institutions have from time to time made ad hoc arrangements to keep individuals on after retirement, but usually not without retirement's attendant stigma and generally not without substantial loss of professorial function. Most faculty members, moreover, continue to be offered only the two mutually exclusive alternatives: continue working full-time on the university budget or quit. A formal program like the one I am proposing could reduce all those problems and make a significant contribution toward alleviating the job crisis. All it would take for this to become a widely available option is for a few of our better institutions to adopt it. Those institutions would find it easier to recruit and retain senior faculty. Other schools would soon copy them. Once this option were widely available and widely present as a budget item, visiting senior

scholar appointments and senior scholar exchanges would be easy to arrange. That would benefit both faculty interested in experiencing new environments and institutions barred from rehiring their own faculty. In the meantime, the absence of any widespread program of this sort often means that departments negotiating with individual faculty have no financial resources to draw on and either cannot rehire faculty at all or can do so only at excessively low salary rates. Negotiations in that context are often doubly humiliating: the stigma of reduced authority is combined with a humiliating salary. We have allowed the present retirement system to persist out of inertia and thoughtlessness. It is time to overhaul it and make new options available that can benefit higher education generally.

To do so, however, does require highly selective programs. The universal retirement offers promoted in California did little good and much damage, sometimes nearly incapacitating individual departments. One protection against the dangers of this and other retirement programs would be universal adoption of a new principle—that no faculty member should retire without receiving a legally binding agreement from a dean stating that he or she will be replaced with a tenure-track faculty member within two years. National organizations should develop such contracts and distribute them widely.

12. POPULARIZE THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ACADEMY. In its desire to curtail diversity, enhance privilege, and compete for power and authority, the New Right has successfully trivialized or scandalized the most innovative social science and humanities research of the last twenty years. Journalists willing to cash in on American anti-intellectualism have helped the Right at every step. Disdaining the public sphere, most faculty have foolishly let this happen without effective counteraction. Now there is no chance that higher education can compete for funds successfully unless we can reverse this process, rearticulate our achievements, and recreate popular common sense about our research and social aims.

In my own field, literary studies, the twenty-year effort to open the canon and recover a fuller sense of our literary heritage should be widely viewed as a triumph of democracy. Yet it has been successfully demonized and represented as a loss of standards and value. What should in a democracy have been a public relations triumph has been disseminated as a disaster. The route from a public loss of faith to a cut in public funding may not seem direct, but it is direct enough. Perhaps no more instructive evidence for the complex, multifaceted nature of the present crisis exists than this. Indeed we cannot address the crisis without taking up all such cultural relations. Those who doubt these connections exist should remember, as I pointed out in chapter 9, that two former heads of

the National Endowment for the Humanities testified before Congress in the spring of 1995 that the Endowment should be cut because the intellectual decay of the humanities meant they were no longer worth funding.

No one person could possibly work on all twelve of these recommendations. Some of the points above, therefore, speak to particular constituencies and particular individual strengths. The range of social, political, and professional fronts requiring action may also seem rather daunting. Yet this list of suggestions—a list that needs to be debated and amended—also demonstrates that we are not powerless, that there are things to be done. Those faculty members who care deeply about the crisis—and there are many who do, even if they do not represent a majority—should be encouraged that a coherent plan of action is possible.

If, moreover, we look back over the last twenty-five years, it is apparent that the job crisis has been with us in varying degrees all that time. Even the brief upturn in the 1980s was not enough to bring employment to those new Ph.D.s who failed to get jobs in the market collapse of the 1970s. Not, of course, that we have any idea what these numbers are, since most disciplinary organizations prefer not to collect data that make them look bad. Indeed, one head of a disciplinary organization recently criticized me in conversation for spreading news about the profession that might discourage people from enrolling in the undergraduate major. The three clearly expendable constituencies in all this are graduate students, adjuncts, and part-time faculty. They pay the highest cost for the inequities of the present system, and almost everyone else involved wants to keep things as they are.

One way to create an appropriate context in which to address the problem is to ask what would be the most ethically sound response to the crisis. One answer would be to close *all* admissions to doctoral programs in fields oversupplied with Ph.D.s for a fixed period of time, say five or six years, so that institutions would be forced to hire from the existing pool of candidates until the backlog of long-term candidates was substantially reduced. Most teaching assistants would then for a time be candidates for the M.A., a shorter degree program with fewer economic inequities—less debt accumulation, less reason for vestment in a retirement program, and substantially less discrepancy between salary and experience—and much less psychological cost. There are many reasons why that solution would create problems of its own, but at least the proposal highlights the seriousness of the crisis.

A surprisingly accurate 1994 article by Tony Horwitz in the *Wall Street Journal* took the rather clever route of comparing two recent generations of faculty members—their salaries, teaching loads, job security, and sense of

professional satisfaction—and found many young faculty leading very different lives from their parents in academia. Of course many would simply reply that at least these young faculty have jobs. And that comment would be entirely to the point. For the job crisis and the oversupply of Ph.D.s color everything we do. Indeed, the market will almost certainly lead many campuses to reintroduce all the injustices the AAUP has fought against for decades. More than just a risk to salaries, the job crisis is a risk to the tenure system and a risk to free speech. When Mary Burgan remarked recently that “tenure is the equivalent of welfare in the public mind,” she offered a succinct figure for the challenges we face.⁵

One potentially positive outcome of this multilevel crisis would be a renewed recognition that all of us professionally involved in education are to some extent in one boat that rises or falls with the economy and public faith in our enterprise. The interests of junior colleges, small liberal arts colleges, and full-scale research universities will never wholly converge, but they now have points of convergence that merit strategic alliances. The job crisis highlights some of those common interests, since new Ph.D.s from the elite schools have for years had to take jobs—when they could find them at all—at all sorts of institutions. Thus the most prestigious schools now have reason to be concerned about academic freedom, tenure, and the general quality of life everywhere in higher education. More than vigilance will be needed to preserve the values in which we believe. We need to marshal our resources for a major struggle of some duration. We are already past the best time to begin.