

CONNECTION

THE JOURNAL OF THE NEW ENGLAND BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Thank You, Gadflies

On CONNECTION's 20th anniversary, a special thank you to the gadflies who have used our pages to rouse New England from complacency and, in the process, helped make NEBHE's journal a forum for tough ideas.

I'm thinking of people like former Cambridge, Mass., City Councilor Kathleen Born breaking from the usual giddiness surrounding higher education's economic impact to note how the spinoff economy in America's quintessential college town had spun out of control, sending housing costs beyond the reach of long-time residents and pushing out locally owned retail businesses. [Pomp and Whine: Can College Towns Keep the Sims Happy?, Winter 2005]

Or former University of Maine System Chancellor Bob Woodbury explaining how the *U.S. News & World Report* college rankings that colleges and parents followed like gospel were encouraging institutions to reject as many applicants as possible, avoid nontraditional students and favor quick fixes over long-term improvement. [How to Make Your College No. 1 in *U.S. News & World Report* and Lose Your Integrity in the Process, Spring 2003]

I'm thinking of author Peter Sacks, refusing to buy into the testing frenzy, noting that, "policymakers fall into a dangerous trap if they insist that achieving the coveted 'alignment' of standards between schools and colleges depends on expanding the use of high-stakes tests," and predicting that college faculty would soon confront "students who, though perhaps adequately trained in grammar and spelling, lack intellectual curiosity, creativity and initiative." [High-Stakes Sandwich, Fall 2001]

Or Kaileigh Tara, welfare mom turned mayor of Lewiston, Maine, urging New England's "opinion leaders" to seek greater public input in their decisions. "Policymakers should start by making a list of all those people whom instinct tells them should be involved in a decision," she wrote. "Then they should put that list aside and start over." [Who's Not at the Policy Table?, Spring 1999]

Before the term "college readiness" entered the lexicon, Northeastern University economists Paul Harrington and Andrew Sum had the gall to argue in CONNECTION that the chief barrier to college was not lack of money but lack of academic preparation. [Access Is About More than Money, Fall 1999] Bud Hodgkinson, America's leading education demographer, stepped back from the rhetoric about degree attainment to remind CONNECTION readers: "We have no idea how long graduates maintain the wisdom that has been jammed into their heads at such pain and expense." [Tunnel Vision, Spring 2004] Education Department analyst Cliff Adelman presented an arsenal of data puncturing popular views of grade inflation, graduation rates and "Culture Wars." [Putting on the Glitz, Winter 2001]

CONNECTION was meant to be edgy from the get-go. Just a year into publication, Bart Giamatti used his perch as Yale president to debunk a sacred tenet of New England higher education. "Please don't tell me that because of our extraordinary array of private institutions that we don't need to nourish the public ones," he wrote, noting that "very expensive private institutions" could not be counted on to attract brains and money to New England's increasingly high-tech economy. [Neglecting Our Own, Winter 1987]

A few years later, with all eyes focused on Asian Tigers and a unified European market, former NEBHE Senior Fellow Nate Bowditch urged New Englanders to embrace an unfolding "African miracle." [Is Africa the Future of New England?, Summer 1999] Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz exposed the p.c. movement of the day. [Speech Codes and Diversity Don't Mix, Summer 1991] Bryant College Professor William Haas asked, in the wake of the Bhopal and Space Shuttle Challenger disasters, why B-schools were not better preparing students for conflicts between company loyalty and loyalty to human life. [A New Measure of Success in Business, Spring 1991]

To be sure, CONNECTION plays a vital role as a forum for best practices in higher education, a vehicle for educational futurists and a purveyor of cutting-edge trend analysis ... all important. But New England's ongoing brain drain, legions of disconnected youth and propensity to rest on its laurels, if not its ivy, indicate the sacred cows need tickling. So thank you, gadflies.

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