

THE
BOX

Nearly two of every five faculty members at Colorado State University are age 50 or older. A group that large, reasoned Sidney Heitman, a professor of history, ought to meet regularly to share common concerns and relay them to the university administration.

Acting as an organizer, Mr. Heitman—himself 61—has established a Senior Faculty Forum. Its goals, he says, are to monitor developments of interest to faculty members nearing retirement, and to act as an advocate for those professors on campus. "It's a special interest group—like a lobbying group," Mr. Heitman says.

Specifically, the group wants to insure that the various early-retirement options offered by the institution are applied equitably, and that aging professors are not treated as "second-rate" citizens, Mr. Heitman says.

The mandatory retirement age at Colorado State is 70.

Some senior faculty members, Mr. Heitman says, were alarmed last semester over talk of incentives for early retirement, some of which were perceived as an effort to force people out of the university and relieve "gridlock in the upper ranks" of the faculty.

In addition, he says, the university needs to clarify the terms of its "transitional-retirement plan," in which a faculty member retires and is hired back without tenure on a half-time basis.

Some departments have responded favorably to the option, while others are pressuring professors to retire and not continue to teach, Mr. Heitman says.

The faculty forum is scheduled to meet at least once a semester. Although it has no official standing in the university's governance structure, members of relevant committees will be invited to sit in as *ex-officio* representatives.

Eventually Mr. Heitman hopes to see a faculty advocate or ombudsman who would deal with issues of concern to senior faculty members.

The "65 Club" at the University of California's Hastings College of the Law is mighty exclusive. Only top-flight legal scholars are allowed to join—and they must be 65 years of age or older.

Hastings recruits the scholars after they reach mandatory retirement age at some of the nation's leading law schools. The professors don't have tenure, but instead are offered annual contracts. Three of the twelve current members are over 80.

The program offers prestige to the institution and allows the scholars to continue in the classroom.

"You've got people here who are literally legends in their own time," said Julian H. Levi, a 75-year-old former professor at the University of Chicago. "As far as I'm concerned, it provides a remarkable and unusual opportunity. Instead of wondering what you're going to do next, you're challenged by able students and colleagues. You have a chance to continue to be useful."

Personal & Professional

50 Lecturers Lose Their Jobs in a Dispute over How—and If—Writing Can Be Taught

U. of Texas teachers are victims of the job market and a split in the English department

By SCOTT HELLER

AUSTIN, TEX.

Because of who they are and what they teach, nearly 50 lecturers in the English department at the University of Texas at Austin are losing their jobs.

The nation's largest English department has decided to rethink an ambitious composition program that, last term, meant teaching 143 sections for freshmen and 141 for sophomores. Lecturers taught many of those courses, and their numbers had increased significantly in the past few years.

Come September, the lecturers were to be the majority of teachers for a new upper-level course that would require every junior to write about his or her academic discipline. About 150 sections were anticipated.

That requirement has been postponed. The course will not be taught for at least a year, and some say it may never be. The lecturers were notified in February that they wouldn't be rehired.

They are the victims, everyone agrees, of good intentions gone awry: of the uni-

Colleges are hiring too many temporary instructors, says a University of Texas professor. See Point of View, Page 80.

versity's attempt to provide its students with a more ambitious writing program than it could—or wanted to—staff.

They are also victims of a harsh job market that had denied some of them tenure-track positions. In contrast, the University of Texas's offer of annual contracts year after year seemed almost benevolent. While the promise of tenure was never there, the trappings—if one closed one's eyes and thought hard enough—were.

In those ways, the Austin group is typical of lecturers at large state universities all over the country.

Institutions are having a difficult time dealing with the growing class—some say underclass—of temporary faculty members who carry heavy undergraduate teaching loads, especially in composition.

"One major attitude of English full-timers is that teachers of composition are the garbage men and women of higher education," wrote M. Elizabeth Wallace in *Part-Time Academic Employees in the Humanities*, issued last year by the Modern Language Association.

The Austin lecturers have found themselves in the middle of a second quandary as well, this one philosophical. Can writing be properly taught as a technique, as a rhetorical skill? Or is it more effectively linked to the teaching of literature?

It is a question to which faculty members here have no one answer.

The lecturers' dismissal came as a direct result of the university's decision to suspend a course called English 346K, or "Writing in Different Disciplines." De-

signed as a junior-year requirement, the course was central to a new, improved writing program, approved by the university in 1981 and slowly phased in since.

The university had previously required its students to take two writing courses in their freshman year and one in their sophomore year.

Under the new plan, five courses were required. A freshman composition course

and the sophomore course, "Masterworks of Literature," would remain the same.

But in a nod to the burgeoning movement that held that students should be taught to write throughout their careers and in their own disciplines, one of the freshman courses was moved to the junior year. Students would take it in the English department, but it would be taught in so-

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3 Tales of Life Off the Tenure Track



Jeanell Bolton, left, and Christopher J. Knight, center, are losing their jobs at the University of Texas, but Michael Adams, right, will keep his.

AUSTIN, TEX.

The names on the door are Leo Hughes, emeritus professor, and Jeanell Bolton, lecturer.

Ms. Bolton, 42, has worked as a lecturer in the English department at the University of Texas at Austin for five years. And, as she sees it, the vagaries of that experience are reflected in her office conditions.

After earning a doctorate in linguistics from the university in 1971, Ms. Bolton conducted, in her own words, a "half-hearted" job search and turned up no tenure-track positions. At the same time she began to raise a family and put career considerations on hold.

In 1980, with three children, she began to look for work in academe again. She is one of several teachers on the Austin campus for whom lectureships represent a mix of convenience and necessity.

"I'm from the era in which you thought that if you had a Ph.D., the world was at your feet," she recalls. "I discovered quickly that it wasn't."

A friend working at the University of Texas indicated that temporary posts

for individuals with doctorates were opening in the English department. Ms. Bolton was hired to teach four classes a semester in 1980-81 at a salary of about \$15,000.

At the time, lecturers and other temporary faculty members were housed in what Ms. Bolton calls the "remodeled attic" of the campus's Sutton Hall.

She shared an office with two other lecturers. The elevator, she remembers, went no farther than the third floor. Instructors walked the extra flight to their offices.

For her second semester, Ms. Bolton moved to an office in another building. In her third semester, the office-space situation became desperate, and department leaders asked emeritus professors to share their space.

So Ms. Bolton has spent the remaining years sharing an office with Mr. Hughes in Parlin Hall, the department's home.

"We basically keep the chair warm for each other," Ms. Bolton says. "He's been a real gentleman about it. But there are drawbacks. This is his of-

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3 Tales of Life Off the Tenure Track

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fice. The decorations are his. He's been very nice about clearing shelves for me. Yet this is, to me, his office."

While most of the room is filled with texts relating to Mr. Hughes's work, Ms. Bolton has fastened pictures of her children to the side of a filing cabinet.

She is philosophical about not being rehired for next year, along with nearly 50 of her colleagues. Most years, she says, she was "never hired more than a week before the school year began. I have been hired the Sunday before the Monday of the first day of classes."

Her disillusionment with the post came well before the February announcement. "At this point I'm not a dedicated teacher," she says. "I could have been three years ago, but it's like behavior modification. I want the acknowledgment, the promotion, the money."

"Most lecturers have the day-dream that someone is going to tap them on the shoulder and say, 'We realize how wonderful you are and we want you to stay forever.'" she adds. "I realized that that wasn't going to happen."

Instead, Ms. Bolton has been working as a part-time neighborhood correspondent for Austin's daily newspaper, earning \$25 a week. When her job at the university ends, she hopes to become an editor with a Texas magazine. Several of her humor pieces have already been accepted by *Austin Woman* magazine.

Of the future she says: "I can be the intellectual Erma Bombeck."

Christopher J. Knight thought his stint as a lecturer in the English department at the University of Texas at Austin would lead to a tenure-track job somewhere else. After all, the Austin post was, in some ways, the best academic job he had held since receiving his Ph.D. at New York University in 1982.

Previously, Mr. Knight had "put together" a living, teaching writing and literature at three institutions in the New York area.

"This was bad," he says of his post in Austin, "but that was sinful."

Working as an adjunct faculty member at N.Y.U., Pace University, and the Stevens Institute of Technology, he estimates he earned about \$1,200 a course. Teaching four courses a semester gave him about \$10,000 a year.

He moved to Austin after answering an advertisement for the lecturer posts. Money—\$15,000 a year—was a chief attraction, as was the chance to teach at one institution instead of racing around to several.

He describes himself as one of the contingent of lecturers with serious scholarly interests. He has cut down his own teaching load to two courses this semester, instead of the typical four, to polish his dissertation in the hope of getting it published.

His book concentrates on early works by Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams. His thesis is that their early writings more likely mark the end of the classical sensibility than the beginning of modernism.

Many of the lecturers on the Austin campus have viewed their posts as a logical steppingstone to an assistant professorship, Mr. Knight says. But the actual tensions of the job have made getting those positions terribly difficult. "Teaching four

classes each semester is a very taxing schedule and doesn't leave you time to do anything but teach," he says.

At 32, he finds himself beginning the job search once again, undaunted by the grapevine gossip that says tenure-track posts for English professors just aren't there.

"Every graduate student thinks he's going to be the exception to the rule," he says. "It's just a matter of holding on, because one's affections for the profession are so great."

Nevertheless, he is interviewing in May for a foreign-service post with the State Department.

"If they had said on the contract, 'We will exploit you, we will pay you

dirt wages,' I would still have said 'Fine,' and would have signed on the dotted line," says Michael Adams, a novelist and lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin.

To Mr. Adams and several of his fellow lecturers in the English department here, teaching is a perfect complement to their chief aim—writing.

A handful are prolific freelance writers who publish in *Esquire*, the *Texas Observer*, and *Third Coast*, an Austin monthly. Others are published poets, short-story writers, or novelists.

Mr. Adams—39 and laconic, born and raised in Killeen, Tex.—doesn't much care about his working conditions, he says. "I teach and I re-

treating. I don't have anything else to do with the English department."

Like two-thirds of the lecturers, he is a product of the university's English department, having received a doctorate in 19th-century English literature in 1973. After a short hitch teaching in Philadelphia, he returned to Austin, where he has worked on and off in the department for more than 10 years. "My situation is different," Mr. Adams says bluntly, and in many ways he's right.

First, he is one of five lecturers who will be rehired for the next year. His position is included as a line item in the state budget and hence cannot be eliminated.

Second, he has just won a \$500 prize awarded to a lecturer for outstanding teaching.

Third, he is negotiating film rights to *Blind Man's Bluff*, one of his two published works. In May, Ballantine

Books will issue the paperback edition of the novel, which Mr. Adams says is about "you know—life, death, sex, Jesus, love, and immortality."

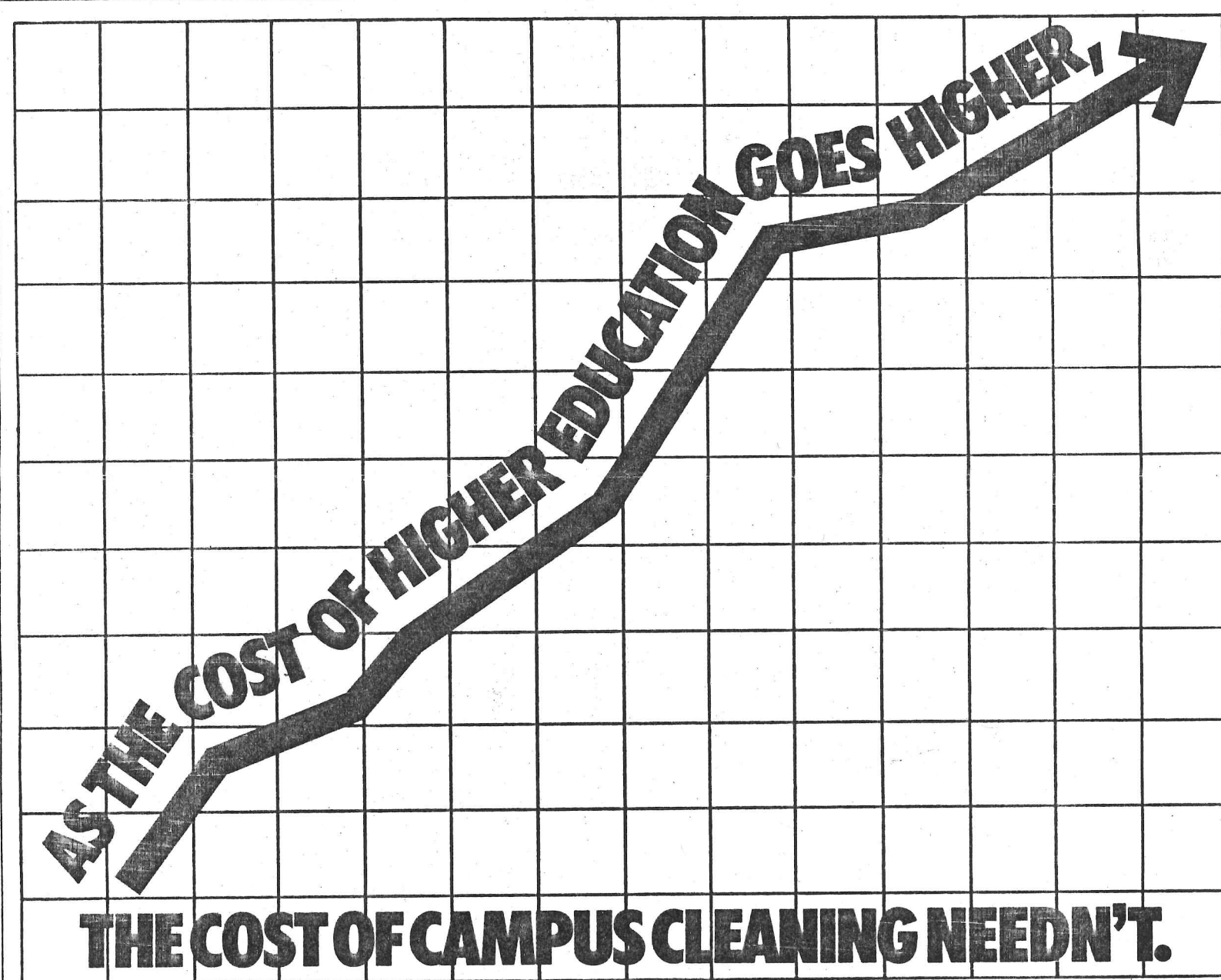
Another novel—*Nothing Normal Ever Happened to Jubilee Jones*—is now under consideration by an editor at Random House.

Why, then, would Mr. Adams choose to lead even the two classes he is teaching now? "If you're a painter or a writer, it's pretty lonely out there, so just in terms of the human contact, it's good," he answers.

Also, as the author of a textbook on good writing, Mr. Adams believes in the courses he teaches.

"Every time I look out in that classroom, I see me," he says. "I came from a small town in Texas like a lot of these kids did. And I came to see what a good teacher of English could do."

—SCOTT HELLER



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Point of View

By Maxine Hairston

We're Hiring Too Many Temporary Instructors

Not only does the practice drive good people from the profession; it paves the way for a future faculty shortage

A YOUNG MAN I shall call John Reeves teaches English at a large public university in the Midwest, a prestigious institution with an enrollment of more than 40,000 students. He has a Ph.D. and good scholarly credentials, and he works the 60-hour week most young professors expect to put in during their first years on the job. But Reeves is not a professor. He is an instructor teaching four sections of freshman writing each semester for \$17,000 a year. Because he has two small children, he supplements that salary by teaching two more sections of writing, at the local community college. With no time for research or publication, he realizes that when his three-year, non-renewable contract expires, his chances of being hired as an assistant professor will be even worse than when he was graduated. So he has decided that rather than take another dead-end job as a temporary instructor, he will leave the profession.

His individual case hardly qualifies as a tragedy. Young people like him are bright and adaptable; they'll survive. But if the consequences of underemployment and low pay for Ph.D.'s in English and the humanities are not tragic for the individual scholars, they may well be tragic for their departments and institutions and for the future of graduate study in their fields. Thousands of young scholars like Mr. Reeves teach in colleges and universities all over the country, some in situations worse than his. Precise figures on the numbers of institutions and faculty members involved are hard to come by, but everyone agrees that those numbers are growing rapidly. In large English departments, particularly in state-supported institutions, frequently as many as half of the lower-division courses are taught by temporary instructors. Most of those courses are in freshman writing.

This change from the tradition of using regular faculty members and the graduate students who are their scholarly apprentices to teach freshman courses has come about gradually from innocuous beginnings. In past years, most English departments hired a few part-time faculty members—typically creative writers who wanted a regular income, some faculty spouses, an occasional Ph.D. graduate who wanted to stay on for another year; not enough to affect the general makeup of the department. But the budget crunches of the late 1970's and concern about declining enrollment caused college administrators to hire more temporary instructors, who cost less and don't have to be tenured. Now the practice has become institutionalized at most large universities. The October 1984 report of the National Institute of Education's study group on excellence in higher education says that in 1980 41 per cent of all college faculty members were part-timers.

Professors, administrators, and legislative-committee members have been slow to grasp the implications of this radical shift in hiring practices. They seem not to realize that what looked like an economical and expedient answer to short-term problems is now having serious repercussions in higher education. Replacing regular faculty members with temporaries is lowering the quality of undergraduate education everywhere, particularly in writing courses; threatening the very existence of graduate education in some fields; and paving the way for a critical shortage of college faculty members in the next generation.

Moreover, when English departments staff most of their freshman and sophomore courses with temporary and part-time teachers, they violate key recommendations of two recent reports on the state of our institutions of higher education. The first, the report on excellence, says: "Faculty are the core of the academic work force, and their status, morale, collegiality, and commitment to their institutions are critical to student learning." The committee recommends that "colleges assign as many of their finest instructors as possible to

courses [that have] large numbers of first-year students." The second report, from a panel of the National Endowment for the Humanities, points out: "If students do not experience the best the humanities have to offer early in their undergraduate careers, they are unlikely to come back for more."

It is particularly important that English departments assign energetic, dedicated, and respected teachers to freshman composition classes, since it is in those classes that students learn the critical thinking and writing skills they must have to succeed in college. Too often, however, students never come in contact with a regular English professor until—if they get that far—they take an upper-division course. Institutions and departments, as the report on excellence points out, "have distinct cultures—nonverbal messages that students pick up." When most freshman courses are taught by low-paid, low-status instructors, students quickly get the message that the department cares little about the large and diverse group of students in its lower-division courses. Even students who have planned to major in English will be discouraged, and few will even consider a career teaching English in high school or college. The system feeds on itself.

Moreover, by hiring temporaries to teach freshman and sophomore courses, administrators create the job shortage for Ph.D.'s in English and other fields in the humanities. In terms of the number of students who must be taught, there is no job shortage in English. Although in most departments the demand for upper-division literature courses is shrinking (largely, I would argue, because of the neglect of lower-division courses), enrollment in freshman writing courses continues to burgeon at most institutions. If the institutions were to hire Ph.D.'s in English on the tenure track to teach those courses, along with a section or two of literature, they would immediately create hundreds of regular jobs in English departments.

USING TEMPORARIES may seem to benefit current regular faculty members, who can now teach nearly all upper-division and graduate literature courses. But inexorably the shrinking job market causes shrinking graduate enrollment—at most institutions such enrollment has already dropped drastically over the past five years. As bright young scholars like Mr. Reeves realize that they, too, will probably wind up as underpaid instructors with no job security, they are leaving graduate school. And as English departments have fewer graduate students to serve their apprenticeships by helping teach writing courses, they must hire even more temporary instructors. Again, the system feeds on itself.

As the influx of temporary and part-time faculty members has depressed faculty salaries, reduced faculty power, and lowered both the status and value of a Ph.D. in English and other areas in the humanities, the news has trickled down to high-school students. The report on excellence notes that the proportion of freshmen planning to become college teachers dropped from 1.8 per cent in 1966 to 0.2 per cent in 1982. An 89-per cent decline! And yet a new study at Claremont Graduate School has shown that in the next 25 years our system of higher education is going to require 500,000 new faculty members. Virtually the entire current professoriate will have to be replaced, and the report says that the new faculty members should be "creative intellectuals who are alive and vigorous, . . . people who are called to the profession." Few are going to feel that call in English departments unless the people who control money and policy begin immediately to curb drastically the hiring of temporary faculty members.

What can be done to correct the situation?

First, administrators and regents could petition legislative budget committees to reverse the present system

of financing freshman courses at lower levels than upper-division and graduate courses. Freshman English, in particular, is necessarily labor-intensive. It must be taught in small sections that resemble studio and laboratory courses, and it should be financed according to the same formulas. Increased support would allow departments to hire more regular faculty members trained in the teaching of writing, to staff more freshman courses, and to train new teachers of writing.

Everyone who allots and disburses money in higher education is also going to have to realize that the days of faculty bargains is over. Budget officers and legislators are going to have to recognize that the 20 per cent in purchasing power that faculty members have lost over the past 10 years must be restored and more, if the profession is to attract and keep good teachers. That will, of course, increase the cost of running the departments—probably by as much as a third. They will have to give the departments more money.

Second, departments could follow the recommendation of the N.I.E.'s report on excellence and combine most of their part-time jobs into full-time jobs and hire regular, tenure-track faculty members to teach lower-division courses. The proportion of temporary instructors should be reduced gradually to no more than 10 or 15 per cent of the faculty, and temporary appointments should be reserved for people with excellent credentials who prefer not to seek tenure-track jobs. The best teachers on the tenured faculty should regularly teach freshman courses and be rewarded for doing so.

Third, professors, department chairmen, and deans should work together to revitalize lower-division teaching in English departments so freshmen and sophomores receive the best possible instruction in writing and in reading literature. Everyone must work to revamp the system of motivation and reward, which has discouraged regular faculty members from investing their efforts in lower-division teaching and has overrewarded highly specialized scholarship and publication. All three reports that I have mentioned stress that such a shift in values must occur if our colleges are to survive.

Finally, everyone connected with higher education—students, parents, faculty members, administrators, legislators, and the general public—needs to examine our current infatuation with computers and high technology. We have been willing to invest in them almost blindly, not knowing how they will benefit our students and our culture. Now we need to realize that a high-quality, committed faculty is more important than the most sophisticated machines, and that it is more important to nurture the natural intelligence and talent of scholars like John Reeves than to pursue the chimera of artificial intelligence.

Now, John Reeves is lost to the academic world. He is moving on to a job in corporate communications that will challenge him, use his skills in research and writing, and pay more than twice the salary he has been making as an instructor. Occasionally he feels a twinge of nostalgia for the university life he is leaving, but mostly he's glad to trade a low-status but demanding job for one that commands respect and won't exhaust him. He has come out ahead, and so will most of the other bright and ambitious young people who leave academe for business or another profession. But their gain is education's loss. How many more like John Reeves will have to abandon higher education before we realize what we are doing to the teaching profession?

Maxine Hairston is professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin and is this year's chairman of the Conference on College Composition and Communication.