

UTAHNS MUST NOT LET ECONOMICS DICTATE HIGHER EDUCATION GOALS

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Market-driven teaching salaries and assignments may be a fact of life on Utah college and university campuses, but state officials must be careful not to incorporate them into law and rigid policy.

Tribune reporter Lili Wright's recent series on faculty salaries revealed a close salary correlation between the business world and institutions of higher learning. Teachers and researchers in the arts, humanities, agriculture and education earn considerably less than their peers in engineering, science and business.

Higher education officials attribute the disparity to society's values. Because the scientist, for example, is in high demand in society (and the artist or teacher is not), the scientist commands a higher salary. Universities must pay scientists more to attract them to academia. That investment pays off when those scientists generate large research grants for the university and spawn businesses (and revenue) for the community.

Other forces play on higher education priorities as well. In Utah, in particular, an enrollment-driven budget crunch requires that the colleges and universities find more efficient and effective ways of serving students. Unfortunately, some scary suggestions are emerging.

For instance, bottom-line, business-oriented Gov. Norm Bangerter is urging scrutiny not only of teaching loads, tenure and class scheduling, but also of the kind of university research unlikely to generate grants and jobs.

"The governor feels research is still very critical in the areas of medical, technical-based areas, sciences, engineering," said his education spokeswoman, Colleen Colton. "The history majors will argue that their research is for the advancement of mankind and the accumulation of our knowledge," she said, sarcastically adding, "and we need a few more books on Columbus this year."

It makes sense to review entrenched practices and make improvements where possible. Despite reports that the typical university research professor in Utah works 55 hours a week, for example, much of that time involves the kind of personal and professional development that anyone must pursue to keep current with new trends in professional fields.

Many research university professors, who now spend about nine hours per week in the classroom, undoubtedly could serve additional students, either by teaching another class each week or by fitting more students into the hours they teach.

However, too heavy an emphasis on productivity would compromise a primary purpose of higher education: to understand humanity and promote its liberation and advancement.

If research is held to a strict standard of economic production, the liberal arts could be shoved aside, and analysis of society and culture might stagnate. New ideas would be stifled, and students would miss opportunities for developing new insight and understanding of their world.

It would be left to politicians, entrepreneurs and the population-at-large to understand and propose moral solutions for poverty, urban unrest, education deficiencies, medical ethics dilemmas, the industrial revolution at this nation's door, any breakdown in values and new international relationships. Lacking a historical perspective, they might unnecessarily repeat mistakes of the past. Society might revert to old prejudices and retard cultural aspirations.

Efficiency and support of the general economy are goals that Utah's colleges and universities must strive for to survive, but these monetary goals must not dominate to the point of

undermining fundamental purposes of education. After all, there is more to life than making money.