

# Faculty Leaders in N.Y. and California Unite on Productivity Issues

They call for reviews of professors' performance but question higher education's 'outside' critics

BY ROBIN WILSON

**P**ROFESSORS at America's two largest public-university systems have issued a joint statement acknowledging that faculty productivity is under attack and calling for more-frequent evaluations of their performance.

At the same time, the statement strongly defends professors, attributing public criticism of tenure and of faculty workloads to "misunderstandings" by "outsiders" who do not appreciate how universities operate.

If some faculty members do not work hard enough, the statement says, governing boards and administrators are largely to blame. They have failed to establish clear expectations and to evaluate professors accordingly, it says. "Much of the concern that governing boards and academic officers have about tenure is of their own making," says the statement, which has the title "Public Higher Education and Productivity: A Faculty Voice."

The statement was issued by representatives of the faculty senates and unions of the State University of New York and the California State University systems. The document is the result of two years of meetings between those representatives. It has been endorsed by the Faculty Senate at SUNY, while the Cal State Academic Senate is to consider the report next month. About 17,470 full-time and part-time faculty members are employed by the California State University system and about 27,750 by the SUNY system.

## 'COUNTLESS DISCUSSIONS'

The idea to bring the professors together came from D. Bruce Johnstone, a professor of higher and comparative education at SUNY's Buffalo campus and a former chancellor of the system. "As an administrator of higher education, I was part of countless discussions on the financial dilemmas of higher education where the faculty were identified as the principal problem and the barrier to most solutions—but where real

faculty were never part of the discussion," Dr. Johnstone said in a press release that accompanied the statement.

The seven-page statement supports the concept of post-tenure reviews—something that many faculty members across the United States have opposed. "Our view is that reviews after tenure should happen and should be focused positively on enhancing performance," said James M. Highsmith, chairman of the Academic Senate of the California State system, in an interview. "It should not be a punitive ap-

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proach." Tenured professors in the California State system already are reviewed every five years. There is no post-tenure review for faculty members in the SUNY system.

Vincent J. Aceto, president of the SUNY system's Faculty Senate, called the statement's position on post-tenure review a "breakthrough for all of academia." Administrators at dozens of institutions, in Colorado, Minnesota, Texas, and elsewhere, have been pushing for post-tenure reviews, prompted in part by governing boards and state legislators who want greater accountability. But some faculty critics have said the reviews will not do much to improve faculty performance and may endanger the system of tenure.

The statement does not say how post-tenure evaluations should be carried out. Mr. Aceto, who is also a professor of information science on SUNY's Albany campus,

said the group planned to conduct an in-depth study of that issue and others in the coming months.

In its defense of tenure and current faculty workloads, the joint statement offers much the same rationale as has been put forth in the past. "On the overarching public policy issue of productivity," the statement says, "the faculty are treated by many, even from within the colleges and universities, not only as the principal problem, but as the principal barrier to most solutions." But it adds: "Much of the criticism emanates from a serious misunderstanding about what faculty actually do."

The document says that professors at public universities are now expected to do more with less because legislators have reduced money for higher education. Because of that expectation, the statement says, faculty members should re-evaluate how they spend their time. It says they should encourage elementary and secondary schools to prepare students better for college, so that professors need not spend time bringing their undergraduates up to speed. Further, the statement says the use of "newer technologies" can help universities achieve gains in faculty productivity.

Martha C. Fallgatter, chairwoman of the Board of Trustees of the California State system, said the joint document showed that "faculty realize we don't have the money we used to and we have to do business a little bit differently."

The joint statement is available free from the Faculty Senate, State University of New York, State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y. 12246; or on the World-Wide Web at <http://www.suny.edu>, by clicking on "publications."

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\* Documents related to this story can be found on "Academe Today," *The Chronicle's* Internet service at:

<http://chronicle.com>

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