

Community and Culture in Academe

Bad News

On a humid summer evening, about twenty individuals have assembled at Tony's home for a party. "I feel as if I'm going to a wake, not a party," murmurs Jane Riegal as she enters the house and makes her way to the back yard. The guest of honor, Fred, sits at the picnic table and appears to be engrossed in earnest conversation with one of his departmental colleagues. At no point during the evening does the party ever move above whispered dialogues. Finally, toward 10:00 P.M., Tony clears his throat and says, "I'd like to propose a toast." Everyone clusters around Fred, but most stare at the ground. "We wish Fred all the best in his new job and will miss him here for his wit and dedication to his students." Tony reaches for a laugh by saying, "I will also miss someone I could always beat on the squash court," but no one smiles. Fred nods a thank-you, and the crowd begins to break up and head home.

Everyone has gone now except Fred and Tony. Tony walks in and out of the house, peripatetically rearranging lawn chairs and tables as Fred stands awkwardly in the living room staring off into space. Finally he moves toward the door and says, "I had better be going, too." Tony stops picking up the discarded styrofoam cups and plates, but he cannot think what to say. Fred starts to sob, and Tony embraces him. "C'mon now. I'm sure it'll be okay. Forget this place." Fred weeps silently for a moment longer, then quietly says, "Thanks for the party. It was good to be able to say goodbye to everyone at once." After a pause, he continues:

I feel like such a failure. I spent six years working my ass off and I never really thought they'd deny me tenure. I've been over this so many times it's ridiculous. My teaching was good. My service was good. Research was okay. Who do I blame? No one ever—EVER—said anything but good things to me. I get fucked over, and I just . . . I don't know. It just doesn't seem worth it. Getting that letter from the dean, everybody averting their eyes from me like I had a disease. I will never forget it. Never.

Fred's colleague, Jane Riegal, drives home from the party with her husband. Unlike Fred, Jane has been successful. After six difficult years, the university readily promoted her to associate professor this past spring. "Fred was treated unfairly," Jane explains to her husband, Johnny, "but he also never read the signals. He spent too much time worrying about students, and they gave him dopey committees to serve on. Bad move. And he has a way of saying things that set you on edge. You have to be political, and he's not." She shrugs her shoulders and settles into her seat, beginning to plan the vacation that she and Johnny will take next week.

This is the first summer since graduate school that Jane feels she has been able to breathe freely. She and Johnny will even take a two-week vacation. She has told more than one friend, "All I'm going to do is read trashy novels. I can't wait!" She has also mentioned to her best friend that she and Johnny are going to try to have a baby. They have wanted a child ever since graduate school, but the time has never been right. Jane was too busy for motherhood, and the department would have interpreted her pregnancy as a sign that she was not serious about her career. So she waited, and the two weeks on Fire Island seem an odd luxury. She reads her "trashy novels," and Johnny and she spend long afternoons in bed.

Jane also finds herself getting up an hour or two before Johnny and reading some articles for an NSF proposal she wants to write. At night, after Johnny falls asleep, she wonders about her life and its odd twists and turns. She's mastered the system and is proud of herself for having done so, but at times she also feels that something is missing. Her father was a professor, but her career is far different from what she remembers of his. The romance of being a professor, the excitement of engaging in ideas and the challenge of working with stimulating colleagues seems absent. She works in a hollow community, and even while she was telephoning friends and family about the good news of her tenure, she secretly felt that somehow she hadn't measured up to her ideal. Her ideas weren't good enough, perhaps; she wasn't adept at collegiality; maybe that was why she always felt lonely. That would account for the letdown feeling rather than elation when she received the tenure letter. She does not share her misgivings with anyone, not even Johnny. Eventually she drifts off to sleep and awakens to begin work on her proposal before the sun comes up.

Certainly no one other than Jane senses her discomfort in the department. Relationships are generally cordial and always restrained. The department chair says, "How terrific!" when she tells him she's pregnant. In the next breath he tells her, "The provost has asked me to suggest members for a Promotion and Tenure Review Committee. I gave him your name. You may

get a call.” A few days later, the provost’s secretary calls to inform Jane that she has been appointed secretary of the committee. The provost comes to the first meeting in September and tells the group that he wants a study of how to improve promotion and tenure. “I really want to know what it’s like in the trenches. What are the problems? What should we be doing? Pay particular attention to our minorities. Women, too. We need to do a good job, a better job, and I’m relying on this group for information.”

The committee meetings take more time than Jane had anticipated, but she also enjoys the work. It is a university-wide group, and some senior faculty are involved. For the first time at the university, she feels as if colleagues are actually listening to what she has to say. The committee members have set various tasks for themselves, and because Jane has the most experience in survey research, she chairs the sub-committee that develops the questionnaire for all junior faculty. Others interview faculty members and departmental chairs. Throughout the year, she hears a great deal of gallows humor. “You won’t believe this,” says a friend who has been conducting interviews, and proceeds to tell another horror story from an untenured professor’s point of view. The individuals in the group also feel that they have made progress, and as their April deadline approaches, they reach consensus about the kind of problems that exist and the recommendations that they will make to the provost.

Jane almost skips the May meeting with the provost because the baby is due in two weeks. However, she has heard so many snide comments during the year from colleagues hoping she could “keep up” that she overcompensates. By actual count Jane realizes that she had attended more committee meetings than Professor Allen, the endowed chair in chemistry, but no one has remarked on his absences. She arrives at the provost’s office and settles into a chair at the oblong table.

When the provost enters, he is stone-faced and avoids eye contact:

First, I need to thank you for this report. It clearly shows work. Hard work. I don’t think we’ll be able to use it, however, and I want to tell you why. I’ve found the method questionable, and I think if we gave it broad publicity, it would cause harm. The interviews strike me as impressionistic. They have an ax to grind. And the survey is too simplistic.

It also contains too much bad news. The president hates whining, and this report is like that. Faculty feel overworked. Women feel excluded. Minorities serve on too many committees. This is a can of worms that we can’t deal with at this time. But I’m sure we will. Eventually. But not now. I want to let you in on a secret. We’re going to launch a capital campaign this summer

and we wouldn't want to start off with bad news, would we? We need good news. Like Professor Riegal's NSF grant. Congratulations!

Viewing Academe

If the research for this book is representative of what takes place on college campuses throughout the United States, then the above scenario is emblematic of commonplace occurrences in the late twentieth century. Some faculty feel isolated, and others never "learn the rules of the game." Administrators often want to hide "bad news," and others do not want to believe stories about life "in the trenches" that document overwork and stress for women and faculty of color. During a twenty-four month period that began in the fall of 1992, we conducted more than 300 interviews with faculty at twelve colleges and universities. Private and public institutions, research universities, liberal arts colleges, small, medium, and large institutions were included in the sample. The framework for promotion and tenure varies by institutional type, but we shall suggest in chapter 2 that the experiences, frustrations, and challenges of faculty members are often remarkably similar, yet paradoxically, an individual's or group's experiences are also unique.

Chapter 3 delineates the struggles that junior faculty face, and chapters four and five relate specific experiences of women and faculty of color. To be sure, an assistant professor at a small, private liberal arts college will teach more classes than his counterpart at a large, public research university. Similarly, a science professor will be more dependent on funds to equip and maintain a laboratory than her peers in the liberal arts and humanities. The argument we shall develop here, however, is that although the institutional and departmental contexts of one's work may vary, the cultural framework in which it is defined and performed is often quite similar across campuses and disciplines. The feeling of not fitting in experienced by a female professor, the volume of committee work assigned to an African-American assistant professor, or the pressure exerted on a new faculty member to publish are more than individual examples of what someone has encountered on the road to promotion and tenure at his or her own institution.

Common negative experiences are indications that the system is in need of change. Accordingly, in the final chapter we relate the data presented in the text to a theoretical framework we have developed in order to offer suggestions for reform. In this chapter we also offer very specific recom-

mentations on how institutional leaders can improve the probationary period for tenure-track faculty.

Throughout this work, we portray the professional life of primarily one group of participants—junior faculty—in order to expose a system gone awry. By contrasting the comments of junior faculty with those of their senior colleagues, we reveal the competing definitions of reality held by different groups. We did not begin this study with the assumption that promotion and tenure should be abolished, nor will we conclude with such a recommendation. However, academe is in need of dramatic restructuring, and the data in this text are offered as evidence of why we call for change.

In what follows, we outline three interpretations of the present state of the academy and give particular attention to their ramifications for promotion and tenure. Our point here is that the beliefs one holds about the academy inevitably frame how one acts in a postsecondary institution. Far too often, the actors in an institution believe that there is only one possible interpretation of the organization. Consequently, decisions are made in an instrumental fashion with neither a vision of what could be nor an understanding of the cultural context in which the institution exists.

Postsecondary institutions most certainly exist in the real world and have real problems. Reduced revenues from the federal and state governments have played havoc with fiscal planning. Minority candidates for faculty positions are still relatively few in the number pool, especially in the sciences and engineering. On many campuses, the physical plant is in dire need of renovation simply to remain functional. Different constituencies—state legislators, businesses, parents, accrediting agencies—often have competing demands about what they want to see taking place on campus. The collegiality and social fabric that characterized colleges and universities have been torn asunder by daily acts of divisiveness and rancor by virtually every constituency on campus.

On one level, such statements are difficult to challenge. College financing is in dire straits, so consequently deferred maintenance is commonplace. Only four percent of U.S. doctorates were earned by African Americans in engineering in 1993 (National Research Council 1993). Although the style of college protests may differ from that of the Vietnam era, no one argues that faculty, students and administrators have less regard for one another. However, as we explain below, a cultural view of the world takes such facts as statements that demand interpretation.

Upon receiving the report about promotion and tenure, the provost in the initial scenario regarded it strictly as bad news. Bad news of this kind had to be suppressed, for it presented the institution in a negative light.

Another possibility might have been to use the document as a point of departure for rethinking the promotion and tenure process. Still another option might be to consider whether the current faculty workload is actually the best use of faculty time.

Ultimately, these issues are philosophical in nature: What should be the role of the faculty vis-à-vis society? How should academic freedom be defined? What roles do promotion and tenure play in protecting academic freedom? And yet, we seldom deal with such questions in a philosophical manner that might help to give meaning to our lives; rather, such questions are seen as instrumental and political topics. Faculty need more mentoring, the thinking goes, so develop a mentoring system. If the state legislature finds out that we are not hiring a sufficient number of minority faculty members, goes another line of thought, it might reduce appropriations even further. We had better bury the offending document.

Regrettably, this line of reasoning appears to make sense on one level. State legislatures do often meddle in the internal affairs of institutions. The rush of daily events often forces administrators to make spur-of-the-moment decisions rather than long-range ones, so a stopgap program for mentoring is quickly put in place without reconsidering how junior and senior faculty might work together most effectively. Although we understand why the participants in an institution might (or might not) adopt particular policies, we are concerned that academe is not confronting these issues forthrightly with creative and far-reaching analyses.

In what follows, we offer three competing views of the world—conservative, liberal humanist, and critical postmodernist—to illustrate different approaches to academe's ills. We are particularly concerned with delineating the ramifications of each view for the promotion and tenure system. Variations of the first two approaches are the most common ways that organizations function. We first sketch these world views and then critique them. Then we develop the approach to be used throughout the remainder of the text—critical postmodernism.

A Conservative View of the Academy

Beginning in the 1980s and continuing to the present, there has been a succession of well-publicized critiques of academic life by individuals who consider themselves conservatives. Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Education, William Bennett, for example, criticized higher education as being out of touch with the mainstream and having lost its sense of purpose, in large part, because too many faculty presented their "subjects in a tendentious, ideological manner" (1984, 16). The University of Chicago's Allan Bloom con-

tended that in the 1960s faculty and administrators had let reason fall by the wayside as they abdicated their “higher vocation” and allowed “a highly ideologized student populace” to take over (1987, 313). The consequence of the infusion of ideology into the curriculum, argue the conservatives, is that institutions are no longer able to claim that they teach students about truth, freedom, and justice. In his analysis of Duke University, Dinesh D’Souza observed, “The real question is whether, as a liberal arts university, Duke will continue to uphold principles of justice and excellence, or whether those principles will be casually jettisoned for the unabashed pursuit of power and expediency” (1991, 193). The conservative perspective suggests that those who “jettison” such principles are primarily the faculty, with the willing compliance of administrators and the unwitting acceptance of the student body.

Roger Kimball’s book *Tenured Radicals* also follows this line of thought, but from his perspective, the war has been waged and his side has lost. Writing of leftist faculty members who have taken over the university, he contends “their dreams of radical transformation have been realized” (1990, xiv). In essence, Bloom’s “highly ideologized” student populace has been transformed. Writes Kimball:

When the children of the sixties received their professorships and deanships they did not abandon the dream of radical cultural transformation; they set out to implement it. Now, instead of disrupting classes, they are teaching them; instead of attempting to destroy our educational institutions physically, they are subverting them from within. (1990, 167)

What are the implications for the curriculum if we adopt the conservative agenda? How might we assess student learning from this perspective? Should a tuition policy that enables many low income students to attend college be reconfigured if those students are not as well prepared as the traditional students and compel the institution to debase the curriculum? Although these are interesting subjects of debate, for the purposes of this text we focus on two other questions raised by the conservative critique: (a) what is the portrait of faculty that has been developed, and (b) what does such a description suggest about the promotion and tenure process? Not only are these questions germane to the topic of this book, but the conservatives would also argue that if we answer them, then solutions to other problems, such as student access or institutional accountability, can be found.

In general, the conservative critique of faculty is twofold. On one hand, professors are characterized as largely ideological and radical, and on the other, they are depicted as disengaged intellectuals who prefer to conduct

esoteric research rather than teach undergraduate courses. At times these images converge and complement each other, and at other times they are described in isolation. They are never contradictory, however. Conservatives do not contend that all faculty members are radical, but nevertheless they are overly concerned with excellence in college teaching. Similarly, faculty are never described as conducting vital research, but they are invariably accused of not paying attention to teaching. In the conservative framework faculty are parodied as misanthropes who want to be left alone to develop obscure theories that are ideologically tainted (Sykes 1988).

While it would be an overstatement to imply that the conservative critique suggests that all faculty behave in this manner, it also would be incorrect to say that we have reduced the conservative portrait of the faculty to mere caricature. Bennett, Bloom, Kimball and others (Ravitch 1990, Sowell 1992, Sowell 1993) have portrayed the faculty—especially those in the humanities and social sciences—as deserving of societal disdain and disapproval. They have abnegated their responsibility as purveyors of Truth and Reason and, in doing so, now “express lack of interest, if not contempt, for the Western classics” (D’Souza 1991, 255). Similarly, faculty have driven up the cost of higher education by their selfish desire to conduct research. As Thomas Sowell trenchantly observes, all teaching is disdained by faculty—not just the Western classics—and the citizenry end up paying for “the many new boondoggles thought up by the faculty” (1992, 24) who neglected their primary purpose of educating the young.

The promotion and tenure system is criticized indirectly as being flawed. That is, conservatives in general do not call for restructuring the promotion and tenure process; rather, they view the process as having been corrupted by ideologues. Indeed, the title of Kimball’s book, *Tenured Radicals*, proclaims the dangers of the promotion and tenure system. Presumably, if there were merely radicals in academe, they could be removed, but because they have tenure, they have been able to take over the academy. Of consequence, a professor is “blissfully unaware of how privileged and protected a position he and his colleagues occupy in society, thanks precisely to their being insulated” (1990, 184). Tenure allows isolation.

In a curious twist, the promotion and tenure system has also come to subvert what it was created to protect: academic freedom. If one of the reasons for the creation of tenure was to protect faculty so that they could engage in intellectual battle without fear of reprisal, then that purpose has been lost. The conservative argument is that the system has been taken over by leftists, and if a faculty member does not walk the ideological line, he or she will be at risk of not attaining promotion and tenure. The academy has become a McCarthyite nightmare where it is not unusual to inquire, “Are

you now or have you ever been conservative” (Kimball 1990, 172). According to the conservative view, the problem is not only that ideologues have taken over a rational process that once protected academic freedom, but also that younger faculty members who must go through the process are socialized to think that this is the norm. As with today’s students who are deprived of the knowledge that previous generations derived from reading the classics, today’s junior faculty are also losers because they are no longer able to work in a system where the battle for Truth is of paramount importance.

One final observation about the conservative critique is that its proponents offer only the most general solutions to complex problems. In large part, the lack of clear-cut solutions is a result of the problem: the faculty. The promotion and tenure system itself is not so much at fault as are the individuals who control the process. Those who control the dialogue are responsible for the bastardization of the curriculum or the lack of standards in academe. Thus, implicitly, the conservative critique revolves around the ability to purge the universities of radical riff-raff. If the academy had better faculty members—as defined by the conservatives—then its current malaise could be overcome.

Part of the success of the conservative agenda has been the clarity and uniformity with which its proponents have promulgated their interpretation of academic life. While conservatives may disagree with one another on minor points, their similarities are greater than their differences. However, perhaps because of the stridency of their language and the lack of clear-cut solutions, the conservatives have garnered the most notoriety and least support. The “scorched-earth” rhetoric that the conservatives have employed often does not ring true for most academics, and their picture of the campus of the 1950s seems to be a romanticization of the past that can never be, and many believe should never be, recaptured. The colleges and universities of the twenty-first century will be technologically, socially, and culturally distinct from the academic institutions of yesteryear. The conservative yearning for college life as it was in the “good old days” is often based on a revisionist view of those times, and has little if anything to do with the educational needs of present and future generations.

A Liberal Humanist View of the Academy

In contrast to the conservative interpretation of the academic world, the liberal humanist view is less condemnatory of individuals and groups. It also relies less on analyses based on explicit political ideologies. We define this interpretation as “liberal humanist” because its proponents hold a traditional view of the academic world. Colleges and universities have long been, and

still remain, devoted to the life of the mind. The triple functions of the university—research, teaching, and service—are still important. The relationship between society and the postsecondary institution has always been tenuous, and this will continue. Scholars need distance from the everyday world in order to deal with intellectual issues, yet it is their responsibility to provide creative ideas for dealing with social and environmental problems.

In contrast to the conservative's desire to preserve the academic community as a historical artifact, the liberal humanist hopes to maintain core values—academic freedom, for example—while adapting to meet the needs of society. Proponents of this latter view generally subscribe to the belief that cultural diversity is important and to be respected; even so, they bemoan the loss of community on college campuses. Although problems such as political correctness exist, the extent to which they have eroded academic life is seen as less devastating than the large scale cataclysm that the conservatives claim to be observing. In effect, liberal humanists admit that there are leftist ideologues in academe, but they see as much danger in crusades from the right as in indoctrination from the left.

If the problems that confront academe are not political in nature, then what are they? Academe has at least three interrelated problems pertaining to the scope of this text that must be resolved:

1. Undergraduate teaching is undervalued.
2. The social fabric of the academic community has been torn asunder.
3. Research is often irrelevant, and researchers are frequently disengaged from their own communities as well as from society at large.

In general, these problems are not viewed from the personal perspective favored by conservatives. Instead, rationales are offered about how we have arrived at a situation in which senior faculty may never teach a freshman seminar, or faculty of one department at a small liberal arts college may never get to know faculty of another department on the same campus.

Perhaps the chief proponent of the liberal humanist interpretation of academe is Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation. Drawing on the research of Eugene Rice, in *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer does not place blame for the devaluation of undergraduate teaching, but instead he offers a historical analysis of how we have arrived at a system in which research is paramount in academe. He writes:

Research *per se* was not the problem. The problem was that the research mission, which was appropriate for *some* institutions, created a shadow over the entire higher learning enterprise. . . . The emphasis on undergraduate education

. . . was being overshadowed by the European university tradition, with its emphasis on graduate education and research. . . . The focus had moved from the student to the professorate, from general to specialized education, and from loyalty to the campus to loyalty to the profession. (1990, 13)

Such a view largely coincides with analyses by other scholars such as Roger Geiger (1993) and Burton Clark. Clark writes, for example, that “the discipline rather than the institution tends to become the dominant force in the working lives of academics” (1983, 30). If this view is correct, then research—a disciplinary activity—takes precedence over the primarily institutional activities of teaching and service. In fact, research attained greater importance in the United States since the Second World War, and many believe that this has been at the expense of undergraduate teaching. James Fairweather (1993) has recently discussed the results of a national survey that pertains to the faculty reward structure. The results of the survey indicate that in every type of four-year institution, research is more highly rewarded—as defined by financial incentive—than any other activity. Thus, a professor in a public research university or a small private liberal arts college will derive greater rewards for conducting research than teaching undergraduates.

According to liberal humanists, the results are manifold. We have an undergraduate curriculum that is too often assigned to teaching assistants, and faculty devote much more of their time to research than to teaching. Many senior faculty no longer teach undergraduate seminars because they prefer to deal exclusively with graduate students. Moreover, large classes have become commonplace because the faculty would rather spend their time in front of their computers or in their labs than in the classroom.

Similarly, the campus has lost the flavor of being an academic community because the faculty find intellectual “homes” in their disciplines. Telecommunication has made conversation with one’s disciplinary colleagues simple and straightforward, so faculty may now deal with their intellectual comrades rather than their institutional peers. The result is that conversations about the purpose of the institution, or dedication to the work and life of the campus has fallen into disfavor, if not disrepute.

Although one senses that liberal humanists are not unlike conservatives in their yearning for lost community, a key difference is that liberal humanists do not blame “the children of the sixties” for the present state of higher education. Instead, liberal humanists believe the reward structure has created the problem. The implications are clear. If the problem is with personnel, then the solution is to rid the academy of unsatisfactory faculty; if the problem is structural, then the structure itself must be reconfigured.

Boyer's book has been widely discussed in academic circles because he calls for academe to give higher priority to teaching, and to redefine research. "We believe the time has come," he states, "to move beyond the tired old 'teaching versus research' debate and give the familiar and honorable term 'scholarship' a broader, more capacious meaning" (1990, 16). He goes on to define scholarship as spheres of multidimensional excellence in which basic and applied research, integration and synthesis, and teaching are accorded equal importance. As opposed to the simplistic documentation of one's research efforts, Boyer calls for faculty portfolios that show how an individual is involved in each domain of scholarship. He also calls for greater differentiation across institutional types, so that the emphasis of a faculty portfolio in a research university will differ from that of one in a comprehensive institution.

Thus, liberal humanists differ in many ways from conservatives in their analyses and conclusion. All the ills of academe from the curriculum to access cannot be attributed to personnel problems. Indeed, liberal humanists vary in their interpretations of the problem, so that the clarity and simplicity of language that characterize the writings of conservatives is often absent from that of liberal humanists. For example, Boyer talks about the dilemma of teaching versus research, whereas Russell Jacoby emphasizes how academic intellectuals have privatized their language and excluded the public from discussion and debate (1987). Boyer's solution will not solve Jacoby's problem, and vice versa.

At the same time, liberal humanists see the world as defined by structural dilemmas that require creative solutions. Where the conservatives offer quasi-philosophical statements—"reading the classics is what ties civilization together"—liberal humanists offer quasi-practical solutions—"redefine the promotion and tenure system." While the conservatives have garnered most of the attention from the public at large, it is fair to say that the liberal humanists have received the most thoughtful consideration from within the academy.

A Critical Postmodern View of the Academy

In some respects, critical postmodernism is based on assumptions that are akin to the conservative and liberal humanist positions. Like the conservatives, critical postmodernists subscribe to an explicit political ideology, albeit a dramatically different one. Unlike the conservatives, they do not attribute the problem to individual actions and beliefs. Rather, like liberal humanists, critical postmodernists view the problems of academe as structural. They differ from their liberal humanist counterparts, however, by not interpreting

structure simply as technical in nature, but as being rooted in ideology and culture. As critical postmodernism forms the scaffolding for our text, we take pains first to critique the other two approaches and then to delineate how one uses such a construct to analyze the problems and struggles faced by junior faculty.

The liberal humanist analysis of the rise of research and the devaluation of teaching is a point on which virtually all serious scholars of higher education concur. However, the liberal solution is technocratic in nature—change the structure of the way faculty work. From this perspective, organizations exist in ideological vacuums, and if one tinkers with the structure, then change will occur. Logically, approaches such as Total Quality Management (TQM) or a desire for better ways to assess and evaluate different activities have attained prominence.

The foregoing solution ignores the relationship between faculty work and knowledge production. The assumption is that the creation of knowledge is a neutral activity and that individuals discover knowledge in a systematic and objective way. Who discovers knowledge is irrelevant. That an individual is a man, an African American, or a lesbian should make no difference in terms of how one studies a particular area of knowledge. Individual difference is subjugated to communal norms, and common definitions of excellence, effectiveness, or even what qualifies as knowledge are accepted.

Colleges and universities, as institutions, are not placed within a cultural framework where symbols and ideology are in concert with structure. To their credit, liberal humanists have rejected the stark individualism that permeates the conservative critique, but in their search for technical solutions, they seem to have overlooked or ignored the deeper structure in which academe is situated. Instead, the participants in a postsecondary institution conform to specific norms that have accrued over time, and individuals who enter the organization simply must learn those norms. In effect, a standard is set, and successful socialization is defined by the ability of the individual to internalize, accept, and meet that standard.

Conservatives implicitly acknowledge the deeper structures to which we refer, but they do so in a manner that is hardly conducive to thoughtful dialogue. They argue that “leftist” ideas are ideological and therefore tainted, but firmly believe that their own ideas are neither ideological nor tainted. “Revolutionaries” have taken over the academy and replaced a value-neutral curriculum with a “politically correct” one. Where rational dialogue once reigned supreme, the thinking goes, only one line of thought is now allowed.

From a critical postmodern perspective, the problem with such an assertion is that knowledge is constructed. This being the case, it is inevitably related to larger ideological structures, whether on the left or the right. All

knowledge construction is political. All organizations exist in socially created spheres. In essence, liberal humanists avoid the discussion of ideology entirely and assume that problems have technical solutions. Conservatives bemoan the fact that ideology has entered the academy, and assume that if we rid colleges and universities of those who brought it in, then institutions of higher education will return to a level of excellence believed to have been lost within living memory.

Curiously, both standpoints provide similar visions of the academic community as it was in the past. It is remembered with nostalgia, and the wish to return to it is often expressed. To be sure, liberal humanists would like to reconstruct the academic community so that it is populated with a more diverse group of individuals, but the desirability of the community itself is unchallenged. In effect, they want different people brought into the academy, but these individuals need to be assimilated. The academy should serve as a melting pot par excellence, in that individuals will be judged by their ideas and not who they are. As ideas, the rough and tumble of discrimination is avoided.

Both interpretations of academic community stem from the assumption of unity. An academic community is formed around singular notions of what constitutes knowledge, and its members interpret the world from a shared conception of the purposes of higher education. From this perspective, the breakdown of community may be decried or bemoaned, and academic policymakers must strive to regain what we once had. In this notion of the past, students learned what was important, and faculty taught and conducted research on what was equally important.

Rejecting these assumptions, critical postmodernism posits a radically different vision of academic community. For the purpose of this text, we frame the interpretation of academic community from three perspectives: intellectual, existential, and political-strategic. Why we define academic community by way of intellectual, cultural and political perspectives will become clear if we begin by outlining the background of critical theory and postmodernism.

Briefly, we employ critical theory as an analytic tool in our effort to understand the oppressive acts of society; the intent is to develop culturally-based solutions to these problems. Culture neither equates with the technical notion of structure of the liberal humanist, nor does it suggest that solutions exist only through individual action. Instead, critical theorists seek to understand how ideology determines structure. *Ideology* is the set of doctrines through which those in an organization make sense of their own experiences. *Culture* is viewed as the manifold ways in which meaning is enacted; but it is also the terrain on which meaning is defined. We seek to understand how

social groups make sense of their lives and circumstances. Culture is interpretive, the product of the social and ideological relations in which it is inscribed. Culture is neither passed down unproblematically from one generation to the next, nor is it static. Culture is changed as new individuals and groups enter into it, and it is transformed by present contexts and surrounding social life.

The culture of an organization is a contested area in which individuals and groups struggle over the definition of knowledge and what it means to be a knowledgeable individual. As opposed to a static concept that equates culture with the taxonomic parts of an institution, the idea advanced here is that culture is the product of the social relations of the participants within an organization. Ideologies of colleges and universities, then, both reflect and reform the beliefs of the society in which these institutions exist. Culture is a series of contested areas, discourses, and relations of power pertaining to the nature of reality.

From another angle, postmodernists challenge modernist notions of rationality, norms, and identity (Tierney, 1993a). They reject the notion that we can ever understand ultimate Truth through reason; instead, truth is considered ephemeral and subject to multiple, conflicting interpretations. Instead of having the critical theorists' goal of eliminating the oppressive acts of society, postmodernists seek to delineate the multivocal relations of power that exist in order to understand differences. As Henry Giroux notes, "By insisting on the multiplicity of social positions postmodernism has seriously challenged the political closure of modernism with its divisions between the center and the margins and in doing so has made room for those groups generally defined as excluded others" (1988, 166). Postmodernism is thus centrally concerned with decoding the multiple images that occur and brings into question previously unchallenged ideas about language and identity. Rather than assuming that community is good or bad, we investigate its meaning. Instead of operating with the idea that social identity exists as a unified entity, we search for the multiple constructions at work that contribute to the definition of self.

How might we use admittedly abstract theories to deal with life in academe? Luke and Gore answer this question with regard to feminist and critical theories:

Classroom practice is ultimately linked to theories of the subject, the social, learning and teaching. . . . The differences between a [liberal humanist] and constructivist theory of gendered subjectivity has significant implications for the ways pedagogical relations can be conceptualized. In that regard, theoretical choice has important consequences for practice. And what some might call

the more esoteric concerns of poststructuralist feminisms form the very work which has opened up questions of representation, of voice, difference, power, and authorship-authority which are central to the politics of classroom practice. (1990, 193)

We agree; we also suggest that “theories of the subject” and the like have implications for multiple activities in academe and not only for “classroom practice.” How critical postmodernists interpret the struggles that junior faculty face enables us to move beyond simple solutions that either blame individuals or seek to recreate idealized notions of lost communities. Taken together, critical theory and postmodernism imply that to understand the organization, we must come to terms with the multiple interpretations that exist about it. In particular, we need to come to terms with groups who differ from the norm—such as women and faculty of color. If reality is contested and interpreted, then we must understand how different groups define their multiple realities before we develop proposals for change or improvement.

Accordingly, we interviewed individuals in different institutions and from multiple standpoints, not to search for consensus, but rather to come to understand how they interpret their respective worlds. As we shall see, some individuals such as deans or provosts may dismiss such interpretations. “Junior faculty have it tough, and it’s just something they have to get through,” stated one academic administrator in an interview. “We all went through the initiation—you know how it is—and they just need to hold on, figure it out, and they’ll see daylight.” Such remarks reveal an assumption that we are all more or less alike. A conservative would want to know what the neophyte faculty are teaching or writing about to determine whether it is appropriate. A liberal humanist would seek to reorient the structure so that priorities might be reconfigured. Ultimately, however, neither approach encourages respect for differences of individuals and groups nor how differences are structured as negatives by taken-for-granted practices.

From the perspective advanced here, we seek to extend the idea of creating *communities of difference* in academe. In this light the central concept of critical postmodernism is a belief that difference is important, that organized change can occur, and that we must work toward the creation of a community that does not demand the suppression of one’s identity in order to become socialized to abstract norms. We support the development of organizations in which interrelatedness and concern for others is central. A community of difference implies that the community is de-normed. In keeping with the ideas of critical theory, postmodernism, culture, and ideology, we seek to find ways in which struggles might be brought to light and docu-

mented, not simply for the sake of “multivocality,” but so that the community might develop ways to deal with the problems that individuals and groups face in the academy. Rather than assuming that “new recruits” must learn to deal with their situations, we consider how the organizational culture might be changed. Unified, consensual notions of reality are rejected in favor of communities in which it is understood that different individuals and groups will always have competing concepts of reality. The challenge, of course, is to find ways to accommodate diversity and to create a climate for organizational change. In what follows, we utilize a schema offered by Cornel West that defines these challenges as intellectual, existential, and political or strategic. Through an elaboration of these points, we shall explain how they will be used in analyzing the data for the text.

The Intellectual Perspective

West has suggested that one of the key concerns in the late twentieth century “is how to think about representational practices in terms of history, culture, and society. How does one understand, analyze and enact such practices today?” (1990, 94). West’s question serves as the key for this perspective and how we shall go about interpreting the data of this text. In effect, the intellectual challenge for this text is to frame our analysis so that we present the responses of the interviewees in terms of the cultural politics of difference. From this perspective, we hear divergent representations of reality as neither mistaken nor misguided, but as plausible interpretations of organizational life.

To accomplish this, it is necessary for us to locate our analysis both historically and contextually. As explained in chapter 2, to speak of promotion and tenure today is to conceive of a system that is fundamentally different from what individuals thought of as promotion and tenure at the turn of the century. Similarly, when speaking of the process today, the description varies from campus to campus. In effect, the struggle is to examine and explain the historically specific category of tenure in order to demystify and change the system to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. “Demystification tries to keep track of the complex dynamics of institutional and other related power structures,” notes West, “in order to disclose options and alternatives for transformative praxis. The central role of human agency (always enacted under circumstances not of one’s choosing) . . . is accented” (1990, 105). Thus, what it means to be a junior faculty member changes from generation to generation, from situation to situation. It is not enough simply to alter structures in which such individuals find themselves, but instead they must be enabled to take control of the power structures and

change them. An institution is viewed in similar fashion. We regard an academic entity not simply as a repository of neutral knowledge, nor as an organization removed from society, but as an ideologically charged site at which individuals are involved in (re)creating meaning for themselves and society. One of the keys to understanding the meanings is the system of promotion and tenure, and the socializing processes involved in tenure and promotion decisions.

The Existential Perspective

This area deals with an analysis of the “cultural capital” needed to survive in academe. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) coined the term cultural capital to refer to the sets of linguistic and cultural competencies individuals inherit because of their class, race, and gender. Again, the point is not to suggest simplistically that those who do not have specific “competencies” ought to be equipped, for such a suggestion is inevitably doomed to failure. If we do not investigate the systems in which cultural capital is defined, then we shall be forever attempting to acculturate individuals to the mainstream rather than trying to change the system itself.

The consequences of acculturation for the individual are well known. The myth that only the “best” survive ensures that only those who conform to the norm will succeed. Individual identity is homogenized. Yet the consequences for the organizations, and particularly for educational institutions, are equally harmful. The denial of difference does not allow members of the academy, and especially students, to appreciate the diversity that exists in society now and has existed in it forever.

Such an existential dilemma has offered individuals who differ from the norm three alternatives. First, individuals can adapt, but at what cost? They may be able to navigate the promotion and tenure process, but in doing so, they all too often subjugate their own identities in order to attain success.

A second possibility is to opt out. Some individuals will not become involved in academe if the organization demands particular credentials of cultural capital. Although this is a viable option, it moves society no closer to multicultural understanding, and colleges and universities will remain islands of ethnocentricity. If this is the case, how can these institutions purport to educate the citizenry for life in the twenty-first century, when the world will be increasingly multicultural? The technological and communication transformations that we are currently experiencing will no longer allow ethnocentric isolation. If this is true, how is it possible for postsecondary organizations to remain insular and Eurocentric?

The third option is what we will promote here. Individuals and groups

will retain their identities and come together in communities of difference. Dialogue will revolve around disagreement, and consensus will not be sought. The old idea of the unity of community will be abandoned in favor of academic communities that cultivate critical sensibilities and personal accountability without inhibiting individual expression (West 1990, 108).

The Strategic Perspective

We have built in this text the idea that solutions and decisions are always ideological, always philosophical. One shortcoming, however, of many proponents of critical or postmodern theories is that they critique what exists but do not propose solutions. We contend that academic institutions must take into account the intellectual and existential challenges that they face, but they then must address these challenges in the language and action of strategy.

The creation and sustenance of viable academic institutions require thoughtful reflection and action; one without the other is insufficient. The aim is consciously to redefine what we mean by terms such as “academic freedom,” “tenure,” “promotion,” “socialization,” “difference,” and “community.” In the economically difficult times academe has experienced in the late twentieth century, the status quo will no longer hold. For too long we have tried to effect marginal rather than fundamental change. What we propose here is a sense of possibility and potential. As in the scenario at the beginning of this chapter, the interpretation of hard-hitting reports as “bad news” that should be buried rather than acted upon is an act of strategic cowardice, not strategic vision. To continue in established patterns of behavior is not strategic because doing so will not upset the academic apple cart nor bring into question the norms with which institutions have been functioning.

But the intellectual leadership called for here requires academic *bricoleurs* who reject endless rounds of meetings, task forces, and committees that result in minuscule changes around the academic fringes yet do nothing to promote a community of difference within their institutions. We seek a more protean leadership that will bring into question who is silenced and voiceless in academe, and how we might create more democratic structures.

To call for such leadership does not mean that administrators or faculty ought to be transformed into knights errant involved in tasks worthy of an El Cid. To the contrary, the purpose of the strategic challenge is to delineate in concrete terms what critical postmodernism means for a specific institution. Accordingly, individuals need to come to terms with the history and context of ideas such as promotion and tenure, a discussion of which will be pro-

vided in the next chapter. At the same time, we do not mean to imply that simplistic recipes can be created for administrative cooks who want to solve the problems of junior faculty. The purpose of all three perspectives—intellectual, existential and political—is that each component is necessary to build a community of difference.