The Changing Role of Universities in Society: Harnessing Public Engagement and Protecting Academic Freedom

Increasingly in the twenty-first century, American colleges and universities are being asked to be "engaged with the public," to link their core functions—teaching and research/creative activities—with the needs of their surrounding communities, states, and regions. Much of this sort of public engagement is seen as good for both higher education and the larger world. Historically, the imperative to engage the world beyond the "ivory tower" was begun and championed, at least in part, by faculty themselves, particularly by those in the emerging and cutting edge academic fields of the 1970s such as environmental studies and women's studies. More recently, students have also become part of the academy's engagement with the wider world, often via course based service-learning projects and credit-earning internships with community organizations, government agencies, and NGOs (perhaps to counter students' desire for a "relevant" or employment-ready university education).

More negatively, however, universities have also increasingly engaged the public by entering into collaborations with corporations and other private entities that have less obvious relevance to the general academic goals of higher education. Even more problematic, in some cases the above types of organizations have specific profit motives that are in direct conflict with the academic missions of academic institutions. Moreover, tempted by the vast economic resources such organizations can often provide, some colleges and universities have accepted large financial gifts that have been awarded under conditions that appear to be quid pro quo exchanges for changes in the content of curriculums and/or the research projects of faculty.

The 2010 NC-AAUP annual conference will explore this complex matter of "public engagement" by colleges and universities. Among the questions we will examine: how can the relevance of sometimes apparently esoteric faculty research be demonstrated to government and the public; what are the challenges to tenure and intrusions by non-academic bodies into university academic and personnel decision making; how does the pressure to acquire external funding in the face of steadily declining state support for higher
education change the role of the faculty; and does a similar pressure on faculty to pursue "applied" research with easily measurable economic benefits compromise the faculty's freedom to search for truth and contribute to knowledge through whatever avenues their expertise dictates? In general, our task will be to consider how the imperative to "engage" has led to fundamental questions about the way we define and measure the academy's value to society, and also how such values are being used as tools to re-distribute resources both within and from outside colleges and universities. More simply this statewide meeting of the North Carolina American Association of University Professors will explore the impact that the emphasis on engagement can have on academic freedom, tenure, and our very understandings of higher education's contribution to the common good.

**Keynote Speaker -- Prof. John Michael** (University of Rochester)

"Intellectuals and Hope, or the Problem of Engagement"

This talk will explore the problems attending the engagement of intellectuals in democratic politics when the traditional grounds for that engagement--identity, class, and the grand narratives of history--are all increasingly subject to critical interrogation by intellectuals, themselves. Friday, April 16 at 7:00 pm., The Broyhill Room. Reception with appetizers and cash bar following lecture in The Broyhill Inn's Alumni Hall.

John Michael is Professor of English and Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester. His research interests include contemporary relations between academic intellectuals and popular politics, the problematics of national identity in American literary romances and films, and the complex interrelations between the interpretation of literature and the reading of history. His recent books include *Anxious Intellects: Academic Professionals, Public Intellectuals, and Enlightenment Values* (Duke University Press, 2000) and *Identity and the Failure of America from Thomas Jefferson to the War on Terror* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

**MEETING SCHEDULE** (Word document) *All events take place at the Broyhill Inn*

**Friday:** 7:00-8:00pm *Keynote speech: "Intellectuals and Hope, or the Problem of Engagement," by Prof. John Michael Broyhill Room*
8:00-10:00pm Reception with hors d'oeuvres and cash bar Alumni Hall

**Saturday:** 8:00-9:00 am Breakfast, coffee, check-in, and on-site registration. Northwestern Room/Patio

9:00-11:00am Thematic Panel Discussion on Engagement Northwestern Room/Patio

**Panelists:** Beth Velde, Director of Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy and Professor & Assistant Dean of the College of Allied Health Sciences, Eastern Carolina University

Todd Cherry, Professor of Economics at Appalachian State University and Director of the Center for Economic Research and Policy Analysis

Patrick Cronin, Institute for Emerging Issues at NC State University

John Michael, Professor of English and Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester and Friday's Keynote Speaker

**Presider:** Martha McCaughey, Professor of Sociology at Appalachian State University and NC-AAUP President

11:00-12:00 Lunch (provided for all registrants and invited speakers) Main Dining Room

12:00-1:15 The Budget Crisis: Its Impact on Public and Private Colleges and Universities Northwestern Room/Patio

**Panelists:** Cat Warren, Associate Professor, English, North Carolina State University

Cheryl Brown, Professor of Sociology at Greensboro College

Gary Jones, Assoc. Prof., Business Administration and Law, Western Carolina University

1:15-1:30 Break

1:30-2:30pm NC-AAUP Business Meeting Northwestern Room/Patio

2:30-3:30 NC-AAUP Executive Committee Meeting Northwestern Room/Patio