



(<https://www.insidehighered.com>)

Union Hypocrisy?

Submitted by Scott Jaschik on October 6, 2010 - 3:00am

When Bristol Community College in March [announced a partnership](#) ^[1] with the for-profit Penn Foster Group to expand programs in the health professions -- at much higher tuition rates -- the faculty union (affiliated with the National Education Association) objected. When the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [announced a deal](#) ^[2] (since revoked) with Kaplan University to offer online courses to some community college students, the national head of NEA's higher education unit criticized the idea. In both cases, the arrangements were unpopular with many faculty members in the NEA, who don't like for-profit institutions philosophically and who question why public colleges should be teaming up with a sector of higher education that generally doesn't offer tenure.

On Tuesday, the educational institution announcing a deal with the for-profit sector was the NEA itself. The union announced that it was designating three universities for a new program in which NEA members can earn online master's degrees at tuition discounts: the University of Massachusetts Online, Western Governors University, and Walden University. The NEA said that the three were selected from among 110 institutions that expressed interest in participating.

The inclusion of Walden, a for-profit institution, has the NEA's higher ed leaders concerned not because of anything related to the program's quality, but because they have taken such a firm stance against collaboration with the for-profit sector.

"We have been opposed to for-profits for years," said James Rice, president of the NEA's National Council for Higher Education and a professor at Quinsigamond Community College. "This is certainly uncomfortable. A lot of my members are not going to be happy."

Barbara Frank, a senior policy analyst at the NEA Academy, the unit that signed up the three institutions for the new program, said that the decisions were based on "program content and quality" and not on whether those submitting proposals for the program were for-profit or nonprofit. She said that she had hoped that more public universities would be finalists for the selection process, but that many were "just challenged" at this time to offer the kinds of discounts that the NEA wanted to offer its members.

Frank said that the NEA's higher education division "participated in" the planning for the new program, but that "we didn't ask for its endorsement one way or another."

Asked if there might be contradictions in the NEA criticizing nonprofit colleges that collaborate with for-profit colleges, but then doing so itself, she said she could not speak to "political issues" and stressed that she believed Walden's programs (and those of the others selected) were of high quality.

Rice said it was true that the higher education division of the NEA had been involved in the selection process, but he said that was early on. "There were enough public sector institutions that we felt there would be an opportunity for all of the final choices to be in the public sector," he said. Rice said that the higher education division was not consulted about the final selections.

"We would have opposed it. We are very uncomfortable and we are going to be hearing about this from our members," he said.

Source URL: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/10/06/nea?width=775&height=500&iframe=true>

Links:

[1] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/03/23/bristol>

[2] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/05/26/kaplan>

undefined

undefined