

which groups of workers meet for an hour or so each week to try to solve work-related problems).

While most of the 5,987 firms—58 percent—had not adopted even one of the alternative practices, and 21 percent had implemented only one, the picture changed dramatically when firm size was taken into account, note Gittleman, a BLS economist, and his colleagues. Nearly 70 percent of establishments with 50 or more employees had embraced at least one of the new

approaches. Though some analysts have argued that small businesses, being less bureaucratic, are more likely to experiment, the larger firms seem more inclined to make strides toward the “flexible” workplace. Yet the authors are also struck by the finding that no single “best practice” was embraced by a large number of firms. It could be that many techniques work only in certain kinds of settings, or that firms are still feeling their way—or that the techniques actually yield only modest results.

Galbraithian Economics

In *The Nation* (Oct. 26, 1998), Richard Parker, an economist at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, pays tribute to the unconventional wisdom of famed Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith, who recently turned 90.

In the fifties and sixties, all too many of his colleagues thought they’d found a Rosetta stone in an abstruse combination of econometrics, game theory, advanced regression analysis and computer forecasting that would unlock the market’s secrets and thereby tame its nasty cyclical fluctuations and tendencies toward maldistribution. These mid-century economists convinced themselves that because economic “laws” bore irrefutable kinship to the laws of nature, economics itself could now become the physics of the social sciences. Galbraith knew better. He understood even then that economics—far from replicating a physics that ultimately describes forces indifferent to our existence—was instead a strikingly malleable story for describing (and, not least, shaping) our social and political relations and aspirations—the ultimate achievements of human consciousness. . . .

For an age seemingly desperate to convince its inhabitants that abstractions labeled The Global Economy and The Information Age are novel, universal and implacable forces that brook no resistance, that democratic states and their citizens are subordinate (or even irrelevant) to them and that resistance is folly, Galbraith offers a durable reminder: “It is inconceivable that the public could be universally exploited without being aware of it. . . . The first step in reform, it follows, is to win emancipation of belief.”

SOCIETY

On the Academic Mind

A Survey of Recent Articles

Sex, sex, sex. The academy seems even more obsessed with it than Hollywood or Washington. *Academe* (Sept.–Oct. 1998), the normally staid magazine of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), devotes an entire issue to the subject, under the title “Consenting Adults? Sex and the Academy.”

Robert Corber, who teaches American studies and lesbian and gay studies at Trinity College, in Hartford, Connecticut, boasts that lesbian and gay scholars “have moved sexuality from the margins of the curriculum closer to the center. Building on French philosopher Michel Foucault’s groundbreaking work on the history of sexuality, these

scholars have shown that the construction of homosexuality and heterosexuality as binary opposites is at the very core of modern societies.”

The construction is so flimsy, according to adherents of “queer theory,” as to call into question the adequacy of the very terms *lesbian* and *gay*. Sexuality, in the queer theorists’ view, cannot be contained “within the fixed boundaries of a stable identity,” Corber explains, and the idea that people are either homosexual or heterosexual fails to take into account “sexualities and identities, such as sadomasochism, transvestism, and bisexuality.”

Yet even while the field is thriving, asserts Jill Dolan, executive director of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the City University of New York, gay and lesbian teachers “remain second-class citizens of the university,” who are “still subject to workplace discrimination, hate crimes, and college and university practices that favor heterosexuality despite the best intentions of even the most liberal institutions.” A case in point: the storm of criticism that followed a 1997 conference at the State University of New York at New Paltz, which featured workshops on sadomasochism and “Sex Toys for Women.” Last June, the AAUP bestowed the Alexander Meiklejohn Award for academic freedom on New Paltz president Roger W. Bowen for his forceful defense of the conference as a matter of free expression. (The citation and Bowen’s comments are reprinted in the magazine.)

Also at issue on campus, according to *Academe*, is the vexing question of whether professors should be able to bed their stu-

dents. The traditional answer—*No!*—“has long been violated, and the violations, except for occasional scandals, have long been tolerated,” writes Ann J. Lane, a historian and director of the women’s studies program at the University of Virginia. Most often, the professors involved are older, male, married—and figures of authority. Their (usually female) student lovers often “suffer,” Lane says. “Some collapse emotionally, and even attempt suicide. Others change their majors or graduate schools, or drop out permanently.” Though the young women ostensibly are consenting adults, the reality, Lane says, is that most “are not yet fully adult.”

She favors putting such relationships completely off limits. “Sexual relations between a teacher and a student are more than private conduct; they affect the community the professor and student share with other students and teachers. . . . Becoming the lover of a student constitutes an abuse of power and a betrayal of trust.”

But Kal Alston, a professor of education and women’s studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, insists that the university should not intrude. It should not be assumed that a student is not a full adult, she says, and it is up to individual teachers to decide “what it means for them to be a ‘good’ teacher and an ethical person.”

“Most teachers recognize their influence over students and are careful not to misuse it,” Ann Lane observes. But the others exist, and they are not always aware of the harm they may be doing to the students. The teaching profession, she suggests, may well be in need today of an academic Hippocratic oath.

The New Medievalists

“Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies” by Paul Freedman and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, in *The American Historical Review* (June 1998), 914
Atwater, Indiana Univ., Bloomington, Ind. 47405.

Continuing its long march through academe, postmodernist thinking has now reached even into the field of medieval studies. There it is upending American scholars’ long-cherished conviction that the Middle Ages provided the seed bed of the modern, progressive West. In its place, report historians Freedman, of Yale University, and Spiegel, of Johns Hopkins University, has

come a new, postmodernist Middle Ages, which is—depending on one’s tour guide—either utterly strange and different from the modern world or a repellently familiar harbinger of the evil modern West, full of persecution and repression.

The now-passé idea that the modern, progressive state had its origins in the feudal monarchies of 12th- and 13th-century