letters

Jobs in less select academia

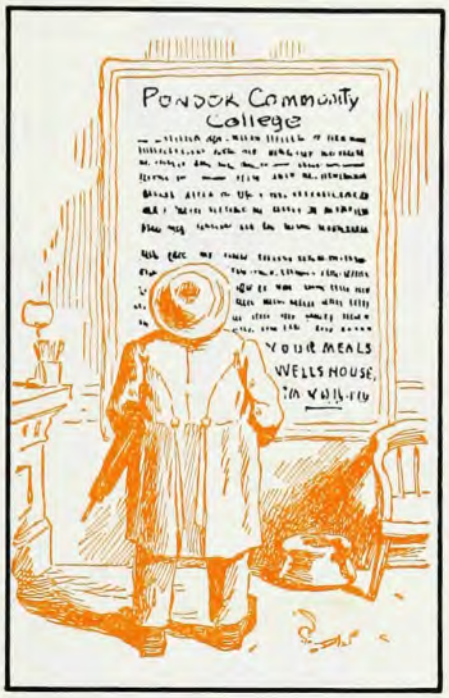
"Six Months Among the Cannibals" by David Bowen (July, page 9) describes how to find a teaching position in an average-to-select four-year college or university. The less select four-year colleges and the two-year colleges, having programs designed for their students, contribute substantially to the skills of our labor force and the enlightenment of our citizens. From my experience I should like to describe these latter institutions for physicists considering employment in them.

These institutions have no "advancement of science" research and little science teaching for advanced students. They mainly need effective teaching at the introductory college level or the high-school level. Some programs at two-year colleges do not require high-school graduation for admission. To meet these needs it is better to hire a good high-school science teacher than a PhD scientist who is a poor introductory teacher.

Most four-year colleges prefer PhD's because of accreditation. Any four-year college now advertising a faculty vacancy will receive tens if not hundreds of applications from PhD's. Under these conditions few people with master's degrees bother to apply. Four-year colleges sometimes offer a faculty appointment to a local high-school teacher with a master's degree and an outstanding reputation. In such cases the college usually approaches the teacher; the teacher does not apply.

Some two-year colleges prefer applicants with master's degrees. Master's salaries are lower. Even if a person with a doctor's degree is willing to work for a master's salary, regulations may forbid such an arrangement. Some administrators at two-year colleges have never themselves been students in a class taught by a PhD scientist.

The most eminent US universities never advertise faculty vacancies; some two-year colleges advertise faculty vacancies in local newspapers. Few faculty vacancies at two-year colleges are listed with the American Institute of Physics—most people who hire faculty for two-year colleges have never heard of the AIP. Some institutions list their vacancies with private agencies. The private agency may charge



the successful applicant 5% of his first year's salary; if you use such an agency, you should still write an individual letter for each vacancy, as Bowen recommends.

The less-select institutions have a pleasantly informal atmosphere but in some ways less "faculty democracy." At some faculty meetings the faculty listen; they may ask questions but they do not vote. Sometimes present faculty members help select a new faculty member. Sometimes faculty candidates are evaluated entirely by the administration.

Operating revenues are closely tied to enrollment in the institutions I am describing. The ability of a faculty member to attract, retain and please students is vital. An administrator struggling with an operating budget studies enrollment data more often than course content.

As Bowen implies, underemployment is no disgrace when many well qualified scientists are underemployed. Underemployment does not necessarily give one job security. That a person is overqualified is an excuse not only for refusing to hire but also for firing. Some faculty in two-year colleges are employed month-to-month and subject to dismissal on short notice. Some defend such arrangements as likely to improve teaching. In my opinion, hasty hiring tends to follow hasty firing.

RICHARD W. COLE
Piedmont Technical Institute
Roxboro, NC

In defense of tenure

The national economic situation has greatly affected all physicists; those in industry have faced transfer and termination, those in academia have faced salary stagnation, work-load increases, and faculty cutbacks. In his letter William Doyle (October, page 13) rightly points out that among the most seriously hurt is the older industrial physicist. He expatiates on this fact to arrive at the conclusion that, because of their efforts to maintain the rate of production of physicists, responsibility for the industrial physicists' plight belongs to "those who enjoy tenure."

In view of the complex set of circumstances and events surrounding the technologic and economic state this conclusion might best be described as simplistic. The problem, however, is real. Of greater concern than Doyle's conclusion is the general acceptance of the postulates on which it is based and which impose unnecessary limitations on the solutions sought. He states that "Industry does not operate on a tenure system," and that to expect it to do so is "impracticable." I would comment that the successful initiation of technical or engineering unions in several places holds promise of developing seniority as a substitute for tenure. In this regard it is also worth noting the appearance of faculty unions, perhaps in recognition of the inadequacies of the tenure system alone in these times.

I don't mean to imply that unionism is *the* right solution for physicists either in industry or in academia. Considerable attention has been paid to various avenues by which a professional body can protect itself from arbitrary forces while not harming its status or adversely affecting the structures in which it functions.[1] However, as many existing professional societies are either incapable or disinclined or