FIGURE 1
Percentage Change in the Number of Employees in Higher Education Institutions, by Category of Employee, 1975 and 1976 to 2011

Note: Percentage growth is from 1975 for full-time faculty members and from 1976 for all other categories. In 1976, graduate student employees included both full- and part-time employees; in 2011 all graduate student employees were defined as part-time employees.


Do we need more administrators? Faculty members have long viewed the growth in the number and salaries of college and university administrators with a strong sense of suspicion. The AAUP devoted an entire issue of Academe to the topic of “Administrative Bloat” more than twenty years ago (November-December 1991). The author of the lead article was Barbara R. Bergmann, distinguished professor of economics at American University and then president of the AAUP. She described the situation with a flourish:

Undetected, unprotested, and unchecked, the excessive growth of administrative expenditures has done a lot of damage to life and learning on our campuses. On each campus that suffers from this disease, and most apparently do, millions of dollars have been swallowed up. Huge amounts have been devoted to funding administrative positions that a few years ago would have been thought unnecessary.

If it were just a matter of the money wasted, that would be bad enough. But the bloating of college administrations over the past decades has made administrative performance worse rather than better. It has bogged us down in reels of time-consuming and despair-creating red tape. It has fostered delusions of grandeur among some of the administrative higher-ups, whose egos have grown along with the size of the staffs under their supervision.

Two decades later, how has the situation changed?