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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CCCS encourages adjunct faculty to apply for state unemployment benefits and \$300/week PUA

In a breakthrough policy change, Colorado Community College System (CCCS) Chancellor Joe Garcia has announced that the statewide, 13-college system will not contest unemployment claims filed by adjunct faculty for the six-week winter break 2020-21. The announcement is welcome news to the System's 4,600 faculty, whose wages are below-poverty-level.

In addition to the weekly State of Colorado unemployment benefit, qualifying applicants might also be in line to receive the \$300/week federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). The \$300/week payment to unemployed workers is part of the nearly \$1 trillion federal Covid-19 relief bill. That bill extends the PUA unemployment boost for 11 weeks.

Garcia announced the decision last week via his letter to a group of executive committee members from the Colorado Conference of the Association of University Professors (AAUP). The AAUP group has been meeting with Garcia and other CCCS vice chancellors since July 2019 over an AAUP proposal to address CCCS adjunct faculty working conditions. In their most recent meeting, the group asked Garcia for the policy change, since state employment of adjunct faculty as W-2 workers meant that, legally, they would be laid off as soon as the Fall 2020 semester ended. Notably, earlier this year CCCS did not contest partial unemployment claims for CCCS adjunct faculty who had lost one or more classes the Summer and Fall 2020 semesters due to declining enrollment related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This gave the adjunct faculty, especially, some breathing room so they could concentrate on making the massively demanding

move to teach their courses online. Additionally, the CCCS offered paid, professional development courses to help the adjunct faculty make the move to teaching online.

In his announcement, Garcia said he was making the change to thank “all instructors for their extraordinary efforts throughout the Fall semester to continue to teach and support students, despite the many challenges posed by COVID-19.”

“We applaud CCCS President Joe Garcia’s continued support for adjunct unemployment benefits knowing, however, that current levels of support are still insufficient and may not meet the needs of many adjunct instructors in this difficult holiday season,” said AAUP Colo. Conf. Co-President Stephen Mumme. “We strongly encourage eligible instructors to be undeterred by the red-tape reporting requirements and apply for this assistance.”

Adjunct faculty who apply for unemployment benefits need to be aware that the green light from CCCS does not automatically guarantee unemployment benefits to every applicant. The Colo. Dept. of Labor and Employment (CDLE) applies a standard formula for calculating benefits, taking into consideration past pay periods, other employment outside the CCCS, yearly caps on benefits, and other factors. The only way to determine whether an adjunct faculty member qualifies for the benefit is for him/her to follow each of the steps through the easy-to-follow, CDLE online, step-by-step application process.

Officials at the CDLE have streamlined the application process and have made significant, helpful changes to their website. Applicants should schedule about an hour of time to complete the form. Some tips for CCCS adjunct faculty applicants include the following:

- List as the first day of unemployment the day after classes ended for the semester.
- List the department chair as the person who notifies layoff, even though most adjunct faculty receive no such notice, but instead, a receive a promise of a class or classes in the next semester.
- Check “non-attached” and, if required, indicate no “reasonable assurance” of future employment in the CCCS, in spite of e-mails adjunct faculty may have received from department chairs about classes for the Spring 2021 Semester.
- Follow the CDLE guidelines for unemployment-related job searches and Workforce Center registration, if instructed to do so.
- File a periodic “Request for Payment” as instructed by the CDLE.

- Use the “Virtual Assistant” button at the lower-right-hand corner of the screen for assistance as needed.
- Post-date the start of unemployment to the day after the semester ended; CDLE calculates benefits predicated on that date (not the last paycheck date or the date grades were due).

The change in CCCS policy regarding unemployment benefits for adjunct faculty and the updated application process created by the CDLE reflect a widening recognition of an American workforce now populated with gig workers of all stripes, among them higher education’s army of adjunct/contingent/lecturer/part-time faculty. The most recent AAUP study of the nation’s faculty revealed that 70% of all American college teachers are working off the tenure track (part-time). Most of them work at low wages and without health care benefits. CCCS adjunct faculty teach nearly 80 percent of the classes the CCCS offers annually, and their average salary is less than \$25K/year.

Chancellor Garcia added in his letter to the AAUP group that he remains open “further conversations regarding compensation and working conditions for the system’s many outstanding contract instructors.”

To file a claim, visit the CDLE Unemployment page and follow the steps:

<https://cdle.colorado.gov/unemployment>

To join the AAUP Chapters of the CCCS, contact Caprice Lawless, AAUP Colo. Conf. Co-President: coloradocaprice@gmail.com

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