

## MYTHS AND FACTS ON HIGHER ED COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

**Myth: Collective bargaining for higher education employees means raising tuition.**

**FACT: Research across several states shows no correlation between collective bargaining and tuition rates,** and it is in place at colleges and universities with both low and high tuition.<sup>1</sup> A comparison between tuition costs for two-year colleges and tuition costs for four-year colleges shows very little difference when adjusted for cost of living between collective bargaining states and non-collective bargaining states. If collective bargaining made a difference in tuition rates, you'd expect a pattern of higher student debt in states with higher education unions. But in fact, states with high student debt include states with widespread collective bargaining rights (like New York and Minnesota) and states with no collective bargaining in higher education (like South Carolina, South Dakota and Mississippi). Evidence suggests that unions, through their advocacy on behalf of students, help constrain tuition cost growth. Between 2008 and 2021, tuition costs at two-year colleges rose by 60 percent in non-collective bargaining states, versus 31 percent in states where staff have a right to collectively bargain. For four-year colleges, tuition costs grew by 64 percent for non-collective bargaining states versus 31 percent for collective bargaining states.<sup>2</sup>

**Myth: State colleges and universities have tight, fixed budgets. They can't afford the better pay and benefits workers would push for through collective bargaining.**

**FACT: Colleges and universities make spending trade-offs all the time and still meet their budget.**

Just like household budgets, higher education budgets are about priorities—and they're much more fluid than the institutions often portray. In fact, colleges and universities are already familiar with budget trade-offs, because in most states, funding for higher education fluctuates year to year. Research shows that meeting budgets is less about variations in state funding and more about colleges and universities putting money where it matters, while still staying within their budgets.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, many issues that employees bring to the negotiating table are non-economic such as workplace rights, and also the teaching, learning, and living conditions for students and faculty.

**Myth: Collective bargaining costs money for handling bargaining, negotiations, and grievances.**

**FACT: Collective bargaining can help save money—and the process doesn't take an MBA.**

Collective bargaining doesn't have to be time-intensive or costly. It only gets costly when management hires pricey anti-union consultants (who often report being paid \$350-plus hourly rates or \$2,500-plus daily rates).<sup>4</sup>

If administrators really want to save money, they should pledge neutrality and voluntarily recognize bargaining units. What's more, specialized staff are not necessary to have a working collective bargaining system. Collective bargaining can help institutions operate more efficiently—for example, negotiating a clear process for class assignments, or implementing streamlined grievance procedures to resolve problems. Unions have shown they can also help colleges spend more wisely, whether working with management to save money in healthcare benefits,<sup>5</sup> or urging caution before administrators spend money on outside contractors.<sup>6</sup>

**Myth: Collective bargaining will mean higher pay for adjuncts.**

**FACT: This one will be true, we hope! Many adjuncts in Colorado live at the poverty level.**

Adjuncts teach a substantial percent of classes in Colorado colleges and universities—in fact, they account for 78 percent of instructors at the 13 colleges in the Colorado Community College System.<sup>7</sup> In Colorado, adjunct pay and working conditions are particularly dire in the community college system. The system's reported salary figures show adjuncts on average are paid less than half what full-time instructors receive— \$20,828 on average in salaries for adjuncts and \$53,693 on average for full-time instructors—for teaching the same class loads.<sup>8</sup> Colorado's cost of living is significantly higher than the national average.<sup>9</sup> Living in the state on \$20,000 or \$25,000 a year is nearly impossible. What's more, most Colorado adjuncts work without benefits, sick leave or job security. Many rely on food banks. Higher pay will attract and keep high-quality adjuncts and high-quality instruction for Colorado students.

**Myth: Collective bargaining will take money out of the classroom.**

**FACT: Many Colorado community colleges are spending less than the national average on instruction,** per the National Center for Education Statistics. Analyses of how much of each tuition dollar goes to classroom instruction show many institutions in Colorado have a long way to go. A few examples: Colorado Mesa University spends 62 cents; Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, spends 65 cents; Metro State spends 83 cents; and the University of Colorado Boulder spends 87 cents.<sup>10</sup>

**Myth: Collective bargaining isn't needed in public colleges and universities.**

**FACT: Collective bargaining is especially beneficial in public colleges and universities: It creates good jobs, advocates for students and communities, and is helping to close race and class pay gaps.**

Thirty-one states, including Florida, New Mexico, New York, Oregon and Rhode Island, have embraced unions for higher education faculty and staff. These unions have made a difference not only for their members but also for the students and communities their members serve—advocating to reduce student debt, improve higher education funding, promote better health and safety on campus, and achieve greater diversity and human rights within the campus community.

**Myth: Colorado college and university administrations already work with their employees through different boards, commissions and partnerships, so employees don't need unions.**

**FACT: Administrations come and go. Faculty and staff need a guaranteed voice and seat at the table.**

We applaud Colorado education leaders who work with faculty and staff through the creation of boards and commissions, but they are mostly consultative in nature and are no substitute for a legally recognized union with the right to collectively bargain. Faculty and staff need a guaranteed voice and the power to negotiate the teaching conditions and the learning environment that are best for them and their students, and to help shape a long-term vision for our colleges and universities where all students can thrive and succeed.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1314&context=jcba>

<sup>2</sup> This is based on analysis of 2020 data compiled by the College Board on average published tuition and fees at public institutions for the 50 states and Washington D.C. The College Board data was adjusted to reflect differences among the states in the cost of living using data from the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.urban.org/research/publication/tuition-and-state-appropriations/view/full\\_report](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/tuition-and-state-appropriations/view/full_report)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.epi.org/publication/unlawful-employer-opposition-to-union-election-campaigns>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.propublica.org/article/in-montana-a-tough-negotiator-proved-employers-do-not-have-to-pay-so-much-for-health-care>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/10/11/rutgers-u-graduate-school-faculty-vote-block-pearson-partnership>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2015/03/13/colo-colleges-lean-low-paid-ajuncts/70286334/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2015/03/13/colo-colleges-lean-low-paid-ajuncts/70286334/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://meric.mo.gov/data/cost-living-data-series>

<sup>10</sup> <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/how-far-does-your-tuition-dollar-go/?agreed=1>