

The health of our prized Maryland institutions of higher learning are at an inflection point. Due to declining enrollment, budgetary constraints, an increasingly hostile political climate, and a host of other external factors, we have a once-in-a-lifetime choice to protect and enhance the education of future generations of Marylanders, or to allow it to be methodically diluted and undermined by voices who place student learning as an inconvenient afterthought to motives of profit and “efficiency.” Therefore, it is essential that this bill be passed out of committee, through both houses, and signed into law. Allowing 4-year faculty the ability to collectively bargain gives those who are most closely involved with student learning a powerful voice in educational decisions. Faculty knows what students need through our interaction with our students. Administrators at two, three, and four layers remove from students (who are currently making essential decisions on compensation, staffing, working climate, etc.) are consistently demonstrating that they lack the perspective to consider student experience and student concerns, choosing instead to embrace for-profit, systemic models that employ jargon and the brutal efficiency of the decimal point without considering what is best for students.

Collective bargaining by 4-year faculty is essential for three reasons, at least. First, it mentioned above, it decentralizes decision-making power, so that much of it resides at the level closest to college students. As citizens of a federal system, this model is the most truly American model of government, and it should be embraced by legislators from all ideological backgrounds. This is similar to what Roman Catholic social teaching calls the “principle of subsidiarity,” which is that we only do for others what they cannot do for themselves. By giving a meaningful voice to faculty, it amplifies the student voice, allows faculty to exercise their expertise, and makes decision-making truly collegial.

Second, it is often stated that—since faculty have so-called “shared governance”—collective bargaining rights are not necessary. This is simply not true. These two concepts are complementary, not interchangeable. “Shared governance” only works when both sides abide by the collegial decisions. In the current model, there is no mechanism to ensure that university administration abides by the policies and decisions it agrees to. Collective bargaining rights would create truly shared governance, as decisions would be enforceable. In other words, collective bargaining rights are a measure of accountability for both administration and faculty. In an age where “accountability” is the watchword, it is essential that it become a reality for all parties involved.

Finally, collective bargaining is a method of fiscal responsibility. We know that when a small group of people gain absolute power and lack transparency, decisions almost always become arbitrary and wasteful of resources. Collective bargaining puts a check on the virtually unlimited power of the university administration to spend tax dollars by ensuring that they must consult with other stakeholders in a binding—rather than an advisory—way.

As Marylanders, we are justifiably proud of our 4-year public colleges and universities. It is past time to give faculty the right to collectively bargain, so that we can provide an American, accountable, fiscally responsible trajectory for the future.

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