The Union Difference

The data is clear: Full-time faculty are paid best when they have collectively bargained contracts.¹

And that’s not all — the presence of unions also is related to the closure of pay gaps between men and women and across racial groups, and protection from gender- and race-based discrimination.² For example, unionized institutions are more likely to have larger shares of female faculty in full professor positions.³ Additional research also shows that unions benefit individuals’ health and relationships, provide protection against poverty-inducing events, and decrease the risk of political and socioeconomic disenfranchisement.⁴,⁵

Figure 1 uses full-time faculty salary data, collected and published by the federal government, to show average faculty salaries for public institutions in 2018-2019: first, with faculty collective bargaining agreements; second, without faculty collective bargaining agreements, but located in the same state as institutions with faculty unions; and third, in states without any faculty collective bargaining agreements.

What is apparent is: In almost every sector, at public institutions where faculty collectively bargain, faculty earn more money. Only liberal arts institutions, which comprise 1 percent of faculty, are exceptions.

Across the board, faculty with unions earn about $6,000 more, on average, than those working without contracts in similar states with collective bargaining. They earn about $14,000 more than faculty in states without collective bargaining.

The largest difference occurs in public 2-year institutions, where faculty at institutions with collectively bargained contracts earn about $18,000, or 30 percent, more than those working in the same states without collectively bargaining contracts. Meanwhile, the union advantage is $15,000 at comprehensive institutions and $8,000 at research/doctoral-granting institutions.

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