**Left Out and Leaving**

North Carolina’s Community Colleges are flirting with a crisis. Our faculty are among the worst-paid in the country. [According to John Quinterno at EdNC](https://www.ednc.org/how-has-faculty-pay-at-north-carolinas-community-colleges-changed-over-time/), “North Carolina has never posted a median salary for full-time community college instructors equal to” the median of our 16 state region. [Nationally since 2006, NC faculty salaries have ranked among the bottom 10 states every year but one (39th in 2008-09).](https://www.sreb.org/post/average-salaries-full-time-instructional-faculty-public-two-year-colleges-and-technical)

In the past two budget years, state employees received 2.5% each year. CC faculty received nothing. The average NC CC faculty salary ranks below the average University faculty salary and the average K-12 faculty salary. [The North Carolina K-12 system ranks 30th in the country](https://www.nea.org/research-publications), the [University system ranks 21st](https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/faculty-salary-comparison-ipeds), while the [Community College system ranks among the bottom 10 states.](https://www.sreb.org/post/average-salaries-full-time-instructional-faculty-public-two-year-colleges-and-technical)

College administrators, deans, and department heads know that poor faculty pay is affecting our ability to attract and retain qualified faculty. We are losing faculty to other states’ community colleges and universities, to private industry, and to the K-12 system. [In fact, from 2016 to 2020, faculty headcount dropped 9% while student enrollment stayed roughly the same](https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics/dashboards/employee-headcount). Although some of this is due to the pandemic, trends indicate that faculty are leaving and not being replaced. Community Colleges throughout the state have difficulty attracting faculty to a variety of programs, and many positions go unfilled as private industry hires potential faculty at rates that far exceed what colleges offer.

This is not a new phenomenon. [In 1989, the Committee on the Future of North Carolina Community Colleges warned of a similar crisis and recommended that faculty pay be set at the median level for our region. Unfortunately, that goal was never met](https://www.ednc.org/how-has-faculty-pay-at-north-carolinas-community-colleges-changed-over-time/). [In the Southeast Region, itself the worst-paying region of the country, North Carolina has only ever ranked in the bottom half or bottom third](https://www.sreb.org/post/average-salaries-full-time-instructional-faculty-public-two-year-colleges-and-technical). Since the collection of that data, NC CC salaries have not changed; it is likely that we have fallen into the bottom third of our region. Does a state with an economy like ours belong in the bottom third of the lowest-paying region?

[In fact, our closest peers in Community College faculty pay are Mississippi and South Carolina. Those two states’ economies rank in the bottom half for GDP (SC at 26th, MS at 37th). North Carolina’s GDP is close to the top-10 in the US, with only two states in our region – FL and GA – having larger economies.](https://www.statista.com/statistics/248023/us-gross-domestic-product-gdp-by-state/) In other words, we are one of the best economies in the region and in the country – an economy whose business and industry rely on community colleges – but we are one of the worst in our region and in the whole country in CC faculty pay. Does it make sense for a state with a near top-10 GDP be in the bottom 10 for faculty pay?

Decision-makers in NC have an important choice to make. Our community colleges are widely respected in the legislature and in our communities, and it is widely accepted that we operate as a vital economic engine in our state. [For every $1 invested in NC community colleges, the taxpaying public receives over $4 in return](https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/sites/default/files/basic-page-file-uploads/nccc_execsum_1213_final_datedfeb2015.pdf), and we are tied together intimately with local, national, and international business and industry. Moreover, with properly-funded faculty and student services, Community Colleges are best positioned to provide equitable economic outcomes for students and communities in our state.

NC Community Colleges will be vital drivers of the post-COVID economy if we receive the appropriate resources. We can provide a quality education at an *efficient* price, but that efficiency requires recruiting and retaining good faculty. A crisis is coming in our CC system. CC faculty have been left out, and they are leaving. And both NC students and the state’s economy will suffer the consequences.

**North Carolina Community College Faculty Association Executive Board**

[**www.ncccfa.org**](http://www.ncccfa.org)