

Case 1: Faculty Union, a Rarity at HBCUs, Is Poised to Emerge at Howard U.

By [Peter Schmidt](#) April 30, 2022

Washington

Adjunct instructors at Howard University appear to be on the verge of unionizing, marking an unusual victory for faculty labor organizers at a historically black higher-education institution.

Leaders of the effort to organize Howard's roughly 130 part-time instructors expressed confidence this week in prevailing when ballots are counted, on Wednesday. The Service Employees International Union, which has mounted the unionization drive at Howard, [has already organized](#) at three of this city's largest universities, accounting for about 70 percent of its adjunct work force.

Howard's leadership has done nothing to oppose the union election. In a statement issued on Monday through Kerry-Ann Hamilton, a spokeswoman, Howard's administration said, "We greatly appreciate the invaluable contributions of our faculty, both adjunct and full time," and "will continue to negotiate in good faith with all represented employees to meet our mission."

The SEIU similarly is seeking to unionize more than 200 part-time faculty members at another historically black institution here, the University of the District of Columbia.

Although the UDC's tenure-track faculty members already are represented by an affiliate of the National Education Association, faculty collective-bargaining units, for the most part, are much less likely to exist at historically black colleges and universities than elsewhere in higher education. They have been established at fewer than a tenth of the nation's 105 historically black colleges and universities, compared with well over a third of all nonprofit public and private colleges in the United States.

The relative scarcity of faculty unions at HBCUs partly reflects such colleges' concentration in Southern states with laws unfriendly to organized labor. In addition, some experts on HBCUs say, the distinct cultures of such institutions often generate opposition to faculty unions.

Marybeth Gasman, a professor of education at the University of Pennsylvania who has studied HBCUs extensively, said last week in an interview that the formation of such a union at Howard would be "very, very meaningful" for other such institutions because "people in general really look up to Howard and see it as being a leader."

"Some HBCUs," Ms. Gasman said, "might get a little afraid that that is going happen on their campus."

Family Affairs

Most HBCUs with unionized faculty members are public institutions in Delaware, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, where the collective-bargaining units were established in the 1970s or 1980s, often as part of a broader unionization of public colleges.

An exception is Harris-Stowe State University, in St. Louis, where nearly 80 percent of full-time faculty members voted last fall to establish the first faculty collective-bargaining unit at any of Missouri's public universities. Contract negotiations between the union chapter, an affiliate of the NEA, and the administration have been contentious.

Gregory S. Carr, an assistant professor of speech, theater, and English at Harris-Stowe and vice president of its faculty union, said in an interview on Tuesday that the unionization effort there had been met by "a great deal of anger, and some people felt betrayed."

"HBCUs tend to be 'family,'" Mr. Carr said. "When someone in the family disagrees, often it is taken personally and not objectively."

Elizabeth K. Davenport, a professor of educational leadership at Florida A&M University who is researching unionization and shared governance at historically black colleges, said in an interview that the presidents of such institutions tend to be heavily supported by alumni and less tolerant of dissent on their faculties than those at other colleges.

Ms. Davenport, the president of her historically black university's faculty union, an affiliate of the United Faculty of Florida, said, "Unionizing—finding a voice—rests with the faculty. It doesn't come from outside forces."

Outside Pressures

The challenges involved in unionizing faculty members at HBCUs were the focus of a panel discussion in New York this month, at the [annual conference](#) of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions.

Derryn Moten, an associate professor of humanities at Alabama State University and co-president of his institution's Faculty-Staff Alliance, which lacks collective-bargaining power, attributed much of historically black colleges' resistance to unionization to the political interference and neglect many have experienced.

"These schools," he said, "have always been left to wither on the vine."

Zillah Fluker, associate vice president for development at Alabama State, argued that many people at such institutions view labor unions as hostile to their colleges, as relics of the past, or as agents of past discrimination against black workers. She discussed the need for faculty members and administrators to work together and avoid being divided by such "haters."

Penn's Ms. Gasman said such institutions had been shaped by a time when the surrounding local community opposed the education of black people, and "the president really did have to protect the institution from the outside."

Such sensitivities appear to have played little role at Howard, where the SEIU has sought to unionize adjunct instructors as part of a broader campaign to organize such faculty members throughout [entire metropolitan areas](#).

Monique A. Peters, an adjunct professor of mathematics at Howard who has aided the union drive there, said not only has the administration offered no resistance, but tenured faculty members, for the most part, “have all shared encouragement toward the effort.”

Case 2: Maryland HBCUs awarded half a billion in racial discrimination compensation

After ‘historic’ \$577m settlement, historically black colleges and universities look to combat educational inequities

[Kenya Evelyn](#) in Washington

Thu 26 Mar 2020 10.33 EDT

Share

Maryland has voted in favor of awarding four state universities more than half a billion dollars in compensation for years of institutional racial discrimination, signaling the end of a long legal battle.

In a victory resulting from a [lawsuit filed](#) more than a decade ago, four historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) can expect a boost to their budgets of a total of \$577m after the Maryland senate, in a rare legislative resolution to legal action, gave bipartisan support to a landmark settlement.

“It’s been a long time coming,” said Michael Jones, partner with Kirkland & Ellis LLP and one of the lead attorneys with the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. “We’ve had four failed mediations under two governors since 2013.

“It was a historic moment. Listening to it was like listening to the passage of major civil rights legislation,” Jones added.

In 2006, the Coalition for Equity and Excellence in Maryland Higher Education [filed a lawsuit](#) alleging the state deliberately duplicated innovative educational programs created at black universities, luring would-be students to their white counterparts.

The coalition is composed of alumni of HBCUs. The more than 100 institutions were established before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, mostly in the latter 19th century, to serve African Americans who were barred from predominantly white schools.

The suit alleged the state’s duplication of programs [exacerbated HBCUs’ existing funding inequities](#).

Earlier this month, the Maryland senate voted unanimously to pass the legislation authorizing the settlement, split between the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, as well as Bowie, Coppin and Morgan State Universities.

A United Negro College Fund 2014 report found that these colleges [produce more than 9,000 jobs](#), generating lifetime earnings of \$95bn. They also have an estimated \$1bn economic impact.

What makes the lawsuit especially rare is for it to be resolved by legislation. Similar suits have been litigated through the US justice department.

Speaking at [a committee hearing](#) on the bill, the Maryland state house speaker and lead sponsor, Adrienne Jones, called it necessary to mitigate “lost time for tens of thousands of students waiting.

“We [needed] to act now to level the playing field for all students regardless of background or race or college they attend,” she said.

Mickey Burnim, interim president at Coppin State said at the hearing that the bill, [known as HB1260](#), can begin to solve the problems discrimination has created.

“HB1260 affords the unique opportunity to address decades of previous untraceable and traceable state-supported inequities and the unnecessary duplication in programs at HBCUs in the state,” he said.

Attorney Michael Jones noted that African American consumers typically [pay more in interest rates](#) for mortgages, loans or cars” and that “societal challenges” add to what Maryland schools, HBCUs nationwide face “by virtue of being largely African American.

“HBCU students [pay more for student loans](#), and schools have to [pay more for bond issues](#) than non-HBCUs, particularly in the south, even accounting for various levels of credit worthiness,” he said.

A bipartisan understanding of that legacy is credited with the bill’s unanimous passage. The Democratic state senator Obie Patterson [told the Baltimore Sun](#) he was inspired to see every Republican vote in support.

“I have never been so pleased in all my life to see all green lights on that board,” he said. “We all can come together for a common cause and do what’s right.”

The bill permits Maryland’s HBCUs to use the additional funding to establish new degree programs, recruit faculty and marketing contractors, and invest in scholarships and financial aid.

Funding would be distributed proportional to enrollment at each institution.

The bill now goes to the desk of the Republican governor ,Larry Hogan. His [spokesperson confirmed](#) he will give the legislative resolution consideration. Due to “overwhelming support”, the Morgan State president, David Kwabena Wilson, is optimistic the governor will sign the legislation.

“It wasn’t passed with a razor-thin edge, it was almost unanimous if you take both houses of the legislature together,” he said.

While the bill is veto-proof, if the HBCU coalition and the state cannot formally accept the legislated agreement by 1 December, it becomes null and void.

The bill requires that attorney’s fees, about \$22m, be paid through a mandated \$10m increase for each campus in each fiscal year to help with long-term planning, scheduled to begin 2022.

As HBCUs grapple with [decreased federal funding](#) and struggling endowments, Kristen Clarke, Lawyers' Committee president and executive director, is confident in the precedent their settlement may have in addressing longstanding HBCU discrimination.

"We hope that an ultimate victory here might provide a pathway that can open up opportunities to achieve greater equity for HBCUS in other parts of the country," she said.

Case 3: Howard University students reach an agreement with officials after a month of protest

NOVEMBER 15, 2021 8:12 PM ET

By

Jonathan Franklin

Howard University students gathered on campus to protest poor housing conditions and what they said was mistreatment by the university administration in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 25.

Salwan Georges/The Washington Post via Getty Images

For more than a month, students at Howard University in Washington, D.C., have been fighting for answers from the school administration as they protested poor housing conditions on campus.

But on Monday, an agreement with protesters at one of the nation's top historically Black universities had been reached, the school announced in a tweet.

The specific details of the negotiations between students and administration were not immediately available. NPR reached out to Howard University; they did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The university's president, Dr. Wayne A. I. Frederick, released a video message Monday addressing the end of campus protests and how the school will improve conditions for students.

Sponsor Message

"The health and well-being of our students is the most important part of my job as president," Frederick said. "As I have said before, even one issue in one of our dormitories is too many, and we will continue to remain vigilant in our pledge to maintain safe and high-end housing."

He also did not provide details but referenced the school's 2020 master plan to "grow and invest" in the university, which he said focuses on improving campus experiences for its students, faculty and staff.

During a news conference Monday, student protesters began to celebrate the agreement. "We spent 33 days saying that not only did our lives matter, that our voices mattered and our concerns mattered," said one student leader. "We came, we saw, we declared and we won."

Students at Howard University are protesting poor housing conditions on campus

Students had been sleeping in tents outside the Blackburn University Center since Oct. 12, protesting what they said were poor housing conditions and the lack of student representation on the Board of Trustees.

Since the start of the fall semester, students say they've raised concerns to campus administrators regarding mold in the walls of their dorms, the lack of COVID-19 testing for students and the overall safety on campus, according to [DCist/WAMU](#).

In his [State of the Union address](#) on Nov. 5, Frederick stated that mold was discovered in 41 out of 2,700 rooms on campus, with some of the damage being the result of "accidental human error."

Sponsor Message

In 2018, students led a [nine-day occupation](#) of the campus administration building which resulted in an agreement between officials and students on several campus changes. The changes included a revision of the school's sexual assault policy, a review of policies allowing campus police officers to carry weapons and the creation of a food bank on campus for students.

Case 4: Human Rights Campaign HBCU Program Announces New Cohort of PrEP Ambassadors

by Jarred Keller • August 25, 2023

WASHINGTON — The Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRCF), the educational arm of the nation's largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) civil rights organization, and the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) program is proud to announce its new PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) Ambassador cohort. This year, 12 students will serve as PrEP Peer Educators to eliminate HIV & AIDS-related stigma on HBCU campuses through public education regarding PrEP, HIV testing and treatment. Since its inception, this program has helped educate some of the most vulnerable communities, including college students, about preventative care and the continuing realities of the HIV epidemic.

Kynna Burney, North Carolina A&T State University

The 12-person cohort consists of students from HBCUs across the country, including: Gevon Finley, Dillard University; Maya Wilson, North Carolina A&T State University; Kalya Dudley, John Jay College of Criminal Justice; Ryan Lastie Jr., Dillard University; Shania Stowe, Winston-Salem State University; Amarachi Okafor, Stillman College; Cheyanne Harris, Spelman College; Korinne Seveur, Spelman College; Maya Hawkins, Winston-Salem State University; Jamal Carr, Bowie State University; Tyronae Smith, Dillard University; and Kynna Burney, North Carolina A&T State University.

*"We are thrilled to welcome this dynamic cohort of HBCU students and take great pride in the work they're doing to continue spreading the message of HIV awareness on the respective campuses," said **HBCU Director, Leslie Hall**. "As a Black gay man and HBCU alumni, I'm aware of the hurdles college aged youth face when it comes to knowing their status and taking the appropriate measures to maintain their optimal health. The creation of this ambassadorship program serves as an outlet for those who may be unfamiliar with the nuances surrounding HIV, but want to take measures to ensure their community is educated on this impactful topic."*

Currently, about 1.2 million people are living with HIV in the United States, but it is estimated that roughly 13% of this group are unaware of their status. HIV disproportionately impacts Black individuals (42.1% of all new diagnoses in 2019 were among Black people), followed by Hispanic people (21.7% of new diagnoses). and individuals aged 13-24 make up 1 out of every 5 new cases of HIV, but 44% of that demographic are unaware of their status—with only 24% of college students having been tested for HIV. Despite these alarming statistics, over half of HBCUs have no formal HIV prevention policies, fueling this program's mission of supporting those who are all too often left vulnerable to the HIV epidemic. Through this ambassadorship cohort, the HBCU program will work to ensure that PrEP is offered on or near HBCU campuses to further protect the communities most at risk.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation is the educational arm of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) people. Through its programs, the HRC Foundation seeks to make transformational change in the everyday lives of LGBTQ+ people, shedding light on inequity and

deepening the public's understanding of LGBTQ+ issues, with a clear focus on advancing transgender and racial justice. Its work has transformed the landscape for more than 15 million workers, 11 million students, 1 million clients in the adoption and foster care system and so much more. The HRC Foundation provides direct consultation and technical assistance to institutions and communities, driving the advancement of inclusive policies and practices; it builds the capacity of future leaders and allies through fellowship and training programs; and, with the firm belief that we are stronger working together, it forges partnerships with advocates in the U.S. and around the globe to increase our impact and shape the future of our work.

Case 5: ‘It’s about damn time’: College workers organize amid nationwide labor unrest

By [BIANCA QUILANTAN](#) and [BLAKE JONES](#)

02/04/2023 07:00 AM EST

Frustrated by low wages and new laws limiting what they can teach — and buoyed by President Joe Biden’s pro-union bent — campus workers across the country are moving with new urgency to organize.

A historic strike at the University of California kicked things off in November. And the six-week standoff among 48,000 campus workers, a [broader surge in labor strikes](#) across industries, a depleted pandemic workforce and a friendlier atmosphere in Washington has culminated in a wave of uprisings.

University of Illinois-Chicago faculty went on strike for four days last month. Hundreds of graduate students at Temple University in Philadelphia took to picket lines earlier this week. And the University of Washington averted a scheduled walkout by librarians and other campus employees in December just three hours before staff planned to hit the streets.

Workers are demanding increased wages, better health benefits, more job security and improved working conditions, and so far colleges are scrambling to meet them.

“We have seen the past two to three years a lot of interest from higher ed workers organizing in states that do not necessarily have the collective bargaining rights or the ability to bargain with their employer on their wages and benefits,” said Enida Shuku, an organizer with United Campus Workers who said the group is in discussions with several institutions about joining UCW.

Even in Southern states, including Tennessee, Arizona and Mississippi, organizers are pressing school leaders about pay and fights over free speech on college campuses.

“We’re all seeing it and experiencing it ... and it’s about damn time,” Shuku said.

Graduate students typically double as employees for their institutions, teaching general education classes and working as lab assistants while pursuing their degrees. Many workers say they make below a living wage. At Temple, for example, the average graduate student worker can expect to make around [\\$19,500 a year](#).

With union-friendly Biden in the White House, campus workers feel they have the extra leverage they need to unionize and strike.

Under President Donald Trump, campus organizers feared the Republican-majority on the National Labor Relations Board would use their cases to overturn a precedent that allowed graduate students at private universities to unionize, said Mark Gaston Pearce, who chaired the board under President Barack Obama.

“Anything that required having to go through the board processes was avoided because they did not want to put the board in the position to weigh in relative to that question,” said Pearce, who is now the

executive director of the Workers' Rights Institute at Georgetown University. "Now — that no longer being an obstacle — it's not surprising that there is a flurry of organizing going on."

In fact, Biden has been stocking the NLRB with commissioners who favor unionization among graduate students, something Trump administration appointees [once considered banning altogether](#).

Boston University graduate students had backed off a unionization drive during the Trump administration, fearing a rejection from the board. But workers regrouped last fall, encouraged by a Democratic majority on the NLRB, and eventually voted to unionize in December.

"With the shift in political landscape more recently, it kind of lightened the stressors of whether or not we'd be able to unionize to begin with and allowed us to have another go at it," said Alex Lion, a PhD candidate and organizer at the university.

UIC faculty almost went on strike in 2019, but the night before they were set to stop work, they agreed on a contract. Following "exhausting" semesters of online instruction, months of inflation chipping away at workers' earnings and a surge in labor action nationwide, faculty vacated lecture halls in January for four days before agreeing to a contract that will raise the lowest-paid employees' wages by \$9,000.

"Across the nation, faculty and students everywhere are pretty exhausted," said Charitianne Williams, a UIC English professor and a member of the union's bargaining team. "I think that whether you're faculty union at UIC or in a union at Starbucks, that's a really difficult space to live in."

Campus workers at the University of California got tens of thousands of dollars in raises, larger child care stipends and commuter benefits after weeks on the picket line. University of Washington's union was able to secure salary boosts and academic freedom protections in January, negating reason to strike.

Conservative critics, though, argue the successful labor wave could spread universities' resources thinner — forcing them to slash student worker positions or make other cuts — to afford the raises won during bargaining.

"The money has to come from somewhere," said Timothy Snowball, a civil rights attorney at the Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit organization that challenges labor unions, "and I think this is when ideology kind of comes up hard against basic economics."

Case 6: USC Workers to Call for Living Wages at Speak-Out on 10/26

Columbia, SC - The United Campus Workers union of South Carolina (UCW-CWA 3765) will hold a speak-out at the Russell House Patio on **Thursday, October 26 at 11:30am**. Staff, faculty, and student workers will join together to call on President Amiridis to raise wages for workers across the University of South Carolina.

In recent years, unionized workers fought for and won \$15/hour wages for full time staff at USC, but inflation and rising cost of living has left workers still struggling to make ends meet. "We've come too far to turn back now," said Ben Brown, a groundskeeper and union member at USC.

Workers are organizing to win the demands of their new living wage campaign, which are listed in a [petition](#) launched earlier in August. These demands include a minimum wage of \$20/hour for all hourly workers, a minimum of \$40,000/year for salaried workers, and a minimum annual stipend of \$20,000/year for graduate workers. Workers are also calling for increases to reflect the rising cost of living, increases based on years of service, and living wages for contract workers.

USC prides itself on excellence and integrity. However, the state's flagship institution does not currently pay workers living wages that reflect their contributions and dedication to our community. Of approximately 9,900 full-time employees at USC, nearly 1,000 currently make less than \$20 an hour. Notably, this does not include contract (food service, custodial, grounds and maintenance, etc.) and graduate workers, who make some of the lowest wages on campus.

According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, the cost of living in Columbia, SC has increased 33% in just four years. This extreme increase in the cost of living has not been reflected in workers' paychecks. **In 1963, Rev. Dr. MLK Jr. called for a \$2 minimum wage. This would be \$20 today, adjusted for inflation. We echo this call for economic and racial justice for all.**

"All campus workers need and deserve a living wage," said Jaimee Wishon, a Graduate Teaching Assistant and Chair of United Campus Workers at USC, "but we will only get what we are organized to take."

The speak-out will be held on the patio of the Russell House on the stage across from the Center for Health and Well-Being (1409 Devine St, Columbia, SC 29208).

Possible Case: Q&A: What does political engagement look like at an HBCU?

by [Skyler Winston](#) February 21, 2024

Students from historically Black colleges and universities have long played a role in shaping social and political movements, and 2024 is no exception. Across the country, HBCU students are [organizing pro-Palestine activism](#) efforts on their campuses. They're struggling with complicated feelings [about who to vote for](#) in November.

To learn more about what political engagement looks like at an HBCU versus a predominantly white institution (PWI), Open Campus spoke with [Princess Williams](#), an HBCU graduate and professor of political science at Washington University in St. Louis.

This conversation has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

Q: Having earned your Bachelor's in Political Science from Jackson State University and completed your Master's at the University of Michigan, did you observe any contrasts in political involvement among students at these universities? If so, what were they like?

Princess Williams: I started at Jackson State in 2010, and I would say students were engaged in local and state politics. In terms of national issues, when Trayvon Martin was murdered, there were protests, and people were engaged on campus. In general, Jackson State students have a history of being involved in politics, dating back to the 1970s when there was [a shooting on campus](#) during the Vietnam War protests. So, students have always been engaged. During my four years at Jackson State, I would say they were engaged. However, just from observing on social media after I left, it seems like engagement increased because more salient issues were happening in the country — such as police brutality and very consequential presidential elections. In the years 2010 to 2014, there were things happening, but they were not as public-facing, and there were more local issues.

For example, there was a Black man running for governor, and it was a very popular election. We also had a highly contested mayoral election, so the focus was more on local issues when I was there. Upon moving to Michigan in 2014, right before Michael Brown was murdered, it was a strange time to start grad school. I was accustomed to being in a Black enclave in the South at an HBCU, where race wasn't a constant consideration — you were just living and existing. Then, I moved to a place where the majority was white, with only four percent Black students. Witnessing the shooting unfold during that time was a profound experience.

But there was a lot of engagement. I wouldn't say that it was just political science or social science students; it was across the board. I would also say that Michigan fostered an environment where students felt comfortable expressing themselves and addressing the issues they cared about.

In 2016, there was an incident on campus where someone posted offensive posters about Black people, leading to campus protests and community demonstrations. Perhaps the issues at Michigan were different, which is why I often mention that there was more engagement at Michigan compared to Texas State. However, both HBCU and PWI students, particularly Black students, are engaging in response to the various issues in the country. With so many challenges, Black people, in general, have always had to go out and advocate to ensure that our needs are understood and addressed.

Q: In your experience as a political science professor, have you noticed any notable trends or shifts in the political participation of young people?

From my point of view, I would say that your generation is way more informed on politics than mine. I also think you all are more engaged, particularly with the use of social media. For instance, you're constantly having dialogues on TikTok, Twitter, and other platforms. When my generation started on social media, it was mainly for jokes and fun, and at some point, everything became politicized. However, I believe that your generation is more informed on issues, and you are not necessarily loyal to a specific political party or candidate.

When I was in college, my generation tended to automatically align with a party, regardless of personal feelings towards the candidate. It was like, "Okay, I'm a Democrat" or "I'm a Republican," so I'm just going to support the party. In contrast, I see that your generation is more critical of political leaders. However, I also feel that you all are more disillusioned with politics. This is one of my concerns about the younger generation. While you are more aware, there is also a belief that you can make a difference, that you should be out there protesting, and that you should not get tired of doing it.

I believe that your generation is way smarter, more informed, more savvy, and more creative than our generation was. However, at the same time, I'm hoping that information and understanding the political landscape in this country do not discourage you all from actually voting, running for office, and engaging in other activities later down the line.

Q: How might political involvement on HBCU campuses differ from that at predominantly white institutions (PWIs)?

Based on my experience at Jackson State as a student, Michigan, and Amherst (where I previously worked, and now I'm at Wash U), I would say they are not similar. For example, at Michigan, students had a more radical approach in terms of expressing themselves. When Charles Murray, who wrote the book "The Bell Curve," was invited by the Republican student group on campus, students hijacked the room and projected an arrow pointing at him, labeling him as a white supremacist. They engaged in more outspoken actions, different from what I observed at other institutions.

There were strikes and protests on campus, particularly by grad students and undergrads, with students of color, especially Black women, taking leadership roles in diversity, equity, and inclusion work. There were instances where students planned strikes, like withholding lectures, demanding payment for

diversity work. This led to the university implementing an initiative to pay students for diversity work through stipends. The approach at Michigan was more radical.

At Jackson State, I'm not entirely familiar with current events, but historically, the issues revolved around local and state politics. Even campus issues were approached with an eye on future engagement beyond the university. The concerns were different, such as disputes over meal plans, but not as intense as those at Michigan. Jackson State students had to care about different things, and there was a certain luxury at Michigan in not having to deal with some of the issues faced at an institution like Jackson State. Of course, both institutions had their own set of challenges, like housing, but the required actions and engagement were not the same.

Q: Many Black students may harbor distrust toward politicians and other public institutions. How do you believe this distrust might impact their participation in the political process?

If you feel like they don't keep their word, you are less likely to participate in politics, because you may not see the political process as a viable vehicle to make changes or maximize your own interests. If you do participate, you might vote third party or, over time, become an independent voter. I believe that this distrust leads to a decrease in turnout over time.

Going back to the concern that younger voters are more aware and critical, my hope is that they don't lose hope and interest in the process. Voting matters; you may not think it will impact you immediately, but at some point, it will influence the policies that are passed or impact your life. Understanding that change is slow but continuous and crucial. You have to have faith that it will work out at some point.

However, I can also understand the discouragement when you see issues persisting for decades. Overall, this distrust will impact turnout and political participation.

Q: What do you think politicians can do in efforts to build trust with Black students?

I think one very simple solution is to have town hall meetings where you invite young voters to come and talk directly to you, providing access to political candidates. A lot of the time, I believe this is one thing that has changed their minds. In the past, presidential candidates and even local candidates were more accessible 10 or 20 years ago. Now, it seems like they rely more on social media to spread the word about their campaigns and express their platforms. However, voters, especially younger ones, feel a bit out of reach, both literally and figuratively. Therefore, engaging with voters in person and in public is crucial.

I also think political parties could do better with outreach, specifically targeting younger voters who are already politically inclined. This involves having them run for offices so they can speak to the issues and bring the voices of youth voters to the table when creating party platforms or passing laws in Congress. In terms of parties and candidates, actively reaching out and mobilizing voters through face-to-face

interactions, as well as appointing younger voters to offices and positions in the party, would ensure representation. When you see someone around your age, you're more likely to listen to them. Therefore, having representation matters and can make a difference.

Skyler Winston is a fellow with the [HBCU Student Journalism Network](#), a project of [Open Campus](#).



Possible Case: Lacking Collective Bargaining Rights, but Organizing Anyway.

By [Ryan Quinn](#)

Public university employees in states lacking collective bargaining rights aren't letting that exclude them from the current wave of union organizing and action in higher education.

Their efforts to build faculty-staff coalitions and improve working conditions despite lacking university recognition or contracts harkens back to higher education organizing before the Cold War.

"What's happening now is a new regeneration of that concept, that wall-to-wall organizing," said William A. Herbert, executive director of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions.

Unlike for private employers, which are regulated by the National Labor Relations Board, states decide whether to offer public university workers collective bargaining rights.

"Wall-to-wall" means trying to unite all workers into a single bargaining unit, even or especially when collective bargaining—the officially sanctioned bargaining process leading to an officially recognized contract—isn't available.

"It's literally an old-school form of labor organizing," said Herbert, whose center is at Hunter College, part of the City University of New York. In [a 2017 history](#) published in the *Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy*, he wrote about what he calls "the little-remembered United Public Workers of America."

"UPWA and its predecessor unions played important roles in advancing collective bargaining in education and other fields in the 1940s," he wrote. "They sought to organize wall-to-wall educational units that included faculty and staff for purposes of collective bargaining, and they successfully negotiated some of the first contracts covering teachers and faculty."

"The successful anti-communist attacks on UPWA, and the demise of the [New School for Social Research's unionized] Dramatic Workshop, lowered the curtain on faculty collective bargaining in higher education, which did not resume until decades later when the AFT [American Federation of Teachers], the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) began organizing faculty for purposes of collective bargaining in the late 1960s and 1970s," he wrote.

"A union is fundamentally an organization of people," said Melanie Barron, a senior campaign lead for [United Campus Workers](#), "and we have the freedom of assembly, the right of association with any group we choose. And so we can exercise those rights at the workplace, whether we have this one particular tactic available to us or not. Like, collective bargaining wasn't always a thing."

United Campus Workers, affiliated with the Communications Workers of America and the AFL-CIO umbrella union organization, is a prominent organizer in non-collective bargaining states.

“Tenure fights are a huge part of what people are talking about right now, almost everywhere,” Barron said. “And then also staff issues. People think of universities mainly as faculty, graduate student types of organizing, but there are also enormous workforces of staff that play a critical role in making universities function, and usually they are pretty underpaid and have a lot of issues.”

Barron said UCW works to unite these different constituencies.

“And we do so without waiting for the legal framework to catch up with the idea that workers need unions in this country,” she said.

UCW says it formed in 2000 at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, where Barron was a graduate worker, out of [campaign for a living wage for staff](#).

Since 2017, Barron said, UCW has expanded into 10 new states in the South and West. Of those, only two allow collective bargaining at public universities: Florida and Colorado, and the latter for staff only.

The UCW Florida chapter opened in 2021, but UCW isn’t officially recognized there yet, Barron said.

“There are places where collective bargaining is a part of the conversation, and we want to see that,” she said. She said part of what UCW does is organize workers “to have an impact at the Legislature, because we elect our bosses—we elect the people who make a lot of decisions about higher education funding and how money is spent and all of those things and, yeah, the future of collective bargaining—should we ever have it.”

Over the past five years, according to Barron’s figures, the number of dues-paying UCW members nationally has grown from about 2,550 to 6,950. The largest net membership growth over those past five years came in the first two years of the pandemic, when membership grew by 2,960 and chapters opened at 19 universities in six new states.

Arizona was among those. Alex Young said the UCW chapter at Arizona State University grew out of activism in the pandemic’s early days, when employees felt in-person teaching and deficient COVID-19 mitigation threatened themselves and their disabled colleagues.

Young, a nontenured associate teaching professor at Barrett, the ASU Honors College, said he thinks being in a union helped engage members in political canvassing—he canvassed for Katie Hobbs, the Democrat who won the governorship in 2022.

“In the political realm like that, it’s gotten us more representation that we could have possibly had just sort of working as individual faculty or staff members,” he said.

“The path to collective bargaining is very long here and would mean flipping the state Legislature,” Young said. “But, you know, flipping the governor’s office seemed like a pretty distant goal two years ago.”

But Young said wall-to-wall organizing also creates an imperative to unite workers who may have different political beliefs—by using common labor concerns.

“A staff member working for \$40,000 a year, whatever it might be, all year long isn’t going to be particularly moved by contingent faculty members’ desire for a research sabbatical,” Young said, “so when the shop isn’t just kind of strictly defined by a working role as it would be in an NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] situation, that creates the necessity of really kind of broadening your perspective on what the sort of labor struggles are on campus. For me, personally, it’s made me focus more on some people who are facing more dire situations than the one I’m in.”

Wendy Goldberg, a nontenured lecturer in writing at the University of Mississippi, said she’s been with UCW since a chapter opened on her campus in 2018.

“I think the most important thing in this phenomenon is—the biggest challenge is to help people understand that they can join the union and that we are guaranteed the right to organize even if we don’t have collective bargaining,” Goldberg said.

“A lot of things that we can do in a non–collective bargaining union is to educate people about their rights, to inform the public about our positions, to have petitions and [teach-ins](#),” she said. “There’s a lot of things in our, quote, arsenal to do that can be successful.”

Barron said an inspiring example of making change without collective bargaining came from West Virginia’s statewide public school worker strikes in 2018 and 2019.

Teachers, bus drivers and other workers—who are represented by unions including the AFT and NEA, but don’t have collective bargaining rights—banded together to shut down every public school statewide and flood the state capitol building with protestors. They halted cuts to their health coverage and won pay raises.

“They didn’t have the legal right to strike,” Barron said, “but they made it impossible for anyone to ignore them or just punish them all outright. They won.”

West Virginia Campus Workers, a non-UCW group, is organizing at West Virginia University. It’s affiliated with AFT Academics.

Leslie Wilber, a member and graduate student who teaches English classes, said WVCW went public as a union in spring 2022 but had been organizing as far back as 2020. At a demonstration last week, WVU graduate workers [publicly signed up for food stamps](#) and demanded pay increases and fee eliminations.

“West Virginia in particular has this really powerful labor history, and we’re proud to be a part of it,” she said. “But we also know ... because of that history, you only win these rights by fighting for them.”

“We become a union by acting like one,” she said.

Unions for Private University Grad Students

Under federal law, private university employees can unionize—except, generally, tenured and tenure-track faculty, following a [1980 U.S. Supreme Court ruling](#).

But Matthew Thomas, a Duke University Ph.D. student who teaches and assists in teaching classes there, said organizing in a Southern, right-to-work state still presents added challenges.

Right-to-work laws mean that even when a union earns official recognition and negotiates a contract with the employer, the workers the union is supposed to represent still don't have to pay dues supporting it. The Service Employees International Union-affiliated Duke Graduate Students Union, which Thomas co-chairs, is currently trying to earn recognition after a failed attempt in 2016–17.

"It adds another job for us—to organize folks to bring them into membership—whereas, you know, in another place, they would automatically be a member," Thomas said. He said other, already recognized Duke unions face this issue.

"I think it's a resource limitation, and it also undercuts sort of the organizing culture on campus," he said.

Like the public university employees who don't have collective bargaining rights, Thomas said his organization has still achieved progress without that imprimatur.

He pointed to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statics data showing that North Carolina has the second-lowest union membership rate among wage and salaried workers over all, at just 2.8 percent. South Carolina has the lowest, at 1.7 percent. The highest percentages were just over 20 percent in New York and Hawaii.

"I think it just creates more of an uphill battle," he said of the low Southern unionization rates, "but I think one thing about the prevailing culture of organizing here is that it makes the work feel a lot more significant."