

## **Joint Committee on Higher Education**

### **Written Testimony Submitted on Behalf of Patricia V. Markunas President, Massachusetts State College Association**

**October 31, 2005**

On behalf of the state college faculty and librarians who provide quality education to the citizens of the Commonwealth, I thank Chairperson Murphy and O'Leary for scheduling this hearing today on state college issues. I regret that my teaching and academic advising responsibilities—Salem State is in the middle of pre-registration for the spring 2006 semester—would not allow me to travel to Boston to present this testimony in person. I thank Professor Len Paolillo of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts for his willingness to appear before you today.

The Massachusetts State College Association represents approximately 2400 full-time and part-time faculty members in both the day programs and the Divisions of Graduate and Continuing Education as well as all full-time librarians at the state colleges.

I want to express the appreciation of the state college faculty and librarians to the legislative leadership for the establishment of this Joint Committee, in recognition of the importance of public higher education to the state's economy and its future growth and security. We are pleased to hear that the Legislature is concerned about the status of our public institutions and interested in exploring long-term and stable funding and other legislative changes that would support our work on behalf of our students. Please do not underestimate how important your work on this Joint Committee is for the state colleges, their faculty and staff as well as for students, parents and alumni.

Members of the Committee, the quality of any academic institution of higher learning and of the education provided to its students rests squarely on the quality and reputation of its faculty. Period. Yes, the administration and the staff support the educational mission of our colleges. Without them we could not do our work with students. Yes, the services that the colleges provide to students and to the larger community are an important part of the mission of the state colleges. But the bottom line is that the quality of the education provided to the Commonwealth's citizens rests on the quality of the faculty who provide that education directly.

Related to the quality of our work with students is the quality and condition of the most important building on every higher education campus: the library. Yes, the construction and maintenance of all campus buildings – academic and non-academic – are important to all of us who work in them and to our students. But it is the library and its services that most directly support the work of the faculty in educating students. It is the quality of the library and its holdings that are key components in the accreditation process and national rankings of institutional quality.

Members of the Committee, the quality of the state college libraries has been severely impacted by the repeated and serious budget cuts that public higher education has endured over the past decade. The quality of the faculty cannot be maintained or improved given the same budget cuts and the serious impediments to the collective bargaining process affecting public higher education unions, including ours. The legislature must come to grips with both issues and help resolve them, or the quality of the education provided by the state colleges will be affected negatively and the system's potential to drive economic growth in Massachusetts will never be realized.

Last fall, members of the Legislature received from the state college Council of Presidents a copy of their faculty salary study, which used salary data from public comprehensive institutions provided by the College and University Personnel Association (CUPA). The MSCA, through its national parent organization, the National Education Association, contracted with JBL Associates, a research consulting firm located in Bethesda, Maryland, to compare our salaries and benefits to those paid to faculty at our peer institutions as defined by the Board of Higher Education. The results of these separate analyses are remarkably similar and several points should be highlighted. **Keep in mind that these findings are based on salary information from the 2003-2004 academic year and are already two years out of date.**

- **The average state college faculty and librarian salary is less than \$60,000 a year.**
- **State college faculty salaries lag behind those of peers by 7% unadjusted and 15% when adjusted for the cost of living.** The gap is smallest at the entry-level academic ranks and greatest for those faculty at the highest, best qualified and most senior academic ranks. Average salary for (full) professors is one measure of quality used in rankings of colleges and universities by *US News & World Report*, and we suffer by comparison.
- **State college faculty benefits lag behind those of peers by an additional 3% unadjusted for the cost of living.** This number would probably double when cost of living is included in the comparison.
- The Council of Presidents has also gathered information on the number of faculty searches conducted over the past three to four years where the first choice candidate declined the appointment of a faculty position at the state

colleges because of the inadequacy of the salary offered and the number of resignations of full-time faculty for financial reasons. **Over 20% of first-choice candidates for faculty appointments declined the job offer for financial reasons.** We have gathered information on the number of librarians who have resigned over the past five years, often for financial reasons; **there has been a nearly 50% turnover in librarian staff due to resignations alone** over this time period. Librarians train both students and faculty in the use of the latest information technologies and electronic resources needed to create the libraries of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

- The Council of Presidents has conducted an analysis comparing state college faculty workload to that of faculty at peer institutions. **Our teaching workload is identical to the workload of faculty at nearly all of our peers,** and our responsibility for academic advising and continuing scholarship is often greater than those responsibilities are for faculty at peer institutions.

It is true that the MSCA's recently settled contract has finally been submitted to the legislature for funding, and we look forward to action on this cost request as soon as possible. However, the comprehensive pay increases amount to 9% over a four-year period of time and it is not likely that this contract will significantly reduce the faculty salary deficits that were identified in last year's research.

These factors create serious long-term negative consequences for the quality of the faculty as a whole and the quality of the services and resources offered by the campus libraries. These issues must be addressed in order to address the quality of the education provided to our students.

In addition to the issues that this Committee has identified as of major importance to public higher education—economic growth, workforce development, accessibility, accountability, and funding—I would add four issues of concern to the Legislature as a whole that affect the quality of public higher education.

**The detrimental impact of the constant turmoil associated with the collective bargaining process in Massachusetts has generated national and regional negative publicity over the past decade for our institutions and has hampered our faculty recruitment and retention efforts.** Neither the Council of Presidents nor the MSCA can gather information on the number of high quality faculty and librarians who wouldn't even bother to consider coming to Massachusetts because of the failure of the last four governors to support good faith bargaining efforts on behalf of our statutory employer of record, the Board of Higher Education.

The MSCA Board of Directors supports legislation that would alter the collective bargaining process to eliminate the governor's de facto preliminary veto of the ability of the BHE to negotiate contracts with its employees. We support our employer's ability to negotiate meaningfully with us and then to be able to submit the funding of the ratified agreements directly to the Legislature for action. I have been told that some legislators

support the addition of binding interest arbitration to the state collective bargaining process where it does not now exist, a change I would urge the legislature to consider.

**A second issue for consideration relates to the legislative initiative to provide health insurance for all citizens.** The MSCA represents nearly 800 part-time faculty members in both the day and DGCE programs, who are not afforded even the option of benefits for health or life insurance through the Group Insurance Commission. Many part-time faculty members have access to health insurance benefits through other employment; however, for those who do not have this benefit, its importance cannot be understated. Legislation has been filed throughout the years to provide benefits to part-time faculty with stable employment histories at the colleges. Hearings have been held, as recently as September 22<sup>nd</sup> of this year, with heart-wrenching testimony provided by part-time faculty who need these benefits. No action has been taken. It would be irresponsible for the Legislature to consider any statewide initiative concerning health insurance benefits, without the state's taking responsibility for providing such benefits to the hundreds of part-time faculty who provide quality education for our students as well.

**A third item for legislative consideration concerns the state's minimum wage.** A colleague from Bridgewater State College sent the following analysis that compared changes in the minimum wage to increases in tuition and fees for our students, many of whom depend on minimum wage jobs to earn the money for their education.

In the early 1970s, the minimum hourly wage was \$1.60. Annual tuition and fees at the state colleges (two semesters) was about \$800. So if a student had held a minimum wage job, it would have taken about 500 hours of work to pay tuition and fees. This amount of money could have been earned during a full-time summer job or by working a about twelve and a half hours a week during the school year.

Contrast that situation with the current state of affairs. The minimum wage in Massachusetts is \$6.75 per hour. Because of cuts in state support, tuition and fees at the state colleges are in excess of \$5,200, not including room and board, books, commuting costs, laptop computers, etc. A student working today at a minimum wage job would have to work 50% more hours to earn today's tuition and fees and can no longer earn this amount of money during the summer alone. An increase in the minimum wage would be an ideal way to help students earn more money in a shorter period of time for college-related expenses.

**A fourth item would allow graduates of Massachusetts high schools, whose parents are undocumented aliens, to enroll in public colleges and universities at in-state tuition rates.** The MSCA and the Board of Higher Education are both on record in support of this legislation and would urge all legislators to take a similar position.

A recent analysis by the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center demonstrated that state budget cuts have had a disproportionate impact on women in Massachusetts. The state colleges historically have been the institutions of choice for women to pursue baccalaureate education, and the MBPC analysis stated that 68% of state college

graduates are women. Increased funding of our state colleges, financial aid for our students, health insurance coverage and an increase in the minimum wage would go a long way to remedy the disproportionate impact of state budget cuts on women students and citizens.

A few years ago, the *Boston Globe* Big Ideas section published a statistic that cannot be cited too often: **for every dollar spent on higher education, five dollars are returned in economic growth.** Higher education benefits the public not just in economic terms by creating new knowledge and a citizenry capable of implementing new processes and technologies, but also in terms of lower crime rates and less need for welfare and public assistance. Educated citizens are more involved in volunteer activities, political life and cultural activities; they not only pay more in taxes but also vote more often and live longer, healthier lives.

In conclusion, I want to state something that has probably been stated by all those who have and will testify before this Committee. **The best colleges and universities have the benefit of economic stability, local control, and political support.** The continual budget crises and uncertainties of the past decade—and the cyclical labor crises as well—demoralize faculty and staff, harm productivity, prevent the recruitment and retention of the best faculty and the best students, and ultimately cost the state in economic and non-economic terms. There is no more important responsibility before the Legislature than to stabilize and support our institutions of higher education, for everyone's benefit.