

# THE WAGES & LIVING CONDITIONS OF EDUCATORS

That Shape the Learning Conditions of Students at Massachusetts Public Colleges and Universities



A DIVERSE UNION  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief examines the average salaries of faculty and staff at public colleges and universities in Massachusetts, comparing them with peers in other states and across the nation, adjusting for the state's cost of living. It also presents data from a survey of faculty and staff (about 3,000 respondents) on the impact that low wages have on their living conditions and their ability to support students. Findings from the data show that **faculty and staff at public colleges and universities are experiencing a financial crisis. Low wages leave many struggling to make ends meet, forcing them to take on additional jobs, which hinders their ability to provide students with the support they need to succeed, and makes it harder for colleges and universities to recruit and retain the staff and faculty our students deserve.** This threatens the ultimate success of the state's remarkable efforts to help working people afford college and thrive.

# INTRODUCTION

The state has shown its commitment to making college more affordable and accessible for Massachusetts residents through the universal, tuition-free MassEducate program and MassReconnect program for community colleges, as well as University of Massachusetts and state university programs that provide free tuition for working-class students. All are paid through funding provided by the Fair Share Amendment. While the state still has work to do in providing debt-free public higher education to all students, the investments in making community colleges tuition-free have resulted in **enrollments increasing by 14%** in fall 2024 as compared to fall 2023.

When college is made accessible and affordable, students are eager to enroll, which makes it imperative that we provide students with the high-quality education they deserve. All students attending public higher education institutions in Massachusetts deserve to get the supports they need to succeed, including access to faculty and staff who have wages and working conditions that allow them to meet the needs of all students.

This brief begins with an overview of the data sources and then demonstrates the depth of the wage and living conditions crises. We use data from two sources:

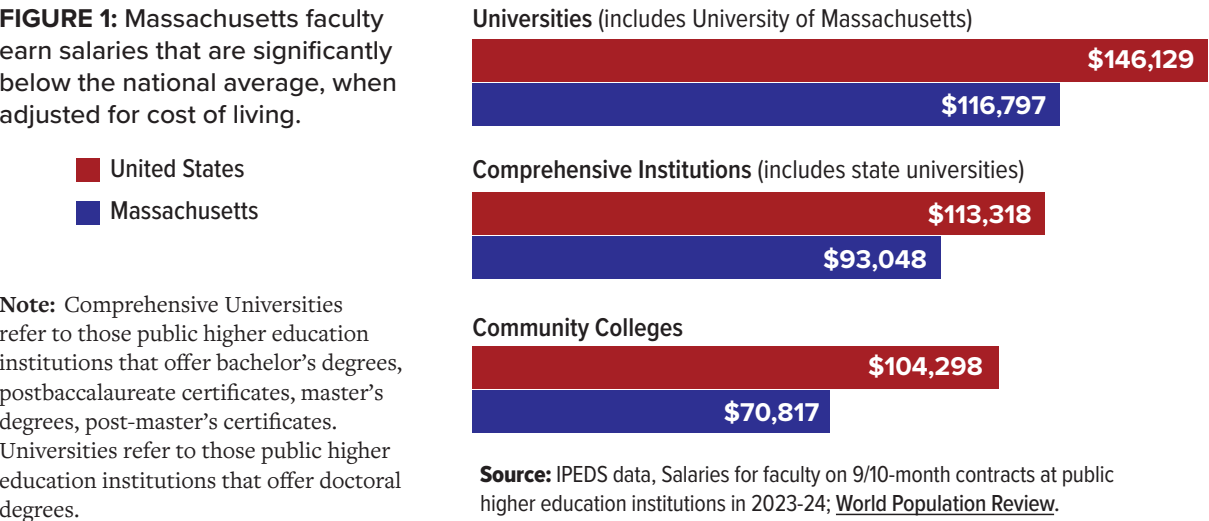
- 2023-24 salary data for faculty and staff at public higher education institutions from Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS).
- A survey conducted by the MTA in collaboration with our higher education members about wages and living conditions of staff and faculty at our public colleges and universities, with about 3,000 respondents.

We compare average salaries paid to Massachusetts’ public institution faculty with those of faculty teaching in other states, by level of institution.

## Staff and faculty at Massachusetts public higher education institutions earn salaries that are significantly below the national average and that of other states, when adjusted for cost of living.

Staff and faculty at public higher education institutions in Massachusetts earn salaries, on average, that are well below the national average, when adjusted for cost of living.<sup>1</sup> This difference in FY2023-24 is the largest for faculty at community colleges, at \$33,000, as shown in Figure 1.

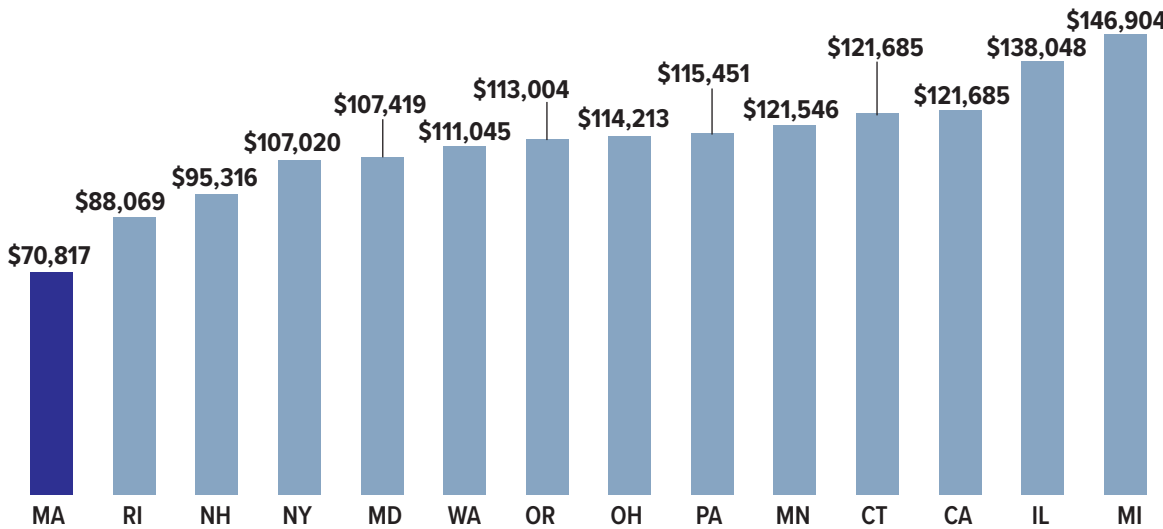
**FIGURE 1:** Massachusetts faculty earn salaries that are significantly below the national average, when adjusted for cost of living.



<sup>1</sup> The salaries for faculty in other states and nationally were adjusted based on Massachusetts’ cost of living. In other words, Massachusetts was used as the base for the cost-of-living adjustments.

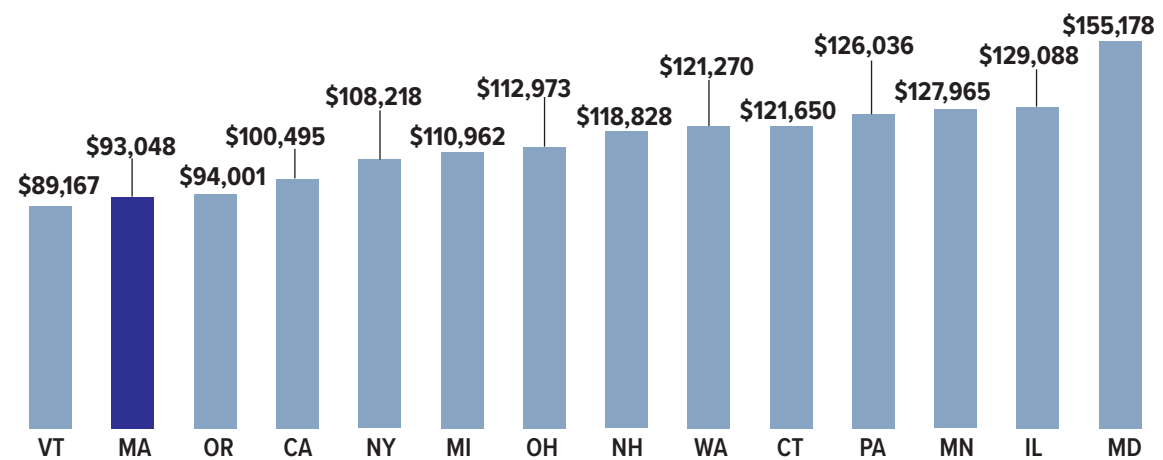
In 2023-24, average salaries for faculty at community colleges in Massachusetts were much lower than their peers in nearby and peer states, adjusted for the state’s cost of living. California, where the cost of living is comparable to Massachusetts, pays its community college faculty 72% more, when adjusted for cost of living (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2:** Community college faculty in Massachusetts have the lowest average salaries in 2023-24 as compared to peer and nearby states, when adjusted for cost of living.



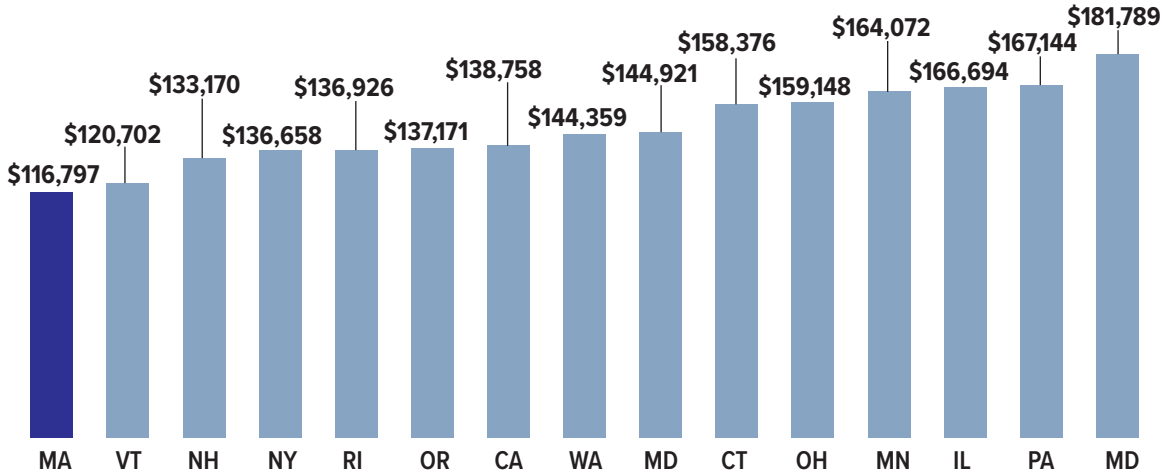
Average salaries for faculty at Massachusetts’ state universities are much lower than their counterparts in peer and nearby states, when adjusted for cost of living (as seen in Figure 3). Adjusted for cost of living, Maryland pays faculty at comprehensive universities 67% more than Massachusetts.

**FIGURE 3:** In 2023-24, compared to their counterparts in nearby and peer states, state university faculty in Massachusetts earned lower average salaries, when adjusted for cost of living.



Average salaries for faculty at the University of Massachusetts are the lowest when compared to faculty salaries at universities in peer and nearby states, when adjusted for cost of living (as seen in Figure 4).

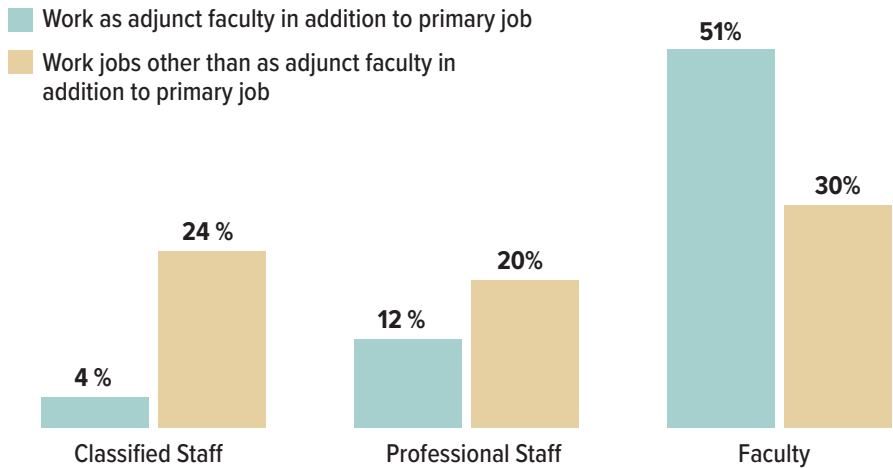
**FIGURE 4:** Average salaries for faculty at the University of Massachusetts are much lower than their counterparts in nearby and peer states, adjusted for Massachusetts’ cost of living, in 2023-24.



**Low wages force staff and faculty to work multiple jobs, undermining their ability to provide students with the supports they need to succeed and graduate.**

The high cost of living in the state and low wages at the state’s public higher education institutions have pushed staff and faculty to take on additional jobs, either as adjunct faculty or in other jobs available in the economy (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5:** Among survey respondents, about 30% of staff and most faculty take on extra jobs to make ends meet.



Faculty who responded to the survey said as a result of additional jobs, they are “**not able to take on additional responsibilities in my faculty role (e.g., mentoring students, advising student organizations, etc.).** This means that students do not get real-life experience doing research or building partnerships.” Or that,

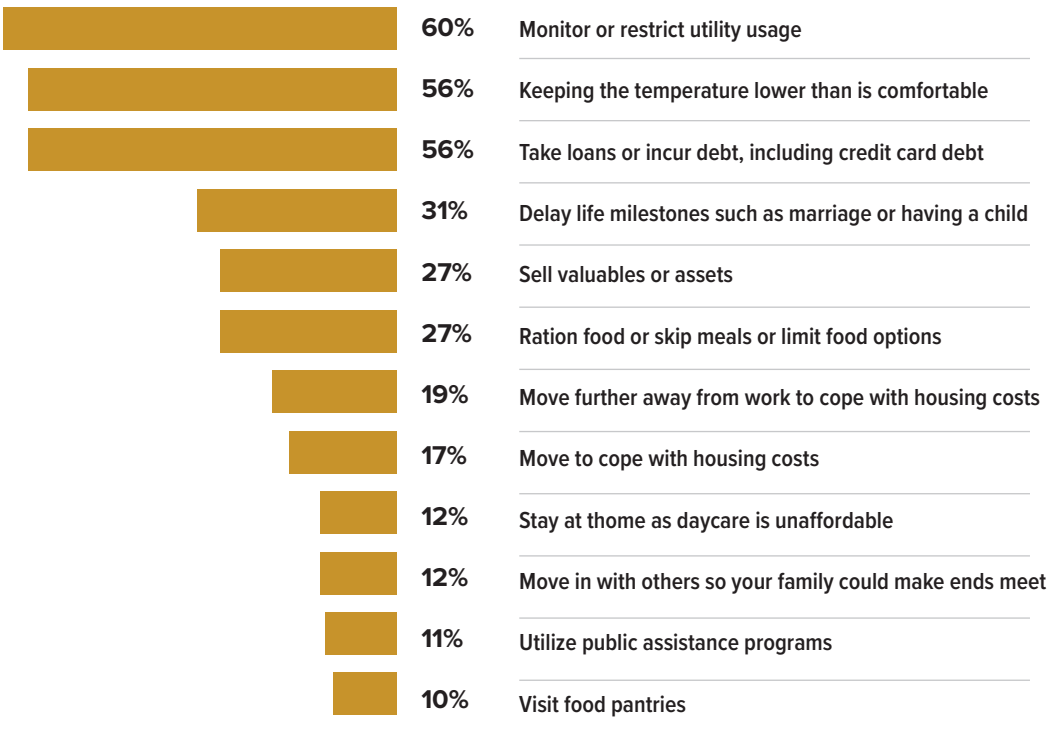
“Balancing multiple jobs significantly strains the ability to dedicate time to course preparation, student interaction, and overall academic responsibilities. When additional job responsibilities take priority, it can result in fewer available hours for developing engaging lesson plans, grading, and offering meaningful guidance to students. The constant rush and divided attention not only affect the quality of teaching but also diminish opportunities for meaningful student support, potentially leading to disengagement and missed learning opportunities.”

Several staff mentioned that “having additional jobs can impact student success by influencing the time, energy and support available to students. If it limits availability or increases workload stress, it may reduce direct engagement, timely feedback or personalized support, potentially affecting student outcomes.”

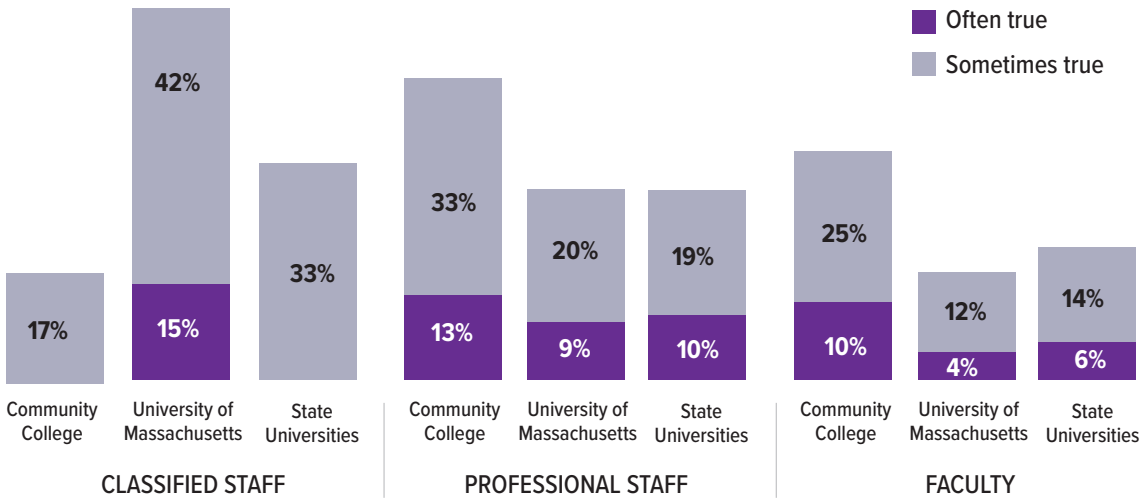
**Inadequate wages adversely impact the living conditions of staff and faculty, leading to challenges like having to monitor utility usage, delaying life milestones, and taking on debt.**

Due to earning wages below a living wage, a high share of faculty and staff said they had to monitor or restrict utility usage, keep temperatures lower than comfortable, take on debt or incur loans (including credit card debt), and delay life milestones such as marriage or having a child (see Figure 6). They often worry that they will run out of food before they have money to buy more (see Figure 7).

**FIGURE 6:** In the past three years, did you have to take any of the following actions?



**FIGURE 7:** About 32% of staff and faculty said that they worry that food would run out before they got money to buy more.



## Inadequate pay rates are severely harming the ability of colleges and universities to recruit and retain high-quality staff and faculty.

Lack of proper compensation, high workload, and high cost of living in the state have had broad implications for public colleges and universities. Low salaries and poor working conditions make it challenging for public colleges and universities to recruit and retain the high-quality faculty and staff that they need to help the students. A study by the state Department of Higher Education (DHE), reported that leadership at community colleges **“struggle to recruit and retain diverse talent due to our low salaries. We have lost individuals to the public [k-12] schools (that offer higher pay), other higher ed institutions that provide more pay and better perks (as well as perceived prestige), and the private sector.”**

Recruiting and retaining faculty of color is particularly challenging and a “competitive pursuit,” as noted in the DHE study. Public colleges and universities find it hard to compete with private institutions also hiring for diversity that have more resources, competitive salaries and greater research funds.

## CONCLUSION

Providing fair wages and decent working conditions at public colleges and universities in Massachusetts is critical to attracting and retaining high-quality staff and faculty. Ultimately, low wages for our faculty and staff threaten student success and the MassEducate and MassReconnect programs, because our public colleges and universities do not have the support staff and faculty to provide new students with the level of service they need to succeed. It is critically important that we ensure all students receive the supports they need to graduate. The goal should not be simply to provide students with access to college; it must be to support their ability to thrive and graduate.

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