

Vice President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20501

January 18, 2012

Dear Mr. Vice President:

Thank you very much for your extensive remarks in support of higher education at Central Bucks West High School in Doylestown, Pennsylvania this past Friday. We agree wholeheartedly that the current simultaneous rapid increases in both college tuition prices and student debt loads threaten to put a college education out of reach for many well-qualified students from working and middle-class families. At a time when the value of a college education in contributing both to individual well-being and the development of our local and national economies has never been greater, depriving students of access to higher education is a wasted opportunity our nation cannot afford.

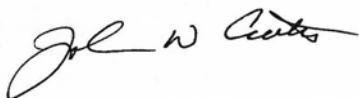
We must take issue, however, with your characterization of faculty salaries as a significant factor driving up the price of attending college. As has been noted by our colleagues in the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties and the influential publication *Inside Higher Ed*, full-time faculty salaries have actually been stagnant for a number of years. Our own analysis of full-time faculty salaries over the last three decades compared with increases in college and university tuition prices indicates that *tuition rates have grown between three and fourteen times as fast as full-time faculty salaries*, depending on the type of institution.

And full-time faculty salaries are only one part of the story. We have now reached a point where *the majority of the instructors in our colleges and universities (approximately 60 percent as of fall 2009) are employed as part-time faculty members with little or no benefits or job security, or as graduate assistants who are increasingly taking on full responsibility for teaching courses while simultaneously pursuing their own degrees*. Our colleagues in these contingent positions earn only a fraction of what their full-time colleagues earn, even while doing much of the same work.

The independent Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity, and Accountability concluded in its *Trends in College Spending, 1998-2008* that “[o]ver the 1998 to 2008 period, the share of instruction spending declined against increased spending for academic support (libraries and computing), institutional support (administration), and student services. ... [T]he common myth that spending on faculty is responsible for continuing cost escalation is not true.” (p. 22)

We appreciate the ongoing efforts of the Obama administration to support students in pursuing higher education. In order to maintain the quality of this important national resource, we must all work together to ensure that our investments are focused on the core mission of higher education: teaching, learning, and innovation. As faculty members and academic professionals committed to this shared national priority, we look forward to working with you to achieve greater educational opportunity for all Americans.

Respectfully,



John W. Curtis, PhD
Director of Research and Public Policy