seven years. The public-sector disadvantage is greatest at the full professor rank, ranging from 17 percent at master’s universities to 35 percent at doctoral universities. The range of disparity for associate professors is 10 to 23 percent, and that among assistant professors is 7 to 24 percent. The pattern by institutional category is similar for all three ranks, with faculty members in doctoral universities lagging quite a bit further behind than those in master’s universities or baccalaureate colleges.

It’s noteworthy that the salary disadvantage for public-sector faculty members increased beginning in 2010–11, after the recession in the national economy was technically over. Continued large and rising differentials in faculty salaries between public and private colleges and universities reflect the reductions in state support for higher education described above.

It’s important to bear in mind that these figures represent the average salary disadvantage for a public-sector faculty member in a given year. As noted in the first section of this report, the average salary increase in public institutions was also lower this year, and that has been true for many years. So for the individual, the earnings deficiency accumulates over the course of a career. The pipelines into academic positions are long, ranging through college and graduate school and sometimes through postdoctoral fellowships or visiting assistant professor positions.

But higher education is a service industry, and as such its labor resources are among the most valuable on campus. Colleges and universities that ignore this point and attempt to underpay their faculty for the work they perform will increasingly confront labor markets where it is difficult to hire and retain the best faculty and where talented graduate students who could have been great faculty members choose nonacademic careers instead.

The salary disadvantage experienced by faculty members at public colleges and universities, and the continued growth in exploitive contingent employment practices, are thus matters of significant public policy. The disinvestment from fully supported and compensated faculty positions in the public sector means that the majority of students will be deprived of the most engaged instructors and mentors. Our elected leaders consistently proclaim that investing in higher education is a state and national imperative, yet the data on state appropriations and public-private faculty salary disparities belie these proclamations. Public officials need to hear from their constituents about the value of higher education, and, importantly, about the critical role of faculty members in providing that education.

We encourage all of our readers to get involved, take action, and “spread the news.”