

Plans by University of Colorado at Boulder to cut 50 tenured jobs evoke opposition

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The University of Colorado at Boulder's College of Arts and Sciences dean, James White, ostensibly in reaction to the \$69 million revenue reduction last spring, has floated a plan to eliminate 50 tenured positions and replace them with 25 adjuncts.

The action immediately faced a backlash from students, faculty and staff on the campus. One day later, in an effort to head off an explosion, the dean claimed that the numbers were only hypothetical.

In an interview Thursday, White stated, "Cutting is hard but growing back intelligently can be even harder." Echoing the words of former Chicago Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel who infamously said, "Never let a good crisis go to waste," White stated menacingly, "Never waste a good pandemic."

In other words, cuts to tenured staff were long planned by the administration, which was waiting for the right moment to implement them. The proposed cuts were in line with the trend throughout much of academia where relatively secure tenure and tenure-track jobs are being replaced by essentially low-pay contractor jobs, entailing increased workloads.

The dean made clear that the proposed destruction of tenured jobs and their replacement by non-tenured and/or temporary positions would be permanent. White stated, "We must envision the College of Arts and Sciences of the future, five to 50 years from now," adding that the university would be "better able to withstand the inevitable economic downturns and better able to invest in great new ideas."

He stated bluntly, "The fact that our budget is mostly devoted to salaries means that when we must cut our spending, reducing salary costs is the only large lever we have to pull."

There is no talk of cutting salaries of top administrators, who eat up a disproportionate share of

the budget. According to publicly available information, as of FY 2019, White made \$303,400, which has risen by around \$8,000 since then. In FY 2019 the school spent \$7.24 million in a buy-out of UCB football coach Mike McIntyre, with a base salary being \$575,000 in FY 2019 excluding supplemental salary, bonuses, and incentives. The add-ons, the *Denver Business Journal* noted, amount to "hundreds of thousands or even millions in additional pay."

For FY 2019–2020, the UCB athletics director, who leads the most profitable football program in the state, was paid \$850,000 along the same lines. Meanwhile, the heads and deans of other departments are routinely making well over \$300,000 annually. As of FY 2019–2020, at least 41 staff made over \$300,000, 16 more than the 25 staff making over \$300,000 in FY 2019. One-hundred twenty-six made between \$200,000 and \$299,999, an increase of 26 since last year. A rough calculation reveals that at least \$38 million is paid to this small administrative-sports strata.

Meanwhile, the non-tenure track pay scale in the Arts & Humanities and Select Social Science Departments stands at a paltry \$23,000–\$29,900 for teaching four classes a year, with the pay for the maximum of eight classes set at \$44,100–\$48,000. Natural Sciences & Select Social Science Department non-tenure track pay is only slightly better, \$3,000–\$5,000 higher in the same categories.

The pay scale for temporary faculty is lower however, with pay divided into three "levels," with those mainly in liberal arts such as English lecturers and history lecturers receiving the lowest pay, set at a miserable \$36,000 a year for teaching eight courses (four a semester), and with no eligibility for health benefits, merit salary increases, retirement or leave accruals.

The decimation of public funding for higher

education is a nationwide trend carried out by both Democrats and Republicans, which have starved the universities while handing out massive tax breaks to the rich. The relentless cuts have forced ostensibly “public” institutions to massively raise tuition while relying to a great extent on the successful courting of wealthy corporate donors.

Massive cost cutting is on the agenda as the pandemic further erodes university finances. The president of Medaille College, Kenneth Macur, stating the need for major cost reduction, wrote to faculty in April, “I believe that this is an opportunity to do more than just tinker around the edges. We need to be bold and decisive,” adding, “a new model is the future of higher education.”

The *Wall Street Journal* in an article published December 7, “Hit by Covid-19, Colleges Do the Unthinkable and Cut Tenure,” notes that “struggling colleges around the country are reacting to the pandemic by unilaterally cutting programs, firing professors and gutting tenure, all once-unthinkable changes. Schools employed about 150,000 fewer workers in September than they did a year earlier, before the pandemic, according to the Labor Department. That is a decline of nearly 10 percent.”

The percentage of faculty who are tenure or tenure-track has decreased from 70 percent in the 1970s to about 30 percent now, with projected tenure-track professors further reduced to 10 percent in a generation. The *Journal* notes that faculty who work part-time cost the university “far less, [and] can be easily fired and typically have little or no say in how the school is governed.”

Colorado ranks last in higher education spending at \$726 per student compared to other states in FY 2018, while its tuition has shot up more than 60 percent between 2008 and 2018, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Less than 5 percent of the \$1.89 billion FY 2019–2020 Current Funds Budget for UCB, that is the total budget, comes from Direct State Funding. The majority of funding (64 percent) is made off students through fees, tuition, and revenues from bookstores, housing and dining, parking services, and sales.

The Socialist Equality Party insists that the right to free, high-quality, university-level education is a social right. It must be fought for based on the unity of

students, faculty, campus workers and broader sections of the working class.

The United Campus Workers Colorado union, an affiliate of the Communication Workers of America, has postured as an opponent of the attacks on tenured faculty in an attempt to recruit members on campus. However, the CWA, like other unions, is intimately tied up with the Democratic Party, which has helped enforce the assault of public funding for universities. As has been demonstrated in the betrayal of the powerful strike by Verizon workers on the East Coast and other struggles, the unions will do nothing to mount a serious fight that might cut across their relations with the Democrats and the corporations.

If campus workers are to fight the attack on jobs and living standards, they must organize independently of the unions hand-in-hand with students and broader sections of working class by forming rank-and-file committees run by the workers themselves. Already, teachers in New York, Michigan and other states have formed such committees. The Socialist Equality Party will help faculty and students who want to fight the attacks on education. Sign up today.



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