

GLOBE EDITORIAL

Romney's ax at UMass

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AT STRONG colleges and universities a potent chemistry of passion, knowledge, and good teaching transforms classrooms, creating academic and eventually economic prosperity. For this, a vibrant faculty is fundamental. But in Massachusetts, the ranks of faculty members on public campuses are being eroded. Their pay has been stagnant. And their numbers have declined. The University of Massachusetts at Amherst has lost nearly 200 full-time faculty over 10 years.

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To save money, the university has added more part-time teachers. They help carry the teaching load, but they cannot create stability. And because part-time teachers are typically not on a tenure track, they face pressure to find jobs with more-secure futures.

Last week Governor Romney made a grim picture grimmer by vetoing more than \$30 million that would have raised the salaries of the state's higher education faculty and staff. Although the raises had been negotiated in collective bargaining, the governor argues that faculty should live with the same belt-tightening as other state programs.

Troubling budget cuts on public campuses are a problem across the country.

"Nationally, state appropriations for higher education in fiscal 2004 declined by 2.1 percent, the first such decline in 11 years. This cut followed a year in which state appropriations for higher education rose by only 1.2 percent," says a report from the American Association of University Professors.

In this bleak environment, students scramble to find the courses they need. Professors scramble to find working copy machines or use aging computers that repeatedly crash under the strain of running new software. The effect on salaries has been harsh.

"The average salary of full professors at public doctoral universities is now only 77.4 percent of the average salary of full professors at private doctoral institutions. This percentage is the lowest since the AAUP started archiving its salary data in the late 1970s," according to the AAUP report.

This paves the way for private colleges to poach faculty from public schools, a trend reported last fall by The Chronicle of Higher Education. Romney has proposed giving more money to faculty who get competing offers. But such a star system could create a perverse incentive for faculty to pursue other jobs, and it could set up a two-tier salary structure that dampens morale. The better solution is to keep salary levels current.

State revenues are creeping upward, creating opportunities to increase faculty pay and hiring. This can't happen too soon. In counting the state's assets, it's easy to focus on roads and revenue. But -- especially in Massachusetts's knowledge-based economy -- great wealth also lies in the state's faculty members.