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### **Universities Benefit From Their Faculties' Unionization, Study Finds**

*By Peter Schmidt*

An unusual new study of the effects of faculty unionization on public universities—rather than on just faculty members themselves—reaches the controversial conclusion that such institutions generally become more efficient and effective when their professors form collective-bargaining units.

"Unionization contributes to lower budgets, higher graduation rates, and a greater number of degrees and completions," says a draft report on the study's findings scheduled to be presented on Sunday in New York, at the annual conference of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions.

Mark K. Cassell, a professor of political science at Kent State University, based the study on an analysis of 23 years' worth of federal data from 432 public universities compiled by the Delta Cost Project at the American Institutes for Research.

In an interview on Thursday, he said his study "tries to cut through some of the hyperbolic rhetoric" surrounding the effect of faculty unionization on colleges and shows "that unionization, on average, has a positive impact."

But one prominent researcher of higher-education unions, Stephen R. Porter, a professor of higher education at North Carolina State University, on Thursday described Mr. Cassell's analysis as unconvincing, in part because it had been conducted without solid data on colleges' administrative or faculty cultures, or the budget models such institutions use, or how such institutions tie faculty members' compensation to their productivity.

He said Mr. Cassell's methodology "doesn't really grapple" with the central question of how to take into account the role such variables play in college faculty members' decisions to form collective-bargaining units.

Measuring the effects of the unionization of college faculties is notoriously difficult. Researchers find it a challenge to rule out the

influence of factors other than unionization, such as regional variations in the economy or the cost of living, or the myriad ways in which the leadership, culture, or policies of individual institutions can affect whatever variables are being studied.

Also complicating such studies is the added difficulty in establish causal relationships and showing which way the causation flows. It might be the case, for example, that dealing with faculty unions hinders college administrations, but it also might be that dealing with dysfunctional administrations makes faculty members more likely to form unions.

Mr. Porter of North Carolina State said there were intangible factors as well. "The major issue in trying to understand the effects of faculty unions," he said, "is that schools that unionize are different from the ones that don't in ways that we can't observe." He noted, for example, that the federal data from colleges that many researchers rely on does not contain accurate measures of faculty satisfaction.

#### More Spending on Teaching

Most [previous studies of this issue](#) have focused on the question of whether unionization leaves colleges' faculty members better off, not whether colleges benefit or suffer from their faculty members' unionization. Mr. Cassell's study stands out in terms of its focus on the effects of unionization on colleges and the large number of colleges covered.

He tried to isolate the effects of faculty unionization on such institutions by statistically controlling for their size, selectivity, and Carnegie classification, and for the cost of living, economic conditions, partisan control of government, and level of state regulation of higher education in the states where they are located. To try to tease out causal relationships between the factors studied, he examined the data over time.

His analysis found that having faculty unions led public universities to spend a larger share of their budgets on instruction, as opposed to administration. Over time, his paper says, universities with faculty unions consistently spent 2 to 3 percent less than others on administration, "a sizable amount given that university budgets often can exceed \$500 million."

The paper says the higher spending on instruction at unionized public universities might help explain the finding that such institutions have significantly better student success rates, as measured by the share of students who graduate within six years, earn degrees, or complete some other academic program.

Stephen G. Katsinas, a professor of higher education and director of the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, said he suspects that having faculty unions might affect the composition of colleges' academic work forces, leaving them with larger shares of full-time, not part-time, faculty members than colleges without faculty unions.

Such differences in work-force composition, he said, might help account for differences in student performance, considering that other research has found that being full time leaves faculty members better able to advise students. While saying he needed more time to review the new study's methodology, Mr. Katsinas said Mr. Cassell "is to be commended for tackling a tough and important topic."