FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Matthew Boedy
President of Georgia AAUP
matthew.boedy@ung.edu
706-830-8010
@matthewboedy

Faculty in the South Describe a Climate of Fear on Campus, Grants Cancelled, and Students Impacted, Survey Finds

A major new survey of higher education faculty across the South has revealed the significant impact of federal and state political attacks on faculty work and recruitment. The survey, conducted by multiple state conferences of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), received responses from nearly 4,000 individuals [3,926] in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas.The findings highlight a widespread climate of fear and anxiety and by effect, an ongoing desire by some faculty to apply for other jobs outside their current state, exacerbating "brain drain" across the region.

An open-ended question about the direct impact on faculty work from attacks on higher education reaped more than 2,700 responses. One of the most repeated themes in the responses was about the climate of fear and anxiety on campus. One respondent wrote: "Attacks have instilled fear in our graduate students and led some to reconsider seeking an academic position in the U.S." Another wrote about "a general fear of my entire career being dissolved" due to a "fear of talking openly about academic findings that may contradict political ideology." Another wrote they were fearful of "ambush videos which take course and class discussions out of context to attack faculty." This fear has "changed my approach to teaching and its content in ways that are detrimental to understanding both sides of any issue."

Overall findings from the survey indicate about 55 percent [55.4] of respondents would not recommend their state as a desirable place to work for colleagues, while 25 percent are planning to apply in another state in the coming year. That same amount has applied for academic jobs in other states since 2023. The top seven states for those applications are: California, New York, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Every state in the nation was listed at least six times. More than 15 percent [17.6 percent] said they do not plan to stay in academia long term.

The survey also sheds light on the primary factors driving faculty members to seek employment elsewhere. Respondents could list multiple reasons. Last year's top reason, salary, was replaced this year by the "broad political climate" (56.6 percent of respondents) of a faculty member's current state. Salary was No. 2 at 50.7 percent and academic freedom garnered 45.5 percent. Issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and shared governance were mentioned

by more than 30 percent. LGBTQ+ issues, reproduction/abortion access, and tenure issues were also factors for more than 20 percent of respondents. Cost of living was 14.8 percent.

Two new questions were added this year. One asked respondents if they personally in the last year had any syllabi or curriculum choices questioned by administrators. More than 15 percent (17.1) said yes. The second question asked respondents if they personally had any federal contracts ended by the Trump administration. More than 10 percent (10.6) said yes. Respondents to the open-ended question about attacks on higher education wrote about having grants cancelled, others revised grant applications to avoid certain words, and a fear for the future of government-sponsored research. One respondent wrote: "As an early career faculty member, I am very concerned about the availability of grant funding to support the research that I am passionate about."

Furthermore, the survey revealed the detrimental effects of attacks on hiring within higher education. Almost 40 percent said they knew of candidate hesitancy through the interview process (39.9) and generally applications were down (39.8 percent). More than a third of respondents noted the quality of applications were down (35.2 percent) and job offer refusals by candidates (34.8 percent). About 20 percent (21.4) said they knew of no impact.

The survey, conducted by state AAUP conferences in the region from August 4 to August 29, utilized social media and email for distribution. About 17 percent of respondents identified as non-white and 51 percent as female. The respondents encompassed a broad range of experience, status, and salary. More than 60 percent of respondents said they hold tenured positions.

These findings echo a similar survey of about 3,000 faculty conducted in 2024 in these same 12 states. Final respondent count per state:
Texas: 1162
Georgia: 812
North Carolina: 387
South Carolina: 331
Alabama: 200
Florida: 198
Virginia: 173
Louisiana: 164
Mississippi: 146
Tennessee: 136
Kentucky: 132
Arkansas: 56

If any media organization wants the full database of responses please contact Matthew Boedy.