

Subject **News from AFT Higher Education, March 2014**  
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## Faculty strike makes waves in Chicago

In the first strike at a research institution in recent memory, 1,100 faculty at the University of Illinois at Chicago went on strike Feb. 18 and 19, with strong support from students. The faculty are represented by UIC United Faculty, a joint affiliate of the AFT, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, and the American Association of University Professors. The union was first certified in 2011 as one unit of full-time tenure-track and nontenure-track faculty, but the university immediately appealed—the beginning of a relationship marked by stonewalling. In 2012, the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board separated the faculty into two bargaining units, but the union bargains as one and—judging from the wildly successful strike—are stronger together.



- + [Read more about the strike on AFT.org](#)
- + [See great commentary piece in \*Jacobin\*](#)

## Michigan research assistants have right to bargain



A United States District Court has ruled that the Legislature and governor of Michigan violated the state's constitution in 2012, when they passed and signed into law a provision saying graduate research assistants at the University of Michigan are students, not employees, and therefore don't have the right

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### AFT on

AFT Higher Ed:  
"We're proud to be partnering with USAS [United Students Against Sweatshops] on this campaign to take back our schools from corporate interests."

- + [Visit AFT on Facebook](#)

to decide on the question of collective bargaining. The provision appeared suddenly in March 2012, tacked onto an unrelated bill in the Republican-dominated Legislature. It came after the assistants, known as Graduate Student Research Assistants, had organized themselves to join the existing Graduate Employees' Organization, which has represented teaching assistants at the university since 1975. Plaintiffs in the suit included then-GSRA member Christie Toth—at the far right in the picture.

➤ [Read more about the Michigan decision](#)

## Reclaiming the promise of higher education

At the February meeting of the AFT executive council, the union's key leadership body passed a resolution making explicit that reclaiming the promise of high-quality higher education is a top priority of the organization and our locals and affiliates. The resolution states that an accessible, affordable and high-quality system of public higher education is critical to the health of the nation. This is the theme of the April 11–13 AFT Higher Education conference in Baltimore as well.

➤ [Learn more about the conference](#)

➤ [Read the resolution](#)



## Students want higher ed, not debt



On March 6, more than 60 organizations and partners are launching Higher Ed Not Debt—a new campaign to fight the crushing effects of student debt on our communities. AFT President Randi Weingarten (left) and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) spoke at the Washington, D.C., launch.

The long-term vision of the campaign is to ensure that high-quality higher education is affordable and accessible to all, without the burden of financial hardship. The campaign has four core principles:

- To support borrowers currently paying off the existing \$1.2 trillion of debt;
- To address the causes of declining affordability and quality, including changes to state funding and financial aid policies;
- To educate the public about Wall Street's complicity in the creation of the debt crisis; and
- To plan actions of civic engagement across all geographic, demographic and political lines.

+ [Read about the launch](#)

+ [Learn more at higherednotdebt.org](#)

## Colleges use healthcare reform against adjuncts

The AFT and other organizations have complained that colleges and universities have been misinterpreting aspects of the Affordable Care Act and are using it as an excuse to cut back on adjunct and part-time faculty's teaching loads. The U.S. Department of the Treasury issued guidance in February that is intended to clarify how employers count the hours of their workers. While the new guidance, described in this [Inside Higher Ed article](#), provides some illumination, it doesn't entirely solve the problem, says AFT President Randi Weingarten. Employers that "embrace the spirit of the [law]—which is rooted in the idea that everyone deserves access to high-quality and affordable healthcare—will work with us to make it happen," she notes. "Those who oppose the law or put cutting costs above high-quality education probably won't."

+ [See if your college is on AFT's list of bad actors](#)

## Faculty push back against Nicholas Kristof

Did you see Nicholas Kristof's Feb. 15 op-ed, "[Professors, We Need You!](#)"? Many academics took issue with his premise that faculty are withdrawing from one of their roles as public intellectuals. Our favorite rejoinder came from Jonathan Senchyne, a member of the United Faculty and Academic Staff/AFT at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



[Read it here](#)

## AFT calls for halt to deportations

The AFT has called for a moratorium on low-priority deportations and is demanding that President Obama exercise his executive powers to end the tragic separation of families that is occurring as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement deports an average of 1,200 people per day.

Meeting in New Orleans Feb. 10–12, the AFT executive council passed a resolution that reiterates the AFT's support for comprehensive immigration reform and a road map to citizenship for some 11 million aspiring Americans. This is a cause that has brought the AFT into a coalition of labor, social justice, faith-based, and civil and human rights organizations.

[Read about it here](#)



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