

Lower Pay in Higher Ed

Exploring the Pay Gap Between Public University Workers and State Employees in Illinois

September 19, 2023



Robert Bruno

Professor and Director

Project for Middle-Class Renewal

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

I ILLINOIS LABOR & EMPLOYMENT
RELATIONS
PROJECT FOR MIDDLE CLASS RENEWAL

Andrew Wilson

Policy Analyst

Illinois Economic Policy Institute

Frank Manzo IV

Economist

Illinois Economic Policy Institute

ILEPI
ILLINOIS ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE

Executive Summary

Public universities in Illinois are anchor institutions, directly employing tens of thousands of workers and contributing tens of billions of dollars to the state's economy. However, Illinois' public universities are significantly lagging other public sector employers on employee compensation for comparable jobs. This disparity could undermine efforts to attract and retain a qualified workforce at these critical institutions in a historically tight labor market.

Economic data reveal that:

- Workers at Illinois' public universities earn **14 percent less** than their state government employee counterparts—after accounting for important factors such as hours worked, age, gender, race, urban status, marital status, veteran status, level of educational attainment, and occupation.
- After matching 69 non-instructional job titles at public universities and state agencies, public university employees earn **21 percent less** on average than state employees once the data is weighted by the number of workers in each occupation.
- **\$80 million** annually is needed to achieve pay parity for more than 5,600 public university employees who earn less than their state government counterparts.
- State employees earn more on average than public university employees in 64 of the 69 matched occupations (**93 percent**).

The data reveals that non-instructional workers employed by public universities earn less than their peers who perform similar work for state agencies. These low earnings not only place Illinois' public universities at a competitive disadvantage in the labor market relative to other public sector employers, but they ultimately result in their workers having less disposable income to spend at local businesses—affecting local economic development in places like Urbana-Champaign, Normal, Charleston, Macomb, Carbondale, and Edwardsville.

Because public universities—like the state agencies to which they are compared in this analysis—are supported with public funds, elected officials should consider exploring ways to eliminate this wage gap and ensure that these institutions are positioned to compete for the workers needed to serve Illinois students and campus communities.

Introduction

Illinois has world-class public universities that educate tens of thousands of students every year, preparing them to become productive members of the workforce and scholarly members of society. But Illinois' public universities also serve as economic engines in local communities, providing advancements in research that drive economic growth, purchasing goods and services through the supply chain that support local businesses, and directly employ thousands of workers (DePillis, 2023).

In Fiscal Year 2021, there were 73,443 active members in the State Universities Retirement System (SURS), including 60,397 in the Defined Benefit Plan (82 percent) and 13,046 in the Retirement Savings Plan (18 percent) (COGFA, 2022). Directly employed positions range from those requiring minimum experience and skillsets up to the very highest levels of expertise and education. From building custodians and dormitory chefs to laboratory clinicians and tenured professors, these individuals spend their hard-earned incomes back in the local economy at restaurants, retailers, car dealerships, and other businesses, producing an “economic multiplier” that further employs additional workers. Consequently, universities anchor their communities. For many smaller communities, the presence of a public university serves as the primary driver of the local economy.

Public universities generate great economic value to the State of Illinois. A 2022 study by Emsi Burning Glass found that the University of Illinois System contributes \$19 billion annually to the state's economy through its education, operations, research, hospital, and entrepreneurial activities (EBS, 2022). Additionally, Southern Illinois University Carbondale adds \$2.3 billion annually to the Illinois economy (Sharma, Diaby, & Harfst, 2011). Illinois State University adds \$833 million, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville adds \$514 million, Eastern Illinois University adds \$503 million, and Western Illinois adds \$473 million (Mohammadi & Beck, 2016; SIUE, 2015; EIU, 2017; RETAC, 2016). Education-based communities may afford greater economic stability because higher education does not experience the business cycle as drastically as private businesses, which can be a moderating force during recessions because they can maintain certain levels of spending.

Both the United States and Illinois are presently facing a tight labor market, and public universities are not immune. As of May 2023, there were 422,000 job openings in Illinois, or 1.6 per unemployed resident (BLS, 2023a; BLS, 2023b). Researchers have linked the shortage in workers to a multitude of factors, including lack of adequate child care, early retirements, the persistence of long COVID symptoms, and an overall lack of job quality that has led to high turnover rates and job changes referred to as a “Great Resignation” (Faria e Castro, 2021; Fowers & Van Dam, 2021). In the current labor market, public universities face imperatives to maintain competitive pay and benefit standards to attract and retain a qualified and reliable workforce to serve Illinois' students and communities.

This economic brief, conducted by researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Project for Middle Class Renewal (PMCR) and the Illinois Economic Policy Institute (ILEPI), explores pay gaps that exist between employees at public universities in Illinois and their counterparts employed at state agencies.¹ While much research has been conducted on pay differences between public sector workers

¹ In addition to hourly wages, total compensation incorporates a range of benefits such as health insurance, dental insurance, and retirement contributions. However, this study does not include a comparison of benefits because they are prescribed by state law and are consistent for employees across state government and public universities. One final point. The data in the study precedes the new collective bargaining agreement to which the State of Illinois and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees Council 31 agreed in July 2023 (State of Illinois, 2023).

relative to private sector workers and on pay gaps across demographic groups—such as women earnings compared to men or Black workers’ earnings compared to white workers’ earnings—no research has been conducted *within* state government. Universities are an important comparison to state government because they share many characteristics, including a public-interest focus, the need for knowledgeable and experienced workers who are highly educated, and the scrutiny and transparency that comes with taxpayer-funded institutions. Furthermore, if pay gaps exist between workers at public universities and state employees, they would make it more difficult for the anchor institutions of Illinois’ regional economies to attract and retain workers, which could also contribute to population stagnation and decline. Ultimately, these disparities could have important budget or policy implications for the state, which now boasts a \$1 trillion economy (Manzo, Bruno, & Jekot, 2022; BEA, 2023).

Pay Gap Between University Employees and State Employees

Economic research has documented that workers earn between 11 percent and 14 percent less than their counterparts in the private sector after controlling for important variables like education, experience, organizational size, gender, race, and hours worked. In particular, state government employees earn between 16 percent and 19 percent less (Keefe, 2010; Morrissey, 2021). Previous studies have found that workers in state and local government in Illinois earn 13 percent less in annual incomes (Bruno & Manzo, 2013).

However, the public sector pay gap is significantly reduced in states with laws that protect collective bargaining (Morrissey, 2021). Labor unions have also reduced gender pay gaps for faculty at public universities in the United States, and campuses with strong unions can address broader gender inequities (Dominguez-Villegas et al., 2020).

Results from 2019-2021 Data from the *American Community Survey*

This analysis first utilizes 2019, 2020, and 2021 *American Community Survey* data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The *American Community Survey* is an annual survey of approximately one percent of the U.S. population and includes questions on demographics, educational attainment, economic characteristics, housing characteristics, and family and household characteristics. The data is adjusted to match Illinois’ estimated population using weights provided by U.S. Census Bureau researchers.

Figure 1 focuses on all full-time workers employed by state universities and community colleges excluding only professors, instructors, and teachers at those institutions. Occupations ranging from high-level administrators and legal counsel to administrative staff and maintenance workers are all included in this first analysis. These workers are compared to full-time workers employed by the State of Illinois and to full-time workers employed in the private sector, including at for-profit companies, at nonprofit organizations, and the self-employed. Full-time workers are limited to those who usually work at least 35 hours per week and worked at least 40 weeks last year, for a minimum total of 1,400 annual hours worked.

Educational, geographic, occupation, and demographic characteristics—like age, racial background, gender identification, marital status, and veteran status—are likely to influence an individual person’s annual income. Employees at public universities and community colleges are highly educated, with more than two-thirds of full-time workers at public institutions of higher education holding bachelor’s degrees or higher (71 percent) compared to about half of those in state government (49 percent) and two-fifths of the full-time private sector workforce (42 percent). Additionally, employees at public universities and

community colleges may be more likely to live in the Urbana-Champaign and Bloomington-Normal area, while state employees may be more likely to be in the Chicago and Springfield areas. To account for these factors, Figure 1 utilizes a statistical technique called a “regression.” The regression describes how much a variable, such as working for a university or community college, is responsible for raising or lowering worker incomes.

FIGURE 1: ROBUST OLS REGRESSION RESULTS – IMPACT OF WORKING AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE ON INFLATION-ADJUSTED INCOMES FROM WAGES AND SALARIES, ONLY WORKERS IN STATE GOVERNMENT, 2019-2021

Impact of Working at a Public University or Community College on Annual Wage and Salary Incomes, 2019-2021 (Workers in State Government Only)	Effect on Annual Income (Coefficient)	 t-stat (≥1.96 is Significant)
Public University or Community College	-13.9%***	5.39
Hours Worked Per Week	+3.4%***	18.72
Age	+8.0%***	13.59
Age ²	-0.1%***	11.69
Gender Identification: Female	-10.6%***	3.79
Racial Background: White	+16.9%	1.50
Racial Background: Black or African American	+0.03%	0.03
Racial Background: Hispanic or Latinx	+14.5%	1.18
Racial Background: Asian or Pacific Islander	+14.6%	1.15
Urban Status: City Center	+2.9%	0.70
Urban Status: Suburb	+2.4%	0.86
Marital Status: Married	+4.6%*	1.91
Veteran Status: Military Veteran	+2.9%	0.63
Educational Attainment: Less than a High School Degree	+4.9%	0.47
Educational Attainment: Some College but No Degree	+8.2%**	1.96
Educational Attainment: Associate Degree	+12.4%***	2.57
Educational Attainment: Bachelor’s Degree	+26.5%***	6.42
Educational Attainment: Master’s Degree	+42.5%***	8.69
Educational Attainment: Doctorate or Professional Degree	+47.7%***	5.64
Weeks Worked Variables (5 Intervals)	Yes	--
Occupation Variables (20 Major Groups)	Yes	--
Constant (Expressed as Natural Logarithm)	5.318***	22.38
Observations	5,396	
R ²	0.682	

Source(s): Authors’ analysis of 2019-2021 *American Community Survey* (1-Year Estimates) data from the U.S. Census Bureau (Ruggles et al., 2021). Analysis limited to employed workers who worked in state government and excludes postsecondary teachers, teachers, special education teachers, tutors, and “other teachers and instructors.” ***p≤|0.01|; **p≤|0.05|; *p≤|0.10|.

After accounting for hours worked per week, weeks worked per year, age, gender identification, racial background, urban status, marital status, veteran status, level of educational attainment, and occupation, working at a public university or community college is statistically associated with a 14 percent decrease in average annual wage and salary income when compared to people employed by the state (Figure 1). The analysis excludes those in professor, instructor, and teaching occupations but includes all other occupations, from administrative services and library occupations to financial services and legal occupations. The results are significant at the 99-percent level of statistical confidence.

Comparison of Matched 2022-2023 Public University and State Employee Job Titles: Methodology

A subsequent analysis is derived from a specialized dataset using publicly available information from the State of Illinois and proprietary information provided by American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 31, a labor union representing over 53,000 public service workers in Illinois (OLMS, 2023). State government employment and pay data is publicly available at the Illinois Department of Central Management Services portal on State Employee Pay (Illinois CMS, 2023). Additionally, AFSCME Council 31 member salaries and job titles are also publicly available or attainable through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

Through these channels, the number of public university and state occupations exceeded 3,000 job titles, and approximately 100,000 employees. This number was reduced to 69 matched (or apples-to-apples) job titles by dropping occupations that did not have equivalent job descriptions in both the state university system and state government. Job titles and employees were further reduced and matched in the following two ways: 1) through a literal textual word-for-word match of job titles and 2) where available, comparing job descriptions aided by O*Net Handbook occupation equivalents (ETA, 2023).²

There are 69 job titles that appropriately match with workers employed by both state agencies and public universities. In the 2022-23 period, 10,736 people were employed within these 69 matched job titles. The final list of comparable 69 occupations represent job titles that exist at the state level and are present at least at one of the state's public universities. Note that none of the job titles is a professor or an instructor. Many matched occupations are present at more than one university (see Appendix Table 1). The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign represents the largest percentage of university titles and employees working within the positions compared to the state occupations (see Appendix Table 2 and 3).

An average hourly pay was calculated by employer type, for each job title and the differences were computed.³ Information provided by universities in FOIA requests varied in format from hourly pay to annual pay. Where pay data was submitted as annual or monthly earnings, an average hourly pay rate for all matched titles was derived by dividing by 37.5 hours per week.⁴ Pay differences were calculated in two ways. First, a differential was arrived at based upon a comparison of the hourly pay rates for each job title by employer. A second calculation was done by weighting the number of workers in each job title. This latter approach generates an hourly pay difference after considering the number of employees in each job classification.

² The O*NET Handbook is the nation's primary source of occupational information. The O*NET database contains information on hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors. The database is continually updated by surveying a broad range of workers from each occupation.

³ *Medians* are often used to assess differences in wages and salaries to remove the influence of highly paid individuals at the top end of the income distribution, such as chief executives and investment bankers. However, *averages* (or means) are utilized in this report because wages and salaries are generally more equitable in the public sector and the occupations evaluated in this section are apples-to-apples comparisons. That is, a highly paid football head coach and the Dean of a public university are not being compared to security guards or library specialists working at state agencies in this analysis.

⁴ The analysis uses a 37.5 hour workweek because it is common for the matched titles across the state and university systems.

Comparison of Matched 2022-2023 Public University and State Employee Job Titles: Results

Overall, across all 69 job titles, Illinois workers earn an average of 21 percent less if they work for public universities than if they are employed by the State of Illinois or a state agency (Figure 2). Note that this is the occupation-level pay gap weighted by the number of workers in each non-instructional occupation. Prior to the data being adjusted for number of workers in each occupation, the pay gap is 25 percent less. Additionally, state employees earn more on average in 64 of the 69 occupations (93 percent) while public university employees only earn more on average in 5 occupations (7 percent). The data are consistent with the regression data in showing a pay gap between public university workers and state employees in Illinois (Figure 1).

FIGURE 2: 69 AFSCME COUNCIL 31 JOB TITLE MATCHES, PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES VS. STATE GOVERNMENT, 2022-2023

69 Job Title Matches	State Government	Public Universities	Public University Difference
Accounting Assistant / Account Technician I	\$27.86	\$19.20	-31.1%
Accounting Officer / Account Technician II	\$31.72	\$20.69	-34.8%
Accountant I	\$25.34	\$24.15	-4.7%
Accounting Specialist	\$21.28	\$24.34	+14.4%
Administrative Aide	\$27.69	\$26.77	-3.3%
Administrative Assistant	\$30.21	\$28.63	-5.2%
Administrative Assistant II	\$42.68	\$31.47	-26.3%
Benefits Counselor	\$32.34	\$24.63	-23.8%
Building Service Foreman	\$24.62	\$26.19	+6.4%
Building Service Worker	\$26.67	\$20.71	-22.3%
Business Manager	\$42.65	\$25.26	-40.8%
Child Development Associate / Child Support Specialist I	\$33.00	\$16.02	-51.4%
Clinic Nurse / Registered Nurse I	\$49.95	\$27.69	-44.6%
Culinary Worker III / Cook I	\$27.86	\$20.85	-25.2%
Culinary Worker IV / Cook II	\$30.92	\$21.92	-29.1%
Food Service Administrator / Corrections Food Service Supervisor I	\$41.49	\$20.58	-50.4%
Graphic Designer	\$32.00	\$23.12	-27.7%
Health Information Technician	\$27.82	\$22.39	-19.5%
Human Resource Officer	\$35.08	\$21.82	-37.8%
Human Resource Representative	\$20.92	\$20.12	-3.8%
Institutional Research Data Spec	\$38.97	\$25.78	-33.9%
Interpreter of Deaf and Hard of Hearing / Sign Language Interpreter	\$38.15	\$23.84	-37.5%
Inventory Clerk / Property and Supply Clerk II	\$22.97	\$16.90	-26.4%
Inventory Specialist	\$27.08	\$19.23	-29.0%
Library Assistant / Library Technical Assistant	\$32.00	\$18.84	-41.1%
Library Operations Associate / Librarian I	\$36.06	\$25.50	-29.3%
Library Specialist/Senior Library Specialist / Library Associate	\$33.23	\$24.08	-27.6%
Licensed Practical Nurse II	\$35.65	\$23.24	-34.8%
Maintenance Laborer	\$40.98	\$24.88	-39.3%
Maintenance Worker	\$40.62	\$25.04	-38.3%
Office Administrator / Executive Secretary II	\$34.71	\$24.74	-28.7%
Office Manager / Executive Secretary I	\$30.79	\$21.39	-30.5%
Office Support Assistant / Office Assistant	\$23.09	\$19.42	-15.9%
Office Support Associate / Office Associate	\$24.94	\$18.80	-24.6%
Office Support Specialist / Office Coordinator	\$26.76	\$19.69	-26.4%

LOWER PAY IN HIGHER ED

Payroll Specialist III	\$30.77	\$21.65	-29.6%
Procurement Officer	\$35.69	\$21.71	-39.2%
Program Assistant	\$35.69	\$20.87	-41.5%
Program Coordinator	\$35.08	\$25.75	-26.6%
Program Services Aide	\$25.23	\$15.57	-38.3%
Public Safety Telecommunicator / Telecommunicator	\$43.02	\$23.65	-45.0%
Shipping/Receiving Clerk / Stores Clerk	\$23.11	\$20.39	-11.8%
Storekeeper I	\$30.00	\$21.85	-27.1%
Storekeeper II	\$34.00	\$24.12	-29.1%
Storekeeper III	\$34.31	\$24.66	-28.1%
Accountant II	\$29.13	\$25.72	-11.7%
IT Technical Associate / IT Developer	\$39.38	\$36.55	-7.2%
IT Support Associate / IT Support Specialist	\$28.31	\$27.48	-2.9%
IT Manager	\$51.52	\$52.75	+2.4%
Senior Library Coordinator / Library Program Administrator	\$48.00	\$38.40	-20.0%
Research Analyst	\$46.77	\$32.51	-30.5%
Electrician	\$56.14	\$43.90	-21.8%
Security Guard	\$32.21	\$16.00	-50.3%
Financial Aid Coordinator / Financial Aid Advisor III	\$26.67	\$20.71	-22.3%
Financial Aid Associate / Financial Aid Advisor IV	\$42.67	\$32.62	-23.6%
Health Information Specialist / Health Information Associate	\$29.59	\$24.78	-16.3%
Help Desk Specialist / Help Desk Support Specialist	\$35.69	\$24.56	-31.2%
Internal Auditor Associate / Internal Auditor	\$35.08	\$30.83	-12.1%
Manager	\$42.73	\$37.14	-13.1%
Mental Health Coordinator / Mental Health Technician I	\$30.54	\$28.59	-6.4%
Grounds Worker / Building/Grounds Laborer	\$34.77	\$21.89	-37.0%
Customer Service Representative	\$19.04	\$20.46	+7.5%
Events Coordinator / Special Events & Program Coordinator	\$40.62	\$21.26	-47.7%
Volunteer Relations Associate / Volunteer Services Coordinator II	\$34.05	\$33.85	-0.6%
Clinical Veterinarian / Veterinary Supervisor I	\$54.15	\$58.70	+8.4%
Telephone Operator I / Switchboard Operator I	\$26.56	\$15.85	-40.3%
Telephone Operator III / Switchboard Operator III	\$39.79	\$18.20	-54.3%
Licensed Clinical Social Worker / Social Worker II	\$43.37	\$32.98	-24.0%
Pharmacist / Clinical Pharmacist	\$65.53	\$59.13	-9.8%
Occupation-Level Average Pay Gap			-24.7%
Occupation-Level Weighted Pay Gap			-20.9%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2022 & 2023 wages by job classification of union members affiliated with AFSCME Council 31 who are employed at public universities cross-referenced with monthly income for public sector workers employed by the State of Illinois. State employee income is converted to hourly rates by dividing monthly pay by 162.5 hours, which is the equivalent of 1,950 full-time hours divided by 12 months, or 162.5 hours per month on average. Data obtained through public data and Freedom of Information Act requests.

For the 5,636 university employees working in comparably lower-paid positions to achieve parity with their state government counterparts, universities would need to raise their pay by an average of nearly \$14,300 annually. The compensation adjustment would range from \$400 per year (Volunteer Relations Associate) to \$43,400 per year (Clinic Nurse). Overall, universities would have to boost pay for these 64 occupations by a cumulative total of \$80 million annually (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: ADDITIONAL PAY NEEDED TO ACHIEVE PARITY IN UNIVERSITY POSITIONS BY TITLE, BASED ON 2022-2023 DATA

69 Job Title Matches	State Government	Public Universities	Pay Difference (Dollar)	Public University Count	Total Parity Adjustment (Yearly)	Parity Adjustment per Employee
Accountant I	\$25.34	\$24.15	-\$1.19	53	\$123,174.02	\$2,324.04
Accountant II	\$29.13	\$25.72	-\$3.40	42	\$278,851.02	\$6,639.31
Accounting Assistant	\$27.86	\$19.20	-\$8.66	22	\$371,593.83	\$16,890.63
Accounting Officer	\$31.72	\$20.69	-\$11.03	107	\$2,193,773.34	\$21,507.58
Accounting Specialist	\$21.28	\$24.34	+\$3.06	38	\$0.00	\$0.00
Administrative Aide	\$27.69	\$26.77	-\$0.92	182	\$328,069.78	\$1,802.58
Administrative Assistant	\$30.21	\$28.63	-\$1.58	109	\$335,197.81	\$3,075.21
Administrative Assistant II	\$42.68	\$31.47	-\$11.21	2	\$43,727.67	\$21,863.83
Benefits Counselor	\$32.34	\$24.63	-\$7.70	5	\$75,086.11	\$15,017.22
Building Service Foreman	\$24.62	\$26.19	+\$1.57	44	\$0.00	\$0.00
Building Service Worker	\$26.67	\$20.71	-\$5.96	762	\$8,855,866.50	\$11,621.87
Business Manager	\$42.65	\$25.26	-\$17.39	21	\$712,135.56	\$33,911.22
Child Development Associate	\$33.00	\$16.02	-\$16.97	12	\$397,158.83	\$33,096.57
Clinic Nurse	\$49.95	\$27.69	-\$22.25	124	\$5,380,283.11	\$43,389.38
Clinical Veterinarian	\$54.15	\$58.70	+\$4.54	2	\$0.00	\$0.00
Culinary Worker III	\$27.86	\$20.85	-\$7.01	141	\$1,927,664.30	\$13,671.38
Culinary Worker IV	\$30.92	\$21.92	-\$8.99	22	\$385,837.55	\$17,538.07
Customer Service Representative	\$19.04	\$20.46	+\$1.42	35	\$0.00	\$0.00
Electrician	\$56.14	\$43.90	-\$12.24	138	\$3,293,989.04	\$23,869.49
Events Coordinator	\$40.62	\$21.26	-\$19.36	7	\$264,259.37	\$37,751.34
Financial Aid Associate	\$42.67	\$32.62	-\$10.05	11	\$215,594.88	\$19,599.53
Financial Aid Coordinator	\$26.67	\$20.71	-\$5.96	27	\$313,551.18	\$11,613.01
Food Service Administrator I	\$41.49	\$20.58	-\$20.91	10	\$407,707.53	\$40,770.75
Graphic Designer	\$32.00	\$23.12	-\$8.88	13	\$225,100.55	\$17,315.43
Grounds Worker	\$34.77	\$21.89	-\$12.87	90	\$2,259,497.70	\$25,105.53
Health Information Specialist	\$29.59	\$24.78	-\$4.81	6	\$56,332.50	\$9,388.75
Health Information Technician	\$27.82	\$22.39	-\$5.43	24	\$254,071.80	\$10,586.33
Help Desk Specialist	\$35.69	\$24.56	-\$11.14	8	\$173,720.00	\$21,715.00
Human Resource Officer	\$35.08	\$21.82	-\$13.25	27	\$697,873.76	\$25,847.18
Human Resource Representative	\$20.92	\$20.12	-\$0.80	18	\$28,179.77	\$1,565.54
Institutional Research Data Spec	\$38.97	\$25.78	-\$13.19	1	\$25,729.00	\$25,729.00
Internal Auditor Associate	\$35.08	\$30.83	-\$4.25	6	\$49,693.72	\$8,282.29
Interpreter of Deaf and Hard of Hearing	\$38.15	\$23.84	-\$14.31	3	\$83,716.50	\$27,905.50
Inventory Clerk	\$22.97	\$16.90	-\$6.07	4	\$47,344.90	\$11,836.23
Inventory Specialist	\$27.08	\$19.23	-\$7.84	8	\$122,373.00	\$15,296.63
IT Manager	\$51.52	\$52.75	+\$1.23	123	\$0.00	\$0.00
IT Support Associate	\$28.31	\$27.48	-\$0.83	210	\$340,978.29	\$1,623.71

LOWER PAY IN HIGHER ED

IT Technical Associate	\$39.38	\$36.55	-\$2.83	566	\$3,123,371.94	\$5,518.32
Library Assistant	\$32.00	\$18.84	-\$13.16	22	\$564,618.60	\$25,664.48
Library Operations Associate	\$36.06	\$25.50	-\$10.56	32	\$659,162.66	\$20,598.83
Library Specialist / Senior Library Specialist	\$33.23	\$24.08	-\$9.16	233	\$4,159,712.05	\$17,852.84
Licensed Clinical Social Worker	\$43.37	\$32.98	-\$10.40	26	\$527,075.43	\$20,272.13
Licensed Practical Nurse II	\$35.65	\$23.24	-\$12.41	93	\$2,249,894.41	\$24,192.41
Maintenance Laborer	\$40.98	\$24.88	-\$16.10	6	\$188,340.23	\$31,390.04
Maintenance Worker	\$40.62	\$25.04	-\$15.57	3	\$91,105.08	\$30,368.36
Manager	\$42.73	\$37.14	-\$5.59	10	\$108,966.27	\$10,896.63
Mental Health Coordinator	\$30.54	\$28.59	-\$1.96	6	\$22,893.22	\$3,815.54
Office Administrator	\$34.71	\$24.74	-\$9.98	349	\$6,790,396.48	\$19,456.72
Office Manager	\$30.79	\$21.39	-\$9.40	417	\$7,643,708.79	\$18,330.24
Office Support Assistant	\$23.09	\$19.42	-\$3.66	79	\$564,539.00	\$7,146.06
Office Support Associate	\$24.94	\$18.80	-\$6.14	240	\$2,875,096.88	\$11,979.57
Office Support Specialist	\$26.76	\$19.69	-\$7.07	430	\$5,925,338.95	\$13,779.86
Payroll Specialist III	\$30.77	\$21.65	-\$9.12	6	\$106,711.05	\$17,785.18
Pharmacist	\$65.53	\$59.13	-\$6.40	11	\$137,224.52	\$12,474.96
Procurement Officer	\$35.69	\$21.71	-\$13.98	21	\$572,496.59	\$27,261.74
Program Assistant	\$35.69	\$20.87	-\$14.82	91	\$2,630,099.65	\$28,902.19
Program Coordinator	\$35.08	\$25.75	-\$9.33	314	\$5,710,630.18	\$18,186.72
Program Services Aide	\$25.23	\$15.57	-\$9.66	8	\$150,751.81	\$18,843.98
Public Safety Telecommunicator	\$43.02	\$23.65	-\$19.37	7	\$264,355.36	\$37,765.05
Research Analyst	\$46.77	\$32.51	-\$14.26	2	\$55,601.16	\$27,800.58
Security Guard	\$32.21	\$16.00	-\$16.21	109	\$3,446,270.95	\$31,617.16
Senior Library Coordinator	\$48.00	\$38.40	-\$9.60	1	\$18,714.58	\$18,714.58
Shipping/Receiving Clerk	\$23.11	\$20.39	-\$2.72	9	\$47,697.00	\$5,299.67
Storekeeper I	\$30.00	\$21.85	-\$8.14	29	\$460,357.82	\$15,874.41
Storekeeper II	\$34.00	\$24.12	-\$9.88	29	\$558,858.62	\$19,270.99
Storekeeper III	\$34.31	\$24.66	-\$9.65	20	\$376,336.24	\$18,816.81
Telephone Operator I	\$26.56	\$15.85	-\$10.71	8	\$167,140.00	\$20,892.50
Telephone Operator III	\$39.79	\$18.20	-\$21.59	1	\$42,102.69	\$42,102.69
Volunteer Relations Associate	\$34.05	\$33.85	-\$0.21	1	\$400.00	\$400.00
Total				5,636	\$80,508,101.12	\$14,297.30

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2022 & 2023 wages by job classification of union members affiliated with AFSCME Council 31 who are employed at public universities cross-referenced with monthly income for public sector workers employed by the State of Illinois. State employee income is converted to hourly rates by dividing monthly pay by 162.5 hours, which is the equivalent of 1,950 full-time hours divided by 12 months, or 162.5 hours per month on average. Data obtained through public data and Freedom of Information Act requests.

One final point is that AFSCME Council 31 and the State of Illinois agreed to a new collective bargaining agreement in July 2023 that raises employee pay for covered employees by 4 percent and base wages by 18 percent over four years ([State of Illinois, 2023](#)). This brief does not incorporate future higher earnings for state employees into the comparison because the pay data examined were all established prior to the

new contract. However, depending on the adjustments made during labor negotiations at each university, the new compensation rates in the state collective bargaining agreement may create the conditions for increasing the pay disparities between comparable university employees and state employees.

Conclusion and Implications

Public universities are economic anchors across Illinois that provide consistent sources of education and commerce. However, the relatively low earnings at these anchor institutions hamper economic development in communities that house universities. The data is clear that workers employed by public universities earn between 14 percent and 25 percent less than their peers who perform similar work for state agencies. Simply put, it is more difficult to attract and retain qualified workers in places like Urbana-Champaign, Normal, Charleston, Macomb, Carbondale, and Edwardsville when pay rates are, on average, 14 percent to 25 percent below comparable occupations at state agencies and even lower than market-competitive salaries offered in the private sector. Moreover, low earnings result in less disposable income—specifically, upwards of \$80 million less for more than 5,600 non-instructional workers—to spend in the economy, reducing sales at retailers, restaurants, and other local businesses. With the importance of public universities in many towns and cities in Illinois and a persistent labor shortage in which workers are seeking out higher job quality, elected officials and university leaders in Illinois should consider exploring ways to eliminate this wage gap and ensure the state’s public universities are able to compete for, attract, and retain the qualified workers they need to serve the state’s campus communities.

Sources

- Bruno, Robert and Frank Manzo. (2013). *Working in Illinois' Public Interest*. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). (2023). "SQGDP2 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by State 1/ Illinois 2023: Q1." U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). (2023). (a). "State Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary." U.S. Department of Labor.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). (2023). (b). "Civilian Labor Force and Unemployment by State and Selected Area." U.S. Department of Labor.
- Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability (COGFA). (2022). *Illinois State Retirement Systems*. State of Illinois.
- DePillis, Lydia. (2023). "Colleges Have Been a Small-Town Lifeline. What Happens as They Shrink?" *New York Times*.
- Dominguez-Villegas, Rodrigo, Laurel Smith-Doerr, Henry Renski, and Laras Sekarasih. (2020). "Labor Unions and Equal Pay for Faculty: A Longitudinal Study of Gender Pay Gaps in a Unionized Institutional Context." *Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy*, 11(2): 1-24.
- Eastern Illinois University (EIU). (2017). "Eastern Illinois University Economic Impact Study 2017."
- EMSI Burning Glass (EBS). (2022). *Analysis of the Economic Impact and Return on Investment of Education: The Economic Value of the University of Illinois System*. University of Illinois System.
- Farber, Henry, Daniel Herbst, Ilyana Kuziemko, and Suresh Naidu. (2021). *Unions and Inequality over the Twentieth Century: New Evidence from Survey Data*. Princeton University; University of Arizona; Columbia University.
- Faria e Castro, Miguel. (2021). "The Covid Retirement Boom." Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.
- Fowers, Alyssa and Andrew Van Dam. (2021). "The Most Unusual Job Market in Modern American History." *The Washington Post*.
- Illinois Department of Central Management Services. (2023). "State Employee Pay." Illinois State Government.
- Keefe, Jeffery. (2010). *Debunking the Myth of the Overcompensated Public Employee*. Economic Policy Institute.
- Manzo IV, Frank and Robert Bruno. (2022). *The State of the Unions 2022: A Profile of Unionization in Chicago, in Illinois, and in the United States*. Illinois Economic Policy Institute; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Manzo IV, Frank, Robert Bruno, and Michael Jekot. (2022). *Illinois at \$1 Trillion: Putting the Historic Economic Achievement in Context*. Illinois Economic Policy Institute; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Mohammadi, Hassan and Frank Beck. (2016). *Economic Impact Analysis: Illinois State University*. Illinois State University.

Morrissey, Monique. (2021). *Unions Can Reduce the Public-Sector Pay Gap: Collective Bargaining Rights and Local Government Workers*. Economic Policy Institute.

Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS). (2023). "Union Reporting History: State County and Muni Empls AFL-CIO Leadership Council 31 Illinois Public Employees." U.S. Department of Labor.

Ruggles, Steven, Sarah Flood, Matthew Sobek, Danika Brockman, Grace Cooper, Stephanie Richards, and Megan Schouweiler. (2023). "IPUMS USA: Version 13.0 [dataset]." IPUMS.

Rural Economic Technical Assistance Center (RETAC). (2016). "Western Illinois University's impact on the economy of the State of Illinois." Western Illinois University.

Schmitt, John. (2008). *The Union Wage Advantage for Low-Wage Workers*. Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. (2015). "2015 Economic Impact Study."

Subhash, Sharma, Aboubacar Diaby, and Kyle Harfst. (2011). *The Economic Impact of Southern Illinois University Carbondale in the Region and the State of Illinois*. Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

U.S. Employment and Training Administration (ETA). (2023). "See All Occupations." U.S. Department of Labor.

Cover Photo Credit

Gary Todd. (2023). "University of Illinois Alma Mater Statue." Flickr.com. Shared under the following license: CC0 1.0 Universal (CC0 1.0) Public Domain Dedication.

Appendix

TABLE 1: JOB TITLE COUNT BY JOB TITLES AND ILLINOIS' UNIVERSITIES, 2022-2023

University Job Title	Governor State	Illinois State	Eastern Illinois	Northern Illinois	Northeastern	Southern Illinois Carbondale	Southern Illinois Edwardsville	Southern Illinois School of Medicine	UI Chicago	UI Urbana-Champaign	Western Illinois	Total
Accounting Assistant	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	6	0	10	0	22
Accounting Officer	2	10	3	11	0	14	17	17	0	29	4	107
Accountant I	0	3	0	4	0	12	1	11	1	17	4	53
Accounting Specialist	0	10	0	1	0	12	4	1	0	9	1	38
Administrative Aide	8	35	0	24	1	0	1	19	0	94	0	182
Administrative Assistant	13	3	0	30	11	0	1	18	0	33	0	109
Administrative Assistant II	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Benefits Counselor	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	5
Building Service Foreman	1	9	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	44
Building Service Worker	16	172	78	129	0	0	0	18	0	349	0	762
Business Manager	3	3	0	4	0	5	1	3	1	1	0	21
Child Development Associate	2	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	4	0	12
Clinic Nurse	0	9	0	0	0	0	1	114	0	0	0	124
Culinary Worker III	2	38	23	13	0	14	0	0	0	51	0	141
Culinary Worker IV	0	5	0	1	0	0	5	0	0	11	0	22
Food Service Administrator I	0	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	10
Graphic Designer	2	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	13
Health Information Technician	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	17	1	1	24
Human Resource Officer	0	4	0	7	0	0	0	11	0	5	0	27
Human Resource Representative	0	3	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	7	2	18
Institutional Research Data Spec	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Interpreter of Deaf & Hard of Hearing	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Inventory Clerk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Inventory Specialist	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	8
Library Assistant	0	0	3	1	0	3	0	4	8	3	0	22
Library Operations Associate	2	5	0	6	2	1	3	0	2	11	0	32
Library Specialist / Sr. Library Specialist	3	19	10	12	8	17	8	1	36	109	10	233
Licensed Practical Nurse II	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	87	0	0	0	93
Maintenance Laborer	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Maintenance Worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Office Administrator	3	38	0	29	14	0	18	16	30	192	9	349
Office Manager	16	42	33	46	6	0	26	27	0	221	0	417
Office Support Assistant	1	0	0	0	1	4	1	1	7	64	0	79
Office Support Associate	1	2	3	10	4	0	9	10	16	179	6	240
Office Support Specialist	1	30	3	30	5	0	79	21	32	213	16	430

LOWER PAY IN HIGHER ED

Payroll Specialist III	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	6
Procurement Officer	0	2	0	6	0	2	1	0	0	10	0	21
Program Assistant	2	24	1	41	0	6	6	4	0	7	0	91
Program Coordinator	12	119	0	91	0	52	1	29	0	10	0	314
Program Services Aide	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	8
Public Safety Telecommunicator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7
Shipping/Receiving Clerk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	1	9
Storekeeper I	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	18	8	1	29
Storekeeper II	0	0	0	5	0	3	0	0	8	12	1	29
Storekeeper III	0	1	0	1	0	2	4	0	1	10	1	20
Accountant II	2	8	0	4	0	17	1	8	0	2	2	44
IT Technical Associate	7	133	0	97	3	0	44	0	225	57	0	566
IT Support Associate	7	59	0	36	5	0	23	0	64	16	0	210
IT Manager	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	99	11	0	123
Senior Library Coordinator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Research Analyst	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Electrician	2	16	0	10	0	18	12	0	1	77	2	138
Security Guard	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	7	1	96	0	109
Financial Aid Coordinator	2	5	0	9	1	3	5	1	0	0	1	27
Financial Aid Associate	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	7	11
Health Information Specialist	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	6
Help Desk Specialist	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8
Internal Auditor Associate	0	3	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	6
Manager	1	0	0	0	0	5	4	0	0	0	0	10
Mental Health Coordinator	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
Grounds Worker	0	15	0	11	0	0	11	1	0	43	9	90
Customer Service Representative	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	35
Events Coordinator	0	0	0	2	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	7
Volunteer Relations Associate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Clinical Veterinarian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Telephone Operator I	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	8
Telephone Operator III	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Licensed Clinical Social Worker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	2	0	26
Pharmacist	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	3	0	11
Total	125	864	157	713	67	202	309	480	579	2,063	74	5,636
Percentage	2%	15%	3%	13%	1%	4%	5%	9%	10%	37%	1%	100%

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2022 & 2023 job classification of union members affiliated with AFSCME Council 31 who are employed at public universities. Data derived from proprietary information provided by American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 31 according to their 2022 annual report ([OLMS, 2023](#)). AFSCME Council 31 member salaries and job titles are publicly available or attainable through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

TABLE 2: JOB TITLES AND TOTAL JOB COUNT IN ILLINOIS PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, 2022-2023

University Job Title	Employees
Accountant I	53
Accountant II	42
Accounting Assistant	22
Accounting Officer	107
Accounting Specialist	38
Administrative Aide	182
Administrative Assistant	109
Administrative Assistant II	2
Benefits Counselor	5
Building Service Foreman	44
Building Service Worker	762
Business Manager	21
Child Development Associate	12
Clinic Nurse	124
Clinical Veterinarian	2
Culinary Worker III	141
Culinary Worker IV	22
Customer Service Representative	35
Electrician	138
Events Coordinator	7
Financial Aid Associate	11
Financial Aid Coordinator	27
Food Service Administrator I	10
Graphic Designer	13
Grounds Worker	90
Health Information Specialist	6
Health Information Technician	24
Help Desk Specialist	8
Human Resource Officer	27
Human Resource Representative	18
Institutional Research Data Specialist	1
Internal Auditor Associate	6
Interpreter of Deaf and Hard of Hearing	3
Inventory Clerk	4
Inventory Specialist	8
IT Manager	123
IT Support Associate	210
IT Technical Associate	566
Library Assistant	22
Library Operations Associate	32
Library Specialist / Senior Library Specialist	233
Licensed Clinical Social Worker	26
Licensed Practical Nurse II	93
Maintenance Laborer	6
Maintenance Worker	3
Manager	10
Mental Health Coordinator	6
Office Administrator	349
Office Manager	417
Office Support Assistant	79
Office Support Associate	240
Office Support Specialist	430
Payroll Specialist III	6
Pharmacist	11
Procurement Officer	21
Program Assistant	91
Program Coordinator	314
Program Services Aide	8
Public Safety Telecommunicator	7
Research Analyst	2
Security Guard	109
Senior Library Coordinator	1
Shipping/Receiving Clerk	9
Storekeeper I	29
Storekeeper II	29
Storekeeper III	20
Telephone Operator I	8
Telephone Operator III	1
Volunteer Relations Associate	1
Total	5,636

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2022 & 2023 job classification of union members affiliated with AFSCME Council 31 who are employed at public universities. Data derived from proprietary information provided by American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 31 according to their 2022 annual report ([OLMS, 2023](#)). AFSCME Council 31 member salaries and job titles are publicly available or attainable through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

TABLE 3: STATE GOVERNMENT JOB TITLE COUNT TOTAL, 2022-2023

State Government Job Title	Employees
Accountant I	17
Accountant II	6
Account Technician I	265
Account Technician II	132
Accounting Specialist	41
Administrative Aide	2
Administrative Assistant	35
Administrative Assistant II	336
Benefits Counselor	11
Building Service Foreman	1
Building Service Worker	3
Business Manager	35
Child Support Specialist I	188
Registered Nurse I	403
Veterinary Supervisor I	1
Cook I	44
Cook II	25
Customer Service Representative	30
Electrician	81
Spec Events & Program Coordinator	1
Financial Aid Advisor IV	3
Financial Aid Advisor III	3
Corrections Food Service Supervisor I	38
Graphic Designer	3
Building/Grounds Laborer	76
Health Information Associate	24
Health Information Technician	5
Help Desk Support Specialist	5
Human Resource Officer	2
Human Resource Representative	1
Institutional Research Data Spec	3
Internal Auditor	4
Human Services Sign Language Interpreter	3
Property and Supply Clerk II	3
Inventory Specialist	1
IT Manager	7
IT Support Specialist	1

IT Developer	1
Library Technical Assistant	1
Librarian I	20
Library Associate	17
Social Worker II	100
Licensed Practical Nurse II	90
Maintenance Laborer	17
Maintenance Worker	36
Manager	35
Mental Health Tech I	409
Executive Secretary II	44
Executive Secretary I	144
Office Assistant	394
Office Associate	948
Office Coordinator	662
Payroll Specialist III	1
Clinical Pharmacist	37
Procurement Officer	1
Program Assistant	1
Program Coordinator	2
Program Services Aide	2
Telecommunicator	22
Research Analyst	4
Security Guard	104
Library Program Administrator	3
Stores Clerk	9
Storekeeper I	62
Storekeeper II	32
Storekeeper III	25
Switchboard Operator I	24
Switchboard Operator III	3
Volunteer Services Coord II	6
Total	5,095

Source(s): Authors' analysis of 2022 & 2023 job classification of public sector workers employed by the State of Illinois. State government employment and pay data is publicly available at the Illinois Department of Central Management Services portal on State Employee Pay (Illinois CMS, 2023).