

Summary National Agendas - A Democracy Index for Higher Education

At the [Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor \(COCAL\) conference](#), during a two-day working group on "National Agendas" participants came together and developed a new way to rate and rank universities and colleges. In what is being called a Democracy Index, each school will be assessed for its ability to promote democracy through its level of shared governance, pay equity, accessibility, affordability, and job security. For example, we will analyze which faculty are able to participate in shared governance, including non-tenure-track faculty. We will also look at the pay ratio between part-time faculty and full-time faculty and between faculty and the administration.

The guiding principle behind this index is the following: "Building on the ideals embodied in the political statements of past COCALs, we commit to a trans-national agenda whose goal is to shape an equitable and democratic future for higher education by continuing to build networks, coalitions and alliances across discipline, campus, international border, and industry sector, in order to democratize the workplace, the classroom, and the broader community." This mission statement will be applied to a study of the democratic level of higher education institutions in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

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- Political Democracy: shared governance
- Economic Democracy: pay equity; free tuition
- Social and Cultural Democracy: common good; alliances; value of intellectual development
- Democratic Accountability: access to data; financial transparency; comparative analysis
- Workplace Democracy: union democracy; value with academic peers, value of work

By September 15, 2014, COCAL will have formed a tracking sub- committee to oversee this project , and will encourage local entities to collect data by which institutions (including unions) can be evaluated. This index can be used for actions such as publicizing the indexed data, taking action against undemocratic practices, and documenting violence against, and defending, academic workers.

One of our central claims is that we cannot have democratic institutions of higher education if most of the faculty do not participate in shared governance or do not have stable jobs with fair pay, effective job protections, and academic freedom. We have found that as universities and colleges increase their reliance on contingent faculty, the cost of administration goes up, and the level of shared governance goes down. We also affirm that the lack of democracy in higher education reflects the lack of democracy in most other workplaces.

By working with unions, professional organizations, and individual institutions, we hope to democratize higher education by informing the public about the close relation between teachers' working conditions and students' learning conditions.

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