Twitter Thread by ■■ Ethereal Bisexual Chanda Prescod-Weinstein



■■ Ethereal Bisexual Chanda Prescod-Weinstein
@IBJIYONGI

Part of the ecosystem we need to contend with is that the federal grants from which many research assistants and postdocs in science are paid set the pay for RAs and postdocs too low. Faculty may feel tempted to shrug and pass on the bad pay without pushing back. That's fucked.

If your grant doesn't allow you to pay certain salaries, be up front during the hiring process about that. I talk openly to my students about why the numbers are what they are, depending on my funding source.

It is also the case that when I apply for grant money, I try to ask for a higher than typical salary and I do try to justify my request in my budget justification. I still haven't won a grant with a postdoc in it so I don't know how that's going.

In the long run, I've reminded my students and postdoc that I think unions are great!

A union contract that binds the university to pay them a certain among actually makes it so that my request to federal agencies is "this is what I am required to pay." Academic unions ftw!

I also think that all faculty should, to the extent of their ability given their circumstances, participate in advocating for an increase in minimum wages and an increase in federal and state funding for science and universities to cover the increased cost.

It is unethical to insist that labor stay cheaper because it benefits your research career. These are human beings we are talking about, not pieces of equipment.

I also acknowledge there is a structure out there coercing us to do that and we need to change that structure.

Academic funding is organized around the idea that junior researchers should be paid below a living wage.

It is up to faculty to resist the coercion, but that is not enough. It is up to all members of our society to recognize and dismantle the structure in the first place.

Pretending that this is all up to individual faculty or even individual departments individualizes a structural problem and lets the structure off the hook.

And faculty unions where we exist have a part to play here, including in supporting contingent lecturers and their unions

But I also want ppl, when they see the $$ for science grants, to be okay with this especially if it is paying people's salary. A grad student and postdoc at current wages can each cost $70k/year. Funding will need to grow for wages to grow w/o shrinking hiring.

A note to folks about unionizing junior researchers: scientists letting humanists do all the work is trash. Just because science students tend to be paid more doesn't mean that you don't benefit from union organizing. Show some solidarity. Help out.

Insert the part where I go on a long rant about how we are all dealing with huge multi billion dollar institutions and students would benefit a lot from learning in detail where the leavers of power are and how they work on faculty and this is necessary to organize effectively

As a student, I assumed individual faculty had more power than they did. As a postdoc, I saw how these juggernaut institutions knew exactly how to keep faculty in place. It's an economic and psychological art. And the solutions to the problems produced require solidarity.

Case in point: until the Obama administration, the NIH literally barred postdocs across the life sciences from making more than like ~ $40K/year. Federal policy!

tl;dr
It's easy to hate on the professor who says she can't pay more off her grants (and whose research helps mass incarceration so you shouldn't work for her anyway) but you need to confront the system that is at work producing her stance on how wages affect academic hiring