

Salaries

Since the mid 1970s, inequitable salary increases at WCU have led to salary differentials that border on the ludicrous. In one department, for example, there is a salary differential of \$26,292 between the lowest paid associate professor and the highest paid full professor, and both teachers received their Ph.D. within one year of one another. Similar differentials can be found in nearly every department on campus and in every college. If you have the stomach for it, check the 1998-99 BD 119 for the salaries in your department and college.

And these differentials have been exacerbated by the extraordinary range in raises awarded in most years. In the College of Business, for example, this year's salary increases ranged from \$0 to \$5,821. For the College of Arts & Sciences, the range was from \$625 to \$2,325, and in the College of Applied Science the overall range was from \$625 to \$2,975. In the College of Education and Allied Professions, one individual received an increase of \$3,975 while another received \$375. These huge differences in raises are sometimes the result of working with a percentage system (only the College of Arts & Sciences has abandoned the percentage system to work with fixed dollar amounts), but nowhere do the raises seem to be part of any attempt to redress currently gross disparities. In fact, the range of salary increases seems to be widening these disparities, and there does not seem to be any overall plan for addressing inequities and bringing salaries into a more equitable pattern of distribution. In fact, there seems to be no overall plan for making rational salary adjustments in general. New faculty are often hired at salaries higher than existing faculty with the same or more experience, and every year the problems with salary get more serious and harder to solve.

One obvious problem is that there are too many categories of salary increase--too many fine distinctions that must end up seeming arbitrary to those who finish lower rather than higher on the merit ladder. Here is the breakdown of the number of faculty in the four undergraduate colleges, along with the number of categories used for salary increases. Part-time faculty (whose salaries are unconscionably low), visiting faculty, endowed chairs, faculty on phased retirement, faculty on short-term disability, new and vacant positions, and promotion monies and administrative supplements were excluded:

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| College of Business | 48 faculty | 36 categories |
| College of Education and Allied Professions | 60 faculty | 26 categories |
| College of Applied Sciences | 50 faculty | 24 categories |
| College of Arts and Sciences | 131 faculty | 27 categories |

In the College of Business, the largest number of faculty in any one salary category was only 3. How can the people who make decisions on salary increases decide whether an individual is worth a \$1,200 increase or a \$1,250 increase? Or how about increases of \$1,253, \$1,267, and \$1,271, or 3.20% and 3.21%, if you prefer? What, on the other hand, is the effect on an individual's morale when s/he sees that s/he is ranked at the "bottom" of a scale of 10 for a department? Wouldn't it be easier and more effective to have fewer categories and make fewer fine distinctions?

Solutions

1. Salary Adjustments

- a. Develop "base line" data for each college to establish the expected salaries for faculty based on years of experience and the average percentage raises available for each year. Then establish a reasonable range of salary for each year of experience. As a suggestion, you might have a range of \$6,000 for faculty with 20 years of experience, from \$45,000 to \$51,000, the median being \$48,000. If an individual who has performed acceptably for 20 years was earning \$48,000, an individual who has consistently performed above average would be earning \$51,000, and an individual who has consistently performed below average would be earning \$45,000. Individuals with mixed records would be somewhere between these limits. When, after making these calculations, obvious inequities appear, make it a high priority over a period of years to fix them.
- b. If new faculty are hired at a salary higher than existing faculty with the same or more experience, adjustments must be made the following year to readdress the salary differential.
- c. Continually monitor salaries and make adjustments when appropriate.

Salary adjustment requires that a pot of money be set aside from the total monies available from the state for raises each year. Complete adjustment may take several years, and faculty should understand this.

2. Merit Raises

- a. Drastically revise the current system. Let's reduce the number of categories. I suggest three--better than average, average, and below average. I would expect most faculty to fall in the average category.
- b. Provide merit in dollar amounts rather than in percentage amounts in every college. Percentage increases simply compound the inequities that already exist. With raises in dollar amounts, young, exemplary faculty would get the same amount as old, exemplary faculty. Such a system would substantially decrease the widening differentials seen when comparing new and experienced faculty. I know that some experienced faculty support a merit system based on percentages, but this leads to the discrepancies we see in salaries today.

3. Informing the Faculty

The letter informing faculty of the salary increase each year should clearly state the dollar amount awarded for each category of merit for the year, the amount that the individual received, and the amount of any adjustment.

4. Who does the work?

Set up one committee for each college and an overview committee for the entire university. The university committee should report directly to the Faculty Senate. The College of Arts and Sciences has had such a committee for several years, and most of the solutions proposed above have been recommended to various deans over the years. I've been on this committee for several years, and, if a university committee is appointed, my hat is in the ring already.

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