
The Investment

Kadie Otto, Chair of the Faculty Senate
Report to the WCU Board of Trustees
Friday, March 5, 2021

I'm glad we're all on the same team—we agree there is a compensation crisis in N.C. higher education. And, I venture to say, we agree that if investments are not made, faculty, who are experts in their respective fields and who train our students to become leaders in their fields, will go elsewhere. Thus, at minimum, a sustained cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) plus 1% is not a *cost*—it's a smart, necessary *investment*.

Working 9-to5¹

Most people work a traditional 9-to-5 job. Faculty do not. Faculty have invested their time, money, energy, effort, and intellectual ability to earn the highest degree known to humankind. They are the world's 'thought leaders'. They spend their careers thinking, teaching, mentoring, writing, serving, publishing, analyzing, refining, debating, studying, discussing, questioning, and problem-solving toward the goal of making this world a better place. Some faculty write in the middle of the night; others write on weekends. When their teaching duties end in May, faculty spend the summer researching, writing papers, and revamping their courses. When faculty are not *doing*, they are *thinking*. This, a blessing and a curse—a thinking mind, an aware mind, a curious mind, a problem-solving mind *never* turns off. Faculty work 24/7.

Our Reality

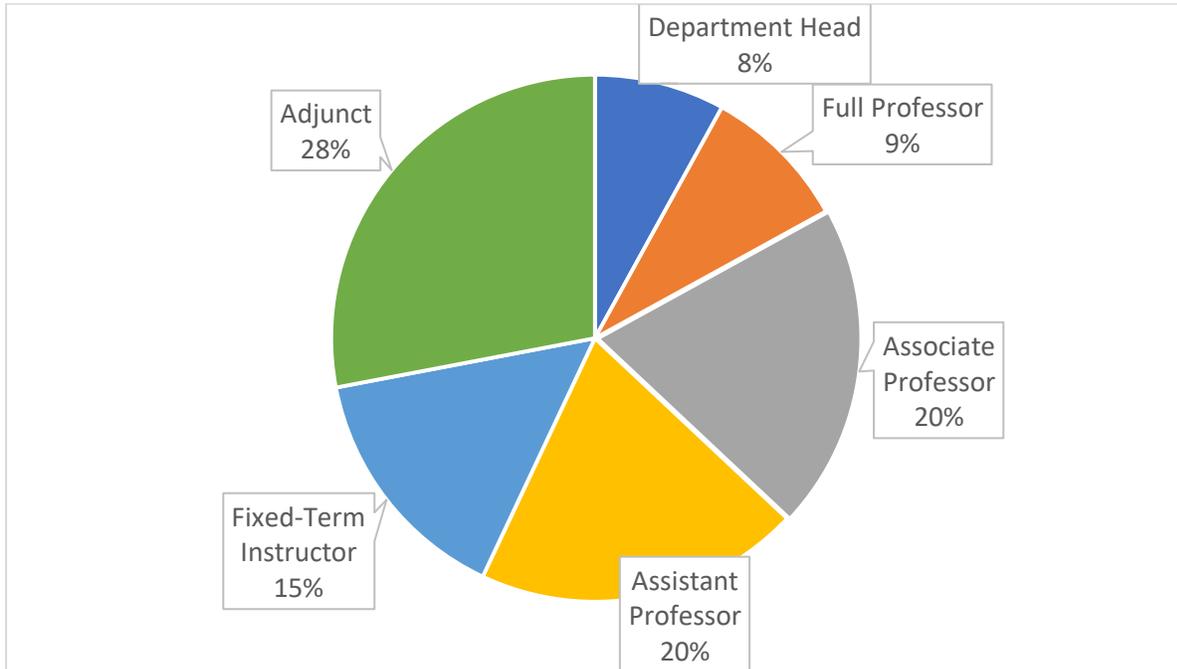
Given the above, the fact that first-year college students were just 5-years-old the last time faculty had a COLA is *confounding*. Why isn't N.C. investing in its future? To uncover the hardships this 13-year COLA absence has had on WCU faculty I asked them to share their stories. I received 113 emails spanning 55 single-spaced pages of text. I anonymized the data into Excel. Below are the results of the *Descriptive Analysis*.

Descriptive Analysis (n = 113)

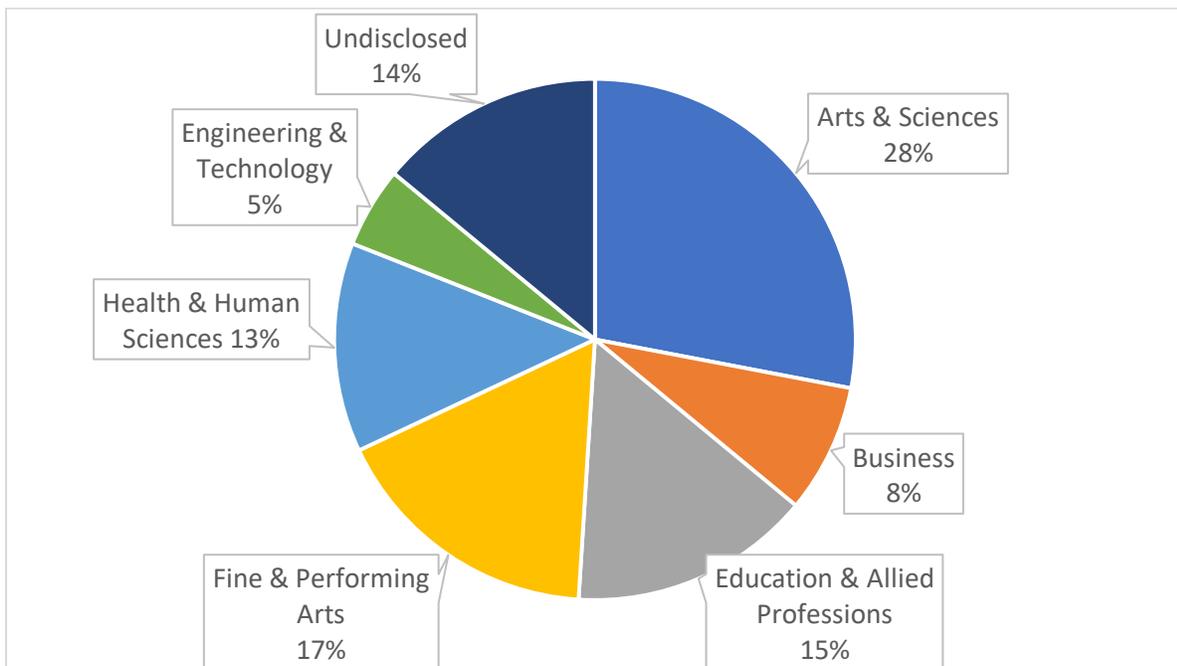
<i>Gender</i>	Male	49%	Female	51%
<i>Race</i>	Caucasian	91%	Minority	9%

¹ Dolly Parton's 1980 Hit Song

Rank

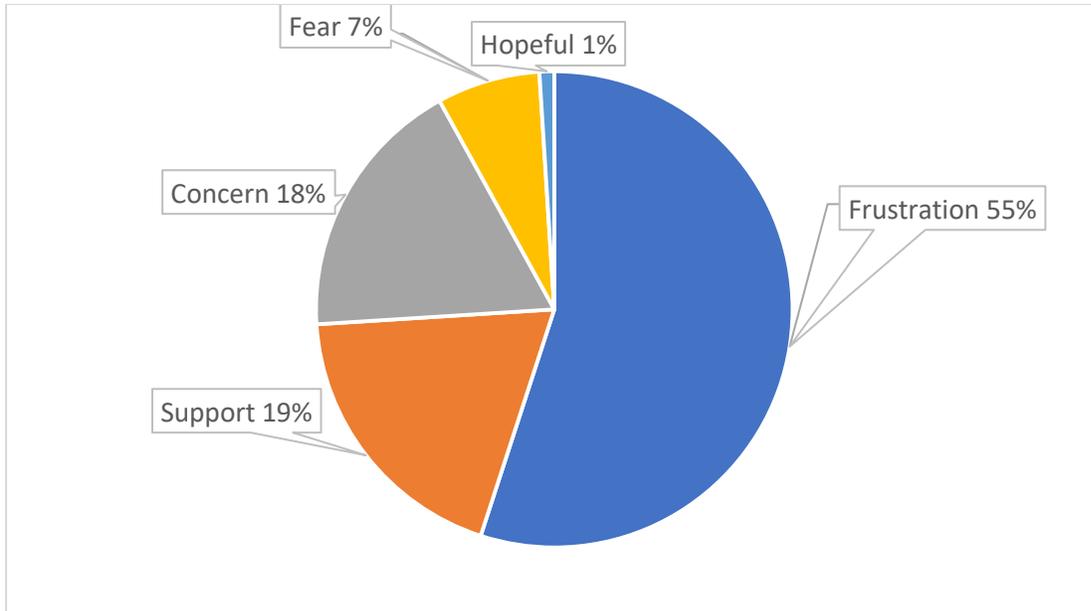


College



Next, I asked Dr. Heidi Dent, Faculty Senator and Assistant Professor of Marketing,² to run a *Thematic Analysis* which revealed the overarching sentiments of the faculty.

Thematic Analysis



The *Word Cloud Analysis* below reflects the themes (underlined) that emerged; sentiment and verbiage which appeared frequently throughout the commentary surrounds each theme.

Word Cloud Analysis



² Permission to use Dr. Dent’s results in this Report granted on February 18, 2021.

Last, based on my reading of the 113 faculty comments, I identified *Key Word(s) & Key Feedback by Rank*, respectively.

Key Word(s) & Key Feedback by Rank³

Department Head

Recruitment & Retention

“I’ve lost candidates because I can’t compete and lost multiple faculty to better paying universities. I’ve been searching for five years; over a dozen candidates have turned us down. I fear it will only get worse.”

Full Professor

Insecurity & Morale

“It’s difficult to make a significant contribution while raising a family in this financial reality. Raises indicate the degree to which an employee is valued by their employer, which impacts morale.”

Associate Professor

Underpaid & Morale

“I am still living paycheck to paycheck. My family is uninsured. My salary is nearly identical as a K-12 public school teacher with equivalent years of service. Faculty pay equity = faculty morale → quality teaching, research, and service → student achievement and institutional prestige.”

Assistant Professor

Non-Competitive

“My salary is the same as when I was hired three years ago. Faculty are jumping ship to survive, leaving for jobs in other states. Each year my standard of living decreases and my retirement and buying power is significantly reduced. WCU is not competitive because it fails to invest in its faculty.”

³ “Key Feedback” was paraphrased to maintain anonymity and is a combination of two or more distinct faculty comments.

Fixed-Term Instructor

Hardship & Cost

“Housing and food costs continue to rise and health insurance for my spouse is impossible (this factor alone may have me looking elsewhere). Because of the lack of affordable housing, we live an hour away. I supplement my WCU income with a part-time job which pays more than half my WCU pay. We wouldn't be able to pay our bills if not for my second job.”

Adjunct

Exploited, Unappreciated, Demotivated, & Underpaid

“I'm increasingly less motivated to do my best at WCU. I cannot survive on 3 courses/semester/\$3000 each and no benefits. Because I work two other jobs to make ends meet, I don't have the time to devote to my students/courses. Adjunct pay was \$1000/credit hr. in 1992 and has not changed.”

In closing, when I reflect on the time, energy, and effort faculty have put into surviving this crisis, what saddens me most is knowing what faculty otherwise would've been *doing* and *thinking*.

