



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

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At Western Carolina University, Teaching Count\$

A peculiar aspect of state employment is that, for better or worse, our salaries are a matter of public record. Chancellor Bardo has repeatedly told us that we need to "assume a larger role" in matters concerning our professional lives at WCU. One very large matter is salary, and it behooves us to take some responsibility when it comes to our annual increases. This requires that we know how the annual merit pie is sliced. Hence my foray into the statistical nuances of the BD-119.

The following analysis is based on the 1999 salary increases of 235 full-time rank and file faculty members. Individuals on phased retirement, new appointments, instructors, department heads, and administrators including associate deans were excluded, as was a faculty member who changed departments. In cases of promotions, the portions of the salary associated with the increase in rank were deducted.

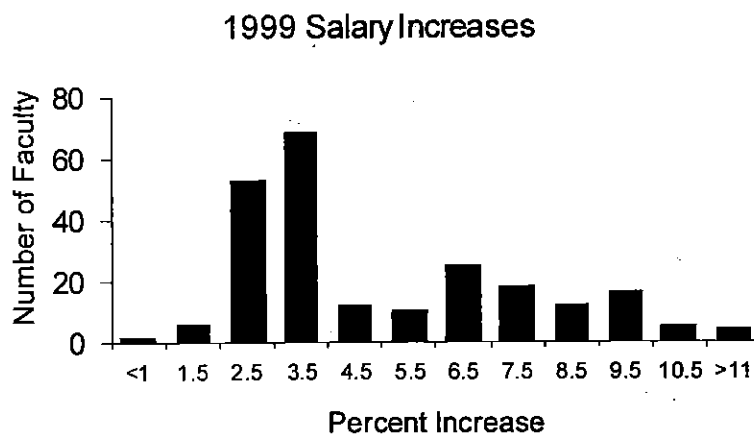
In 1999 the average salary increase at WCU was 4.9%. The median (50th percentile) was 3.5%. These percentages translated into an average increase of \$2,412 (median = \$1,825). Naturally, the increases varied widely, ranging from 0% to 14% and, in dollars, from zero to \$6,679. Faculty in the four colleges differed in the magnitude of their raises (Table 1).

College	Number	Average %	Median %	Average Increase	Median Increase
Business	40	4.6%	4.4%	\$3,065	\$2,912
Applied Sciences	39	4.8%	3.7%	\$2,449	\$1,975
Arts and Sciences	106	5.3%	3.5%	\$2,283	\$1,700
Education/Allied Profs.	50	4.5%	3.3%	\$2,144	\$1,433

Last year, the North Carolina General Assembly weighed in on the salary distribution process. Consistent with their penchant for simple solutions to complex issues of which they know nothing, our elected representatives determined that the way to enhance the educational experience of undergraduates in the UNC system was to reward teaching in a big way. To this end, they augmented a general performance-based merit increase averaging 3% with a substantial supplement specifically earmarked to reward "teaching excellence." On our campus the supplement amounted to \$198,467. The legislature was explicit as to how the teaching reward funds were to be divvied out on each campus:

1. Any increases for teaching excellence were to be over and above the 3% (average) merit raise.
2. The increases were to be at least \$1,200.
3. No more than a third of the faculty at any campus could be given the teaching supplement.

As a consequence of this policy, meaningful differences in percentage increases at WCU last year were based almost entirely on teaching. In short, the General Assembly, by legislative fiat, did an end run around our departmental AFE processes in which service and research are significant components of the reward system. The number of faculty receiving various levels of salary increase is indicated in the graph below by the vertical bars. Note that each bar actually represents a range of percentages (for example, the bar labeled "3.5%" actually includes faculty with raises between 3.0 and 3.9 percent). While the bulk of the faculty received increases in the 3 to 4 percent range, a substantial number got increases of 6% or greater based almost exclusively on performance in the classroom.



But just what is excellent teaching, and who does it? The General Assembly actually specified two mechanisms that should be used to identify excellent teachers. The first was through, to quote their directive, "the regular process of annual review or teaching evaluation procedures including student evaluations and peer review...." The second was through teaching awards. At WCU, teaching awards were the preferred mechanism for allotting the salary supplement. For example, in the College of Education and Allied Professions, salary increases above about 3% were distributed to teaching award winners proportionately to the prestige of their award. In the College of Business, on the other hand, the supplemental funds were divided equally among 16 award winners and nominees. Both of these policies met the spirit and the letter of the General Assembly's mandate.

There can be, however, unintended consequences to even the most well-intentioned legislative initiatives. At WCU, teaching awards effectively determined the vast majority of substantial pay increases last year. The result was considerably skewed salary increases. In one department, for example, five teaching award winners got 63% of the available increase money, leaving nine faculty to share the remaining 37%. This pattern was not uncommon. Of the 235 individuals included in this analysis, 35% received pay increases of 6% or higher. This meant that 65% of our faculty wound up splitting 41% of the total pot.

The legislature's mandate dramatically increased the cash value of teaching awards. Having been a nominee or winner of a college or university level teaching award nomination in the sometimes distant past was worth, on average, an additional salary increase of \$2,025. And the great thing about this money is that, unlike the original monetary award, it goes in your salary--forever. Were this policy to continue next year, finalists for the Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award who stay at WCU for 15 years will be \$38,792 richer if we include the effects of compounding (and assuming 3% annual increases).

Because teaching awards have been elevated to a high stakes game, we need to pay careful attention to how they are awarded. I discussed this problem a couple of years ago in the *Faculty Forum* and have no wish to revisit the topic. I cannot resist, however, pointing out that chance plays a major role in being nominated. Granted, there are among us a few genuinely extraordinary teachers who are consistent contenders for university level awards. But the truth is that for most of us, teaching award nominations are a hit and miss proposition in which longevity counts--the more years we have in the game, the more likely we are to have a couple of livewire students who bother to fill out the forms. New faculty are not even eligible for the university level awards; you must be tenured to be considered for the Board of Governors' Award and at least in your third year to be nominated for the Chancellor's Award. This means that that in one college, not one of the 18 faculty members who received an increase of 5% or more had been hired within the last five years.

Who is responsible for this sorry state of affairs? Not the deans and department heads. For the most part, they distributed the funds as directed by the General Assembly. Each spring, they are thrust into a no-win situation as they struggle to rate their colleagues for merit increases. Several studies have shown that college professors are particularly susceptible to Garrison Keilor's "Lake Wobegon Effect"--almost all of us are convinced that we are above average, especially when it comes to teaching. Unfortunately, by definition, half of us--believe it or not--are below average. Widespread disgruntlement among the troops is the inevitable consequence of a salary system often based on trivial differences in faculty rankings.

Is it the General Assembly's fault? Of course. Remember they are the bozos who in the last couple of years have managed to put the state half a billion dollars in the red in the midst of unprecedented prosperity.

Ultimately, however, the faculty are also culpable. Granted, last year's problems were exacerbated by legislative lunacy. But, they are also symptomatic of the larger issues that Henry Mainwaring so cogently brought to our attention last February. At that time, the Faculty Senate resolved to establish a means to systematically analyze our salary distribution system. While this has not yet been done, representatives of the faculty (Kinnear and Mainwaring) recently met with the deans of the colleges, the director of the library, and Vice Chancellor Collings to begin a discussion of changes in our allocation process. More meetings are scheduled. Keep tuned.

There are a couple of other things that we can do to enhance the perception of fairness when it comes to pay. First, we can encourage each of the deans to respect the February 18, 1999 Senate resolution and, following the lead of the College of Arts and Sciences, establish faculty advisory committees on salary structure and distribution. Second, we can remember that it is the faculty's responsibility to establish the reward criteria within their own departments. Departmental AFE documents are revised annually and this year are due on the Vice-Chancellor's desk by April 14th. In the next couple of months, those involved would do well to take the review process seriously this year.

In the meantime, can someone tell me who is in charge of the bell tower carillon? I want to have the Ray Charles classic "Them That Gots Is Them That Gets" added to the play list.

Hal Herzog, Psychology

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