



Faculty Forum

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Retention, Recruiting, and Faculty Salaries

Over the past five years, the faculty, staff, and administration at WCU have devoted considerable time, energy, and financial resources to recruiting and retaining students. But WCU is also faced with another recruitment and retention problem--attracting and keeping excellent faculty. It has been estimated that between half and three-fourths of our first choice job candidates turned us down last year. This year, the UNC Faculty Assembly released a report comparing faculty retention rates across the state universities. The results are disturbing. In 2000, the proportion of resignations among WCU tenured faculty exceeded the UNC system average by 130%, and the proportion of resignations of tenure track faculty exceeded the system average by 53%. These numbers include only voluntary resignations, not retirements or non-renewals.

While there are a number of reasons for our faculty retention and recruitment problems, one factor looms large--money. This issue is not unique to WCU. Some institutions within the UNC system have addressed these problems by approaching the UNC Board of Governors for permission to raise average faculty salaries, using special supplements paid for by local tuition or fee increases. Take Appalachian State University. Last year their administration requested that the Board of Governors allow them to levy a "campus-initiated tuition increase" specifically earmarked for faculty pay increases. The effect was substantial. Whereas most WCU faculty saw a \$625 salary increase (virtually all of which was eaten up by increases in health insurance premiums), the average increase at App State was \$2,240.

What is not widely known is that last year most universities in the UNC system took the same approach as ASU. Nine of the public universities in North Carolina requested and received permission from the Board of Governors to use special salary supplements to increase base salaries. Salary increases at the six schools that did not request a supplement (WCU among them) averaged 1.1% or \$625. In contrast, pay increases at the institutions that did get the supplements averaged 2.8% or \$1700. The mean increase for each of the 15 institutions is shown in Figure 1.

Two alarming trends emerge when these data are broken down into the "Have Nots" (the institutions who got the \$625 minimum increase) and the "Haves" (those who received the supplements). First, the distribution of the additional funds is biased--the six who got only the \$625 included four of the historically minority schools (Elizabeth City State, Fayetteville State, Winston-Salem State, and UNC-Pembroke) and two of the mountain schools (WCU and UNC-A).

Second, one might expect that the colleges requesting the supplements would be those with the lowest salaries. In fact, the opposite was true. The average pre-raise salary of colleges that got the supplement was \$5,346 higher than of the six who did not. Thus, rather than ameliorating salary inequities across the system campuses, our recent salary "increase" exacerbated existing differences. It is probably unfair to compare WCU with, say, Chapel Hill or NC State. However, disparities are also increasing between WCU and the universities that Chancellor Bardo has identified as our major competitors for students (ASU, UNC-Charlotte, ECU, UNC-G). At these institutions, the average faculty member saw a pay increase of \$2,100 this year--about triple that of WCU faculty.

But salary distribution problems also extended to the allotment of available funds within our own institution. Faculty often have inadequate information concerning merit pay decisions. For example, last fall most WCU faculty members received a letter from their dean indicating that every full time WCU employee--from secretary to department chair--got the same \$625 increase. But, according to the 2001 BD 119, a public document listing all salaries, this was not the case. In the vast majority of departments, one to three members received supplements in addition to the minimum \$625. The fact is that nearly 15% of WCU faculty got more substantial raises than their colleagues. These ranged from \$1,225 to \$1,825 (mean = \$1,324). In one college, all department heads were given increases; these averaged \$2,250 over and above the normal department head supplement.

In some cases, faculty members were actually sworn to secrecy about their extra salary increase. This practice seems to be a violation of the 2001-2002 EPA Salary Resolution from the Office of the President that specifies that "Criteria for the distribution of salary funds must be clearly understood by the faculty. . . .It is critical that the faculty be engaged in the discussions of the (distribution) process and in establishing the criteria for merit within the unit."

The need to increase faculty salaries is a high priority within the UNC system; President Broad has set the long term-goal that salaries at each state university in North Carolina reach the 80th percentile of a group of selected national peer institutions. A December 1999 report by an outside consulting firm on UNC system salaries recommended that WCU faculty be given an average adjustment of \$4,992 to bring us up to a competitive level. The increase recommended for us was higher than that of any other UNC system school in our category (AAUP IIA-Without Engineering). This increase did not materialize, and the unfortunate truth is that, rather than catching up with our peer institutions, we are falling farther behind.

Our faculty and administration need to work together so that WCU can achieve parity with the universities with which we compete for students and faculty. As a "focused growth institution" WCU has been designated by the Board of Governors to grow by 2,700 students in the next few years. If we maintain our present 20:1 student to faculty ratio, this growth will require that we hire an additional 135 faculty members. In a talk at the University Club several years ago, Chancellor Bardo correctly noted that market forces drive faculty salaries. It is obvious that attracting and keeping new additions to our community will be a major challenge. As indicated by President Broad, we need to establish mechanisms through which our faculty can be involved in developing principles for the distribution of merit pay.

The issue of faculty salaries directly affects the quality of teaching and learning and the retention of students at WCU. Great faculty create exciting learning experiences, which improves student retention. But great faculty tend to be sensitive, proud, and imaginative people. They will not go to or stay where they feel unnecessarily undervalued. In recent years, we have experienced a brain drain of established faculty members who have chosen to abandon our campus for presumably greener pastures. Salary parity and fairness affect faculty morale and, ultimately, student retention.

Hal Herzog, Psychology

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Average 2001 Salary Increase

