Saint Martin's UNIVERSITY

Faculty Compensation at SMU

Recent History and Ongoing Challenges

As a part of our ongoing discussions on the Budget Committee and University Council, I respectfully ask you to consider this brief history of faculty salaries at SMU and related concerns. Seeing that there is no sound argument as to why some employees should receive market-level pay and others should not, it is incumbent upon us to do everything we can to prevent this from happening again.

Brief History on Faculty Compensation:

The faculty salary improvement plan at SMU, approved by the president's cabinet and ratified by the Board of Trustees in May of 2023, was based upon the Classification of Instructional Programs codes (hereafter CIP codes) and the corresponding median salary data acquired from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (hereafter CUPA HR). These data, which were purchased under JBR's direction, represent a group of two-dozen unidentified universities with religious affiliations, similar-sized enrollments, and comparable operating budgets to SMU.

In the attempt to create a plan grounded in fairness for both the university and the faculty of SMU, the Faculty Compensation Taskforce (hereafter FCTF) elected to average the median salary data from CUPA HR by grouping the disciplinary CIP codes into their corresponding schools and ranks. In so doing, we succeeded in creating salary floors approximating the market-rates for regular faculty in SMU's four schools/colleges. The FCTF dubbed this plan "Phase 1" (see Table 1):

	Instructor	Assistant	Associate	Full
CAS/CEC	$57,717	$59,389	$67,430	$81,147
HIMSE	$57,717	$75,936	$84,141	$102,234
SOB	$57,717	$72,853	$78,381	$92,181
			Cost to SMU:	**$857,858**

Table 1: A summary of the Phase 1 Salary Improvement Plan. The salaries for each school/college by academic rank are listed. The total cost to enact Phase 1 of the plan was estimated to be ~$860,000.

Not unlike the staff salary Improvement plan, the faculty salary Improvement plan was built on the premise of "doing no harm." Specifically, any regular faculty already earning more than the corresponding Phase 1 salary, based on their rank and school/college, would receive a 1% raise. By contrast, any regular faculty who were below their corresponding Phase 1 salaries were given raises to the salary listed in the table above. While it is true that some people received larger raises than others, the goal of Phase 1 was to create a salary plan approximating the market-rate. With the implementation of this plan, every full-time faculty member is now being compensated at a mutually agreed upon market-rate based on their rank and school/college – a first in the history of SMU. For a full comparison between the salary scales of 22/23 and Phase 1, see the accompanying document.

Ongoing Challenges:
When we adopted Phase 1, we abolished the notion of steps and yearly salary increases, which were a modest attempt to honor longevity and COLA's (i.e., most steps were set 1% a year or less). As it now stands, the salaries in Phase 1 are static, which means that regular faculty will remain at these rates indefinitely. Faculty knew this was a risk, but we made this decision in good faith in hopes of bringing all faculty up to something resembling a market rate.

The longer we keep salaries locked at their current rates, which obviously benefits the budget of the university in the short term, the more expensive it will be to offer market rate salaries that honor longevity and COLAs in the future. This situation will be even more pronounced should the administration decide to roll salaries back to pre-Phase 1 levels.

Yet another concern involves the information from CUPA HR, which dates to AY 2021/22. By this time next year, the CUPA HR data will be four years old. Given the extreme levels of inflation we have experienced over the last few of years, and the outdated numbers we received from CUPA HR, it stands to reason that we are already several years behind the market-rates for regular faculty salaries, which is a benefit to the budget of the university, yet again.

A third concern involves the identities of the universities we were being compared to in the CUPA HR data. Not only do we not know the names of these institutions; we do not know where they are located. Given the higher cost of living in the Pacific Northwest, as compared to the Midwest and large portions of the South, for example, it stands to reason that the median salary data from CUPA HR may not be reflective of the cost of living and economic realities of living in the Puget Sound region. Yet another financial advantage for the university.

Additional Concerns:
In the fall of 2023, the interim co-presidents attempted to roll salaries back to the 22/23 rates plus a 1% increase, but this is not entirely accurate description of what was being proposed. Based on evidence of the reissued faculty contracts (dated November 20, 2023), it appears that some salaries were going to be rolled back, others were going to be partially rolled back, and some would remain unchanged. Concerning the latter, those who received 1% raises in the salary improvement plan would experience no roll back whatsoever. By contrast, those who experienced some of the largest increases from the salary improvement plan, would be rolled back to the corresponding steps in the 22/23 salary scale plus 1% (i.e., a reduction of between 20% and 30% for some).

Of SMU's four academic colleges/schools, the proposed roll backs for CAS/CEC were the most convoluted and opaque. Whereas full professors in CAS/CEC were going to be rolled back to the 22/23 rates plus 1%, full-time instructors would have experienced no cuts whatsoever. However, seeing that the rate of pay for instructors in CAS/CEC (i.e., $57,717) was significantly higher than it was for newly minted assistants and associate professors in 22/23 (i.e., $48,650 and $53,220 respectively), a decision was made to reset the compensation for assistant and associate professors to the same rate as instructors - $57,717.

While it is good to see the administration moving to protect the salaries of the instructors in CAS/CEC, who were 33% below the market rate in 22/23, the idea that we were/are on the cusp of offering instructors, assistants, and associate professors in the same college the exact same rate of pay is an affront to the promotion process and does a disservice to those who have committed themselves to the institution through tenure. I think we can all agree that this was/is not a true salary rollback, at least not in the way it has been presented to the community. Rather, this proposal takes an already compressed, inverted, and depressed salary scale and creates two groups of employees: one in which three ranks are paid $57,717 and another where newly minted full professors are paid only $2,748 more than their junior colleagues (i.e., $60,465).

Closing Thoughts:
It is deeply disheartening to think that the incredibly modest salary improvement plan from 23/24 may be too costly for SMU to afford. Not only is the plan already outdated, but it fails to account for longevity and COLAs, which were meant to be the focus of Phase 2. As it now stands, Phase 1 benefits the university budget on numerous levels, as highlighted above. However, if the decision is made to roll salaries back to pre-Phase 1 levels, the cost to reinitiate a market-rate salary improvement plan in the future is going to be far more expensive than it was in 2023. Moreover, rollbacks to pre-Phase 1 levels, or variations thereof, would ultimately necessitate the creation of a new salary improvement plan, which took the faculty and administration a full 12-months to build, approve, and implement.

Having done the hard work of bringing all regular faculty up to a level of compensation that reflects a market rate, the university community must do everything it can to protect faculty salaries and honor the work we did to get to this point. Although Phase 1 is outdated and flawed, it nevertheless represents a communal effort to offer something approximating market-rate pay to SMU's regular faculty. Rolling salaries back to pre-Phase 1 levels, or a variation thereof, would not only destroy the work we have done and destroy faculty morale, it will return a significant portion of the faculty to compensation levels far below those of the market while allowing others to remain at or near their current rates. Seeing that there is no sound argument as to why some employees should receive market-level pay and others should not, we must do everything we can to prevent this from happening.

Best,

Ian Werrett, Ph.D.
Professor of Theology and Religious Studies
Faculty President AY 23/24
Saint Martin's University

5000 ABBEY WAY LACEY, WA 98503-7500 T: 360-491-4700 F: 360-459-4124
www.stmartin.edu