



Saint Martin's
UNIVERSITY

To: The Stakeholders of Saint Martin's University
From: The Faculty Senate
RE: Rolling Back Faculty Salaries and Eliminating Retirement Contributions

11/13/2023

Dear Stakeholders,

For much of Saint Martin's University's history, faculty have been underpaid relative to their peer institutions. Early in President Heynderickx's tenure at Saint Martin's, he increased the salaries of faculty within two schools, thereby affecting a minority of all faculty, and promised to provide market adjustments to the remaining faculty in due course. Over his 14-year tenure at Saint Martin's, however, President Heynderickx never made good on his offer to increase the salaries of the remaining faculty, who were prevented from realizing over a decade's worth of earning potential as a result.

When President JBR took office, faculty (and staff) pay was at a crisis point. Dedicated faculty who had served at Saint Martin's for decades were effectively making less than when they began working here thanks to inflation and the lack of appropriate COLA's for residents of the Pacific Northwest. President JBR repeatedly expressed a commitment to "investing in our people" and, after a year's worth of research, planning, and faculty involvement, she and her cabinet approved a faculty-led proposal to raise faculty salaries to a level that was on a par with similarly sized, faith-based universities with comparable operating budgets – a decision that was ultimately ratified by the Board of Trustees when they approved the 23/24 budget in May of this year.

Fast forward to today. JBR has left the university, Dr. Heynderickx and Fr. Kilian Malvey are our interim co-presidents, and Saint Martin's is reeling from a significant budgetary shortfall – a financial crisis that has driven the interim co-presidents to cut faculty salaries and freeze retirement contributions. This damaging decision can be seen as a rejection of the year-long process that faculty engaged in good faith as they worked towards improving quality of life through long-needed pay increases.

Let us be clear, with this action by interim co-presidents Heynderickx and Fr. Kilian, our community is effectively turning its back on the idea of "doing no harm," which was the central pillar of last year's work on salary improvement. Not only does the act of targeting faculty salaries and retirement benefits affect faculty more than any other stakeholder on campus, but it does so in a way that hurts most those faculty who earn the least. In short, rolling salaries back to last year's rates is not only the antithesis of "doing no harm" it is a moral and ethical hammer-blow to those within our community who can least afford it. Reverting to the 2022-23 contracts harms all faculty and given that last year's salary improvement plan addressed historical inequities in CAS & CEC, it harms most CAS & CEC faculty at disproportionate rates than other faculty with salary cuts between 10%-20%. These cuts, arriving in Faculty's paychecks starting just days after Christmas, are the height of injustice and fly in the face of Saint Martin's University's identity as a Catholic, Benedictine institution.



As a Catholic university founded by monks from the Order of Saint Benedict, Saint Martin's University is called to a higher standard when it comes to the education of its students, the care of its employees, and the stewardship of its community. Our Benedictine values emphasize justice, community, and dignity of work. Living these values demands that our community tackles problems as a community that is engaged in shared sacrifice, with everyone doing their part to survive this budgetary shortfall. And living these values demands that we seek to protect the most vulnerable, rather than having the lowest paid faculty carry the heaviest burden of these budget cuts.

The faculty of Saint Martin's University have children, mortgages, and other financial responsibilities and the recently implemented salary improvement plan finally provided a measure of breathing room and relief after decades of financial hardship and stagnation. It is not an understatement to say that the prospect of balancing our budget on the backs of the lowest paid faculty, once again, will result in longstanding and potentially irreversible harm. In the immediate, it is harmful to faculty whose salaries have been out of step with the cost of living in the Pacific Northwest for decades. Paying bills, fixing broken cars, affording childcare, and all of life's basic expenses will become a struggle once again. More broadly, this approach will cause untold damage to faculty morale as well as the relationship between administration and faculty. And most fundamentally, this approach will damage Saint Martin's expressed commitment to our Benedictine values. How can we identify with these values, call on students to join us at Saint Martin's because of our unique identity, when we are not living out these values ourselves?

The act of rolling salaries back to last year's rates and freezing retirement contributions for the fifth time in 14 years is damaging for our community in ways far more costly than dollars and cents. These actions will have a ripple effect that extends far beyond the tenure of our interim co-presidents. The divisive atmosphere and damaged morale precipitated by this decision will make it all the more difficult for us to find a quality presidential candidate in the coming year. Furthermore, it will make it exponentially harder for a new president to have a successful start to their tenure. As such, we, the Faculty Senate of Saint Martin's University, strongly condemn the actions taken to reduce faculty salaries and formally request that the indicated cuts be rescinded with immediate effect. Using the Benedictine values of justice, dignity of work, listening, stewardship, community, and stability as our foundation, we offer to work together to successfully heal this budget shortfall with positive, community focused solutions.

Unanimously approved by the fourteen members of the Faculty Senate on 11/12/23 and respectfully submitted by Ian Werrett, Ph.D. – Faculty President, Chair of the Faculty Senate, and Professor of Religious Studies – 11/13/2023