



March 7, 2024

Faculty Resources Working Group

Compensation and Benefits Open Forum, February 27, 2024: Executive Summary

The Open Forum facilitated by the AAUP's Faculty Resources Working Group brought to light a broad range of concerns about faculty and librarian compensation and benefits. We highlight some of these concerns below. We do so for the purpose of informing the faculty and the administration about concerns that should be addressed for the sake of the health of the institution.

In doing so, we want to be mindful that

- improving benefits cannot be in competition with improving compensation (e.g., better salaries are deserved *and* many current benefits are insufficient to their purpose);
- benefits must be designed to be used, not to be achievements (e.g., a housing & mortgage benefit must make it possible for new employees without prior savings to find stable housing ASAP, rather than as a savings goal);
- benefits must be designed to efficiently meet the intended need (e.g., the dependent tuition benefit works straightforwardly; the moving-expenses benefit does not);
- benefits must be equitably distributed across all ranks (e.g., full-time librarians have the exact same life needs as full-time faculty);
- the entire benefits package must be designed and tested from the standpoint of equity and accessibility: it is unacceptable when basic needs are unmet because of personal or conflicting circumstances (e.g., when taking pregnancy leave cancels out the ability to make use of the mortgage benefit);
- the array of available benefits, ways to use them, and any changes to any benefits (e.g., especially "volatile" benefits such as healthcare and retirement) must be communicated clearly, in accessible terminology, to all employees on an annual basis so that changes are not surprises.

Employer benefits must constantly be updated to current economic conditions and the demographics of current employees. If such updates are not made, then benefits become increasingly unusable, and instead of serving their intended purpose are experienced as unreachable goals or restrictions on smart decision-making. Employees at Wesleyan (as elsewhere) are experiencing many benefits as unequal, regressive, or even irrelevant to the problem they are designed to address because so much about the world has changed since 2020 (let alone since 2005 or 2010 when many benefits were last updated), and much about the demographics of the faculty and staff have changed. We believe that the intended purpose of our compensation and benefits is to ensure that Wesleyan University is an equitable and welcoming place to work. The following detailed feedback was generated in the spirit of informing both colleagues and administrators of the most dire paradoxes, unintended consequences, and egregious gaps in the design and substance of current compensation and benefits.

## Salaries

- In 2020, the administration presented the faculty and staff pay freeze as a shared sacrifice. However, the continued *very high* pay increases for top-level administrators (excluding the president and CIO) indicate that faculty and staff bore the brunt of the pay freeze. During the last two years for which tax returns are publicly available (2020 and 2021), top-level salaries increased on average by 23.48%. In light of this and of the steep cost increases in the areas of housing, transportation, and insurance (including CT town mill rates), the CBC's 2021 resolution calling for a 12% across-the-board salary increase should be reiterated.
- Librarians should receive the same percentage pay increases as faculty.
- The administration should ensure that compensation data is reported according to AAUP instructions (e.g., do not count coaches and deans as faculty for salary purposes).

## Housing

At this juncture, housing is at the top of many colleagues' concerns about their cost of living. Especially recent arrivals and mid-career colleagues are facing a housing affordability and availability crisis. Rents and housing prices in all parts of the state of Connecticut have been increasing above the national trend, frequently by double digits. The state's housing inventory is barely growing. At the Open Forum, colleagues made the following suggestions for immediate improvements to the mortgage benefit:

- Increase the restriction from the current 25-mile areal radius to 100 miles;
- Eliminate the restriction (introduced in 2022) of having to use the benefit within 10 years for faculty and within 3 years for librarians/staff;
- Allow the benefit to be used for purchase of land for construction;
- Reinstate the 2%-below-market-rate discount for mortgages;
- Regularly adjust the value of the benefit to local/regional housing inflation;

Moreover, the drastic downsizing of the university's inventory of rental units for faculty and staff has removed an important mechanism for protecting junior faculty from the vagaries of the housing market. We urge the administration to consider long-term investments in purchasing and building new rental units for faculty and staff. The lack of faculty and staff housing is bound to have a detrimental effect on faculty recruitment, hiring and retainment efforts, and it creates major obstacles for visiting scholars who need housing for only a semester or a year.

## GISOS

There was widespread agreement that Wesleyan's teacher-scholar model is underfunded, and that requesting support is often unnecessarily burdensome. We have seen the addition of more categories to GISOS without adequate regular increases in the funding of these categories. General support, conference travel support, project grants, and teaching/pedagogy grants are currently underfunded. Colleagues made the following specific suggestions to improve support for scholarship:

- Increase the modest \$750 general grant to \$1500;
- Award this grant automatically to each faculty/librarian at the beginning of the FY;
- Regularly adjust conference travel support to reflect inflation trends in the travel sector;
- Reinstate conference travel support for colleagues who participate in a meeting without presenting papers;
- Increase budget for project grants and fund all approved grants fully;

- Add faculty stipend to student-faculty research Internships;
- Report annually to the faculty the total GISOS budget, the budget for each category, and the budget available per capita.

### Merit

The meeting's response to the merit process was universally negative. It was viewed as a cost-saving technique that pits faculty against one another. The mandated percentage spread of merit levels for each academic unit were described as an artificial measure that normalizes the false assumption that a set number of colleagues are less than deserving. There is no evidence that merit pay has a beneficial effect on faculty productivity and the quality of teaching, research, and collegueship. Rather, the merit process was described as creating unnecessary work for all of us, especially department chairs and deans, and simmering resentment.

- Whether there will be a merit process in a given year should be subject to negotiation between the CBC and the administration;
- If merit bonuses are given, they should only come on top of a guaranteed COLA+1% for each faculty/librarian.

### Immigration benefits

The university has committed itself to the internationalization of the institution and its curriculum. To hire and retain international faculty, it should provide competent legal support and cover the complete legal and administrative expenses required to obtain permanent work and residence permits.

### Retirement benefits

Being able to invest in their retirement is vital not only to individual faculty but to the university as a whole; to thrive, Wesleyan needs to ensure that faculty can afford to retire at a reasonable age.

- Match each dollar contributed by an employee 1:1 rather than 1:05;
- bring the total employer match from the current 3% to at least one point above the CUPA median of 6%, as the CBC requested in 2021-22.

### Health insurance

Health insurance/health care is another high-inflation sector. In addition to worries about steadily increasing expenses, there is notable anecdotal evidence for a deterioration in the services provided by CIGNA: as coverages unexpectedly change from year to year, colleagues are having a harder time having the services and prescriptions they need covered and are spending more time on the phone pleading with CIGNA representatives. This deterioration of services not only adds unnecessary stress at times when colleagues might already be in health distress; it is also a colossal waste of time. Some colleagues who have seen their coverage unexpectedly change suggested that Wesleyan HR has been trading cuts in benefits for cost savings. This is an important under-the-radar issue about which the CBC should be kept apprised so that changes to our insurance can be reported to the full faculty in a timely and transparent fashion.