

SHOULD FORMER COLLEGE DEANS RETAIN THEIR HIGH SALARIES?

By Nick Gier

Deans have the toughest job in today's universities and colleges. Like their presidents, they are reluctantly spending less and less time on academic matters. Unfortunately, their institutions have gradually become corporatized, so it is only natural that they should act more like CEOs.

What makes deans' jobs difficult is that they sit in an uneasy seat between their faculty and the upper administration. Do they represent the interests of their faculty, or do they do the bidding of the upper administration? Sadly, my experience is that they usually do the latter.

Deans at European universities have an easier time resolving this dilemma.

Unlike our deans, who are appointed by the upper administration, European deans and presidents, according to a tradition that goes back to medieval times, are democratically elected. Therefore, European university administrators are totally accountable to the faculty they represent.

Another sign that higher education administrators have become academic CEOs is their huge salaries. From 1982-2005, UI administration salaries have increased 251 percent, while full professor salaries have increased only 154 percent. (The CPI for that time period was 193.) Faculty don't want their administrators to be paid less; rather, they also want to earn professional salaries that match their long years of training and hard work on the job.

In the old days, if new administrators were chosen from the UI faculty, they were given a 12-month salary and an administrative increment. That is not the case any more. When I started teaching in 1972, President Richard Gibb made three times as much as I did, but now President Tim White makes seven times more than new assistant professors.

More and more deans are also hired on the open market at much higher salaries than ever before.

It was also understood that when administrators returned to teaching, they would receive a 10-month contract and lose their administrative bonus. But that has not happened for many years. In some instances, but not always, there is a "step-down" agreement with some reduction in salary.

There is one benefit that former deans receive that I believe is well earned.

After grueling years straddling the fence between faculty and administration, former deans who stay on campus are given sabbatical leave so that they can retool for the classroom and restart research projects. Faculty, however, must take full-year sabbaticals at half pay, so there is no reason why former deans cannot do the same.

As I look at the faculty union's salary surveys for the past five years, I note the following examples:

- An associate dean of liberal arts earned \$8,074 per month in 2005, but now she is back in her department at \$9,090 per month. Her department colleagues make an average \$5,239 per month.
- The liberal arts dean recently resigned in disgrace, and he is now on sabbatical earning his dean's salary of \$137, 134. As in the case in private industry, there is no discount for poor performance. His salary will go down 15 percent at mid-year, but that was due to a prearranged step-down agreement.
- An earlier liberal arts dean took a 6.43 percent reduction when he returned to teaching, but he is now making \$10,669 per month as department chair in contrast to the full professor monthly average of \$8,003.
- The former dean of art and architecture makes \$8,561 per month, but the current interim dean makes only \$7,708 per month. The other full professors in the college earn a monthly salary of \$7,063.

- The former dean of business experienced no step-down reduction and stays at \$137,322 per year.
- In 2005, a former dean of engineering returned to the UI after five years in private industry at a monthly salary of \$10,537. His successor was still on the faculty at \$11,758 per month. That same year the average monthly full professor salary in their department was \$8,413.
- The former education dean took a 14 percent reduction, and the former law dean went down 18.8 percent, placing him below many of his teaching colleagues.

This issue is especially crucial when 24 UI staff employees have been laid off because of funding cuts, and students are paying higher fees and walking into ever larger classes.

Administrators work very hard for their high salaries, but surely not any harder than their equally diligent faculty. Former deans return to their departments with tenure; they are awarded full-salary, full-year sabbaticals without competing for them; but there is no way to justify this huge salary advantage over their peers, on which they build financially for the rest of their careers.

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