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Statement to the Kansas Board of Regents The State of Faculty Salaries at Kansas Universities

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Overview

A recently completed audit of faculty teaching loads concluded, among other things, that faculty salaries at the state universities have, since 1985, generally increased at rates exceeding inflation. That statement is accurate, but it fails to paint either a relevant or complete picture regarding the condition of faculty salaries at our state universities.

It is indeed the case that those salaries have grown at a greater rate than inflation during that period. It is also the case, however, that for most if not all of that period, it has been the explicit policy of the state of Kansas (through initiatives like the Margin of Excellence and the Higher Education Coordination Act of 1999) to increase faculty salaries well beyond the inflation rate.

The important story to be told about faculty salary levels is not that they have grown beyond inflation pace – the state has purposely sought to achieve that result. No, the important story about faculty salaries is that they have failed to keep pace with the state's own assessment of where they need to be. That failure has consequences.

Why Faculty Salary Levels Matter for Kansas

Success in the 21st Century global economy requires that Kansans have access to high quality higher education if our state and its economy are to achieve their full potential, and if our citizens are to achieve the quality of life aspirations they hold for themselves and their families.

In this regard, high quality faculty at our universities is essential because faculty members are at the core of what universities do. Thus, a strong faculty is the most vital ingredient for a university seeking to make its contribution to the state, its economy, and its citizens. It is critical, therefore, that our universities be able to attract and retain top-notch faculty if we are to deliver our best to the people of Kansas.

Universities compete in a remarkably competitive international marketplace for outstanding faculty, in which salary is key. Strong faculty members are difficult to attract and increasingly difficult to retain. Salary is a critical element for institutions that seek to achieve success in this competitive market.

Unfortunately, Kansas universities are at a significant competitive disadvantage. The salaries they can offer make it difficult for them to attract and retain the high quality faculty members necessary to meet the needs of Kansas and its citizens.

The Problem – Faculty Salaries at Kansas Universities Fall Short

Across the board, faculty salaries at Kansas state universities fall below relevant peer averages. For example:

- Faculty salaries at both the University of Kansas and Kansas State University fall below the average of salaries for faculties at other Big 12 universities.
- Faculty salaries at the state's other universities (Emporia State University, Fort Hays State University, Pittsburg State University, Wichita State University) lag behind the average of those salaries provided at similar institutions in those same Big 12 states.
- Faculty salaries at all of our universities are below the *average* of what is paid to faculty at their Board of Regents' selected peers.
- Faculty salaries are also well below the averages paid nationally. KSU salaries rank in the bottom one-third of land grant institutions. KU salaries lag significantly behind the average of what is paid in other institutions that belong to the prestigious Association of American Universities – a grouping of the nation's top comprehensive research universities. Similarly, salaries at our other institutions fall below the average of those paid in their national comparison categories.

In short, no state university in Kansas is able to pay its faculty at a level equal to the *average* of what is paid to faculty at institutions in any legitimate peer grouping.

Salary Levels Undermine Effective Faculty Recruitment

The failure to provide competitive salaries has profound and adverse implications for our universities and for our state. First, recruiting top faculty is increasingly difficult. Here are just a few examples that illustrate the scope of the difficulty:

- At one institution, the university has been unable to recruit a department chair. During FY 2005, the position was offered to four qualified individuals, but each of the four cited salary as the reason for declining the offer.
- That same university undertook six searches in which the first choice declined the offer because they were already earning at least \$8,000 more in their present position.
- Positions in ESU's School of Library and Information Management, including the deanship, remained vacant for several years due to inability to recruit because of low salaries.

- A position in Adaptive Special Education at ESU remains vacant for a second year because the University's salary is insufficient to attract candidates in this rapidly expanding field.
- A general biology position at ESU has remained unfilled. Each candidate (including one completing a doctorate) declined the position because of the salary.
- Pittsburg State University has experienced small applicant pools for its posted faculty vacancies because the market views the salary levels PSU is able to offer as woefully inadequate.

Even success on the faculty recruiting and hiring front produces critical salary-related difficulties – namely, salary compression, which disadvantages long-term faculty members. For example, Fort Hays State University recently had to offer an annual salary of \$40,000 to hire a new English professor. Faculty members with three and four years of service are paid \$37,000, \$38,000, and \$39,000. This is a dynamic that each of our institutions experiences.

Impending Retirements Will Only Exacerbate the Problem

This difficulty in recruiting and attracting top faculty becomes even more significant when you recognize that approximately one-third of our university faculty will become retirement eligible in the next decade. This situation is not unique to Kansas. The push to replace retiring faculty nationally will only intensify the already hyper-competitive market in faculty recruiting. The ability to offer competitive salaries will become even more crucial, and, if we don't act soon, Kansas' ability to gain ground in this race will only become more difficult and more costly.

Salary Levels Make It Difficult to Retain Our Best and Brightest

Here's an unfortunate scenario that plays itself out with distressing frequency. Sometimes our universities are successful in attracting top faculty members, and then invest the time, support and other resources necessary to promote the growth and development of those professors.

Too often, those talented academics are lured away by institutions able to offer more competitive compensation packages. In this way, our institutions risk becoming "farm teams" for institutions able to offer salaries substantially higher than ours. We are already experiencing this phenomenon; here are some examples:

- An Associate Professor of Business at the University of Kansas left KU and an annual salary of \$108,924 for the University of Minnesota at a salary of \$125,000, plus a \$3,000 start-up package.
- A Librarian III for KU's renowned Slavic Collection with a salary of \$79,105 moved to Harvard University and received a salary package of over \$100,000.
- A Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Curator in the Natural History Museum with a KU salary of \$72,052 was lured to Yale. His Yale salary of \$120,000

was one KU tried to match, but the \$775,000 in start-up funds offered by Yale put his package completely out of reach for any possibility of a match.

These three individuals were mid-career individuals who were valued very much by their colleagues and students. Each was a great contributor and their contributions and accomplishments at KU led other prestigious institutions to seek them out and recruit them. While other AAU institutions, like Minnesota, Harvard and Yale, are very often the "raiders," KU is currently in danger of losing two young faculty members for far larger salaries at institutions with reputations that are not equal to KU's:

- An Associate Professor of Business has an offer from the University of Arkansas for \$200,000 - \$75,000 more than he is currently earning at KU. In addition to this astonishing bump in salary, his teaching load, should he take the Arkansas offer, will be lower than at KU. This is one of the School's most productive and promising scholars. His loss will be very keenly felt if he decides to take the Arkansas offer.
- An Associate Professor of Teaching and Leadership in the School of Education whose KU salary is \$57,512, is pondering an offer from the University of Georgia at a salary of \$85,000, plus graduate student support, which he does not have at KU.

Here are some additional examples:

- Several faculty members have left ESU from various disciplines indicating salary as a principal reason. Two departed for better paying positions in local school districts. One left after only one year to return to a high school principal's position, which paid him \$32,000 more than he earned at ESU. Another departed for a better paying teaching position at a nearby K-12 school district.
- At Kansas State University, five outstanding academics in the biological and physical sciences have recently left for salary increases ranging from 24% to 67%.
- Additionally, seventeen top-notch faculty members, in disciplines ranging from social sciences, human nutrition and fine arts/music to veterinary medicine, mathematics and business have left the institution for increases in salary ranging from 20% to 200%.

This "raiding" activity creates a serious cyclical problem for our universities. One of our administrators was told that many institutions have adopted a recruiting strategy that looks for extremely promising assistant professors at places like universities in Kansas. These individuals will have enough experience to have demonstrated their potential as scholars and teachers. They will also have had enough time to fall behind "market rates" in salary terms, which makes them vulnerable to offers of higher salaries at institutions with lower teaching loads. When they are lured away, our institutions then must struggle to replace them in a market that demands higher salaries than we are generally able to pay, only to have the cycle begin anew.

Salary Levels Adversely Affect Faculty Morale

The failure to provide competitive salaries at our universities also has a profoundly adverse affect on institutional morale. According to a recently conducted survey of university faculty, 62% of faculty indicated that their salaries were among those aspects of their jobs about which they were least satisfied.

In addition, approximately one-third of faculty surveyed indicated that they were actively seeking employment elsewhere. We have no doubt that concerns about salary are prompting such exploration.

Salary Levels Frustrate Efforts to Achieve Faculty Diversity

The inability to offer more competitive salaries has profound implications for our institutions and their students as universities seek to provide those students with opportunities to learn from a faculty that is diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. The need to provide such opportunities is increasingly vital as the global economy develops.

The effort to diversify university faculties is being aggressively pursued by higher education institutions around the country. Faculty members who bring diversity to their campuses are among the most highly sought academics in the country. Salaries offered at Kansas universities place them at a significant competitive disadvantage in this important effort.