

THE WESTERN UNION

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A SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS

Why Washington's Funding for Higher Education is Declining

By Johann N. Neem and Kristi Lemm

In the past decade, Washington State's already tenuous support for public education has continued to slip. State funding per student has declined substantially since 1995, Washington now ranks close to last in state rankings in class size and compensation for educators, and an increasing share of the financial burden for higher education has been shifted to families.

To help reverse these trends, the Washington Education Association (WEA) recently launched *Take the Lead*, an ambitious, multi-year program to build awareness of the crisis and promote increased funding for public education at all levels.

In May 2007, we represented the UFWW at a *Take the Lead* forum for union representatives from across the state. Although unions at 4-year universities are recent additions to the WEA, presenters at the forum emphasized that increasing funding for higher education is a priority for *Take the Lead*, in addition to improving funding for the K-12 sector. Presenters also emphasized that one of the reasons that Washington's colleges remain so under-funded is the state's regressive, inefficient tax system. The long term health of Washington higher education will depend on comprehensive tax reform.

In "Washington Learns," Governor Christine Gregoire compares Washington to nine

other "Global Challenge" states. We do not come out well. Our average 2004-05 faculty salary of \$64,982 was second from the bottom, compared to \$79,394 at number one New Jersey. Overall, Washington's four-year faculty salaries are 23rd in the nation. Per-student state funding for higher education has fallen behind inflation. In 2003 dollars, state funding declined from \$5673 in 1994 to \$5476 in 2003. This is particularly harmful to Western where state funds comprised 77% of the operating budget in FY 2004 (compared to 24% at the University of Washington).

To make matters worse, tuition is considered part of state funding. Western now relies increasingly on tuition and fees rather than state general funds. Tuition in 2004-05 composed 40.3% of per-student cost for the state's four-year comprehensives, compared to only 25% in 1992-93. In other words, as state funding has declined the burden for paying for college has shifted from the commons to individual students and families.

Why has state funding not kept pace with growing student enrollment despite the widespread recognition that higher education is vital to the health of Washington's de-

mocracy and economy? The answer is Washington's antiquated tax system. Over the past 30 years general fund revenue has grown more slowly than the economy because Washington relies heavily on the sales tax and has no income tax. In the 2005-07 biennium, 52% of state revenue depended on sales. The shift toward a service economy and Internet purchasing, however, has diminished the sales tax's yield.

Washington's tax structure is also the most regressive in the nation. Raising sales taxes hurts those least capable of paying. Taking both state and local taxes into account, the poorest 20% in Washington paid 17% of their income in taxes in 1996; the middle 20% paid 10%; and the top 20% paid between 7% and 4%. Thus, sales taxes not only represent an inefficient way to raise resources, they hurt the poorest Washingtonians.

If Washington is to maintain a competitive higher education system, it will have to address its tax code's limitations. Otherwise declining public financial support may be hard to counteract and the ambitious rhetoric of our political leaders will be just that. A weakened public higher education system is not just bad for UFWW members but for the entire state.

Additional Information on *Take the Lead* and state funding of higher education is available at
http://www.weafourthcorner.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=57&Itemid=83

by faculty in the California State system which includes several of our peer institutions.

The impact of the salary disadvantage faced by Western faculty is exacerbated by the fact that the cost of living in Bellingham is now higher than in the locations of 19 of our 25 peer institutions. Figure 2 shows that, adjusting for differentials in area cost of living, the differences in earnings between Western faculty and those of faculty at peer institutions are even more pronounced. Specifically, the average cost-of-living-adjusted salaries for tenure-line faculty at Western is over seven

thousand dollars below that of the average for peer institutions and about \$15,500 below the 75th percentile. Figure 2 also shows that these gaps between WWU salaries and those of peer institutions are pronounced for all tenure-track ranks and instructors but are especially stark among higher faculty ranks.

Western's failure to make up significant ground toward even the average salaries of our peer institutions is especially troublesome given the top-level performance of our faculty in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. These accomplishments have enabled Western to maintain a standing well above those of our peer institutions in national and regional rankings of best colleges, and make the 75th-percentile goal established by the Board of Trustees appear modest at best.

Failure to take quick and decisive action to redress deficiencies in Western's current salary structure will make it increasingly difficult

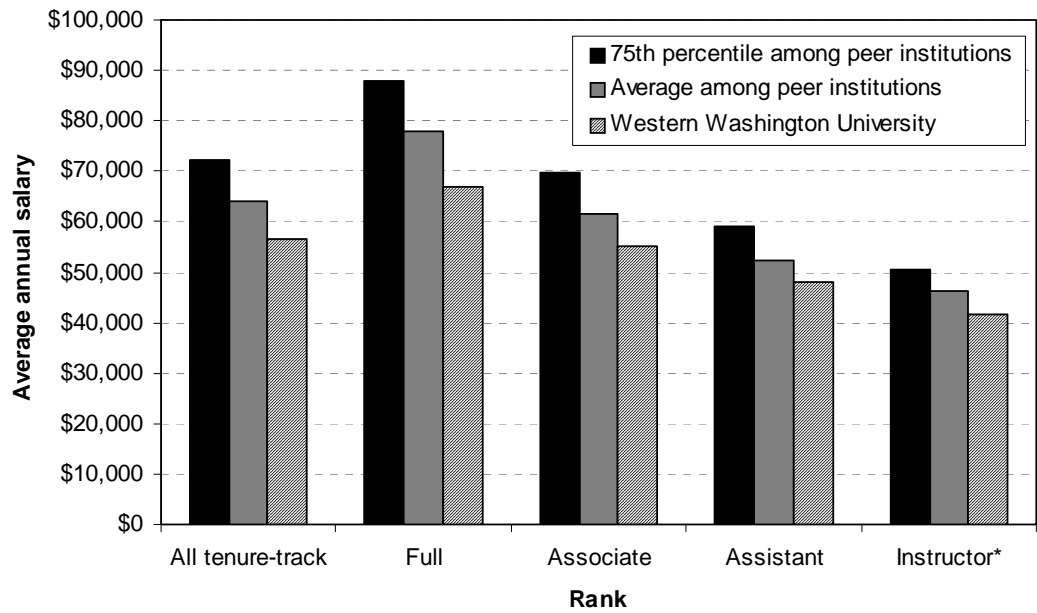
to recruit and retain the best faculty capable of maintaining and bolstering the strengths of the institution. As most faculty and deans will attest, these difficulties have already begun to materialize. Over 17% of faculty searches failed outright last year, with departments unable to attract high quality new faculty to campus. Moreover, while recently hired members of the faculty continue to make remarkable contributions to the institution, most departments report that the current salary structure at Western makes it increasingly difficult to attract top-tier choices in faculty searches. This represents a very serious threat to the university's ability to achieve its strategic goals and maintain its national reputation. As UFWW President Bill Lyne recently put it, "the failure to dedicate funds necessary to recruit and retain the best faculty will be felt by our students first, their employers second, and U.S. News and World Report last – and by then it will be too

late."

An often underappreciated fact is that salary levels are determined by local decisions as well as state allocations. Legislative earmarks for salary increases are important but the university administration can choose to draw on other revenues to bolster faculty salaries.

As President Morse and others across campus have noted, this is a very good budget period for Western. The state has allocated funds for a 3.2% increase in faculty salaries, but the overall operating budget for the 2007-09 biennium is up 19.7% from the previous biennium. This year's budget contains more than 9.7 million dollars that the university administration can devote to any purpose deemed important. The questions remain, what proportion of these discretionary funds will be dedicated to help achieve the oft-stated goal of a competitive salary structure at Western, and will it be enough to maintain Western's tradition of educational excellence?

Figure 2. Salaries by rank, adjusted for area cost of living



*Note: The definition of "instructor" may not be comparable across institutions.

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-Bill Lyne, UFWW President and Bargaining Team Member

LAGGING FACULTY SALARIES A PERSISTENT LOCAL PROBLEM FOR WESTERN

Perhaps the most important, but least surprising, result of the faculty survey conducted by the UFWW last year was that salaries remain a top concern for our faculty (see *Western Union* volume 1, issue 2). Specifically, vast majorities of faculty respondents reported that regular cost-of-living increases and salaries competitive with those at peer institutions should be a top priority in bargaining the first faculty contract.

These priorities are well in line with the stated goals of the university's administration. President Morse has repeatedly pointed out that increasing faculty salaries is her "top priority" (<http://www.wwu.edu/depts/pubs/fast/FAST09-23-04.pdf>), and in 2002, Western's Board of Trustees directed the administration to pursue the salary increases necessary to push faculty salaries to the 75th percentile of our peer institutions by 2004-05 (see <http://west.wwu.edu/trustees/minutes/August2002MinutesAPPROVED.pdf>). Moreover, the university recently developed a strategic plan that not only directly refers to the need for higher faculty salaries, but also lays out a wide range of objectives that hinge directly on the ability to attract and retain the best quality faculty (see http://www.wwu.edu/president/action_plan.shtml).

In light of this apparent consensus on the topic, the lack of significant progress toward a competitive salary structure for Western's faculty is dismaying. Between the 2000-01 and 2006-07 academic years, the average salary across all ranks of Western's tenure-track faculty did grow by just over 17%, from about \$53,100 to \$62,200 (see Figure 1). Most notable were salary increases after 2003, the years leading up to the faculty vote for collective bargaining.

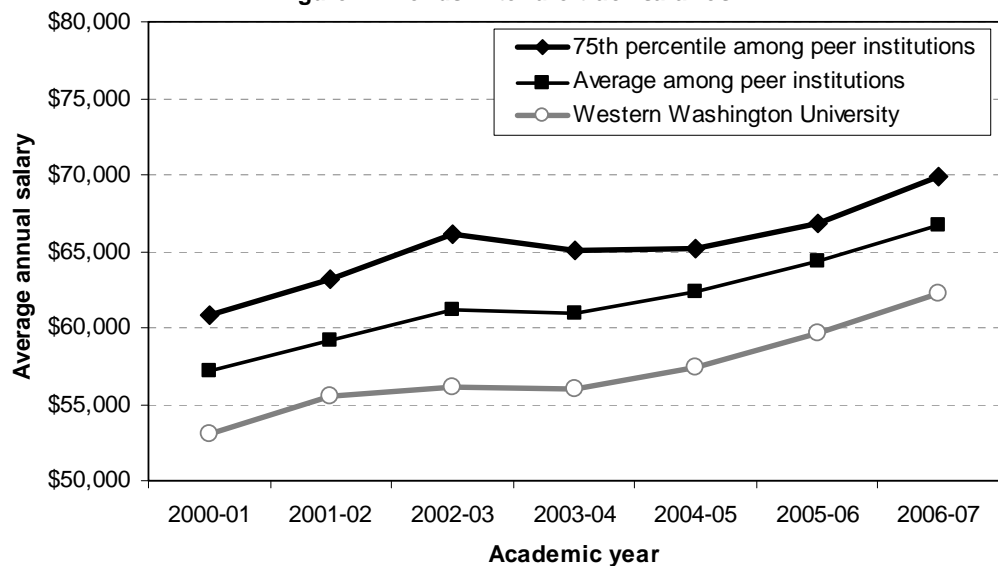
Yet these increases were not even enough to prevent us

from losing further ground relative to the peer institutions selected by President Morse as the key reference group in assessments of the university's performance. Between 2000-01 and 2006-07, the gap between salaries for tenure-track faculty at Western and the average salary among these peer institutions actually increased from \$4,093 to \$4,461 (salaries for non-tenure-track faculty are not included in these trends because peer institutions have reported these salaries only irregularly).

Progress toward the administration's stated goal of the 75th percentile among peer institutions has been similarly sluggish. As of the most recently completed academic year, annual faculty salaries at Western still lagged almost eight thousand dollars behind the 75th percentile among peer institutions, a gap that barely changed since 2000-01. These gaps are likely to grow given the large salary increases recently negotiated

The gap between salaries for tenure-track faculty at Western and the average salary among peer institutions has actually increased slightly since 2000

Figure 1. Trends in tenure-track salaries



Thanks to Morse

Members of the UFWW Executive Committee would like to thank President Karen Morse for her 14 years of dedicated service to the university. Upon her retirement, effective September 1, 2008, Morse will leave a university with a clear mission, a strong student body, and a productive faculty and staff. The UFWW looks forward to working with the Board of Trustees in the search for a successor to continue building on these institutional strengths.

Foundations for stronger universities

Faced with stagnant state revenues and rising operating costs, many public universities are increasingly turning to private donations to help retain faculty and maintain their strong educational tradition. Leading the way is UC-Berkeley where an aggressive fund-raising operation and a strong gift-matching program have been established to raise \$220 million in faculty endowments. See <http://insidehighered.com/news/2007/09/12/cal>.

Executive Board change

Joara Minhara has accepted a position at another college and has resigned her at-large position on the UFWW Executive Board. We send her our thanks and wishes of luck!

Nominations for Joara's replacement on the board can be sent to Steven Garfinkle.

The *Western Union* is a quarterly publication designed to foster communication between members of the UFWW.

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BARGAINING UPDATE

By David Bover, Chair of UFWW Bargaining Team

The bargaining team for the United Faculty of Western Washington worked throughout the summer and held several negotiation sessions with the bargaining team for the university administration. We have made some progress in these meetings and reached tentative agreements on several key issues. In all of our negotiating positions we are guided by a commitment to faculty autonomy and departmental control.

We have scheduled several more all-day sessions for October and November. During these sessions we will continue to push for a first contract that will provide faculty with the

tools we need to carry out the university's educational mission of engaged excellence.

The number one priority for Western continues to be competitive faculty salaries that will allow us to continue to recruit and retain the excellent faculty who have made Western such an outstanding institution. The state legislature appropriated funds for a 3.2% increase in faculty salaries this year. This is a start, but it does not go nearly far enough. The 3.2% increase alone would leave us falling even further behind in the university's goal to develop a competitive salary structure. We are working hard with our adminis-

trative colleagues at the bargaining table to continue Western's recent tradition of enhancing the legislative salary appropriation with local funds.

Our goal is to complete negotiations on a comprehensive contract as soon as possible. In the meantime, please note that the funds appropriated by the state for faculty salary increases remain in Western's budget. Although these increases were not reflected in the first paychecks of the year, the UFWW will ensure that these funds will still reach the faculty along with any additional salary increases that are negotiated.

MEMBERS MAKE US STRONGER

By Steven Garfinkle, Chief Steward

As UFWW approaches a membership of 200, I have a question for the rest of the faculty. *What are you waiting for?* I understand that membership is a serious financial commitment so I would like to take a moment to explain why that commitment is so important right now.

At the moment, the UFWW bargaining team is hard at work negotiating our first contract with their administrative counterparts. Our growing membership adds strength to the position of our bargaining team. Membership shows the dedication of the faculty to the process of collective bargaining. I have heard from some stewards that the faculty are discussing joining

the union once the negotiations are complete and there is a contract on which the membership will vote. I know that this will be a compelling argument for membership in the future. A willingness to join now, however, not only gives you that vote, but also immediately bolsters the voice of the faculty.

UFWW is working on a number of statewide initiatives, including lobbying the legislature on higher education issues. This work is often undertaken in cooperation with our colleagues on other campuses. The resources that our dues provide are used locally to help represent the entire faculty, and they are put to use at the state level

to highlight the importance of Western within Washington State higher education. More members means more voices speaking out on faculty concerns and more resources to ensure that those voices are heard.

As chief steward I have already seen the benefits that UFWW brings to our campus. We are working in all of the colleges to enhance our educational mission and to support our colleagues. I am also a witness to the many hours of hard work being put in by our bargaining team. Your membership provides a clear indication of support for this work and guarantees us a better future at Western.

YOUR UNION BY THE NUMBERS

2 Western's ranking in educational quality among masters-granting public universities in the West (#1 in the Northwest region) according to the 2008 *U.S. News and World Report* college rankings.

38 Ranking of Western's average faculty salaries among the 56 masters-granting public universities in the West listed in the AAUP's most recent faculty salary survey.

9,700,000 The number of dollars in discretionary funds in the 2007 budget that can be used by Western's administration on any worthy purpose, including faculty salaries.