

The Columbus Dispatch

OU professors may get \$6M more

By [Collin Binkley](#)

The Columbus Dispatch • Sunday January 26, 2014 7:59 AM

Ohio University faculty members could receive an extra \$6 million in raises over the next three years to catch up with salaries at other schools.

Professors at the Athens campus receive an average salary of \$103,757, which ranked No. 8 last year among four-year public universities in Ohio. But Ohio University leaders want to climb to No. 3 amid a push to recruit and retain strong employees.

To reach that goal, a committee made up mostly of faculty members is proposing an extra \$4 million in raises for faculty on the Athens campus, plus \$2.2 million for proportional increases for other faculty members in Athens and at regional campuses. In total, the proposal amounts to a 2.19 percent pay raise for all types of faculty.

Those increases would be on top of others already planned over the next three years, including \$5.6 million allotted for professors in Athens. How the new salary raises would be distributed has yet to be decided, but university leaders said they are considering a merit system.

Early impressions from the university board of trustees were varied. Some said the raises might be long overdue. Others said they want to see more information, including how the plan would increase retirement costs down the line. Trustee Dave Scholl said he is concerned about how the raises would be distributed.

Spreading the raises evenly “just kind of inflates the numbers,” Scholl said.

In the 1970s, the trustees agreed that OU should strive to keep its compensation in the top quarter of public colleges in the state. To achieve that now, the university would need to rank No. 4. But the committee recommending new salary raises said OU should aim higher.

“We are third in retention, we are third in graduation rate, we are third in the ability to attract students,” Provost Pam Benoit told trustees on Thursday. “We belong there in compensation.”

The highest-paid professors in the state are at Ohio State University, with an average salary of \$136,948, followed by the University of Cincinnati, at \$110,820. Between those two and OU now are Miami University, the University of Toledo, Kent State University, the University of Akron and Wright State University.

Benoit said the proposed raises are detailed in a draft report the committee has yet to finish. The group plans to submit the report for consideration by the trustees on March 14. The university did not respond last week to a *Dispatch* request for the draft recommendations under Ohio’s Open Records Act.

At a board of trustees meeting on Thursday, Benoit gave a preview of the report. Over the past year, she said, the 11-member committee has compared pay at OU and at other schools across the state and country. It found that OU ranks even lower among similar schools across the U.S. than in Ohio.

But in their comparison, the group didn’t factor in differences in the cost of living among cities. “Obviously, Columbus is different from Athens,” Benoit told the trustees. “But it’s very hard to figure it in for salary costs.”

Some data give a glimpse of the difference. The average professor salary at the Athens campus is 24 percent lower than at Ohio State, but the average price of a home sold in Athens last month was also 24 percent lower than the average in Columbus, according to data from the Ohio Association of Realtors.

Although the proposal now recommends boosting salaries over three years, university leaders said they are talking about speeding that up. Before they submit a final proposal, they plan to gauge reaction from students and employees.

“We’re beginning to vet the report across campus,” Benoit said. “There will be a lot of feedback about the plan, as you can imagine.”

cbinkley@dispatch.com