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SLICING the PIE

Story by David Roepke

Take a look at who's getting paid what on the ISU campus
Actually, it's not all that much in comparison with a state university vehicle and living quarters at the Knoll.

That sounds like a bunch of money, right? Actually, it's not all that much in comparison to the dough paid every year to men's basketball coach Larry Eustachy or football coach Dan McCarthy.

In the fiscal year ending in June 2000, Eustachy was the top-paid employee in the state with a contract totaling more than $640,000. The only other employees even in the ballpark of Eustachy's hefty salary are two coaches from the University of Iowa, football coach Kirk Ferentz and men's basketball coach Steve Alford, pulling down about $540,000 and $440,000 respectively. ISU women's basketball coach Bill Fennelly had a salary of $206,000 for the year.

In the same time period, former ISU President Martin Jischke and U of I President Mary Sue Coleman were only getting paid about $227,000, and Governor Tom Vilsack was barely making more than $100,000.

Obviously, a winning basketball or football coach is worth a lot more on the open market than a university president or even a governor.

But it's also important to keep a quality medical school and law school in the state, if state salaries are any indication. Of the top-paid 100 state employees, 90 of them are professors at the University of Iowa.

It costs a whole lot to convince a knowledgeable surgeon, pharmacist, dentist, or lawyer to stay on as a faculty member than it takes to keep a sociology, English, or journalism professor from fleeing to the "big money" in the private sector.

And then next time any of your high school friends who went to the University of Northern Iowa try giving you any slack, just point out that of the top-paid 200 state employees, they have only one coach, professor, or administrator on the list — President Robert Koob coming in at number 200 with a salary at a little under $180,000.

Enough with the rest of the universities in the state, though, let's concentrate on ISU.

The highest-paid professors at the university are both in the chemistry department, professor John Kozak with $208,000 and distinguished professor Edward Yeung at $181,000. Compare that to the $64,000 paid to Barbara Mack, an associate professor of journalism who has been decorated many times as one of the university's top teachers.

The highest-paid deans are engineering Dean James Melsa at $185,000 and business Dean Ben Allen at $175,000. Melsa tried to bump that even higher when he put his name in the running as a candidate to be ISU's next president. Compare that to the $81,000 paid to Kathleen MacKay, former dean of students.

The highest-paid administrators, excluding the president, are Vice President for External Affairs Murray Blackwelder at $188,000 and Vice President for Business and Finance Warren Madden at $187,000. Compare that to the $132,000 paid to Vice President of Student Affairs Thomas Hill.

But you can miss the whole picture if you just look at specific employee salaries. For a more accurate gauge of how the money is being divided up and what the university's priorities are when it comes to salaries, it's best to look at overall statistics and comparisons.

For example, the average salary for an ISU faculty member last school year was $68,500. That's not too bad, considering it ranked our faculty as the second highest paid among Big 12 schools.

But when you compare that average to the average salaries of other land-grant institutions such as Michigan State University and Purdue University (where Jischke is now president), ISU doesn't stack up as well. The faculty were the ninth highest paid in a group of 11 land-grant schools last year.

The area where that gap is most pronounced is when it comes to full professors. In comparison to their peers at other land-grant schools, assistant and associate professors at ISU are paid average salaries. However, the average salary for a full ISU professor is about $1,000 lower than the average salaries of full professors from other schools. That surely doesn't sit well with the 36 percent of ISU faculty members who are ranked as a full professor or higher.

There are some interesting internal statistics concerning salaries as well. The top salaries in each department go to who's been there the longest, who has the highest rank, and who has tenure. Especially who has tenure, that wonderful academic paradise that every faculty member strives for because it brings with it job security and higher pay.

Last year, only 20 percent of tenured faculty were women. However, 40 percent of the faculty eligible for tenure but who have not yet attained it were women. And nearly 50 percent of the faculty who were not on track for tenure were women.

Taking a look at this by race, 89 percent of tenured faculty are white, but only 78 percent of tenure eligible employees are white.

What's the difference? Well, professors and associate professors, much more likely to have tenure, were paid average salaries of $82,000 and $62,000 last year, respectively. Assistant professors and instructors, much less likely to have tenure, were paid $50,000 and $36,000, respectively. Being denied tenure is one of the consummate grievances of an academic, and it often can be a several thousand-dollar difference.

A Few Thoughts

What does all of this mean? First you have to understand that who's getting the money is important. Salaries for faculty are usually set within each department, so the profs getting paid the most are either old, tenured institutions or a really hot commodity. The university wants to attract the best professors it can, and it is willing to pay them handsomely if that is the only way to retain them.

The best example of that is the enormous percentage of the top-paid state employees who are U of I professors. You simply have to pay them more because they're worth more. Even if you are the best social worker in the world, there's always going to be a mediocre doctor making 10 times your salary. That's
just life (and economics).

It's the same story with the salaries of Eustachy, McCamney, and Fennelly. It might be difficult to make the argument that one basketball coach is worth as much to ISU as 10 full professors, but it is true. Reigning national Coach of the Year Eustachy, in particular, is worth a lot of dough.

These coaches have been successful at Iowa State, and their victories mean more money for the school at nearly every imaginable level (more willing donors, more ticket revenue, increased enrollments, etc.) and incredible free press for ISU. A school that is concerned at all about athletic success can't scrimp and save on coaches. They need to go out and get the best they can, using all reasonable resources.

The high salaries for administrators are once again a necessity, although I've always wondered why the VP for student affairs needs to be paid $50,000 less than the VP of business and finance and the dean of library services needs to be paid $50,000 more than the dean of students.

Apparently if your job involves dealing directly with students, you're not worth as much.

But if the university is truly striving for excellence and is willing to pay to keep the best around, why do salaries for ISU's top educators and researchers, its full professors, fall short of peer averages?

More importantly, what a faculty member is paid is a rough estimation of how valuable the university considers him or her to be. So think about who has touched your life at ISU. Think about that professor who really moved you or taught you something you didn't even realize you didn't know. What do you suppose the university considers that individual to be worth? How much do you think he or she is getting paid?

Now that you know that all these figures are available at your fingertips, you can check it out for yourself. There's a book in the library that annually lists every employee's salary, among countless other confusing minutia. Check it out sometime and see for yourself how the pie is getting split up.

The salary averages can be found on the ISU fact book on the ISU Web page. Pull up the page and see where the money is being spread around.

Or if you're interested in seeing how much the good Prof. Snooze-in-the-back gets paid or what your favorite prof is pulling down, check out the state salary database compiled by The Des Moines Register last year at

If you look at them close enough, these lines and lines of numbers can be some truly interesting reading.

Dave Roepke is a senior in journalism and a senior editor at Ethos.