Salary disparity at UL

Women professionals earn less, hold fewer high-ranking jobs

By Megan Wyatt | mwyatt@theadvertiser.com

Female faculty members who have not yet earned tenure shake their heads no, murmuring that they'd rather not comment on their salaries or whether the university treats women with equity.

Male faculty members are more forthcoming, admitting their own salaries are not competitive enough and that there is gender disparity in the university.

The university's provost acknowledges the gender and salary disparity among faculty members and says that it's something that will take time to correct.

But the University of Louisiana at Lafayette is not isolated in its lower salary average and lower position ranks for women.

There is a trend nationwide in academia, especially in research universities such as UL. Women faculty members make less than their
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male counterparts, even taking into account discipline, experience and education level. What’s more important, however, is why women are making less. The trend at UL and nationwide at doctoral universities is for women to hold only about one-third of the highest positions of full professor. The lower the position rank, the more females are represented.

During an investigation by The Daily Advertiser, we learned that gender disparity exists in both faculty rank and faculty salary at UL. More problematic is that although the university has large quantities of data available, there is not an effective method for analyzing and disseminating that data at the local university.

University administrators have provided requested data to a UL Faculty Senate committee or to the American Association of University Professors in recent years.

Little change over the years

Judith Gentry, who holds a doctorate from Rice University, dedicated 43 years of her life to researching and teaching in UL’s Department of History and Geography. While much of her research focused on women’s history, Gentry is also known for fighting for gender equity for the university’s faculty.

Gentry formerly served as head of the UL Faculty Senate’s Committee on the Status of Women and still attends committee meetings even though she is retired.

A study done by the committee in 2007 demonstrated that the university does not advance women from associate professors to full professors as quickly as it advances male associate professors.

The committee did a followup study with updated data in 2010 that demonstrated little had changed.

The committee has since requested the same data to see whether the university had come closer to equity for women faculty members through raises and promotions, but the administration has not provided the committee with the necessary data.

“We ask,” Gentry says. “And we ask again. And we ask again.”

University faculty salaries are public information.

The data requests go through the university’s provost and vice president for academic affairs, a position which was filled this year by James “Jim” Henderson.

Gentry says that Henderson is the best provost the school has seen in many years, but only time will tell if he is more transparent than previous administrators.

Data rich, analysis poor

The faculty senate committee is not the only group looking for data analysis on UL’s faculty members and their salaries. Even members of the UL administration have struggled with obtaining useful data for internal use.

Robert McKinney, UL’s assistant vice president for faculty affairs, said he was unaware of the disproportionate numbers of male faculty in high position.

WHAT WE LEARNED

» Women faculty members make 22.88 percent less than men.
» Women earned, on average, $17,653 less per year than men.
» Women earned nearly as much as men for the same positions in the university.
» The disparity exists in rank more than pay.
» More than three times as many men held the highest faculty rank as women.
» The lower the faculty rank, the more women were represented.
» These trends match national trends.
» The highest paid faculty member was a woman, but she has since left the university.

HOW MUCH LESS DO WOMEN MAKE?

After controlling for every potential source of pay differentials, a study by a UL Faculty Senate Committee found that more than not, women made less than the average male in the same positions. How much less?

White female: $1,113
Black female: $2,495
Hispanic female: $941.82
Asian female: $1,645.59
Native American female: $2,731.73


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The faculty senate committee is not the only group looking for data analysis on UL’s faculty members and their salaries. Even members of the UL administration have struggled with obtaining useful data for internal use.

Robert McKinney, UL’s assistant vice president for faculty affairs, said he was unaware of the disproportionate numbers of male faculty in high positions at the university or the pay difference that exists among male and female faculty members. Henderson has made data requests to the university’s Office of Institutional Research that have yet to be fulfilled.

Earlier this year, Henderson and university President E. Joseph Savoie hired data-use experts from the National Commission on Higher Education Management Systems to evaluate the university’s system for storing and disseminating data.

“They concluded that we were data rich but analysis poor,” Henderson says. “And that meant we have lots of data stored, but what we don’t have are a lot of people who can access that data, analyze that data and provide it to users in a way that makes them able to make decisions.”

The university is working to transfer existing in-house data into a new system that should greatly improve the university’s ability to analyze data, but the transfer process could take several years, Henderson said.

One of the responsibilities Henderson was tasked with upon beginning his role as the university’s provost was to look at the policies involving faculty at the university.

A mathematician by education and first-generation college graduate, Henderson joined the UL administration in January after a string of interim provosts.

Henderson learned that there were few written policies in place that governed the faculty hiring process and much of what was written didn’t make sense.

While there hasn’t been a lot of hiring since Henderson began, largely the result of several years of state budget cuts, he did say that 13 of the 21 tenure-track faculty members in orientation for the new semester are women.

“I think that these issues of gender equity among faculty, salary equity among faculty are difficult issues. And it’s going to be an issue that will be on everyone’s mind as we go forward with hiring and give forward with budget allocations,” Henderson says.

“It’s taken us a long time to get here. It’s not going to be overnight that we’ll make some of the changes we’re looking for, but that doesn’t mean that we’re not committed and that it won’t happen.”

Representation gap

An annual report by the American Association of University Professors demonstrates that while there is a gender-based wage gap between male and female faculty members at universities nationwide, the bigger issue is the representation gap.

The average salaries of all male faculty members at doctoral universities are pulled upward by the high number of male full professors, and the average disparity between male and female faculty members are pulled down by the high number of those holding lesser ranks.

The report’s co-author Saranna Thornton has studied pay disparity trends nationwide as chair of the Committee on the Economic Status of Women in the profession for the Virginia chapter of the AAUP.

Thornton’s committee has found basic reasons for pay disparity:

» Women tend to be overrepresented in lower-paying disciplines such as humanities and underrepresented in higher-paying disciplines such as sciences.

» Tenure-track positions aren’t usually friendly to women who wish to have a family, women who have spouses also in the higher education profession are more often older and the highest-paying positions are often the most flexible.

Some higher education experts blame the gender disparity seen at universities on old practices that will take time to correct as women move through the academic pipeline.

But discrimination safeguards such as Title IX have been in place for decades. Title IX, part of the United States Education Amendments of 1972, prohibits gender discrimination at any educational program that receives federal financial assistance.

“We are, 40 years later, and women still aren’t making what men do,” Thornton says. “If it was just a problem for women to move through the pipeline, we would be there by now.”

Solutions that Thornton’s committee has found for leveling the playing field for women include encouraging universities to adopt family-friendly policies and provide better opportunities for trailblazing spouses, in addition to helping faculty members learn what their rights are.

Growing pains

The highest-paid faculty member at UL for the 2013-14 academic year was not a man, but a woman named Carolina Cruz-Neira, whose salary came in at $223,400.

Cruz-Neira joined the university in February 2006 but left her position as the W. Hansen Hall and Mary Officer Hall BORSF endowed super chair in telecommunications in Computer Engineering in July. Her departure was not related to pay, she said, but to seek opportunity for professional growth. She now serves as the director of the Emerging Analytics Center at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

“I’m a very impatient person,” Cruz-Neira says. “And I want to do it today, not tomorrow. That was my main reason for moving on.”

She says that UL is experiencing growing pains and does not have the structure to support research faculty at the level she hoped for. Many of Cruz-Neira’s afternoons at UL were spent doing administrative tasks, such as filling out expense reports, instead of focusing on high-level research.
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McKinney said he does not regularly hear such complaints from faculty members.

Previously, McKinney served as a professor of architecture, for the university before working in faculty affairs, and he does not believe there is a problem with faculty having to handle administrative tasks.

"My response is a personal one," McKinney says. "I've been here 25 years, and I've not had an issue with processes. You want accountability. You want assessment."

Stagnation, frustration

Attracting and retaining diverse and talented faculty members is not always easy, especially when UL faculty members know they can earn more at comparable universities across the nation.

Somesay that they stay at UL out of love for the university, Lafayette or Acadiana. Others search for positions elsewhere while continuing to research and teach at UL.

"If I were teaching at another university in another state, I'd be making thousands of dollars more. I'm certain of that," says James McDonald, a professor in the university's Department of English and executive officer of the UL Faculty Senate. "But I like the area, and I like things about the university."

McDonald has been employed at UL since 1987, and he says that state budget cuts have not only meant that salaries have been stagnant for six years now but also that faculty now have to pay for more professional development out of their existing salaries.

"It makes it harder to hire people," McDonald says. "It makes it harder to keep people."

David DuBois, an assistant professor in the Visual Arts Department, has learned through research that his salary is below that of state averages for his rank and position.

"When I inquired about that, I was told that my salary though was in line with the university averages for that rank and that position," says DuBois, who has worked at UL for six years. "I was told why there's disparity between this university and other universities."

While he said he does not constantly search job listings, DuBois does keep an eye out for better opportunities. "It makes it hard to say that most of the professors in this university are very frustrated," he says.

Both Henderson and McKinney acknowledge that there is salary dissatisfaction among university faculty members.

McKinney says that the university administration works to keep morale up through filling endowed professorships, which include additional stipends from outside sources, and through recognizing outstanding faculty members through the annual Distinguished Professor and Ray P. Authment Excellence in Teaching awards.

Henderson's staff is also working to recommend salary adjustments for faculty members who have been at the university for many years but are earning smaller salaries than newly hired faculty who are hired at a market-rate salaries.

The process is a technical one that uses faculty salary averages based on rank, discipline and time in position to determine faculty salary inversions.

"It's a priority this coming year to start working on those salaries for faculty and staff," Henderson says. "To start turning this around and to see what we can do to hire some additional faculty and staff but also make sure that the people who have been here through these tough times are starting to be compensated in a way that makes sense."