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Faculty Persist in Pursuit of Better Salaries In Spite of Board's Compensation Policy Adoption

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Amidst the mounting concerns about faculty compensation at Sarah Lawrence College, on Mar. 1, the Board of Trustees unanimously adopted an "Employee Compensation Policy." Despite efforts to implement federal cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) for all faculty members, the Board opted against its adoption, as detailed in a Feb. 28 article by The Phoenix. However, the COLA For All campaign persists, reflecting some of the ongoing faculty concerns regarding the newly adopted policy.

The adopted policy utilizes a method known as "Salary Benchmarking," which was cultivated by the school's Employee Compensation Working Group comprising faculty and administrators. In Jan., the working group released a report comparing Sarah Lawrence to similar private undergraduate institutions. The report highlighted that Sarah Lawrence pays its employees significantly lower salaries than the comparator institutions. As a result, the working group recommended that the college commit to ensuring that its faculty members never fall behind more than 10% of the mean salary of faculty members at these comparator institutions, excluding guest faculty.

Several faculty members at Sarah Lawrence have expressed gratitude to the Board of Trustees for publicly acknowledging that professors are under-compensated. The Board also approved the addition of between \$800,000 and \$1 million to the budget for faculty salaries. However, some feel that administrators and the Board could have done more to consider the depleting value of faculty salaries due to inflation. The addition to the budget would technically result in a 2% increase in the faculty salary budget, but even so, the percentage fails to keep pace with inflation.

Additionally, many have questioned why guest faculty are not included in the compensation policy. "For guests, compensation as well as longer-term contracts need to be addressed," said an anonymous faculty member.

On Mar. 4, the Board of Trustees Chair Meryl Rosen and President Cristle Collins Judd sent an email to SLC Faculty that said that the "COLA For All" petition "received full consideration." However, Rosen and Judd wrote that the adopted compensation policy was more "equitable and sustainable."

The topic of equity has been a subject of debate when discussing which policy should have been adopted. Some argue that COLA For All is not equitable due to wide gaps among faculty salaries, which would only be exacerbated with the compounded interest of cost of living adjustments. Peggy Gould, the President of SLC's chapter of the American Association Of University Professors (AAUP), said that there could potentially be a cut-off, ensuring that faculty members earning above a certain amount wouldn't receive the COLA adjustment. "That's a very simple fix," Gould said.

Others believe that the newly adopted policy is unfair. The adopted policy does not say that any individual faculty member will be paid 10% below the mean of the salary of the comparator institutions, it says that "groups" of employees will be paid 10% below the average. Gould said, "There's no guarantee that any individual in the group would be brought up to that 10% below." This is because the school just "has to raise the average salary of that group." The groups of faculty include 1. "tenure-line faculty"; 2. "administrators, senior professionals, professionals, and administrative support positions"; 3. "senior positions."

On Mar. 26, Judd responded to some faculty concerns via email. In response to the concerns about guest faculty, Judd

wrote in her email, "The College must address issues of guest faculty appointments and compensation and develop policies that will guide that effort in a timely manner."

The email goes on to explain that the Provost's office, which consists of a single individual, will evaluate the needs of guest faculty before it is reviewed by a committee. A faculty member said, "the Provost [could] argue that because guests are generally paid more than adjuncts... at other institutions, that there is no need for real action." They added, "Guests at SLC are asked to do so much more than adjuncts elsewhere and adjuncts are [also] known to be exploited. This does not provide a good baseline."

President Judd wrote in her Mar. 26 email that the school is working under a three-year plan to get faculty salaries at the 10% margin. The email does not fully elaborate on the specific details of the plan.

David Peritz, a politics professor, wrote in a statement to The Phoenix, "Many of us don't presently trust that the initiative is adequate to the need, includes all employees, or will in fact be carried out in accord with the announced policy and time-frame." Peritz emphasized that for faculty to place trust in the initiative, there must be transparency regarding fund allocation, opportunity for faculty and appropriate committee members to contribute to the implementation decisions and assurances that the Board will uphold its commitments.

As it currently stands, "the COLA For All campaign continues," Gould said. She said the AAUP will "continue to bring pressure" and that "you will be seeing increasing visibility of the campaign."