

HIGHER EDUCATION'S SLIDE

Leave Oregon, get a raise

A REGISTER-GUARD EDITORIAL

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The market for academic talent is national, sometimes global. Oregon universities must compete with institutions in other states for top teachers and researchers. The accompanying chart makes it clear that Oregon has dropped out of this competition.

The chart shows that university faculty members are paid lower salaries in Oregon than in any neighboring state except Idaho. The chart also lists average faculty salaries in states that are home to universities that the Oregon University System regards as the University of Oregon's peers. Oregon's salaries aren't even close to any of theirs.

Universities in only seven states - Alaska, Idaho, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and West Virginia - pay lower average faculty salaries than Oregon.

Recent editorials in this series have documented other indices of weakness in the Oregon University System: low graduation rates, low expenditures per student, low spending per unit of personal income. Low faculty salaries are further evidence of decades of disinvestment in higher education.

Oregonians struggling to get by on stagnant or declining wages may find it difficult to muster much sympathy for a college professor making \$81,514 a year. Yet when a professor is paid more in Alabama, New Mexico or Kentucky - indeed, just about anyplace - Oregonians at all income levels should be concerned.

These professors teach students how to design bridges, interpret the Constitution and develop pharmaceuticals. Oregon places a lower value than most other states on faculty members' ability to impart knowledge and skill. Consequently, the civic, economic and social strengths that flow from knowledge and skill will be found elsewhere.

Money, of course, isn't everything. Many first-rate teachers and researchers have accepted lower pay at Oregon universities in exchange for a high quality of life. Oregon has long benefited from what economist Ed Whitelaw calls the "second paycheck" - the non-monetary perquisites of livability.

But Oregon isn't the only state where it's possible to lead a good life. And even if it were, university professors still would expect the kind of paycheck that can be cashed at a bank. Oregon can't hope to match the salaries paid in California anytime soon, but the quality of the state's universities depends on being able to compete with academic pay

levels in such states as Washington, Colorado and Arizona.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski's recommended budget for 2007-09 would bring salaries up to 88 percent of the average of Oregon universities' peers. The current percentage is 86 percent, according to the OUS. Narrowing the gap by 2 percentage points still would leave Oregon lagging far behind. But the increase would get the state moving in the right direction, a turn that would send an enormously encouraging signal to faculty.

The co-leaders of the legislative Joint Ways and Means Committee, however, propose scaling back Kulongoski's budget by \$41 million. That almost certainly would prevent meaningful progress toward closing the pay gap. Oregon would continue to have lower-paid faculty than Wyoming, Louisiana and Arkansas.

The state can coast only so far on past recruitment successes and the second paycheck. In the end, Oregon will get what it pays for.

Average
Faculty
Salaries
(*selected states*)
Faculty at Oregon
universities are paid less
than in most other states.

Note: Figures are for full-time members of instructional staff. 2004-05 Medical school faculty excluded.

	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor
Oregon	\$81,514	\$60,573	\$55,001
Washington	\$90,744	\$65,438	\$60,997
California	\$122,458	\$78,596	\$69,678
Idaho	\$70,992	\$58,182	\$48,921
Nevada	\$101,691	\$75,685	\$57,230
Iowa	\$97,061	\$68,969	\$60,262
Michigan	\$110,538	\$77,056	\$64,668
Virginia	\$102,757	\$72,166	\$59,696
Colorado	\$94,809	\$69,526	\$59,796
Indiana	\$94,510	\$66,852	\$56,398
North Carolina	\$105,772	\$77,618	\$64,817

⁷ Source: *Chronicle of Higher Education*