Using Data for Equitable Change: How Institutional Research can support decisions for faculty compensation

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About Davidson College

- Private, Liberal Arts College
- 20 miles North of Charlotte
- ~2,000 Students
- 230 Full-Time Faculty
- ~$25M in annual Faculty Salaries (non-unionized)

Setting the Stage

- A history of uneven salary increases
  - Long standing professors experienced 10%+ yearly increases over 15+ years ago (2003-04)
  - Created significant disparities between new vs. old employees
- Institutional priority was to keep employee benefit contributions stable over time, at expense of salaries
- The standing faculty committee recommendations were continually ignored/ineffective
  - Siloed efforts. Faculty asked for data, not for input.
- Trustees abandoned established salary targets

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Current Situation related to Faculty Salaries

- Spike in faculty departures in 2019
- New Leadership (President & Provost) at Davidson College
  - Provost was a long-standing, respected member of the Faculty
- Inherited underspending on Faculty Compensation
  - Favorable Student:Faculty Ratio, but ranked low on Faculty Salaries and Academic Financial Resources
- There was established practice of providing roughly equal percent increases across faculty ranks
  - Annual performance reviews only considered to a minor extent
- Board of Trustees openness to reconsidering salary targets

COACHE Results

Conducted in 2020 and 2024 (Resp Rate 60%+), with similar results:

- 30%+ of Faculty Members were Dissatisfied/Very Dissatisfied with Salary
- Davidson College ranked bottom 30% among our Peers
- Salary was an area of concern across all genders and racial/ethnicity groups
- There were significant differences in Tenure vs. Pre-Tenured

Discussion about Key Metrics

- AAUP Faculty Compensation Survey was essential
  - 800+ institutions participated, but we focused analysis on our institutional peers
  - Key Data Points: Salary by Faculty rank, % Change in Salary for *Continuing* Faculty, Total Benefits Expenditures ($ and % of Salary)
- Debates about setting a "target"
  - Peer-based vs. inflation-based
  - Mean vs. Median amounts (comparison group)
- Adjusting for differences in location
  - Many of peer institutions are based in the Northeast
  - Regional Price Parity adjustment vs. Zip Code adjustment
- Faculty arguments based on Endowment, Tuition Rev, and Inflation
- How do we provide **equitable** increases when the longest serving faculty benefited from large increases that have compounded?

Two charts that explain it all...

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Challenges & Institutional Politics

- Establishing a sense of shared goals, moving in the same direction instead of an internal "them vs. us" dynamic
- Providing clarifications about the nuances of available data
  - Subtle differences compared to HR IPEDS - Excludes sabbatical replacements, excludes outliers, prorates phased retirements, etc.
  - Aligning visiting assistant professors to the faculty rank categories
- Faculty insist on a long-form report to make argument
  - Compromise: Creating an Executive Summary with bullet points
- Preparing administrators to listen
- Trustee dynamics

Lessons Learned & Final Decisions

- New leadership offered an opportunity to reconsider practices and targets

- It's a good idea to re-check assumptions every now and then

- Institutional Research expertise needed to support decision-making

- Importance of using the *right* data to inform the decisions

- Annual Faculty Salary Increases differentiated by rank, targets by rank as well

- There may be good reasons to not invest in faculty salaries today, but the next leaders will have a hard time digging out of that hole

Questions?

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Questions for Discussion

- What role does Institutional Research currently play in faculty salary decisions (or other negotiations) at your institution?
- What challenges has your institution faced in ensuring equitable faculty compensation?
- Have you seen data-driven decisions lead to positive changes in faculty compensation? If so, how?