

# WSU is bucking trend with merit pay plan

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Just say "merit pay for teachers" if you're looking for an argument. Educators resist the idea, though it's politically popular.

Wayne State University is in its third year with a merit pay system, and President David Adamany finds the old resistance is wearing down.

"Merit pay helps us head off the railing," said Adamany, arguing that "colleges and universities are in a national market."

The system gives monetary thanks to faculty and academic staff for doing good work, but more importantly it gives institutional recognition to the person, he said.

"AMONG UNIONIZED institutions, we're virtually alone," Adamany said during an interview in his Mackenzie Hall office overlooking the Detroit campus. "But among research institutions, merit pay is the dominant mode."

He pointed to a survey of the 61 defined "research" universities. Of 51 which responded, almost half — 25 — were using merit pay fully. Another 23 were partly on merit, partly on across-the-board systems.

Only three had no merit systems — a category that included WSU up to three years ago. "Wayne State, in my view, was way out of kilter with the rest of the country," Adamany said.

"This is a unionized community," said the president of WSU, which has a center for labor studies named after the late UAW chieftain, Walter Reuther, "so merit pay is suspect. Traditional union opposition is based on the fear it's a tool to punish the union activists, a union-busting device."

Adamany said some union leaders have done well under merit pay, and there's "no systematic evidence" of abuse.

In his fifth year as president, Adamany, a lawyer and political scientist, came here after a career in state government in highly unionized Wisconsin and work at universities in Wisconsin, California and Maryland.

Despite its big-city image, much of the WSU faculty lives in the suburbs, particularly southeastern Oakland County, and WSU has launched a major student recruitment effort at satellite centers in Birmingham, Southfield, Livonia, the eastern and downriver suburbs.

WHILE ADAMANY and such leaders as U.S. Education Secretary William J. Bennett like merit pay, others resist:

- Officially, WSU's faculty union denounced it during a brief strike last fall. But the resulting contract preserved the system.

- Teacher Evaluation: Five Keys to Growth — a national guideline endorsed by education groups representing teachers, principals and administrators — took a dim view of merit pay, though not of evaluations. It argued that merit pay increases teacher anxiety.

- William Rasberry, a nationally syndicated columnist, opposes it because "The good teachers will go on being good, and the mediocre ones will continue in their mediocrity, with or without merit pay . . . You cannot expect the prospect of extra money to improve the performance of mediocre civil servants — or teachers — unless you believe they are deliberately mediocre."

- In 1984 Gov. Blanchard's Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Michigan pushed many "new directions" but shied away from mentioning merit pay.

THE WSU SYSTEM is mixed: 3 percent for traditional across-the-board pay hikes, 3.5 percent for merit pay and 0.2 percent for promotions in rank.

Of the merit percentage, 1 percent is distributed by departmental committees with what Adamany calls "modestly satisfactory" results. "That is, some departments just split the money evenly; others work to implement differential raises, he said.

Heart of the system is the 2.5 percent in the President's/Deans' Fund. He outlined the procedure for judging:

"I've requested the deans to set up committees of five or six members. The deans appoint three who have experience on the promotion-tenure committee and two or three others."

"One student nominated by the student council for each school is appointed. I wanted to get students into (evaluating) the teaching side (as distinct from research). There has not been a single complaint about the students' serving. Most deans say students are a constructive force."

"THE DEAN chairs the committee."

## What merits a pay hike?

In granting merit pay hikes from the President's/Deans' Fund, WSU committees consider three factors:

- Teaching quality — classroom evaluation by the department head, quality of student research project, quality of graduate dissertations, special materials such as laboratory books prepared by the instructor, textbook authorship, student advising beyond the usual meetings, plus "substantial weight" for winning the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching.
- Scholarship — books, articles, chapters in volumes edited by scholars, recitals (for those in performing arts), book reviews, papers delivered to scholarly societies, prizes, successful competition for grants.
- Service — editorship of journals, community boards, consultancies, academic committees.

"They make salary recommendations, but the dean has final authority. A merit pay decision can't be grieved," he said.

After ratings are completed, the panels assign "salary priorities" from A to E.

Top ratings don't necessarily assure a professor the A rating for salary increase, Adamany said, because it's sometimes necessary to bring able younger members up to what senior members are earning.

The dean's recommendation goes to the academic vice president who, in 90 percent of cases, upholds it. Where the VP disagrees, the pay adjustment may be either down or up.

IN PRACTICE, 80 percent of WSU's more than 1,100 faculty this year received some kind of merit increase, however small.

Most raises tend to be in the \$500 to \$1,500 cluster. Median increase was \$1,305 — meaning half got more, half less.

The mean increase — total dollars divided by the number receiving them — was \$1,889.

Five people got top increases \$6,000 to \$8,500.

"There's one scientist, maybe in his upper 30s, who was wooed by other (universities). He got 50 percent in three years. I think he'll stay at Wayne," Adamany smiled.

He predicts resistance will continue to soften as more people become familiar with the system. There are 14 committees with five to six members each — nearly 80 members in any one year.

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