

Summary

This work represents the culmination of the investigation of a working group of the Faculty Senate exploring faculty-salary-related issues. The group did not find evidence of salary mismatches with other regional TBR community colleges, nor did it find evidence of overall gender bias in WSCC faculty salaries. It did uncover ongoing salary inequity issues related to initial salary levels for individuals, a lack of financial reward for institutional dedication that will continue to create salary inequity issues unless addressed at the root, and COLA amounts that have not kept pace with the CPI.

Introduction

In the spring semester of 2023, several groups of faculty brought a number of concerns to the Faculty Senate (FS), seeking answers and possible solutions. Their concerns can broadly be put into these categories:

1. There was concern that WSCC was losing excellent faculty candidates due to a lower salary.
 - Several key faculty positions had gone unfilled at that time.
2. There were allegations made regarding gender bias in salary levels.
3. Examples of initial salary inequities regarding experience and education level were noted across nearly all divisions. These inequities grow larger over time because of the way COLAs work.
 - In some cases, these inequities can be attributed to initial salary negotiation efforts on the part of the prospective employee. In other cases, the inequity existed in the initial offer made to the employee.
4. There is no mechanism to recognize (via salary) continuation of service and commitment to the institution.
 - There were several documented cases where an employee could theoretically resign and then be rehired at an increased salary level. This situation is a byproduct of granting experience credit for *potential* faculty members, but not for *actual* faculty.
 - The raises associated with rank promotion (5%, 6%, and 7%) are not significant enough to serve as long-term motivation – and in several cases can be demoralizing, given the relatively small impact they make on personal finances and the large effort required during the promotion process. Over time, this leads to employees feeling underappreciated.
5. While all are grateful for COLAs received, salaries have not kept pace with the CPI.
 - One full professor notes that in terms of real dollars, their salary is about \$500 less than in 2010 when they were an associate professor.

The FS formed a working group to investigate and act upon these concerns, demystify salary comparisons among sister institutions, and promote transparency in the overall salary assignment process. This report is the culmination of that work.

The first phase of the investigation was to collect as much relevant salary data as possible from WSCC and its sister institutions.

Data Set and Limitations

All data came from TBR's publicly available online database¹ and thus reflects whatever shortcomings might be present there. Employment contract length and compensated additional responsibilities are notable limitations/unknowns. First, the data listed does not indicate the length of an individual's employment contract. In some cases, faculty may have twelve-month employment, which puts their salary above the typical range. In other cases, a faculty member might be a January starter with a shortened work contract, subsequently below the typical range. Second, some faculty have additional compensated duties (director, department head, etc.), which puts them above the typical range; there is no way to parse their base salary.

Updates to TBR's database occur twice a year. As this work was conducted in the Fall of 2023, the data represents salaries as of July 2023. All recorded salary values were then increased by 5% to account for the COLA to approximate current salary levels. Recent promotions are not reflected in the data set.

Names were redacted from the data, and then gender, rank, and salary were entered into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

Data Presentation and Discussion

The data is presented in several charts, allowing comparisons across different categories. The data in each graph appears in columns: a triangle and a diamond shape represent the maximum and minimum salary values, respectively; the circle represents the median value; and the vertical bar represents the middle fifty percent (MFP) of the values in that category. These MFP ranges are the most meaningful component of each data set, and their trends will be telling. Both maximum and minimum values are based on single individuals within the set and do not necessarily indicate much about the character of the data set as a whole.

Statistical analysis note: Each category contains a relatively small data set with maximum and minimum values that tend to be obvious outliers. Median values were used rather than mean values for improved robust set representation against outlier values. The MFP ranges were based on determining quartile values (25% and 75%).

The charts present salary comparisons across sister TBR institutions in East Tennessee, rank comparisons within WSCC, and then the same as those except broken out by gender.

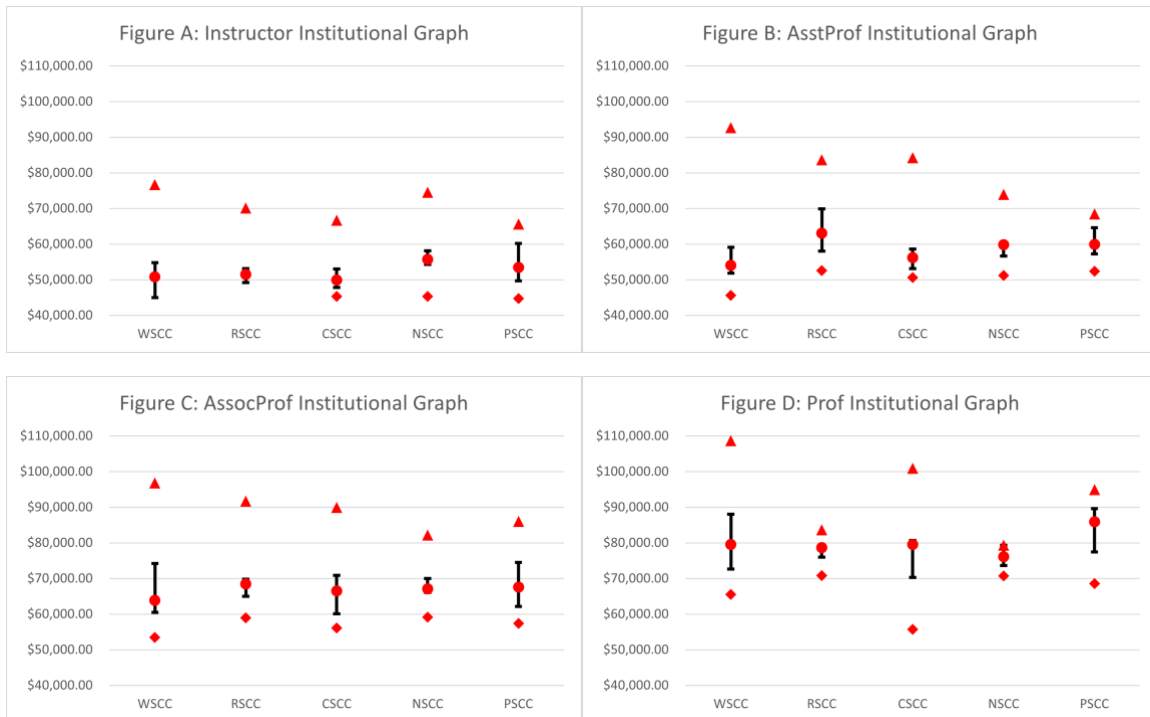
Institutional Comparisons

WSCC salaries were compared rank-to-rank against the following sister institutions: Roane State C.C., Chattanooga State C.C., Northeast State C.C., and Pellissippi State C.C.

¹ <https://www.tbr.edu/hr/salaries> [Accessed 2/12/24]

Observations:

- In all cases, the WSCC maximum salary value is the greatest. As these are tied to single individuals of unknown contract length and unknown compensated duties, this observation may be no more than a mere curiosity or reporting anomaly.
- With one exception (RSCC assistant professors), median salary values are remarkably stable across institutions.
- The MFP ranges are similarly remarkably consistent across institutions.
- The distance between minimum and median values is very consistent across institutions.
- Some minimum values do not show up because they are below the \$40k “floor” of the graph. It appears in those cases that such individuals are “January starters.”

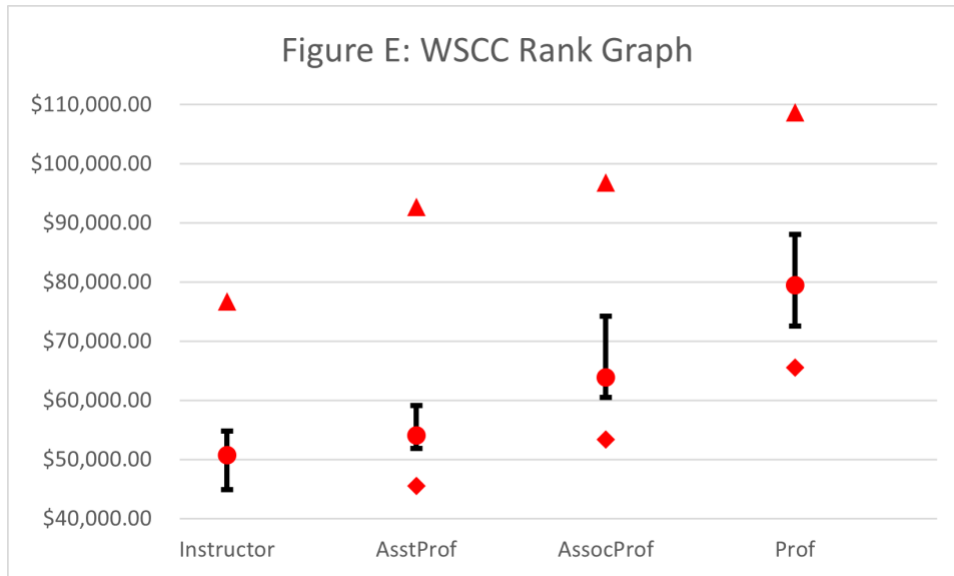


Rank Comparisons

Figure E indicates rank comparisons within WSCC.

Observations:

- The monotonic behavior of the set descriptors is unremarkable and expected. (All the markers go up with increasing rank level.)
- MFP ranges have very little overlap between ranks.
- It is concerning that the minimum values at both the rank of Associate Professor and Full Professor lie below or at the median values of the preceding rank, respectively.

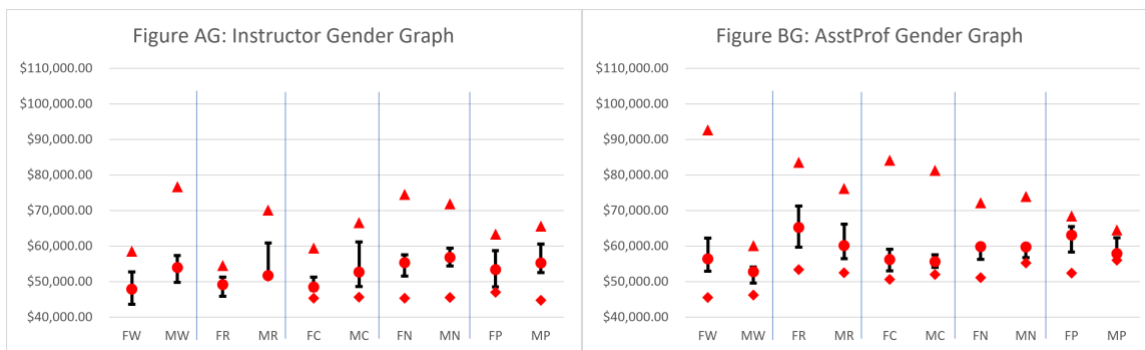


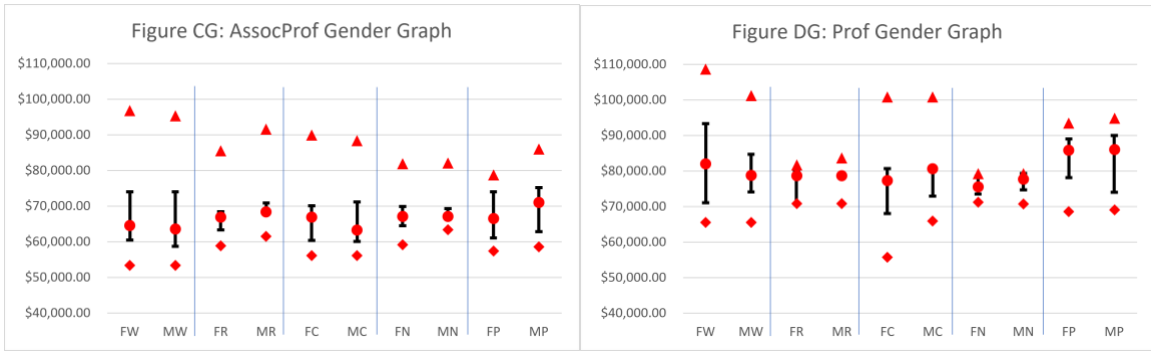
Gender Comparisons

The data was parsed by gender and compared across institutions.

Observations:

- Regarding maximum salary values, there is considerable variation, and – as previously noted – it is unlikely that this variation is meaningful. For the instructor rank, maximum male salaries are generally higher than female salaries. However, for the remaining ranks, that general trend is erased or even reversed.
- Regarding MFP values, there is some bias toward increased male salaries for Instructors, but as before, this trend is reversed or erased for the remaining ranks.

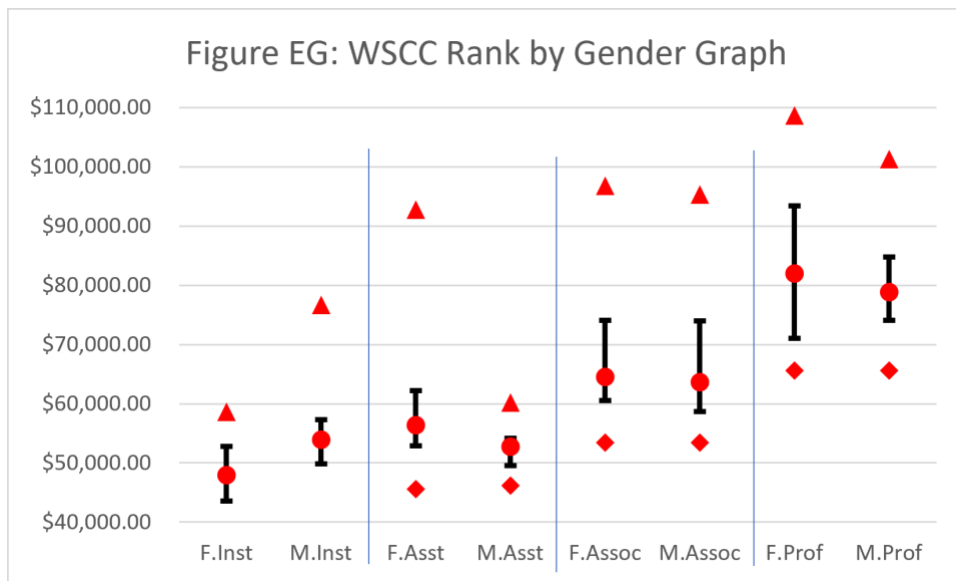




The data was parsed by gender for WSCC and compared across ranks.

Observations:

- As with the institutional comparison, there is a male bias in the maximum values only at the rank of instructor. After the rank of instructor, the bias is reversed.
- Similarly, there is a male bias at the Instructor rank with the median values and MFP ranges. That trend is reversed for the remaining ranks.



As a side point of interest, the table below breaks down WSCC faculty by gender and rank based on our data. (There is no mechanism currently for tracking non-gender-conforming individuals.)

	Instructor	Asst Prof	Assoc Prof	Full Prof	Totals
Female	17 (57%)	19 (59%)	43 (67%)	15 (56%)	94 (61%)
Male	13 (43%)	13 (41%)	21 (33%)	12 (46%)	59 (39%)
	30 (20%)	32 (21%)	64 (42%)	27 (18%)	153

Conclusions and Recommendations

After collecting and assessing data, holding conversations with the Human Resources Department, and hearing personal testimony from faculty, the FS working group is ready to present its findings. Here, the five issues mentioned in the Introduction are addressed.

1. Institutional Comparison: Upon comparison to sister TBR institutions in our region, salaries for the MFP are remarkably similar across all ranks. The data does not suggest that an initial salary offering would be the primary reason for a candidate to choose a sister institution over WSCC. According to Univstats.com, the only regional non-TBR institution that may have greater salary levels is Lincoln Memorial University – likely due to their advanced professional programs skewing their data.²
2. Gender Bias: Regarding allegations of gender bias in salary values, the data indicates that for the ranks of Associate Professor and Full Professor, there is no discernable gender bias for MFP values in the aggregate. Data for the ranks of Instructor and Assistant Professor suggest a slight gender bias towards men and women, respectively. Lack of data regarding individual degree attainment and prior experience clouds analysis.
3. Salary Inequities: Addressing and correcting salary inequities is complicated and may require multiple pathways. The data presented above was augmented by a wide variety of interviews with individuals who have come forward privately, sharing their experiences and evidence. Additionally, this specific situation was informed by conversations with the Human Resources Department.
 - WSCC administration has been open to allowing individual faculty to request a salary audit, making corrections as needed. Some have found this correction process to be very helpful, while others find that there is still a significant inequity for one reason or another. The Human Resources Department invites any faculty member to request to have their salary audited and corrected if necessary.
 - Current practice regarding initial salary offering appears to have reduced some of the inherent inequities since the role of negotiation is significantly reduced. The role of negotiation played a bigger role in previous administrations. Unfortunately, the Human Resources Department would not release the exact formulation used to determine an initial salary offering, citing concerns over individuals “gaming the system.”
 - The intention to institutionalize the “eight-year adjustment³” is a great start toward an ongoing commitment to minimizing inequities. However, there are a number of remaining issues to be addressed, including details of how the “adjustment” will work, definition of what constitutes median salary level, frequency of “adjustment,” and triggering of “adjustment.” (For example, who initiates said adjustment?)

² <https://www.univstats.com/salary/lincoln-memorial-university/faculty/> [Accessed 1/27/25]

³ The Human Resources Department revealed that there is a plan to adjust individual salary values when someone has been in their position for eight years. Details about the execution of this plan were not revealed. The working group received this communication from the Human Resources Department regarding salary adjustments: “[T]he years of service credit for faculty is 8 years as professional staff. Once an employee has been in their current position (job grade) for eight years then their salary will move [to the] top of the hiring range for that job grade if they are not already there.” Faculty are considered professional staff in this regard.

- FS encourages the administration to further their efforts at transparency regarding issues of initial salary (e.g., salary offering range, salary schedule, or formula).
4. **Step System:** Determining appropriate financial recognition of commitment to the institution will require a concerted effort to explore a transparent and equitable step system.
- The majority of the revealed inequities are a byproduct of a lack of a step system of any design. Currently, experience at previous institutions is valued more highly than experience at WSCC. The cycle of inequity will continue until this discrepancy is addressed.
 - Public K-12 school systems employ a variety of fair and transparent systems that could form a platform from which WSCC could begin to work to forge its own system. The salary schedules – including formulas for determining initial salary amounts – for Jefferson County schools and Hamblen County schools are published online.⁴ It should be noted that the steps in those school systems are independent of COLA.
 - Additionally, an appropriate step system would improve morale and feelings of appreciation.
5. **COLA:** The FS encourages the administration to continue providing COLA at a level that will remediate much of the financial distress caused by recent inflationary pressures – such as was done this past year.
- Social Security income values increased by 8.7% in 2023; in 2024, they are set to increase 3.2%.
 - We encourage the administration to consult the Consumer Price Index⁵ for setting COLA levels.

Final Remarks

The Faculty Senate acknowledges the ongoing efforts of the administration to provide livable salaries for faculty and staff. Additionally, the Senate looks forward to working with the administration to find creative solutions to the challenges facing all of us financially.

There is some urgency to addressing these remaining challenges (salary inequities, a transparent step system, and COLA levels): in May 2023, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed the Teacher Paycheck Protection Act⁶, which sets the minimum K-12 annual teacher salary level at \$50k, to be phased in by 2026. Such a salary value is greater than that of approximately half of WSCC's Instructors and, of course, does not require an advanced degree.

The working group is grateful to the Human Resources Department for open, cordial, and enlightening conversations regarding these difficult and oft-sensitive topics.

⁴ <https://www.hcboe.net/employeesalaryscales> [Accessed 1/27/24];
<https://www.jefcoed.com/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=5557&dataid=24204&FileName=2023-2024%20Salary%20Schedule.pdf> [Accessed 1/27/24]

⁵ https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/data/consumerpriceindexhistorical_us_table.htm [Accessed 2/6/2024]

⁶ <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=SB0281> [Accessed 1/28/24]