

Salary Anecdotes

“I have been looking very closely at remuneration in the post-secondary sector and I think it’s time we have a serious conversation about this. ... I will be opening up the legislation for post-secondary education (PSE) this fall and the manner in which we set salaries and remunerate individuals in that sector needs to be one of the things that we review for certain”, Enterprise and Advanced Education (EAE) Minister Thomas Lukaszuk, quoted from the *Calgary Herald*, April 30, 2013. Forget, therefore, that academic salaries in the PSE sector in Alberta are set via collective bargaining processes, reflective of competitive conditions in the academic labour market across Canada (and, ultimately, the international academic labour market). Those are simply factors which are too inconvenient to take into account.

This latest pronouncement from this Minister is apparently, like many heard from this source recently, based on “belief” and anecdote, rather than facts and broader statistics. The above statement was prompted by the anecdotal information that the outgoing President of SAIT will be on one year of administrative leave following conclusion of her term in office (fifteen years), following which she is to retire. When “outliers” of various sorts are seen, these are often seized upon as evidence that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark”, so needs to be “fixed”. Usually, however, these outliers are in no way representative of general factors at play in the situation at hand, and ought not to drive decision making but, unfortunately, they often do.

Until quite recently, Statistics Canada published a survey every year, detailing the academic salary distribution of all universities in Canada. The last of these surveys appeared for the 2010/11 academic or financial year, after which these surveys were cancelled by Statistics Canada to save money, when the Government of Canada cut the Statistics Canada budget. According to this most recent survey, median salaries of Professors at a group of universities across Canada, comparable to and including the Alberta research universities stood at \$142,000. This group of academics has at least ten years of post-secondary education, on average, a couple of years of post-doctoral research training, and around an average of fifteen years experience of the full range of professorial duties. So, these professionals have been out of high school for over twenty-five years, and exhibit a wide range of qualifications and experience. They are “at the top of their game”, and are highly productive.

Based on this 2010/11 survey, at Trent University, a small university in Ontario, the median salary of Professors was \$159,000; at the University of Windsor, it was \$147,000; at Wilfrid Laurier University, it was \$147,000; and at the University of Toronto, it was \$166,000. Further west, the median salary of Professors at the University of Manitoba was \$138,000; at the University of Regina, it was \$139,000; and at the University of Saskatchewan, it was \$142,000. Here in Alberta, the median salary of Professors at the University of Alberta was \$155,000; at Athabasca University, it was \$142,000; at the University of Calgary, it was \$150,000; and at the University of Lethbridge, it was \$143,000. In British Columbia, the median salary of Professors at the University of British Columbia was \$148,000.

Reference to the above information indicates that salaries of Professors in Alberta are not at all out of line with salaries of Professors in Canada generally. Thus, if the Government of Alberta, as espoused by

Premier Redford before the last Alberta election, is serious about building and keeping the best PSE sector in Canada, Alberta needs to invest more in PSE, to attract even better talent than it has in the system right now. Instead, however, the Government is *cutting* the PSE sector budget by close to 10% over what it had promised last year. This is a recipe for disaster. It is most certainly not a prudent approach to building an enviable, top-flight PSE system. However, it is in accord with a knee-jerk reaction to a perceived, distasteful anecdote which has emerged from the PSE sector, and which the Minister just can't be bothered to explain properly to Albertans. From a Minister with a portfolio which includes Advanced Education, and so advanced education should therefore be reflected in his decision-making, Albertans deserve better.

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April 30, 2013.*