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Recruitment: University faces difficulty retaining faculty

Continued from page 1

"Faculty salary plays an important role in that."

Moseley said part of the problem stems from the salary freeze that was implemented for state employees between 2003 and 2005.

"We made progress up until the salary freeze," he said. "We did everything we could within the boundaries of the freeze ... and we argued vociferously (against it)."

Moseley said in spite of the University's budget woes, faculty can expect a raise next year.

"We expect to get money from the state for salary increases of 2 percent," he said. "But we're giving salary increases between 4 and 5 percent. It's going to put a lot of strain on our budget."

"The faculty draft"

Unlike professional basketball, "there is no faculty draft," Hsu pointed out. So when it comes to recruiting new talent to the University, it has only its merits on which to rely. It's not surprising that low average salaries pose recruitment challenges.

Professor Gerald Berk, the head of the Political Science Department, said in an interview on May 19 that his department has been completely unsuccessful in recruiting faculty of color, due in part to low faculty salary.

"We've had no success but we've been recruiting like crazy," he said.

Berk said just this year the department attempted to recruit a black political scientist from University of California, Los Angeles.

"He had counter offers from University of Washington and UCLA and the salary was over a third more than we could offer him," he said.

Berk added that other institutions offered the candidate a better research package and one institution even offered the candidate money to recruit graduate students of color.

Richard Kraus, a political science professor and the director of the Robert D. Clark Honors College, was also on the search committee. He said what the University offered the candidate was far above what it typically offers faculty of the candidate's rank, but the University still couldn't compete.

"That was just in a whole other league," Kraus said.

In another search committee Kraus sat on, the candidate was offered substantially more money by another institution.

"This candidate was given \$15,000 to \$20,000 more to go to (Pennsylvania State University)," he said. "I think he would have liked it here, but he couldn't convince himself to come here." Kraus said recent searches in the Honors College have been fairly successful.

"The salaries were competitive and we were able to get the candidates we wanted," he said of three recent hires.

Biology Professor Nathan Tublitz said faculty salaries have prevented his department from getting its first choice candidates.

"That's always been a challenge," he said.

Tublitz added that candidates often receive offers from other institutions that are "typically tens of thousands of dollars higher."

Hsu said that the University typically can't offer the sort of startup packages or money to start laboratories and conduct research that other institutions can.

Hsu said the inability of the University to recruit top faculty has had a subtle psychological effect on search committees.

"If you get to a point that you know you're going to get outbid ... it will influence the search committee to try and get the person they can rather than the best candidate," he said.

This can have dire effects for the University, Hsu said, and will lead to a gradual erosion of academic quality at the University if something is not done.

Raiding faculty

Low faculty salaries have not only created challenges with recruitment, but the University has had difficulty retaining its faculty members when they receive better offers from other institutions.

Faculty have been leaving the University at worrisome rates, Moseley said.

"It's been one of the hardest years in regards to retention," he said. "We've had more losses in top faculty this year than we've had in my 11 years here."

Hsu said low salary has caused many faculty to leave the University.

"If we're lagging behind ... We're the ones whose going to have our faculty raided away," he said.

Moseley said the Biology Department has taken particularly big hits. He said he knew of at least two MacArthur Fellows that left the University because of better offers elsewhere.

Professor Jeffrey Mason, the head of the Theatre Arts Department, said low faculty salary has created a problem with morale.

"I know of people whose salaries are 20 percent less than the average of people in their discipline at their rank in the short list of comparator institutions ... They are strong faculty doing their jobs conscientiously and well, but their salaries still lag," he wrote in an e-mail. "Of course, the problem with relatively low salaries ... is we have difficulty retaining faculty, and we foster a morale problem among those who stay."

Associate Professor of Violin Fritz Gearhart said he knows of at least four faculty members from the

School of Music who are leaving the University.

"In a majority of those cases, salary played a significant issue," he said.

Assistant Professor of Saxophone James Bunte is one of those four. He will leave for the University of Cincinnati after this term but said his decision to leave "has nothing to do with the (University)."

"The cost of living here is crazy," he said. "I literally can't support my wife and myself here. We've gone into debt every month."

The salary he will be receiving at University of Cincinnati, he said, "is essentially equivalent."

"The housing market ... is much higher here than in Cincinnati," he said.

The Oregon factor

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Russ Tomlin said while salary is a critical factor that faculty weigh when deciding to come to or leave the University, it is only one of many.

Housing, research opportunities, health and retirement benefits and community are among the factors outside of salary that people consider.

Many of these factors used to work in Oregon's favor, Kraus said.

"Ten, 15, 20 years ago you could sell Oregon by saying the cost of living was relatively low, schools were good and the state pension was first-rate," he said. "None of these things are true anymore."

Moseley cited loyalty as a factor that keeps faculty here, but he said this too will only last for so long.

"Of course most of them could make more money somewhere else," he said. "We probably depend too much on their loyalty to the University."

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