

## CASH FOR UO COURTESY CARS

*Athletic department employees collect hundreds of thousands in stipends in lieu of actual cars*

The University of Oregon athletic department, like many athletic departments in the country, has a “courtesy car” program, in which it provides its employees free cars to drive for personal use. The program, in theory, should be free to the department, because the cars are provided by local auto dealerships as gift-in-kind, and the employees using them pay for the insurance.

An analysis of public records obtained by *Eugene Weekly*, however, shows the UO athletic department has been paying its employees hundreds of thousands of dollars through the program by awarding lucrative monthly stipends in lieu of actual cars.

Contracts between the UO athletic department and its employees often include a clause saying the department will provide the employee one or two courtesy cars to use during their employment. The clauses also state that if the athletic department is unable to provide a car, it will pay the employee a stipend instead of a car, usually between \$300 and \$600 a month.

Those stipends have added up to more than \$1.1 million in the last decade, *EW*’s analysis shows. In the last two years, the athletic department has paid an average of more than \$12,500 a month on stipends and \$150,000 a year.

The athletic department promises employees far more cars than it actually has, so the majority of employees involved in the program receive monthly stipends in lieu of cars. The athletic department currently has 36 courtesy cars at its disposal, but as recently as August 2017, 42 employees collected stipends in lieu of cars. The athletic department declined to say whether all 36 cars were currently in use.

Many employees, including UO athletic director Rob Mullens, have collected tens of thousands of dollars in monthly stipends over several years. Mullens’ contract entitles him to two courtesy cars on top of his \$700,000 base salary; he drives one and collects \$600 per month in stipends in lieu of the other.

During his seven years as athletic director, Mullens has made more than \$50,000 off stipends in lieu of cars, the most of any athletic department employee since 2007. Head golf coach Casey Martin has made \$44,000 in nine years. Former women’s lacrosse coach Jen Beck and current men’s basketball coach Dana Altman — who receives both a courtesy car and a stipend for a second car — have made \$38,000 each off car stipends.

Chris Sinclair, a math professor and president of the UO faculty senate, calls the program an “embarrassingly ridiculous” use of funds, which could be allocated to other purposes, such as reducing the cost of football tickets the athletic department charges to students. According to the athletic department’s projected 2018 budget, it expects to bring in \$113 million in revenue and spend every dollar.

“It’s clearly just a way of getting some additional money into these people’s pockets,” Sinclair said. “These people are already rich, or at least richer than I am. So I do think that is problematic, and really the word is ridiculous as far as I’m concerned.”

The UO athletic department, through spokesman Jim-



THE UO SPENT \$150,000 A YEAR IN THE PAST TWO YEARS ON COURTESY CAR STIPENDS FOR ATHLETICS

my Stanton, did not answer why the athletic department promises its employees cars it is unable to provide.

“This is a standard compensation practice throughout the marketplace in college athletics,” Stanton told *EW* via email. “Anyone who receives an automobile or stipend does so through their employment agreement.” Stanton collected a \$400 stipend last month in lieu of a courtesy car.

According to *EW*’s analysis, 104 different employees have received more than 3,200 monthly stipends in lieu of cars in the past 10 years. The courtesy car program started in November 2007, when then-athletic director Pat Kilkeny paid himself and four other employees stipends of between \$300 and \$500. The number of employees participating in the program grew to 17 in 2008, and by 2009, it reached 35. In 2017, 52 different employees have received stipends, including head coaches, assistant coaches and athletic department administrators.

In general, employees in more prestigious positions receive bigger stipends and/or multiple cars. Altman and former head football coach Chip Kelly each received \$500 monthly stipends. Head coaches of smaller sports and associate athletic directors typically receive \$400 stipends. The lowest stipend is \$300, offered primarily to assistant coaches.

Records show four of UO’s 14 head coaches — Martin, soccer’s Kat Mertz, softball’s Mike White and acrobatics and tumbling’s Keenyn Won — are currently receiving \$400 monthly stipends. Six of head football coach Willie Taggart’s nine assistant coaches — Jim Leavitt, Marcus Arroyo, Joe Salave’a, Keith Heyward, Donte Pimpleton and Charles Clark — are currently receiving \$300 monthly stipends. Taggart is entitled to two courtesy cars and is not receiving a stipend.

The average stipend for athletic department employees is \$343 a month, or \$4,125 per year, the records show. That

is about \$700 less than the amount the average American household spends on gasoline, motor oil and other vehicle expenses per year, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics’ most recent data from 2015.

“My car payment is \$325-or-something a month, so these people can essentially get a car better than mine without having to pay for it,” Sinclair said. “It just seems ridiculous to me.”

Mertz said she uses her \$400 monthly stipend toward her personal car payment, but did not say whether it appropriately covered her costs.

“I haven’t actually ever looked into it,” Mertz said.

The UO athletic department declined to disclose the make and model of the cars, which are owned by local car dealerships as opposed to the department itself.

Public records show Martin collected \$3,733 a month in courtesy car stipends for four years straight and former assistant football John Neal more than \$2,569 a month for a year, but Stanton disputed those records. According to Stanton, \$3,333 of Martin’s stipends were “related to golf course duties” and Neal’s were “performance stipends.”

UO President Michael Schill receives a \$1,200 monthly car stipend from the UO Foundation in lieu of a school-provided vehicle, his contract shows. Unlike athletic department employees, Schill’s stipend comes with the caveat that he will not receive any vehicle-related reimbursement from the school. Athletic department employees are typically entitled to receive business-travel-related reimbursement in addition to a courtesy car or stipend.

No UO faculty receive courtesy cars, according to Sinclair.

“I have to buy my own car, and I think that I work as hard for the university as other faculty members or any member of athletics,” Sinclair. “These people are already well paid. They can buy their own damn car.” ■

*Jack Butler contributed reporting to this story.*