

## Guest View: University professors underpaid

*By Terry L. Allison*

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ON the recent Labor Day weekend I was catching up with old friends and naturally the state of the California economy came up. One of my friends, a very well informed person, complained of all the highly paid university administrators in the two state systems, knowing that I might be one of them.

"One acting department chair at UCSD is getting \$267,000," she said! I told my friend that after years of diminishing numbers of tenure-track faculty we had done a number of recruitments in the past year resulting in 16 new hires in the College of Arts and Letters at Cal State Los Angeles. I explained that most faculty members had at least eight years of university education and several had 10 or 13 years. Then I asked my well-informed friend how much she thought they earned as new professors.

"\$175,000 a year?" she asked.

"No, about \$60,000," I replied. "That's all we can afford to pay."

Is Cal State LA particularly cheap among the CSUs? I regularly meet with my fellow arts, humanities and social sciences deans and we discuss what it cost to hire faculty. Cal State LA is about in the middle of the 23 campuses in salaries. Our exact figures? New faculty who have a master of fine arts degree got on average \$60,400; those with doctoral degrees get \$62,211 per year. But this new school year they will earn 9.23 percent less on CSU's furlough program.

I mention these specific dollar amounts so you understand how little we value higher education in our state. Accountants, information scientists, chemical engineers, and many other new bachelor degree recipients earn on average \$50,000 to \$70,000 per year. Our newly minted professors, who often have spent years as low-paid teaching assistants accumulating student loans, finally grab their dream job only to find that it barely pays the rent. One of my colleagues had to work at Hallmark Cards, others moonlight in community colleges, and still others take on consultant or other work just to make ends meet.

That doesn't mean that the faculty doesn't work hard. In fact, they typically work between 50-60 hours per week to prepare for class, teach, grade, hold office hours, do administrative work and creative work or research. For that work, we pay less than many prison guards or plumbers earn in California.

This year, I'm very excited about our new hires, some selected from among hundreds of applicants. I also worry how long they'll stay and whether they can afford to remain, especially if they plan to have children. The two main reasons we lose newer faculty are the cost of living versus salary and because some faculty who accept our job really prefer to work at a research university. The second reason is acceptable; people learn through working what they want to do most. But the first reason, to lose promising people who we know can succeed and contribute to California, is a tragedy we witness too often.

Building a quality faculty at a public university is a decades-long project frequently interrupted by California's roller coaster tax base. Without any more tricks or budgetary lock-ins, we Californians need to find a way to finance our future through more dependable spending on higher education.

We must continue to attract and retain the brightest new professors through decent salary, benefits, and workload. We can continue to skimp but ultimately we will pay - through less business creation, a lower tax base, higher unemployment, outflow of skilled jobs, higher social welfare, and yes, even higher prison costs. That's a future we simply can't afford.

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