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Bargaining for Salary Equity: General Wage Increases and Equity in the Academic Labour Market

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Abstract

In collective bargaining, General Wage Increases (GWI) are most normally framed and implemented as percentages, with each eligible member seeing a salary rise of X% on top of pre-existing salary. While this approach is not remarkable where salary grids are in place and union members start at the same rate, it can have significant effects where starting salaries vary, as is common in the university sector. Under these conditions, percentage increases over time contribute to the widening of intra-member salary inequity, exacerbating structurally gendered and racialized inequities of the academic labour market.

This paper explores the impact of a flat rate increase approach to salary bargaining. Beginning with the context of collective bargaining in British Columbia, it examines how percentage-based and flat-rate increases would impact real salaries of faculty members at Simon Fraser University in order to better understand how faculty associations and unions could use flat rate approaches to begin to counteract the impact of differential starting salaries on the career earnings of faculty members. The paper finds that flat rate increases could be an effective tool against pay inequity even where that inequity is driven by forces outside the university.

Keywords equity, salaries, bargaining

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Négocier l'équité salariale : augmentations générales des salaires et équité sur le marché du travail académique

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Résumé

Dans les négociations collectives, les augmentations générales de salaire (AGS) sont le plus souvent formulées et mises en œuvre sous forme de pourcentages, chaque membre éligible bénéficiant d'une augmentation de salaire de X % en plus de son salaire préexistant. Si cette approche n'est pas surprenante lorsque des grilles salariales sont en place et que les membres du syndicat commencent au même niveau, elle peut avoir des effets significatifs lorsque les salaires de départ varient, comme c'est souvent le cas dans le secteur universitaire. Dans ces conditions, les augmentations en pourcentage au fil du temps contribuent à creuser l'inégalité salariale entre les membres, exacerbant les inégalités structurelles liées au sexe et à la race sur le marché du travail académique.

Cet article étudie l'impact d'une approche de la négociation salariale fondée sur des augmentations forfaitaires. En commençant par le contexte de la négociation collective en Colombie-Britannique, il examine comment les augmentations basées sur le pourcentage et les augmentations forfaitaires auraient un impact sur les salaires réels des membres du personnel académique de l'Université Simon Fraser afin de mieux comprendre comment les associations de personnel académique et les syndicats pourraient utiliser des approches forfaitaires pour commencer à contrecarrer l'impact des salaires de départ différentiels sur les revenus de carrière des membres du personnel académique. L'article conclut que les augmentations forfaitaires pourraient être un outil efficace contre l'inégalité salariale, même lorsque cette inégalité est due à des forces extérieures à l'université.

Mots-clés équité, salaires, négociation

Introduction

Issues of equity are increasingly a central concern of universities and public institutions generally. As a result of activist social movements and the political-cultural shifts they represent, governments, public institutions, and private organizations have implemented strategies to demonstrate their commitment to the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Known most commonly by the acronyms EDI or DEI, these institutional initiatives have often been met with cautious optimism at best and more often with significant critique, as is evident by growing literature on the subject (See Thobani (2022); Tamtik and Guenter (2019), Campbell (2019); Henry et al. (2017) among others) and labour organization reports such as those published by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (CAUT 2018b; 2023; OCUFA 2023). Critique, however, is by no means sufficient. As labour organizations for whom the principles of equality and fairness are foundational to our purpose, there is an urgent need for unions to not only address the limits of institutional EDI/DEI programs but also to take proactive steps to identify how our own structures and processes themselves might require attention.

There are a number of ways in which unions engage with equity work, and the history of organized labour in Canada includes multiple examples of unions breaking down barriers in ways that fundamentally alter the social landscape. Parental leaves, benefits for same sex partners and common-law partners, child care initiatives, employment equity and anti–discrimination legislation, minimum paid leaves related to illness, bereavement, and domestic violence — all of these now-standard features of the Canadian employment landscape owe a substantial debt to the legal and political challenges brought forward by unions. As we confront the EDI/DEI initiatives of our institutions, however, there is a tendency to limit the discussion to the frame established by institutions themselves: unconscious bias in hiring processes, long-standing practices that create barriers for various groups, discriminatory assumptions in our language, standards of assessment, measures of achievement and excellence, and so on. All of these are indeed sources of inequity and serve as institutional gatekeepers to reproduce the institution, complete with its structures of power and privilege. With very few exceptions,[1] institutional frameworks ignore the question of how resources are distributed.

No shortage of studies have noted the lack of a distributional approach to EDI, and many in fact go further, showing how, in the absence of attention to material equity, the project becomes rooted in managerialism, often reinforcing the very institutional inequities it purports to address (Ahmed, 2012; Drazenovich & Mazur, 2022; Li & Marom, 2024; Mugo & Puplampu, 2023; ross, 2022; Thobani, 2022).[2]

Continued attention to and analysis of these dynamics are critical to the strategic thinking of university-based unions. But as our organizations undertake equity audits and campaign for greater material investment in equity from employers, it behooves us, too, to examine our own salary bargaining norms and assumptions from an equity lens, and to ask ourselves: do the approaches we take as unions build greater equity or exacerbate existing inequities? And, as this paper specifically asks, how does the bargaining of percentage as opposed to flat rate salary increases impact economic equity among faculty members?

What we provide here is not so much a research paper as a thought experiment. There is an emerging body of work on university equity programs, including the first assessments of success rates of such programs (Henry et al., 2017; Wolbring and Nguyen, 2023; Milian and Wijesingha, 2023). We are not reviewing this literature here, rather, as union workers actively engaged in the collective bargaining process, we are exploring an idea to help ourselves and others begin to consider the extent to which our default positions in salary bargaining impact equity, with a view to facilitating conversations among our executive committees, bargaining teams, and members. The paper should be read in that light, as a contribution to unions' own discussions of salary equity and our capacities to use salary negotiations as a means of addressing it. For simplicity, we are using salary data and practices from Simon Fraser University (SFU), located in Burnaby, B.C. There are, of course, differences between how institutions manage salaries, and provincial contexts will necessarily inform union negotiations. British Columbia has a unique and restrictive bargaining landscape in the public sector, which we will outline below as it has a major impact on how we negotiate. We will then offer a number of examples of how salaries are impacted over time by different types of salary increases, including one generic public sector example to demonstrate that these issues go beyond university salary systems.

The B.C. Bargaining Context

In 1993, the B.C. provincial government established the Public Sector Employer's Council Secretariat under the Public Sector Employer's Act. Housed in the Ministry of Finance, the council, known colloquially as PSEC, was formed as a mechanism for the province to coordinate and influence bargaining across the public sector. While initially its mandate was to encourage the consistency of collective agreement language in B.C.'s public sector, government increasingly used PSEC to constrain and ultimately seek to control over all aspects of collective bargaining, most notably total overall compensation. Between 1993 and 2010, PSEC issued mandate letters

privately to public sector employers; as of 2010 those mandates have been publicly released, setting out total compensation limits, pre-determining the term of collective agreements, and at times promoting specific government priorities through incentives. Given court rulings that government cannot formally interfere with collective bargaining (*Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada*, 2015, *Dunmore v. Ontario (Attorney General)*, 2017), enforcement is managed politically; public sector employers are expected to get approval from PSEC prior to making any agreement, and should an employer break from the mandate, it may well find its governing body dismissed, as happened at Okanagan University College in 2001 when its Board-agreed settlement with faculty exceeded the mandate set by PSEC (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2001). PSEC facilitates, then, "consistent government intervention in what was supposed to be 'free collective bargaining'" and "reveal[s] the role and power of the state in public (and para-public) sector negotiations" (Ross, 2013, p. 61).

PSEC is, without question, a fetter on collective bargaining, and has been an effective tool of the government to constrain both worker rights and salary expenditure in the public sector. There are ways, however, that unions can use the public nature of the mandates to their advantage; knowing the employer's priority areas may allow for creative proposals to be developed, and the common employer mandate can facilitate cross-bargaining unit strategy and the development of sectoral bargaining when advantageous. Economists such as Ilglika Iganova and Veronique Sioufi (2024) from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) have publicly advocated for sectoral bargaining as it is more transparent than individual tables, encourages broader unionization, and promotes equity between unions. As they explain (with regard to the private sector):

> Countries with sectoral bargaining have higher collective agreement coverage rates and consequently enjoy better labour standards (including for vulnerable workers), higher levels of employment, lower income inequality and smaller gender and racial pay gaps. Further, setting industry-level standards can boost productivity by essentially eliminating the incentive to compete on who can drive wages and working conditions down further and encourage competition on who can produce a better product and better manage their operations instead (2024, para. 9)

However, sectoral bargaining with a governmental council presents disadvantages as well. For one, every proposal brought forward must be costed and approved by PSEC. This makes bargaining a much less efficient process as the

employer's decision-makers are not actually at the bargaining table but pulling strings from afar and without the benefit of local context. And, because PSEC will rarely speak to unions directly, the implementation of mandates is filtered through the local employer, with little or no ability on the union's part to establish its accuracy, provide the council with context, or seek clarifications. As Annabree Fairweather (2020) puts it, "For B.C.'s research universities, bargaining plays out like this: employers and faculty associations sit across the table and pass proposals back and forth while PSEC casts its shadow over the entire negotiation."

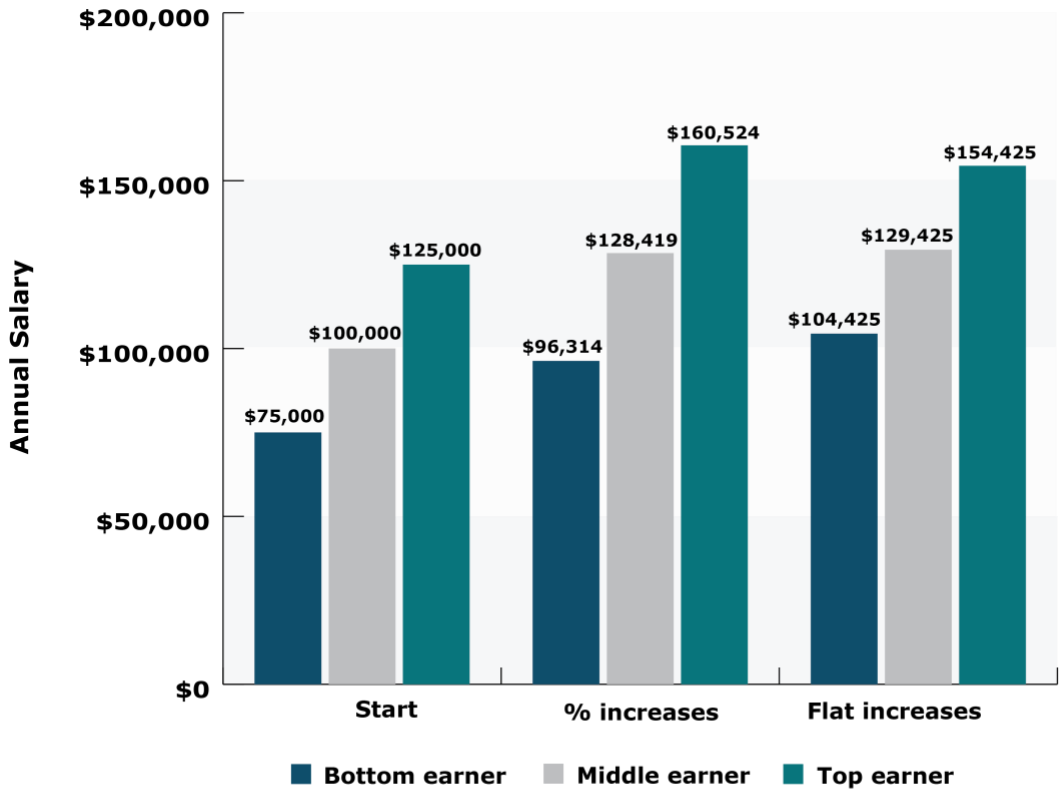
Percentage-Based and Flat-Rate Increases in Public Sector Bargaining

PSEC mandates, like most salary bargaining proposals, are expressed as percentage increases; a government mandate generally directs employers to agree to no more than X% total compensation increase in a given bargaining round. The most recent mandate, for example, set PSEC's limit for approval of general wage increases at no more than 3.24% in the first year, 6.75% in the second year, and 3% in the third year (Government of British Columbia, 2022, para. 4)). Of course, expressing increases as a percentage of total salary is nothing out of the ordinary. What it does mean, however, is that pre-existing salary differentials grow larger with each salary bump. In actual dollars, employees who earn the highest salaries will always receive the larger pay increase while the lowest-paid employees receive the smallest. If we were to translate those percentages into flat rate amounts, however, and distribute the same total on a flat-rate basis, the impact on salary equity would be significant.

Consider a public sector employer in B.C. with just three employees: a bottom earner, middle, and top earner with respective annual salaries of $75,000, $100,000, and $125,000 for a total salary mass of $300,000. Over the last 10 years of PSEC increases, the compounded 28.4% increases would fund $353,442 of increases. Those increases aren't split evenly, with $88,360 going to the bottom earner, while the top earner receives $147,267. Considering annual salaries, the bottom earner ends with an annual salary of only $96,314, whereas the top earner ends with an annual salary of $160,524. Each of the three workers earns the same percentage, which may appear fair on the face of it, but the salary disparity among those workers grows from $50,000 to $64,210 as a natural feature of the salary system, without ever triggering the question: do we intend, and is it in our interest as unions, to see greater or lesser disparity among our own members?

Distribution of total $353,442 increase over 10 years

An alternative approach is to instead distribute these dollars on a flat-rate basis with each individual getting an equal share of available money and the gap between the lowest and highest salary staying constant at $50,000. Rather than the unequal distribution above, each employee would get $117,814, ⅓ of the available $353,442 in increases over this period. In terms of annual salary, the bottom earner ends the period at $104,425 rather than $96,314, and in this example this is a result of a redistribution as the top earner ends with a total salary of $154,425, rather than $160,524.



Salary Disparity and Equity in the University Sector

Returning to the issue of EDI/DEI work, faculty salaries in the Canadian university sector often have been the subject of both national and local analyses with a view in particular to understanding and addressing gender salary inequity among faculty. In the past decade, studies at McMaster, McGill, the Universities of Manitoba, Victoria, British Columbia, Waterloo, and Simon Fraser University have all identified a statistically significant gender salary gap, with female faculty earning less than their male counterparts in all cases (*Pay Gaps*, 2024). And in all cases, the conclusions were the same; these disparities were most acute in disciplines that have the fewest female faculty, which are also those disciplines that have higher starting salaries (where these are individually negotiated) or rely heavily on salary supplements (where salaries are at least formally set by a scale or grid).

This pay gap is often papered over with the rhetoric of meritocracy. However, in 2023, the Canadian federal government conducted an analysis of pay equity at

Canadian universities and found that "Witnesses highlighted the well-documented gender pay gaps between women and men in academic roles in Canadian universities. The most cited figure was that women professors earn on average 10%, or $10,500, less than men for the same work" (*Pay Gaps***,** 2024, p. 9). As University of Manitoba faculty member Susan Prentice explained to the government committee conducting this analysis, "there is a fiction that the academy is a place of simple and pure merit," and that "this fiction goes a long way toward explaining historical resistance to grappling with documented histories of exclusion, marginalization and systemic discrimination" (*Pay Gaps*, 2024 p. 8).

Anke Kessler and Krishna Pendakur's 2015 *Gender Disparity in Faculty Salaries at Simon Fraser University* report reached similar conclusions, finding that:

> female faculty members are paid less than their male colleagues at SFU, by amounts similar to the disparities found at UBC and the University of Victoria in their gender equity studies. At SFU, pay disparity is not driven by disparity in base salary (aka: scale), but rather is dominated by disparity in off-scale amounts, including market differentials but not including retention awards. Women are less likely to be found in departments that intensively use such supplements to base salary. However, even *within* those departments, women have smaller off-scale supplements, and this is largely determined by initial salary. (p. 22, original emphasis)

This emphasizes that the underpayment of women specifically is layered onto a structural inequity in disciplinary labour markets — an inequity which itself has a notable gender component.

The equity issues do not, of course, arise only along lines of gender. Indeed, in its 2018 Bargaining Advisory Bulletin, CAUT cautioned against reliance on market differentials, warning that "(t)he payment of market differentials is a significant factor in the persistence of discriminatory pay differentials in the academy. Market differentials are often paid entirely at the discretion of the administration and set through negotiation with individual members. This can lead to inequitable compensation for women, Indigenous scholars, and members of equity-seeking groups" (2018a, p. 1).

Though less data is available, a similar gap to that seen between men's and women's base salaries is mirrored with regard to the base salaries of Indigenous and racialized faculty. In 2018, drawing on the foundational work of Henry et al. (2017) and Gutiérrez y Muhs, Gabriella et al. (2012), the CAUT explored "practices and patterns of discrimination that limit opportunities for individuals from

marginalized groups" (2018b, p. 12) ultimately creating significant income gaps. The study found a gap between "employed professors who were not members of a racialized group" and "racialized professors" of 14.5%, while "(r)acialized women professors earn 68 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized men" (2018b, pp. 8-9). For Indigenous faculty, who were studied distinctly from other racialized faculty members, salaries were found to be "significantly lower for both men (-26.3%) and women (-26.7%) relative to non-racialized men" (2018b, p. 11). As the report concludes, "(d)espite longstanding employment equity policies and practices mandated by legislation, employment and wage inequities remain in Canada's universities and colleges" (2018b, p. 12).

In addition to the fact of structural salary inequity, these studies also expose where these inequities begin and how they are driven. Salary differentials in the university sector are generally market-driven and are the primary determinant of the existence of and the magnitude of salary disparity. The extent of a salary differential can be clearly seen in disciplinary differences. But once those disciplinary lines are assessed, what becomes apparent is that disciplines are themselves gendered, with those more likely to be male-dominated (Business and Applied Science, for example) valued more in the academic market than those more likely to be dominated by women, such as Education and the Humanities (Fagan and Teasdale, 2020). It is not enough, then, to find that there is structural inequity in salaries and that this arises from differences in disciplinary markets; the crucial step is to say out loud that it is the structural inequity of the academic labour market itself that maintains and grows inequity in our institutions. As the Standing Committee on Science and Research puts it, "much of the responsibility for removing barriers to pay equity in post-secondary institutions falls to the institutions themselves" (*Pay Gaps,* 2024, p. 58).

To try to illustrate both the importance of starting salary as well as the contribution of percentage-based salary increases to salary inequity, we have used data from SFU salary scales and SFU's current system of progress through the ranks.

Salaries at SFU

Our exercise is based on data drawn from Simon Fraser University (SFU), in Burnaby, B.C. Like many institutions of any complexity, including most universities, SFU's salary system is not especially straightforward; that said, its core features will be familiar to most in the sector:

- a starting salary[3]
- annual "step" increases, which include (for the most part) a merit component
- negotiated general wage increases (GWI)
- salary supplements or market differentials (MD), which are permanent market-driven supplements intended to recognize recruitment needs in certain fields
- other temporary stipends for retention or associated with particular research Chairships or administrative duties, which are excluded from this analysis

The details as to how these various components apply and interact are largely beyond the scope of the illustrative purposes of this paper, but the basic operation is as follows. At time of hire, a new faculty member's salary placement will begin with the minimum on the scale. If the prospective hire has previous experience as a faculty member, a postdoctoral researcher, or has other relevant work experience, they will be awarded additional steps in recognition of that experience. Then, depending on market-based disciplinary norms, a market differential may be added to the salary. Together, these will form the member's starting salary. From that point on, aside from temporary stipends for particular purposes, the salary will rise over career on the basis of only two things: negotiated general wage increases (GWI) and other periodically negotiated increases, and step awards.[4] While we do not consider the impact of other temporary salary stipends, such as those received for taking on academic administrative roles such as becoming a Department Chair as one example, market differentials, discipline or sub-discipline based salary supplements at time of hire, do accrue negotiated increases, and so these are useful for our analysis. They help to demonstrate how the inequities driven by percentage-based increases are exacerbated by differences in starting salary/salary supplements, which already reflect structural disciplinary and gendered inequities.

Methodology and Assumptions

We use a mix of historic data and PSEC mandates since the 2015 unionization of faculty at SFU (Government of British Columbia, 2022), and projections based on the average GWI over that same period. It is somewhat crude, but as our purpose is to demonstrate the impact of percentage-based versus flat rate increases, these assumptions will suffice to provide a very general replication of the salary progression of an average faculty member and also allow us to use demographic data to show how these choices affect inequities.

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
GWI (%)	1.85	1.90	1.75	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.24	6.75	3.0	2.0
Step Value ($)	2500	2500	1990	2360	2680	2780	2860	2960	3060	increase at 2.5%
Salary Mass (Million $)	106 (est)	109 (est)	115.1	122.9	130.9	138.9	149.5	153.9	176.5	increase at 2%
Full-time Equiv.	960	960	971	966	981	1018	1039	1051	1065	1065

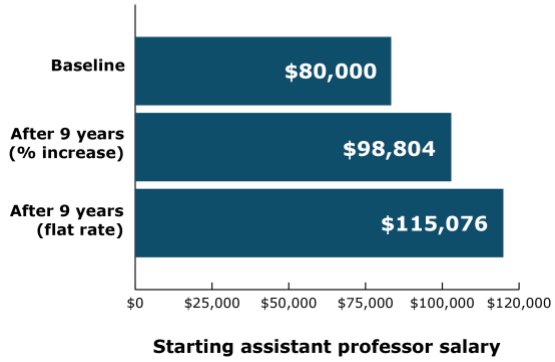
Table 1: Assumptions for GWIs used in modelling are taken from the past 9 years of the percentage increases under the PSEC mandate. Full-time equivalent (FTE), and salary mass data are taken from SFU data, and step values have been rounded. Salary mass and FTE data for years 1 and 2 have been estimated based on prior year and subsequent year data as they are not currently available to the authors.

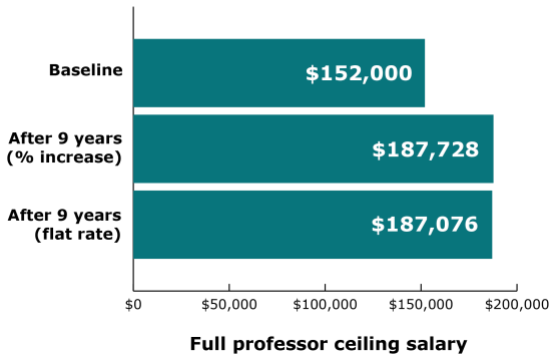
Step awards are dependent on both salary mass and number of eligible faculty. We use the rounded actuals for previous years, and estimate an ongoing increase of 2.5% per year. We assume that every eligible member earns 1.5 steps per year.

Data & Analysis

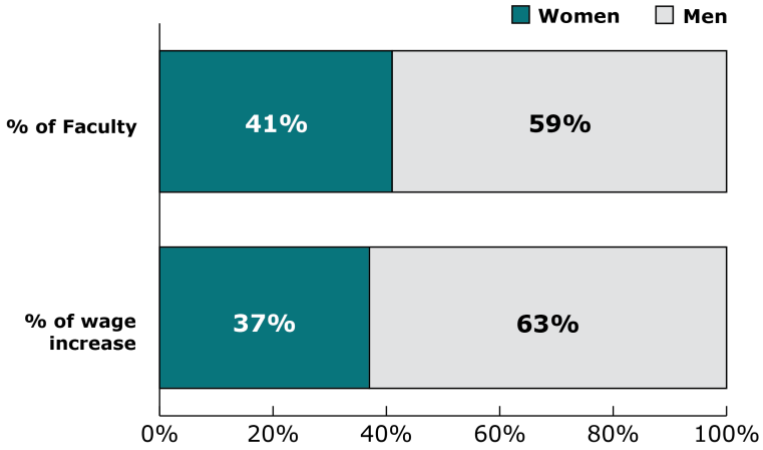
The choice of percentages over flat rates has the most dramatic effect on the lowest earners. Taking the same 9 years of the PSEC mandate (considering GWI alone, and excluding other one-time adjustments) and actual salary data since unionization in 2014, the starting Assistant Professor salary has increased from $80,000 to $98,804, but under a flat rate system would have increased to

$115,641. We might expect that the increase would result in a comparable decrease on the full Professor scale. However, this is not, in fact, what happens. As market differentials at this stage play such a significant role in salary, the on-scale salaries of full Professors are minimally impacted, with the ceiling starting at $152,000 increasing to $187,728 with percentage increases, and $187,076 with the flat rate approach. This may seem counter-intuitive, but the minimal impact to other ranks on the salary scale confirms that salary supplements have substantially corrupted any meaningful link between the salary scale and total salary mass such that the full Professor scale is more or less equivalent to the average real salary and is no longer indexed to the actual salary scales in any meaningful way. This only reinforces the findings of previous studies that salary supplements or market differentials are the driver of inequity, and also confirms that a shift to flat rate increases does not redistribute dollars along lines of rank, but targets supplements themselves.



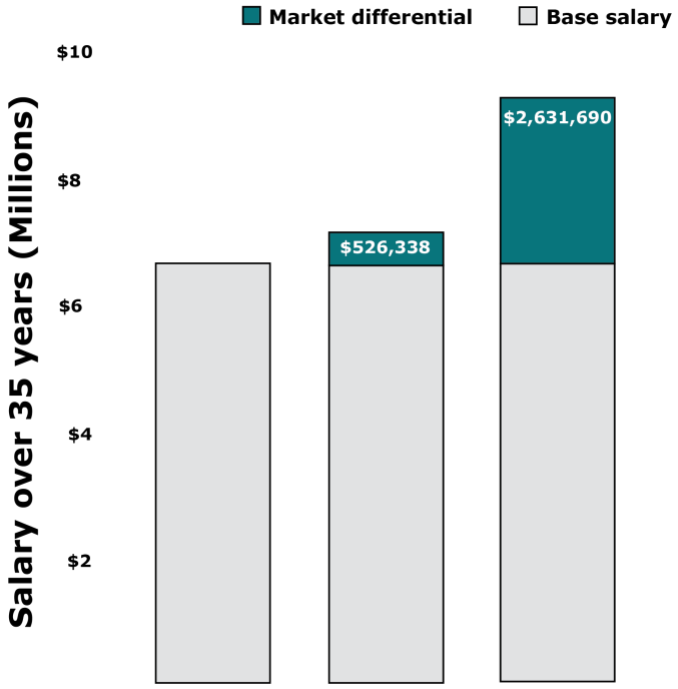


Applying a gender lens to the faculty complement, we note that while women make up 41% of faculty overall, they are only 30% of full professors. At 54%, women also are the majority of teaching faculty, who have a substantially lower pay scale than research faculty. Purely focusing on this rank distribution and assuming all faculty at a rank make a midpoint (breakpoint) salary reveals a gender imbalance as soon as percentage wage increases are applied, with 41% of women faculty receiving only 37% of the wage increase dollars. In a flat rate system, these numbers would be equal automatically.



Turning to market differentials, we consider three cases, an Assistant Professor paid at the base, and then two others paid $10,000 and $50,000 market differentials, respectively. Over a 35-year career spanning the 9 years since unionization and projecting the average 2% increase for the remaining 25 years, a $10,000 market differential yields over $526,000 of additional salary. A $50,000 market differential is worth 5 times that, over $2.6 million over a career.

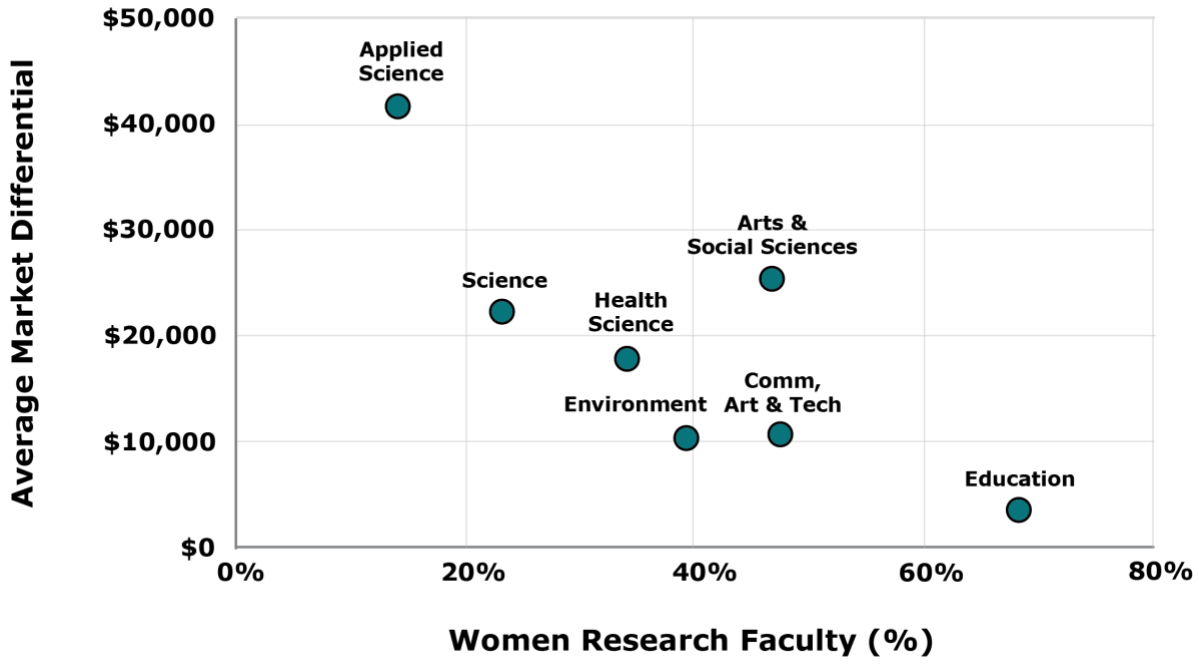
Cumulative Effect of Market Differentials



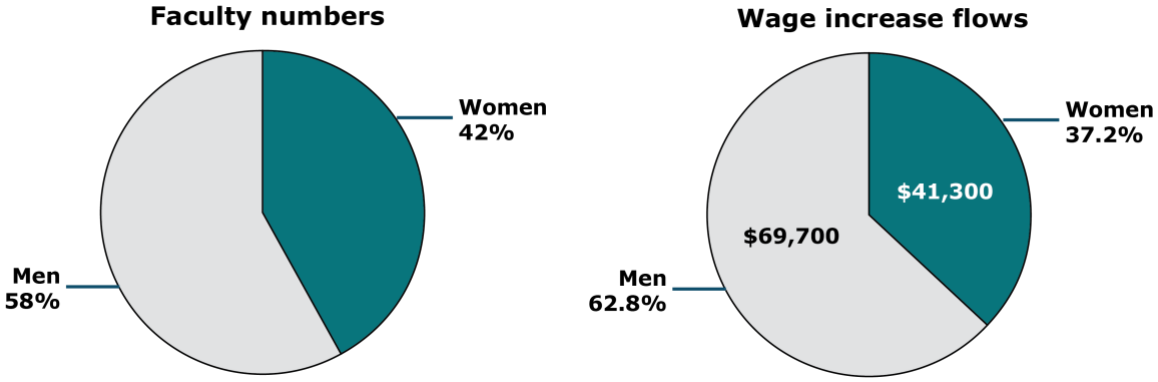
Market differentials are not evenly distributed — with about half of new faculty hires at SFU receiving such supplements — and that distribution is unequal by faculty. Excluding the Beedie School of Business, where the average MD at $71,005 is over twice the institutional average of $34,004, SFU's average MDs are inversely correlated to the percentage of research faculty who are women.

Faculty	Women Research Faculty (Total)	Women Research Faculty (%)	Average Market Differential (5 year avg)
Applied Science	13	14%	$41,627
Arts & Soc Sci	124	47%	$25.463
Business	30	40%	$71,005
Comm, Art & Tech	38	48%	$10,685
Education	43	68%	$3,581
Environment	20	39%	$10,337
Health Science	15	34%	$17,807
Science	46	23%	$22,295

Table 2: Selected demographic data and average market differentials at SFU, from SFU's most recent Continuing Faculty Line Report, April 2024.



The two extremes are Education with 68% women research faculty and an average MD of $3,581, and Applied Science with 14% women and an average MD of $41,627. To demonstrate the effect of this imbalance, let us consider an SFU composed of 100 new Assistant Professors, 50 in Education with a starting salary of $92,000 and 50 in Applied Science with a starting salary of $130,000. Extrapolating existing demographics, we would expect Education to have 35 women and 15 men faculty, and Applied Science to have 7 women and 43 men, for a combined 42 women and 58 men, consistent in line with SFU's overall demographics.



If a 1% wage increase is applied to all of these faculty members, we find that 62.8% of the money goes to men and 37.2% to women, a spread nearly 5% larger than the gender distribution imbalance. Application of percentage wage increases, then, drives gender inequity in salaries particularly through the market differential or salary supplement, and that inequity accumulates and is exacerbated over time. While there is general agreement that market differentials or salary supplements are a key driver of salary inequity, there are few suggestions as to what alternatives might be possible, with the exception of eliminating them altogether to obtain total salary transparency. However, given the pervasive and ubiquitous use of market differentials to subsidize salary scales that are inadequate, and given the disciplinary practices of relying on these salary supplements in recruiting new faculty members, as the CAUT Bargaining Advisory Bulletin (2018a) suggests, large-scale changes or the elimination of market differentials altogether is a long-term goal that would require careful and extensive member consultation should there be any chance of success. It would also require the employer to agree to dramatically increase salary scales overall. In a time of austerity in our sector, this seems to us an unlikely outcome. We do think, however, that changing how salary increases are bargained and distributed amongst faculty members in each round of collective bargaining is a significant and meaningful step towards greater salary equity.

Conclusion

Salary inequity among individual faculty and structural inequity related to the intersections of race, gender, discipline, and more is a common feature of the academy; like inequity generally, it is often initially presumed to arise from merit and/or forces outside of our immediate control as unions.

We have seen how salaries that start unequal will generally become more unequal over time, not only throughout one's working life but into retirement, as those last years, which is where inequity reaches its highest point, are the basis on which pension benefit income is based. The various studies that have been undertaken look at starting salary as the key driver, and identify initial salary differentials, whatever they are called and however they are enacted, as a prime culprit in maintaining the gendered and racialized inequities that so often appear on first blush to be market-based or disciplinary, and therefore more natural. We know, for example, that female-dominated disciplines generally have lower starting salaries than male-dominated disciplines. We know that women are more likely to be teaching faculty than men, and that teaching faculty generally are paid less than

research faculty. We know that the labour market generally continues to reproduce a pay equity gap along gender lines, and that a similar gap exists along lines of racialization. And we know that after decades of government and institutional study and periodical action to address such inequities, they nonetheless persist.

If inequity at time of hire emerges from the various studies as the major contributor to ongoing inequity, that does not mean that we as unions must either eliminate differentials in starting salary or live forever with the effects. One tool at the disposal of every trade union in each and every round of bargaining has the potential, not to eliminate the source of inequity, but to constrain and control its impacts on our members over the course of their careers and into their retirement. Where starting salaries cannot be equalized, or where there is a belief that the inequities in starting salary are an unalterable fact of the market, the negotiation of general increases as flat rates rather than percentages can profoundly affect the long-term impacts of differential starting salaries, allowing unions to use our bargaining power to counter rather than exacerbate those inequities. As the data shows, even a few collective agreement cycles spanning less than a decade can have a marked increase on lifetime earnings and begin to reverse the pattern of ever-greater income disparity.

The question of whether we can or should attempt to eliminate market forces in starting salaries, and hence university hiring, is a political and philosophical one, and we won't get into that here. Indeed, even if there were a consensus among faculty associations that such an end was desirable, there is no doubt that markets are a force, and institutions cannot will them away without jeopardizing the ability to hire altogether. But that need not be the question.

Presuming that we start from the existing conventional wisdom that it is not feasible to hire in all disciplines at the same starting salary, we might ask ourselves different questions. Do we believe a differential of $10,000 or $50,000 in starting salary is practically necessary given the current academic market? If we answer "yes," do we believe that it is reasonable for a $10,000 or $50,000 difference in salary at time of hire to mean a lifetime earnings gap of $526,000 or $2.631 million respectively? Do we believe that the salary premium paid at time hire ought to grow larger with each and every collective agreement?

If the answer to the last two questions is "no," then we do indeed have a mechanism to address the exacerbation of inequity, if not the underlying structural inequity of the market itself. The flat rate increase is a tool within our own agreements and our own institutions that has the potential to make concrete equity gains at the bargaining table. It is not a cure all and will not undermine the big market "out there." But a move to flat rate increases does have the ability to

constrain the internal effects of an inequitable market, such that the inequities we live with as actors in the labour market do not become inequities that we inadvertently nurture within our own bargaining proposals.

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Endnotes

[1] Dalhousie, UBC, McGill, and Waterloo are institutions that Merli Tamtik and Melissa Guenther identify as exceptions where the 'redistribution of resources' was the preferred approach to addressing systemic inequities. (p. 46).

[2] In his 2015 consideration of salary structures in Australian universities, Tony Aspromourgos argues that the use of salary supplements such as market differentials is further evidence of managerialism in post-secondary institutions because individual salary negotiations undermine collective bargaining and can be understood as an attack on collegial governance generally (82).

[3] SFU's salary grid also includes ceilings, which apply only at non-terminal ranks (i.e. ranks that do not allow for further promotion), and "breakpoints," dollar values at which the monetary value of a salary step is reduced by 40%, thereby prioritizing higher increases earlier in career (SFU-SFUFA, 2022). These features, however, are not especially critical to the analysis we provide in this paper.

[4] Step increases are not as simple as they might be, as the annual value fluctuates. 2.5% of total salary mass is dedicated to steps, with the value of a step in a given year calculated by dividing the available pot of money by the number of steps awarded, which will vary according to the number of members at any given time. The average award, however, is 1.5 steps per member per year. And the value of a step has for a number of years been rising by something in the neighbourhood of $100 per year.