

No belt-tightening for university presidents in Nova Scotia

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Tom Traves, president of Dalhousie University, makes about \$393,000, according to a CBC News survey of university presidents' salaries. (ADRIEN VECZAN / Staff / File)

At a time when the province is mandating deep cuts at Nova Scotia universities, top administrative salaries are not suffering.

Chris Ferns, president of the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers, said his organization has been studying 10-year salary trends at most of the province's post-secondary schools and early results show those at the top have outpaced the increases of faculty members or other staff.

"What's beginning to emerge suggests the actual amount of money going to senior administration has been increasing well beyond the amount of money spent on faculty salaries or on new hirings," Ferns said.

"That's our major concern. Even in the face of cutbacks, if there are ongoing increases in expenditures on administration, you could either use that money to mitigate the affect of tuition increases or use it to make new full-time hirings."

He said his organization has so far heard from about half the universities in the province. The association represents half the university teaching faculty in the province at most post-secondary schools, except Dalhousie University in Halifax and the Nova Scoti Agricultural College in Bible Hill.

As the region's largest university, not surprisingly the top wage packages are at Dalhousie.

Last year, The Chronicle Herald reported that spending on salaries for the president and associate and assistant vice-presidents more than doubled from 2005 to 2010, going from just over \$1.4 million to nearly \$3.5 million.

The top salary went to Dalhousie president Tom Traves, who was paid \$363,418 in 2009 and 2010, according to documents the university provided.

Senior university managers also have access to perks such as free parking and subsidized mortgage rates.

Dalhousie has also added three new senior management positions in the last few years.

A recent CBC News survey found that Traves remains at the top of the salary heap, being paid slightly more at \$393,264 per year, excluding benefits.

According to CBC, other top administrators held the line on salaries or took small increases.

St. Francis Xavier University would not reveal the salary of longtime president Sean Riley.

Starting in the fall, all university salaries above \$100,000 must be made public.

According to data collected by the CBC, salaries range from the \$103,000 a year earned by Eric Beresford as president of the Atlant School of Theology to the \$393,264 Traves received at Dalhousie.

The second-highest reported salary is that of John Harker at Cape Breton University. His \$261,310 pay package is the same as last year, CBC reported.

The spotlight on university presidents' salaries comes at a time when the province has asked for cuts of four and three per cent over the next two years at post-secondary schools.

Katherine Sheehan, assistant vice-president of human resources at Dalhousie, said administrative salaries at the university are below or on par with other schools across Canada.

Salaries comparable to those in other parts of the country are necessary to attract top managers, she said.

"We're comfortable where our salaries are."

However, Sheehan said administrative wages have been frozen across the board until issues with the university's pension plan are resolved.

Rebecca Rose, regional organizer for the Canadian Federation of Students, said her group is keenly aware of "senior administration creep" and the toll it takes on staff and students.

It is hard to watch administrators order cuts when they are not feeling the pinch themselves, Rose said.

"It helps to prove the argument that there's simply no money is false. There's no money for some things, but there's definitely money for other things."

Kyle Power, chairman of the Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations, said while university presidents must be skilled administrators, they are working in the realm of the public sector.

"They do manage large and complex institutions, but they're not private-sector CEOs. They're leaders of public institutions and performing a public service."

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