

UI student trustees propose salary freeze for administrators

By [Christine Des Garennes](#)

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Student trustees from each of the three University of Illinois campuses are asking some of the university's administrators to voluntarily freeze their salaries.

Citing numerous challenges facing the university, including climbing tuition, the price of recruiting and retaining faculty, and rising energy, maintenance and infrastructure costs, the three student trustees said administrators can, as a gesture of goodwill, have their salaries frozen for two years.

The proposal applies to administrators, not faculty, who earn \$150,000 or more annually.

"This should be the foundation of a growing trend of fiscal responsibility in the university and how we manage our money," said Paul Schmitt, the student trustee from the Urbana campus.

Defining who is an administrator and pinning down the exact number of university administrators who earn \$150,000 or more can be tricky, according to UI spokesman Tom Hardy.

The university has about 62 administrators who meet a definition outlined by the Illinois Board of Higher Education. These are, for example, senior administrative officers such as vice presidents and vice chancellors. In addition to those, the UI has about 300 employees who earn \$150,000 or more and have some administrative responsibilities.

The amount of money that could be saved is still being figured out – "probably less than \$250,000," estimated James Winters, the University of Illinois at Chicago student trustee who was recently chosen by Gov. Rod Blagojevich to hold the official student vote on the UI Board of Trustees.

The savings may not be a lot compared with the university's total annual budget of around \$4.2 billion, but the amount can pay for 10 to 15 students to attend the university, Winters said.

"Even though the money saved may be meager ... (a salary freeze) would send a powerful message that we're all in this together," Schmitt said.

The last time the university froze salaries for staff and faculty was in 2003.

Since 2003, the average raises have been 2.5 percent for staff and 3 percent for faculty. However, this academic year the average raises were 2 percent for faculty and 1.5 percent for staff.

In recent years, state funding to the university has increased a few percentage points each year. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009, the UI received a \$65 million, or 2.76 percent, increase in general revenue funds.

"Obviously we're in the midst of dealing with real uncertainty," said Chancellor Richard Herman on Monday, when the student trustees unveiled their proposal. Herman said the student trustees' idea is "something to be considered."

"I imagine a whole variety of things will get discussed," he said.

The next regularly scheduled UI Board of Trustees meeting is Nov. 13 in Springfield. The agenda has not been released yet, but Craig McFarland, the student trustee from the University of Illinois at Springfield, said he plans to raise the issue when student trustees present their campus reports to the board.

The announcement comes a few days after trustees met in Chicago in closed session to discuss the possibility of extending UI President B. Joseph White's contract and giving him a raise. White's current base salary is \$450,000.

Student trustees said they started working on this a couple of weeks ago, and their release of the proposal is not related to the meeting.

"It's a reaction to the lack of funding we're getting. We know with the (global) financial crisis, this next year and subsequent years are going to be tight," Winters said.

"There is no animosity toward the administration. We're trying to ensure the burden is shared among all levels of the university," McFarland said.

Schmitt said he hopes their proposal prompts the campus community to start talking about administrative costs at the university.

"The bigger overall question," according to Schmitt, is "is this symbolic, wishful thinking? Or will it lead to, down the road, real financial action when it comes to administrative costs?"

All three student trustees will try to answer that question, Schmitt said.

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