

# PUBLIC POLICY SOURCES

Number 44

## Rewarding University Professors: A Performance-Based Approach

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**Public Policy Sources** is published periodically throughout the year by The Fraser Institute, Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

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Printed and bound in Canada.

ISSN 1206-6257

## Executive Summary

The labour market demand for highly skilled employees is increasing; universities need high-calibre professors to train them. But the demand for superior scholars is not being met in some fields, despite a buyer's market for available Canadian academic personnel.

Many universities are suffering “academic flight” as competition for the best brains develops between the ivory tower and the private sector, on the one hand, and Canada and the United States, on the other.

Budget constraints at most universities make it difficult to recruit and retain the best faculty, but it is the current remuneration framework that is largely responsible for the shortage of star performers. This is because (1) existing pay-, tenure-, sabbatical- and seniority policies do not link rewards to performance and (2) powerful faculty unions, timid administrations, government indifference, and a pervasive egalitarian mind-set penalize excellence and prevent reform.

### Rewards and performance

In general, Canadian universities have eschewed rigorous, measurable, impartial and transparent systems for evaluating the performance of academics. Instead, “soft” standards prevail, making it difficult to recognize and reward professors who perform above the average—or to identify and sanction under-performers.

The University of Manitoba is no exception to this national pattern:

- The University abandoned its competitive merit-pay system in the early 1980s. Performance-based awards now form a very small part of budgets, and “merit” itself bears little relation to the rewards that are granted.

- The authority of university governing structures has been eroded by collective agreements that marginalize managerial functions. Faculty union executives have bargained the most effective performance measures, rewards, and sanctions out of contracts for academic staff.
- Small special funds have been allocated to reward superior performance, but union resistance has prevented their being increased to reward and retain “star” professors.
- Although extraneous, historical factors have created a bias that favours men over women; pay equity awards to the latter to redress this imbalance have created reverse discrimination against men.
- The balance between rewards for teaching and those for research now penalizes the latter.
- Faculty who were promoted during the heady years of university expansion are generally paid at a rate that far exceeds their actual productivity, on the one hand, and the rate paid to their much junior but more productive colleagues, on the other.
- Gaining a tenured position at the top Canadian universities is easier than gaining tenure at their top American counterparts, thereby blocking the recruitment and proper compensation of capable successor scholars.
- Sabbaticals have become an employment right unrelated to past performance; they are even granted to administrative personnel.

### Recommendations

In order for universities to competitively attract and fairly reward the best academic faculty—and

to reverse the academic brain drain—the following changes should be considered:

1. Current, largely illusory performance reviews need to be replaced with rigorous and objective evaluations.
2. Performance and rewards should be linked closely. One model for doing so is to set base-line salaries for minimally adequate work and augment this with non-cumulative performance bonuses. Poor performers would receive no bonuses and be placed on probationary watch leading to possible dismissal in the absence of improvement.
3. Collective agreements should be replaced by flexible private-sector-style contracts for individuals that combine elements of basic employment agreements with incentives for drive, imagination, and productivity.
4. Teaching and research should be evaluated separately. Faculty who neither conduct research nor publish should have their compensation reduced accordingly. Average teachers who are not also scholars would have their tenure revoked in accordance with existing private-sector professorial job descriptions.
5. University tenure systems should be replaced with renewable performance-based contracts. Traditional life-time tenure should be limited to truly exceptional scholars.
6. Sabbaticals should not be automatic, but awarded in a system of unrestricted results-oriented competition.
7. Individual ability, not pay equity, should determine questions of academic remuneration.

Provinces may have to amend the legislative acts governing universities to force these reforms on recalcitrant faculty unions and fainthearted administrations.

## Introduction

Canada's universities are at an important crossroads.<sup>1</sup> Experts claim that 45 percent of all new jobs will soon require at least 16 years of formal education (*Maclean's*, p. 30). This means that a university degree or other advanced education will be the bare minimum for intellectually-rewarding and well-paying employment. As the suppliers of the bulk of the professional brain power for commerce, industry, and public service, universities and other post-secondary institutions need to have enough high-calibre academic personnel to train future generations of entrepreneurs, managers, teachers, researchers, and other professionals.

Given the extant system of rewarding Canadian university professors and the recent spate of cut-backs to post-secondary education by provincial and federal governments,<sup>2</sup> it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract, retain, and properly reward high-quality academics. Ironically, the effects of an uncompetitive reward structure would be worse than they are except that reduced budgets and/or stagnant student enrolment levels mean that it is still a buyer's market in many academic disciplines. Indeed, the current oversupply of personnel in many fields is a godsend to universities as they struggle to cope with finan-

cial and structural constraints on hiring the best faculty.<sup>3</sup> Retirements have also helped this process as academics at the top of the salary hierarchy who were hired during the rapidly expanding late-1950s to mid-1970s period are replaced by casual lecturers or low-paid entry-level scholars.

These two processes will soon end. First, the current retirement blitz will fade by the end of this decade. Since those with the longest service nearly always earn the most money, this will mean a smaller pool of funds for new hiring. Second, the glut of new scholars will end by the middle of this decade. This is because universities and colleges all over North America, faced with similar retirement trends, will be competing for cohorts of new scholars that in many disciplines have been static or declining for several years. Predicted increases in student numbers during the early years of this decade will only exacerbate competition for the best of these new professors. Canadian universities may be going back to the 1960s, a period during which they were forced to accept many marginally competent American and other foreign applicants for the thousands of new positions created by a huge surge in university enrolment.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 I am grateful to Rodney Clifton, Dennis Owens, and a University of Manitoba senior administrator who wishes to remain anonymous for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this report. Of course, these individuals are not responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation.
  - 2 Efforts to curb out-of-control government deficit spending have meant that since 1993 core funding for Canadian post-secondary education has dropped by \$2.3 billion, or 34 percent (*Maclean's*, p. 28). Despite this, government funding for universities in 1995-96 was still 42.7 percent higher than it was in 1981-82 (*Globe and Mail*, p. A3).
  - 3 These constraints include union contracts that make layoffs difficult or impossible, and the presence of too many immovable tenured faculty in low-demand areas.
  - 4 There was a 3.7-fold increase in university enrolment from 158,388 to 595,566 students between 1963 and 1980. Over the same period, the number of university teachers tripled from 10,865 to 33,258 (*Education in Canada*, 1973, pp. 385, 405; *Education in Canada*, 1981, pp. 100, 164.) This is why Canadian universities are at a critical intellectual crossroads, an inter-generational academic intersection, in the way they attract and reward their academics.

Using data from the University of Manitoba (U of M), Western Canada's oldest institution of higher learning, this paper explores the way professors are rewarded at Canada's institutions of higher learning and makes recommendations about how the current reward system can be improved. In particular, it suggests that there are fundamental flaws in the way salary levels and other perquisites are determined, that these defects are adversely affecting the research and teaching capabilities of universities, and that this situation is bound to get worse unless significant reform takes place.

There are three reasons for concentrating on a single institution. First, most discussions that have been critical of Canada's universities (for example, Bercuson, 1984; Bercuson, 1997; Emberley, 1996) have employed a shotgun approach in which a whole host of problems (low standards, deadwood professors, life-time tenure, useless research, political correctness, etc.) are discussed in a smorgasbord fashion, uncritically implying that they apply uniformly to all institutions. Con-

versely, there are few fine-grained discussions of the operation of a single problem at a single institution. Second, although the mandates of all universities involve the unfettered advancement and dissemination of knowledge, they are remarkably secretive about the way they manage many of their internal affairs, in part because they fear that too much transparency could provoke damaging external criticism. Accordingly, except where governments have intervened to make such information public, it is difficult and costly to obtain detailed personnel and related information on institutions other than one's own. Third, a perusal of the collective agreements at five large universities—Alberta, Memorial, Toronto, Queens, and York—shows a similar system of rewards to the one at the U of M. This is no happy coincidence. Rather, it is the deliberate attempt by one unionized faculty association after another to replicate the generous (but uncompetitive) gains made at sister institutions.<sup>5</sup>

## Limitations of the Current Reward System

### Overview

At present, Canada's universities, especially large research institutions like the U of M, reward the performance, real or assumed, of their

academic staff in a variety of ways.<sup>7</sup> These include:

1. Annual percentage pay raises to acknowledge length of service, compensate for low

<sup>5</sup> The result is that differences in starting salaries and earning levels at different academic ranks vary slightly from one Canadian university to another. Not so in the United States where a strict adherence to market principles, faculty productivity, and institutional quality and reputation result in salary gaps of tens of thousands of dollars between universities. In 1999, for example, the average salaries of full professors at the top 19 and bottom 10 American universities were roughly \$150,000 and \$50,000, respectively (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. A16). Not surprisingly, the highest salaries are earned at private universities with large research budgets and world-class doctoral programmes (Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Yale, Chicago, etc.) because such institutions are able to attract and retain the best and brightest scholars.

<sup>7</sup> There are also non-monetary ways to reward faculty, such as reducing the teaching duties of outstanding scholars.

entry-level salaries, and match cost of living increases;

2. Annual cumulative increases in salary based on assumptions of “satisfactory performance” (often called “career progress” or “progress through the ranks” [PTR] increments);
3. A predetermined number of non-cumulative annual bonuses (sometimes called “merit awards”) to top performers;
4. Special salary increases, sometimes institutionalized and sometimes *ad hoc*, to outstanding professors to reward their performance and/or prevent them from moving to other institutions;
5. Special funds to correct individual salary anomalies;
6. Corresponding funds to address alleged pay inequities between male and female professors;
7. Promotion through the ranks, each station in the hierarchy from lecturer to full professor marked by a higher salary level and range and by progressively higher annual wage increments;
8. Travel funds and expenses; and
9. Periodic year-long paid sabbaticals to allow faculty to work full-time on important research projects.

The number and variety of these rewards might suggest that there is a rigorous and competitive system of evaluation and compensation in place that correctly rewards the actual performance of the individuals involved. Direct evidence from the U of M suggests that this is not so. Anecdotal evidence and the perusal of the contracts at other

universities suggests that the problems inherent in the U of M reward system are mimicked at most other Canadian universities.

### **Case study: the University of Manitoba reward system**

#### *Starting Salaries and Annual Percentage Pay Raises*

Despite the many years it takes to earn a Ph.D., a necessary credential in most fields of higher education, entry-level salaries for university professors have always been low compared to many other professions (Melchers, p. 3). At the U of M, the 1999 starting salary for an Assistant Professor in the 1998-2001 collective agreement was \$41,690, well below the initial salary in many other fields demanding advanced post-graduate training. Hence, one of the functions of across-the-board annual percentage pay raises is to compensate for the relatively low starting salary and late entry into full-time employment. The raises are also based on the assumption that teaching experience and cumulative research productivity should be rewarded by progressively higher salaries. Since few, if any, universities have absolute pay ceilings, salaries in excess of \$100,000 are not uncommon for senior professors—those with 30 years or more of service—all across the country.

Though these across-the-board percentage increases were reinstated in the present U of M contract after a hiatus of several years, they still form the largest portion of the salaries of long-serving faculty—those with 15 or more years of service. What this means is that the single most important determinant of salary differentials is years of employment (or “seniority” in trade union parlance). Since the size of the university payroll envelope is relatively inelastic compared with many of its private-sector counterparts, rewarding faculty mainly by seniority distorts the relation between pay and performance by severely constraining universities from differen-

tially rewarding their best academics in other ways.

Low entry-level salaries also discourage the choice of an academic career, especially by those in high-paying professions like computer science, management, and engineering. It is unclear how many potentially outstanding scholars are lost to the universities every year because of low starting salaries. What seems certain, however, is that this practice perverts the relationship between performance and monetary compensation. In particular, automatic salary increases, together with the existing promotion system (discussed below), produce a gap of tens of thousands of dollars between highly productive junior professors and their highly unproductive senior colleagues.

Even the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), the left-wing national umbrella association of university faculty associations, agrees that, “The unique structure of university salaries by age ... hinder[s] recruitment of highly qualified faculty” (Melchers, p. 3). Paying faculty mainly by advanced age also constrains the recruitment of new faculty because it discourages early retirement: it is difficult to retire from a comparatively undemanding vocation when a relatively high salary only begins after the age of 50. As a result, “29 percent of [Canadian faculty in a study released by Statistics Canada] were 55 years of age or older in 1996, compared to only 18.5 percent of doctorate holders employed outside of academe” (Melchers, p. 3).

### *Annual Career Progress Increments*

First introduced in the early 1980s, annual career progress increments now make up the largest share of yearly raises for most U of M faculty members. The current U of M — University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA) collective agreement provides annual baseline pay raises that, in the 1999-00 contract year, ranged from \$616 to \$2,644 depending on rank and salary

level. Though formally based on “satisfactory performance” during the preceding contract year and potentially withheld when performance is deemed “not to be satisfactory,” there are no written guidelines, measures, or indices for assessing satisfactory or unsatisfactory academic performance. The contract merely stipulates, using vague and general language, that members of UMFA are obliged to engage “conscientiously” in teaching, research, administration, and community service:

Faculty members have the right and obligation to develop and maintain their scholarly competence and effectiveness as teachers within their area of expertise; conscientiously to prepare and organize their subject matter; and to revise the subject matter on a regular basis as is appropriate for the courses that they teach.

Faculty members shall be responsible for and have the right and opportunity to carry out a reasonable amount of meaningful research, scholarly work and other creative activities. Faculty members shall endeavour to publish the results of their scholarship. Research, scholarly work and other creative activities conducted by faculty members in the course of their duties shall have as their primary objective the expansion of knowledge and understanding, as well as the improvement of the faculty member’s scholarly competence. (*Collective Agreement*, p. 38)

Indeed, as shown below, the fuzzy and unaccountable way satisfactory performance is defined represents a “dumbing down” from earlier years, a retrogression from the way research, teaching, and service contributions were defined in 1970s-era contracts.

Despite this downgrading of evaluation indices, U of M President Emöke Szathmáry has argued that since “a strong annual performance review system [for tenured professors] is currently in place ... no change from this is envisioned in the



future" (*Winnipeg Free Press*, p. A15). These yearly performance reviews are conducted by department heads (or their equivalents) with anecdotal evidence suggesting that the system is far from "strong." Given the nebulous way that satisfactory performance is defined, the unwillingness of most department heads to report the "unsatisfactory performance" of those under their leadership (who are also their colleagues, friends, and fellow union members), and the penchant of those few professors whose "normal" raises are withheld to lodge time-consuming grievances,<sup>7</sup> few faculty are ever denied annual increments.<sup>8</sup>

### *Cumulative Merit Awards*

The U of M had a competitive performance-based merit pay system between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s.<sup>9</sup> In 1975, the total pool of funds allocated was equivalent to an average of 1.2 increments per member. In the 1975-1976 and later collective agreements, merit pay was dispensed according to the following criteria:

***Research, Creative Works and Performances.*** Efforts shall be made to evaluate the quality and originality of both published and unpublished work. Factors that may be considered include the publication of books, monographs and contributions to edited books; papers in both refereed and non-refereed journals; papers delivered at professional meetings; participation in panels; unpublished research including current work in progress, both supported and non-supported; editorial and refereeing duties; creative works and performances; and scholarship as evidenced by the

Member's depth and breadth of knowledge and general contributions to the research life of the University.

***Teaching.*** This involves competence and effectiveness in teaching and/or graduate student supervision. The written opinions of students and/or fellow faculty members should normally be sought. Factors that may be considered include: course work and all related activities; supervision of the work of honours and graduate students; participation in seminars and colloquia; innovative methods in teaching and other contributions to the teaching activities of the university.

***Service.*** This includes internal and external activities related to the research and teaching functions of the university. Factors that may be considered include: participation in university faculty and department committees; service in professional organizations; general administrative duties; and community service where the individual has made an essentially non-remunerative contribution by virtue of special academic competence.

Though a 1.0 increment was almost automatically given to all UMFA members, competition still succeeded in rewarding superior teaching and scholarship. Dispensed by department heads on the basis of written procedures agreed to by their department colleagues, an award of 2.0 increments gave full professors an amount equal to an eight percent salary increase for those at the full professor salary floor. Today, these baseline merit awards are represented by non-cumulative merit

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- 7 By not lodging a grievance, a union member would tacitly be admitting to unsatisfactory performance, a confession that would leave a "paper trail" that might eventually lead to far more severe punishments including dismissal.
- 8 Only 12 increment-denial grievances were filed between 1991 and 1997 at the U of M representing less than one percent of the unionized professoriate. Among other things, this means that either over 99 percent of professors are performing their job satisfactorily, or that these pay raises are dispensed with little or no regard to performance.
- 9 Actual merit pay allocations were suspended in 1981; they continued to be listed in the collective agreement until 1987 when they were bargained away for good.

awards and other dispensations, including the aforementioned nearly automatic career progress increments, that bear little or no relation to actual performance.<sup>10</sup>

### *Non-Cumulative Merit Awards*

Currently, these merit awards amount to a non-cumulative \$3,000 bonus given annually to a maximum of 30 professors, representing less than three percent of eligible candidates. The monies allocated are administered by two five-member university panels charged with granting awards to applicants “for outstanding achievement”<sup>11</sup> during the previous contract year in teaching (up to eight awards), research (up to eight awards), service (up to six awards), and any combination of teaching, research, and service (up to eight awards). The \$90,000 fund represents *less than one-tenth of one percent* of the total faculty payroll, an amount that bears little relation to either the complexity of its administration or the number of potentially deserving candidates.

### *Exceptional Salary Increases*

The U of M — UMFA collective agreement also states that, “In exceptional circumstances [e.g., a job offer from another institution], the University may provide an increase to a Member’s base salary... The sum total of all such increases shall not exceed \$150,000 in any contract year.” In previous years, the collective agreement even gave UMFA the right to arbitrarily veto recommendations by the administration for extraordinary salary increases to specific individuals. The exercise of this veto resulted in the loss of several exceptional scholars to other institutions.

### *The Anomalies Fund*

This fund has been increased from \$60,000 to \$200,000 in the current three-year agreement and is earmarked to correct alleged salary inequities. Over the years, many female professors have successfully used this fund (as the relevant clause in the contract invited) to gain pay raises by claiming that they were receiving abnormally low salaries compared to their male counterparts.

### *Travel Funds and Expenses*

Annual grants totalling \$3,500 over the life of the three-year contract are set aside for each UMFA member, “for the purpose of subsidizing the travel of Members for attending meetings of academic or professional groups or for pursuing research and scholarly work which forms a part of university duties or for the purchase of books, journals, and other published works and items of equipment to be used in the performance of their academic duties.” As with the annual percentage pay raises and career progress increments, there is neither competition for the funds nor academic accountability for the way monies are spent.

### *Sabbaticals*

All public Canadian universities award sabbaticals, sometimes called research/study leaves, to their full-time tenured faculty. The terms and conditions vary among institutions, but most award 12 months paid leave to all full-time applicants every seven years.<sup>12</sup> At the U of M, as elsewhere, there is little or no attention paid to short- or long-term research productivity or to scholarly accomplishments during previous sabbaticals. This

10 Although many other Canadian universities continue to dispense merit pay to their best faculty, the number and amount of these awards is now overshadowed by non-meritorious dispensations.

11 What “outstanding achievement” means or how it should be measured are not discussed in the agreement.

12 The rate of pay varies among institutions. At the U of M, sabbaticants receive 80 percent of their annual salary while on leave.

means there is little or no competition for leaves, a standard practice in the granting of internal and external research grants and other awards. Where a glut of leave candidates exists in a particular department, a one year's delay may result for one or two people (who receive a year's credit towards future leaves while being pushed to the top of the queue in the following year's competition).

This lack of competition and accountability occur because the sabbatical is either contractually or conventionally defined as an inalienable employment right based solely on years of service. Thus, a sketchy research/study plan, cursorily perused by a couple of administrators is sufficient for being "awarded" a leave. Likewise, there is little or no post-sabbatical follow-up except for a one- or two-page report superficially perused by one of the same administrators.

To be sure, many professors make good productive use of their leaves and this is commendable.<sup>13</sup> The poor scholarly record of many veteran sabbaticants suggests that the leave is often treated in the traditional biblical sense of a "day of rest."

One reason for the indiscriminate allocation of leaves is that they are granted to academic administrators as well, and called "administrative leaves." The apparent rationale for granting them for non-academic service is that no one would want to serve in a senior administrative capacity (dean, director, vice-president, and president) if these leaves were not granted, an assertion that is easily dismissed given the glut of eager candidates whenever such positions open up. Accordingly, any attempt to substantively reform the

leave process would be resisted as much by the administration as it would by the faculty.

### *Promotion*

Advancement through the ranks from lecturer to full professor, though neither automatic nor uniform, is nonetheless an expected and desired part of an academic career. Not all faculty members reach the highest rank but there are no penalties, save monetary ones, for their failure to do so. Additionally, there is no limit on the number of full professors a department may have, no competitive ranking of candidates, and no penalties for rejected applications. Still, the financial rewards for promotion are considerable.<sup>14</sup> At the U of M, these rewards results from a combination of minimum salary floors (\$69,492 for a professor versus \$41,690 for an assistant professor in the 1999-2000 contract year) and differentially higher annual increments. As at other Canadian universities, there are no salary ceilings at the U of M. The overall effect is that a full professor earns tens of thousands of dollars more than a colleague hired at the same time and at the same starting salary but who is still at the assistant professor rank.

Promotion through the ranks is based on formal peer review with candidates judged by the quality of their teaching, research, and university or public service. Though the rank-based portion of salary differentials is supposed to be based on performance, a perusal of the salaries at the U of M reveals scores of anomalies.<sup>15</sup> There are dozens of full professors earning over \$100,000 who were promoted during the 1960s or early to mid-1970s, a time when standards for advancement through

13 How many is "many" is unknown given the high degree of secrecy surrounding the granting of leaves.

14 In 1995-96, the 48 percent of the U of M full-time teaching staff at the full professor rank earned an average annual salary of \$88,442. The average annual salaries for the other ranks were: associate professor, \$67,398; assistant professor, \$52,592; and lecturer, \$46,239.

15 Provincial Bill 57, "The Public Sector Compensation Disclosure Act," mandates the annual publication of the compensation of all public-sector employees who earn more than \$50,000 a year.

the ranks were much lower than they are today. Likewise, many older associate professors who have published little beyond a few trivial articles during a 30- to 40-year career are earning salaries thousands of dollars above the full professor floor.

The inconsistency between rank and salary is partly due to low standards for promotion: assistant professorship is still generally granted as the initial academic appointment on the basis of a completed Ph.D. (though a buyer's market in most fields means that departments can insist on post-doctoral research, refereed publications, and teaching experience); associate professorship, in many cases, comes with the publication of a few peer-reviewed journal articles; and promotion to full professor sometimes is based on a "compensatory model": a slim scholarly record is allowed to be offset by "exemplary service" (i.e., high participation on committees and other administrative duties).

### *Gender-Based Pay Equity*

Though universities have been concerned—some would say consumed—with a number of equality issues (notably race, gender, and physical disability), only women, as a special-interest group, have lobbied successfully for pay equity hand-outs. Presumably this is because their growing numbers, and hence growing political clout, together with the timidity of their male colleagues, have made it easier for them to make specious claims about sexist pay policies.

It is true that female professors, on average, earn less than their male counterparts. Before pay-equity adjustments, Canadian female academics earn between 4 and 25 percent less than male academics (Dean and Clifton, pp. 90, 94). What is contestable is the *degree* to which this difference is a product of a deliberate or unconscious bias against women. This is because most university pay equity investigations have been so poorly conducted and so politically motivated that it is

doubtful whether women are paid less than men with similar academic experience and scholarly accomplishments (Dean and Clifton).

Pay equity in the academy cannot be reduced to the idea of "equal pay for work of equal value," the accepted meaning of the term "pay equity," (Basham, p. A7) because most professors have identical job descriptions and almost identical duties. Hence, a host of other factors are accepted as criteria for salary discrepancies. These include qualifications (usually the highest degree earned), experience (based on years of employment), market value (based on the extent of competition for specialists in high-demand fields), productivity (usually based on research grants awarded, books, articles, and reports published, and overall scholarly reputation), and academic rank (often the results of two or more of the aforementioned factors). When only some of these indices are taken into account, most of the difference between salaries earned by males and females disappears (Basham, p. A7). Whether *all* the difference would disappear if *all* relevant salary variables were considered is unclear because few pay-equity studies have simultaneously analyzed the role of more than two or three of them. In particular, men tend to earn more than women because:

1. Proportionately more of them have been employed longer than their female counterparts;
2. Relatively more are working in fields with higher market value (medicine, business administration, computer science, engineering, etc.);
3. Proportionately more have stronger research records, partly because of their longer careers and partly because men tend to publish more than women; and
4. Relatively more are at the highest rank of full professor, again partly because of a combina-

tion of years of service and increased productivity.

At the U of M, a 1992 report assessing salary differences between female and male UMFA members showed that the average salary of the former (\$54,522) was 24 percent less than the average salary of the latter (\$71,551). Seventy-two percent of this difference, the report found, was because:

1. The women were much younger than the men;
2. They had much less academic experience than the men; and
3. Fewer of them had Ph.D.s, the *sine qua non* of professional standing in most academic fields.

No other variables were considered in making across-the-board *baseline* increases from a special \$100,000 fund. Monies were given—and continue to be given year after year—to female professors despite the fact that:

1. Some of these women already had received equity increases through other programmes;
2. Several women privately confessed that they did not deserve salary increases (but were pleased to accept them anyway);
3. Some women were already earning higher salaries than their male counterparts who had been hired at the same time on the basis of the same professional credentials; and

4. Several critical variables such as research productivity and teaching performance were omitted from the analysis.<sup>16</sup> Since “the literature suggests that including performance variables decreases the estimated effects of discrimination against female faculty members by as much as one-third” (Dean and Clifton, p. 107), it is likely that all of the gender-imputed difference between the average female and average male salaries would have disappeared had these pertinent variables been included in the analysis. In short, it is likely that the difference in pay levels between women and men at the U of M has little, if anything, to do with gender: age, credentials, experience, market value, and performance are probably the sole determinants of any difference in their respective average salaries. Since the increase the women received represented a salary raise rather than a bonus, and since the entire salary pool is generally inelastic, this means that men are punished every time they open their pay envelopes for no other reason than their gender.

### Implications: the brain drain

Every year, scores of mid-career academic superstars are lured away from Canadian universities to more lucrative positions in business or industry in Canada or to American universities willing and able to pay higher salaries<sup>17</sup> and to provide better working conditions and other perquisites (generous relocation bonuses and spousal hiring practices, state-of-the-art equipment and large research stipends, and well-funded graduate students) to high performers (Frank, pp. 8, 10-12; Ford, pp. 10-11). Canadian universities are slowly

16 Studies have shown that starting salaries and productivity differences are important determinants of academic pay and that women tend to enter fields where there is either low market demand or high market supply, on the one hand, and that they tend on average to publish less (partly because of different career priorities and trajectories which result in either later entry into the academic marketplace or lengthy mid-career interruptions) than their male counterparts, on the other.

17 “[T]he average salaries of full professors at 13 large Canadian universities are 25 percent lower than those of their counterparts at US doctoral institutions...” (Frank, p. 11.)

beginning to recognize that for the best performers the academic marketplace is both global and highly competitive, and now often have to offer \$30,000-40,000 above average university starting floors in high-demand fields like biotechnology, computer science, and management. The U of M is currently studying a University of British Columbia plan that pays computer science professors a “market differential” baseline increment of \$25,000; medical specialists at the university are currently commanding a \$15,000 signing bonus (Redekop, p. A3).

Competition for the best and brightest is bound to heat up over the next few years. The retirement of faculty hired between the mid-1960s and late 1970s, combined with an expected 20-percent enrolment increase and the production of only about 1,400 Canadian Ph.D. graduates per year who choose academic careers, mean that it is estimated that by 2010 universities will probably need to recruit 32,000 new faculty members, or nearly as many as are currently employed (Frank, pp. 8, 10-12).

The loss of academic stars has several adverse effects on the academy. First, the most sought-after scholars often are those who teach in popular or emerging fields, and their loss is a blow to these instructional programs. Second, many top academics who are lost are doing groundbreaking scientific research, studies for which there is good funding or the promise of patentable ideas that

will bring both fame and money to their institutions. Third, top academics tend to attract top graduate students, apprentice scholars who are often themselves well-funded fellowship holders. When these top professors leave, they often take their best students with them. Fourth, top performers have reputations that transcend their home universities. A few superstars and a large body of somewhat lesser luminaries are essential if an institution wishes to gain good support from government, granting agencies, alumni, and other donors. Losing such academics, or being unable to attract them, distinguishes great universities from ordinary ones.

Partly because of its uncompetitive reward system, the U of M lost 46 top performers to other institutions in 1996 alone.<sup>18</sup> Given its uncompetitive reward system, it is difficult for the U of M to attract distinguished mid-career professors from other universities to replace those who have left. This is reflected in the U of M’s habitual placement near the bottom of Canada’s large research institutions in receiving national research grants (*Maclean’s*, p. 55). Those highly productive junior faculty who have remained behind perennially complain about low salaries and inadequate research facilities. They also grouse about the high salaries given to their relatively inactive senior colleagues. Save for poor job markets in their disciplines, many would have left by now to take up positions elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

18 There are also monetary and non-monetary motives why people leave the U of M and other Canadian universities over which these institutions have little or no control. Departure for the United States, for example, is often based on a combination of: a desire to move to a more prestigious and/or better-funded university; a weak Canadian dollar; and a much lower American income tax regime. The disciplines that have been most affected by departures are the applied sciences, medicine, and management. In 1997, for example, the faculty of management lost 6 professors, most of them to the United States.

19 The same holds true for the best undergraduate and graduate students. Poor student recruitment efforts and one of Canada’s worst scholarship programmes (*Maclean’s*, p. 58) means that the U of M is as uncompetitive in recruiting and retaining top students as it is in recruiting and retaining top faculty.

## Constraints on Changing the Current System

If the U of M situation has any generality, only about half of Canadian university professors are properly rewarded (or punished) for their performance as teacher-scholars. The remaining half are either over-compensated or under-compensated. Hundreds of the best of the under-rewarded professors have left Canadian universities over the past two decades.

If the current system of compensation at Canadian universities is resulting in the flight of so many top-notch scholars, on the one hand, and the inequitable compensation of those who are left behind, on the other, why has it not been reformed? There are three main constraints on changing the current reward system: an equity ethos, collectivization, and tenure.

### The equity ethos

There is now a value system on Canadian campuses that says that all faculty should be treated equally (Ford, p. 10). How this developed from the more traditional scholarly ethos that all faculty should be treated fairly and impartially is not altogether clear.<sup>20</sup> What is very clear, however, is that the current faculty-union equity ethos (“all professors are created equal”) has subverted the older academic meritocracy ethos based on differential contribution to the scholarly enterprise. As elsewhere in Canadian society, a traditional yearning for equality of opportunity has been transformed into a preoccupation with equality of outcome. Still, even though all professors are now believed to be created equal, some are more equal than others. This means that some are paid

more than others and the main reason for this is their age.

### Collectivization

Canada’s unionized faculty associations have defined equity in the same way it is defined by alliances of workers in the trades and civil service: the well-being of the least competent worker must be protected because the union is only as strong as its weakest member. Operationally, this has meant that “faculty union agreements often stand in the way of the kind of hiring bonuses or merit pay that stars can expect in the private sector” (Ford, p. 11). Indeed, the single most important factor affecting the compensation of professors is the role played by unionized faculty associations. Not all universities have unionized faculties,<sup>21</sup> but all have centrally organized faculty associations and all public institutions belong to CAUT, the parent national lobby organization that has fought long and hard to promote and protect a system of nearly unchallenged lifetime tenure and associated perquisites enjoyed by few other Canadian workers.

Referring to a difficult recent round of contract negotiations at Memorial University, the vice-presidents of the university noted that:

How did we get to the point where those among us who are honest with themselves will admit that universities are basically ungovernable? Perhaps this has always been the case, but when universities changed from being small and largely devoted to the care of the elite to being large

20 The bulk of liberal arts professors hired in the 1960s and 1970s, many of them Americans, were left-leaning in ideology.

21 The unionization of faculty is prohibited in Alberta and British Columbia.

and charged with delivering mass higher education, the fault line has taken on major public implications.

We think that much of the blame for this state of affairs, in Canada at least, can be laid at the feet of CAUT and the presidents of Canadian universities who have lacked a national agenda and an effective mechanism to achieve cooperation in bargaining philosophy and strategy.

CAUT has executed a brilliant campaign over the last two decades or so. CAUT formulated a strong ideological agenda, centrally coordinated, internally coherent and managed to have this package installed in the collective agreements or faculty agreements of just about all Canadian universities. Severe curtailment of management rights were achieved in this fashion, mostly quietly, mostly by taking advantage of the lack of communication and cooperation among senior university administrators. Embedding the values of academic freedom and tenure within the potent rhetoric of classic British unionism, CAUT has in effect assured that in the time period mentioned virtually no faculty members were fired for incompetence or non-performance of duties. Similarly, collective agreements have *de facto* prevented universities from downsizing their programs, even where this was warranted. CAUT has been successful in conflating in the minds of the public as well as of their members the concepts of academic freedom, tenure and job security. CAUT, in fact, while posing as a mere professional organization, has a truly amazing record as a “union,” unmatched we think by the likes of the CAW [Canadian Auto Workers] or the Teamsters. It is our judgment that, in the process, they have contributed considerably to a deterioration of the quality of higher education in this country... If we are to make progress on the agenda of creating labour agreements which will honour the need to protect faculty, recognize the special na-

ture of academic work (as contrasted to the work of most factory employees) and which will provide adequate protection for the university as an institution and to its students, CAUT must shed much of its anachronistic and harmful ideology. (Tuinman, Jaap et al, pp. 9-10)

This “anachronistic and harmful ideology” has meant that most faculty unions have succeeded in ensuring that nearly all their members are granted tenure regardless of their performance as scholars and teachers and that tenure effectively means lifetime employment regardless of post-tenure productivity. As a result, membership in the professoriate—obtaining a union card—has become a near monopoly at least as much because of demands for ever higher salaries and benefits as because of declining university revenues. At the U of M, tenure, high salaries for senior faculty, and the absence of mandatory retirement at 65 mean that resignations often cannot be used for replacement purposes, further enhancing the cartel-like properties of UMFA.

Faculty unions like UMFA have also succeeded in bargaining away salary structures based on performance. According to Cameron:

In most collective agreements, career increments or progress-through-rank (PTR) is now essentially automatic. The demise of merit pay, or performance-based increments, removes a critical mechanism through which the link between academic freedom, embodied in tenure, and the individual’s commitment to scholarship, expressed in research and teaching, is regularly reviewed and confirmed. This is not to say that without merit pay faculty members all immediately turn to professional lives of indolence and sloth. It is to say, however, that the absence of regular performance reviews and performance-based reward systems make it more difficult to confirm that the trust embodied in the principle of academic freedom is vested in responsible hands. In the face of



increasing demands on universities to render themselves more accountable for what they do, this has to be a matter of concern. (Cameron, p. 9)

Though this may be a matter of concern for more and more universities, it has been of little moment to faculty associations which have been concerned only with fighting for job security, benefit enhancement, and “academic freedom” (read: the freedom from any real accountability to the institution or its various stakeholders and freedom to usurp managerial decision-making processes). This fight has been successful: while Canadian universities have been forced to cut back dramatically in most other areas for years,<sup>22</sup> few tenured professors have ever been terminated for reasons of redundancy or financial exigency. Even fewer tenured professors have ever been fired for incompetence. Simply put, despite claims to the contrary from CAUT and its member organizations, tenure does indeed mean *de facto* lifetime job security at Canadian universities.

The bargaining stance of Canada’s faculty unions suggests that most, if not all, would like their members to earn roughly the same salary based on years of service. Since seniority is a product of longevity, this means that they uphold the principle that the older professors are, the more they should be paid. Conversely, large merit-pay packages based solely on performance are suspect because they are believed to be dispensed in a biased manner, on the one hand, and to inevitably result in invidious distinctions between individuals of the same age and rank, on the other.

These sentiments reflect the egalitarian collectivist ethos of university faculty associations. The strongest supporters of faculty trade unionism are housed in faculties of liberal arts, the home of disciplines where ideas merely have to be ‘interesting’ to be considered important.<sup>23</sup>

## Tenure

Until the mid- to late-1970s, the recruitment of high-quality faculty was a hit-or-miss affair. All across the country, academics were hired at a breakneck pace between the late 1950s and early 1970s. Though many outstanding scholars were hired during the period, the root of the present-day “deadwood professor” syndrome (middle-aged or older professors who do little or no productive research and are indifferent teachers) lies here as well. Since Canadian and American universities and colleges were experiencing the same rates of rapid expansion (in student body and programme and institutional proliferation), they were competing for the same relatively small cohorts of newly-minted scholars in dozens of areas of study. Many recruits were even given tenure-stream or other positions without in-person interviews. The scarcity of qualified candidates in many fields required the hiring of ABDs (“all but dissertation”), some of whom never earned their Ph.D.s but were still granted automatic tenure after a few years of employment (Sirluck, p. 329).

To be sure, Canada has thousands of hard-working, productive, and dedicated scholar-teachers. Much is known about the best of these academics, the 2,000 or so star scholars who form

22 Among other things, library acquisition budgets have been slashed, support staff have been either laid off or not replaced, teaching assistantships have been eliminated, sessional lecturers have not been renewed, class size has increased, antiquated laboratory and other equipment have not been replaced, and physical plant repair and maintenance have been deferred.

23 “The academic world is the natural habitat of half-baked ideas, except for those fields in which there are decisive tests, such as science, mathematics, engineering, medicine—and athletics. In all these fields, in their differing ways, there comes a time when you have to put up or shut up. It should not be surprising that all these fields are notable exceptions to the complete domination by the left on campuses across the country” (Sowell, p. 128).

a small but critical part of the country's approximately 33,000 full-time faculty. This is because their sterling accomplishments are featured month after month in university newsletters, alumni journals, and the like. On the other hand, little or nothing is known about those mid- to late-career professors who have given up the scholarly ghost. This is because universities are reluctant to investigate, let alone broadcast, anything that would place their institutions in a bad light during these difficult financial times. If studies of research productivity at American universities can be generalized to Canada (and there is little reason to believe that they cannot), then:

1. The top 15 percent of all academics produce about 50 percent of the articles in the leading journals in their disciplines;
2. Pre-tenure research output often nosedives, sometimes to zero, after that much cherished lifelong appointment is secured; and
3. Between 40 and 50 percent of Canadian academics publish the equivalent of a single book and less than a dozen scholarly articles over an entire career (Boyer, table A-19, A-20).

In most fields, hiring marginal academics has long ended. The supply of candidates caught up with demand by the late 1970s and there has been a glut of highly qualified job seekers in most disciplines since the early 1980s. Indeed, today's aca-

demical buyer's market in most specialities has strengthened the recruitment and selection process. In many fields, there are scores, sometimes hundreds, of candidates for a single tenure-track position, and only scholars with established records of successful teaching and scholarship reach the interview stage. Still, many of the "low achievers" hired during the expansionary 1960s and 1970s are still occupying full-time tenured positions all across Canada, where they block the recruitment and/or proper remuneration of the much stronger scholars who are now available.<sup>24</sup>

Equally problematic is the fact that gaining tenure at many Canadian universities differs from the way it is gained at the best universities around the world, especially those in the United States. At most Canadian universities, a nearly airtight case has to be made for denying tenure: a candidate has to be shown to be very weak, if not totally incompetent, in teaching and/or research to be turned down for an "appointment without term." Accordingly, relatively few candidates are ever rejected; those who are invariably appeal.<sup>25</sup> This often results in years of litigation costing their universities (and faculty associations) tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees. At the best American universities, on the other hand, a very strong positive case has to be made for being granted tenure, and candidates are routinely turned down if they do not have an outstanding publication record.<sup>26</sup>

24 Though the past 20 years has seen a boon in the recruitment of outstanding academics, this gilded scholarly age may be short lived. The expected retirement of thousands of professors over the next 10 years may mean a quick return to '60s-style recruitment practices.

25 At the U of M, four people appealed the decision to deny them tenure during the 6-year period between 1991 and 1996. Since nearly all those who are turned down appeal their rejection and since dozens of faculty applied for tenure during the period, this means that tenure is generally given to all candidates.

26 Many of these people subsequently receive employment at less prestigious colleges or universities.

## Reforming the Current System: Policy Options

Recruiting, retaining, and rewarding top academic staff is one of the most critical problems facing higher education in Canada. The current compensation system views collective union rights as more important than individual academic performance, thereby discouraging the best minds from choosing a scholarly career. It also encourages many highly talented academics, particularly in engineering, management, and computer science, to switch to the private sector or flee to better jobs at more prestigious American universities. What follows are a series of reform suggestions that would help reverse the academic brain drain, on the one hand, and better reward scholarly performance, on the other. The central premise underlying these recommendations is that because university professors are semi-autonomous entrepreneurs who have much control over what, when, and how they teach and conduct research, and that because this freedom results in considerable variability in performance outcomes, then this should be reflected in individually-based reward packages.

### Restore central authority

Reporting on the increasing exodus to the United States of outstanding Canadian professors, Christine Tausig Ford, editor of *University Affairs*, the

newsletter of the *Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada*, recently opined:

So how can universities that want to recruit—and retain—top professors ... compete? The answer, according to some, may require a cultural shift on our campuses, from a system that treats all faculty members equally, to one that encourages the development of superstar professors. (Ford, p. 11)

A cultural shift to market competition and market discipline, two processes alien to the egalitarian orientation on most campuses, will not be easy. A transformation in the current equity culture will take place only if one or more of the following conditions is met:

1. The retirement of a good portion of the current middle-aged or older “progressives” and their replacement by new cohorts of less ideologically doctrinaire scholars<sup>27</sup>;
2. Severe financial exigency (which might force administrators and faculty to expunge their weakest programmes and lay off their weakest faculty)<sup>28</sup>; and

27 University professors, especially the thousands of Americans hired in the 1960s to teach the liberal arts, were generally more left-leaning than either the larger Canadian population or the students that they were hired to instruct. The newer generation of scholars seems to be different. First, more of them are Canadian-born and bred and there is anecdotal evidence that Canadian academics, as a group, are more conservative than their American-born peers. Second, younger scholars, even when exposed to heavy doses of socialist political and economic philosophy, have little career stake in maintaining the discredited theoretical orientation and world view in which their senior peers have invested a lifetime of research and teaching. Third, many young leftist scholars have experienced a paradigm shift after seeing their career aspirations blocked or delayed by faculty-union job monopolies.

28 Though crisis management has often worked in the private sector, it may not work at unionized universities whose convoluted and multi-layered layoff provisions are bound to favour the seniority rules contained in most, if not all, contracts. Since it is the senior generation that most needs replacement, using “first hired, last fired” provisions would merely exacerbate the current demographic crisis.

3. The revitalization of the authority of the central administrations and governing bodies of universities.

Since waiting for the old guard to retire will only bring Canadian universities back to a stage where they again will have to compete for the best minds with schools all over the United States and Western Europe, and since financial emergencies may cause more harm than good, the best alternative is for university governing bodies to re-exert their plenary powers. Former Manitoba Premier Duff Roblin's government-commissioned report on post-secondary education in the province took note of the problems of university internal governance at the U of M as follows:

Over the past thirty years, as William Sibley, former Vice-President of the University of Manitoba, observed in an address to the Canadian Association of University Business Officials in June 1993, we have moved from a situation where "... the powers of the Board of Governors and the President ... were real and operative in fact—not tenuous, disputable and marginalized as they are today." Evidence to support Dr. Sibley's view may be found in the progressive diffusion of decision-making power to faculties and departments. An unintended consequence is a reluctance to change and a reinforcement of the status quo. The principle of collegiality should not be extended beyond academic concerns lest it encroach upon operational decisions of an executive character... A way must be found to ensure that priorities of the university as a whole are not unreasonably influenced by particular interests. (Roblin, p. 64.)

Some faculty members would challenge the report's assertion that this "reluctance to change" is "unintended." They would also argue that decision-making has diffused at least as much laterally—from the office of the president of the university to the office of the president of the faculty association—as it has downward. More particularly, since at least the late 1960s UMFA, with strong direct assistance from CAUT, has succeeded in negotiating policies and procedures that have increasingly limited, if not marginalized, the university's managerial functions.<sup>29</sup> As elsewhere in Canada, this has produced what two university presidents, Bernard Shapiro and Harold Shapiro, call a governing model where senior administrators:

... have a lot of responsibility but no authority and ... faculty [have] ... a great deal of authority and no institutional responsibility. One potential difficulty with collegiality in an environment of substantial change, however, is that it can be biased in favour of the status quo—not to mention the status quo ante. It is much simpler, in human terms, to be supportive of the mission of each colleague rather than to take up the burden of responsive and responsible choice. The challenge will be to redefine our understandings and commitment so that, in empirical terms, collegiality and difficult choices are not mutually exclusive. (Shapiro and Shapiro, p. 22)

This challenge is indeed formidable because the type of "collegiality" that CAUT has promoted is so antithetical to making "difficult choices." This is partly because the gradual but sustained shift to collegial (i.e., bottom-up) decision-making has

<sup>29</sup> To be sure, UMFA and CAUT are mandated to protect the interests of their dues-paying members. Indeed, UMFA has done an exemplary job of ensuring that its members are treated more impartially than they were prior to unionization in 1974. But this gain has come at a heavy cost because treating professors fairly does not mean that they should be treated as if they were all the same, and the best interests of UMFA/CAUT often do not represent the best interests of the institutions in which their members are employed.

been as surreptitious (from the perspective of the external stakeholders of the university) as it has been deliberate (from the perspective of the lowest-level decision-making bodies such as teaching departments) and extra-legal (from the perspective of most university charters which stipulate that boards of governors or other plenary bodies—assemblies usually consisting of a majority of external appointees—have formal power over university governance). Nonetheless, if these governing bodies have the will and the necessary presidential leadership, the *de facto* powers they have recklessly surrendered—and are now being recklessly abused in the name of academic freedom and grass-roots autonomy—can be taken back.

### **Strengthen performance bonuses and other rewards**

Assuming that the “understandings and commitment” referred to by Shapiro and Shapiro can be redefined, what could strong senior administrations and supportive governing councils do to more fairly and competitively compensate university professors? To begin with, they could turn to the private sector to see how performance is rewarded there. Though they face a level of market risk that is nearly unheard of among universities,<sup>30</sup> entrepreneurial companies and universities share the same overall compensation problems. The former have most of their money tied up in the development of products or services, advertising, overhead, and so on; the latter are constrained by many collectively-based inflexible costs, especially contractually-fixed salary pack-

ages, that eat up so much of their budgets that they have little room to reward their best employees. The most dynamic and fastest-growing entrepreneurial companies try to address their remuneration problems by using performance-based compensation packages to reward key employees. In a recent study of the 100 fastest-growing Canadian companies, it was found that senior managers felt that salary should be about 65 to 75 percent of total compensation, with the remainder based on profit sharing, bonuses, commissions, and stock options (Roberts and Golden, p. C7). To be sure, universities are not entrepreneurial companies. But this does not mean that they cannot operate in a business-like fashion to attract and retain the best employees.<sup>31</sup>

These business models suggest that future union agreements will have to be reshaped to allow for large pools of discretionary funds to attract and retain the best academics at Canadian universities. Indeed the top American universities, unfettered by faculty unionization, have learned much from free enterprise and, consequently, try to lure the best talent using generous signing gratuities and/or high starting salaries, spousal hiring packages, housing assistance, decreased teaching and administrative loads, and start-up funds to set up labs.

Attracting star professors is one thing; keeping them is another. Performance bonuses may be the best way to do so. And the best way of distributing such bonuses is through rigorous, measurable, impartial, and transparent systems of evaluation (see below). Variable compensation

30 This does not mean that universities never go bankrupt: scores of small, private post-secondary institutions have closed in the United States in recent years. Except for a couple of private religious colleges, this has not occurred in Canada. Indeed, the history of Canadian universities has involved either the secularization of church-affiliated institutions or their absorption by or amalgamation with non-denominational universities. Since Canadian universities are publicly owned (though privately managed), downsizing by eliminating programs—a process that faculty associations have made sure rarely occurs—rather than closure has been the response to fiscal constraints.

31 Indeed, it can be argued that universities are entrepreneurial-like concerns composed of individual quasi-entrepreneurs (professors) who are in the “business” of producing, preserving, and distributing human knowledge.

based on performance should start at the top with the university's CEO. Although the achievements of many university presidents are now reviewed annually, this is largely window dressing because performance goals are generally self-selected (and hence self-serving) while remuneration levels are fixed for the entire contract period (usually six years). The agreements presidents sign with university governing bodies generally contain termination clauses but their terms are so generous that they result in little overall financial loss to the few presidents who have been forced out of office. Unlike the private sector, fired university presidents are not actually sent packing because even those who come from other institutions are granted automatic tenure in the department of their choice.

Whether university presidents take the lead or not with their own compensation packages, differential faculty performance could be rewarded in a number of ways. One model would be to institute a baseline salary of, say, \$50,000 per annum for all full-time academics. This baseline would be paid for "minimally adequate" teaching and research performance<sup>32</sup>. Since this amount is above the floor for brand-new faculty in many fields, this might even make the choice of a university career more attractive. New scholars would be reviewed annually and the baseline augmented by an annual non-cumulative performance bonus of between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Established scholars would be reviewed every five years or so with variable, non-cumulative performance bonuses paid out in equal annual instalments over the next five-year period. In addi-

tion to the \$50,000 baseline, outstanding performers might earn, say, \$250,000 paid out in \$50,000 instalments for five years. Individuals performing below the "minimally adequate" level would receive no bonus; instead, these professors would be scrutinized for one or two three-year periods (a very generous probationary opportunity compared to the private sector) and, if still found wanting, could be dismissed regardless of years of service.<sup>33</sup>

### **Institute rigorous performance reviews**

At the U of M, attempts by the central administration to introduce rigorous and measurable performance evaluations have not been well received by UMFA. After hard bargaining, all the union was willing to accede to was a new, largely symbolic and rhetoric-filled article on "Performance Evaluation" in which:

The University and Association agree that performance evaluations are primarily for formative purposes, intended to promote the continued professional development of Members in the course of their individual careers... Performance evaluations are not intended to supplant the rigorous evaluations that are carried out for the purposes of hiring, promotion, or tenure, or to erode the status and security that is created by such processes... The result of an evaluation will not be used to assign Members any quantitative rankings. (*Collective Agreement*, p. 121)

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32 Though the definition and measurement of "minimally adequate" might vary from school to school and academic discipline to academic discipline, it should be based on clear and measurable criteria.

33 Introducing such a scheme would be a daunting challenge because no unionized faculty associations, bodies whose leadership is often dominated by either poor performers or individuals philosophically committed to an egalitarian and hence uncompetitive salary scale, would easily accede to requests to radically reform hard-won salary schemes. Of course, they would not refer to their own poor records but would use the tired excuse of how problematic it is to assess performance to justify the status quo. CAUT has already done so by cautioning against the "misuse" of performance indicators (*CAUT Bulletin*, November 1997, pp. 6, 8).

The weakness and vagueness of this article is underscored by a “letter of understanding” attached to the contract creating a joint University-UMFA committee “to make recommendations with regard to the possible use of possible performance indicators [that] shall be considered a matter for collective bargaining” for the next collective agreement.

The relation—or rather lack thereof—between compensation, assessment, and performance at the U of M was not lost on the University of Manitoba Students’ Union, whose president’s thoughtful 1996 report, *Path to Excellence*, pointed out that:

Due to many years of negotiations with the Faculty Association, the University has collectively bargained itself into the undesirable position of rewarding seniority—and not merit—with the incremental salary scale. A professor does not necessarily “get better” with years of service. In fact, an argument could be made for the opposite view. Regardless of the number of years of service, professional compensation should have some relationship with performance. In order to reward the institution’s best performers, a review of teaching, research, and community service must dictate professional remuneration. This change would provide a strong incentive for professors to perform even if they have been fully promoted and tenured. (Gratzer, p. 10)

Differentially rewarding individual performance presupposes its careful evaluation. The annual performance reviews currently conducted by many universities are self-administered sketches of teaching and research accomplishments. Filled out in a perfunctory manner, they are rarely used—despite their name—to evaluate and reward or punish performance. In the Faculty of Arts at the U of M, an “Annual Activity Report” cannot be sent to anyone higher in the administration than the head or director of an individu-

al’s teaching-research unit. Who made this decision? The tenured and unionized professors in the Faculty. What was their rationale? A concern that the contents of the reports might be “misused” by the administration (read: that the reports might actually be used to evaluate and reward or punish performance). In short, current reviews are a smoke-and-mirror exercise meant to give an illusion of accountability where none actually exists.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive model for rewarding the performance of university professors. But whatever model is put in place—and there are many to choose from (for example, see Clifton and Rubenstein, 1998; and Rubenstein and Clifton, 1998)—should be *valid* (it should actually measure what it is supposed to measure), *comprehensive* (assessing all relevant teaching and research variables), *itemized* (e.g., it should clearly and deliberately differentiate between teaching and research performance, on the one hand, and the nature and standards of teaching and research in different disciplines, on the other), *impartial* (conducted by disinterested assessors, not department heads and colleagues), and *rigorous* (based on well-recognized national and international standards). To be sure, measuring and assessing teaching ability (using student and peer assessments) and scholarly productivity (using the number and length of publications; reputation of the journals or presses where publication takes place; size of research grants; number of journal citations; etc.) are difficult and time consuming. But these problems are not insurmountable, especially if it is accepted that the quality of scholarship is far more important than the quantity of material produced. What those who oppose performance indices choose to forget is that university professors are experts in assessing performance because they spend their entire working lives evaluating and ranking students, appraising the work of other scholars, reviewing grant applications, and sitting in judgement of

their colleagues on tenure and promotion committees.

### Individualize contracts

As Tuinman *et al.* make clear, academic work is unlike almost any other type of salaried employment:

By and large, faculty decide what kind of research they want to do and when and where it will be done; whether to publish the result or not; what conferences to attend to discuss their scholarly contributions; what they will do during their sabbatical year, where they will spend it, and so forth. For half the work for which he or she receives a salary, the faculty member makes all the decisions, with an absolute minimum of supervision. The other half of most faculty members' work year is devoted to teaching. Here too, faculty have a surprising amount of choice. Experienced faculty usually can choose what they teach, when they teach it, and to whom they teach it. They can select classrooms in which they teach, thus defining the size of the class; they decide on how they teach. From time to time, they can cancel classes or ask someone else to cover these, when other duties must prevail in their judgment. Faculty serve on many committees—few if any assigned. And when they choose not to attend the meetings of these committees, that is their business too... [A]cademic work allows personal choice to employees beyond any degree available to all but the formally self-employed. (The self employed when they choose not to work, are not paid, of course. Here the faculty members have the advantage). (pp. 11-12)

With all the advantages of self-employment and none of the financial and other risks, it is questionable whether the traditional British industrial labour contract is an appropriate model for faculty union contracts. Equally questionable is

whether a group of “knowledge workers” with so much autonomy and so many rights that are counterbalanced by so few personal constraints and so little individual accountability, would ever complain about their working conditions or contractual obligations. And who would they complain to? Certainly not to their faculty associations. In short, it is up to the central administrations and the governing bodies of universities to form a stronger link with other institutions (their best model would be CAUT itself), on the one hand, and to bargain harder with their employees than they have in the past, on the other, to ensure that the interests of higher education take precedence over the interests of the faculty association. One way to do so is by formally acknowledging the individualism inherent in the academic enterprise and which is entrenched in the blatant imbalance favouring employee rights over management rights in faculty union contracts. Since professors act as if they were private-sector entrepreneurs (but without the attendant risks), this should be reflected in the nature of the contracts they strike with their universities. This is the point made by Tuinman *et al.* when they argue that:

... when the nature of work to be performed is not so well-defined [as it is in factory work], when recognition of different levels of performance is explicitly recognized as is generally the case in academia, but not necessarily in academic collective agreements and when work to a considerable degree is indeed self-assigned, the relationship between workload and systems for (or levels of) remuneration needs to be dealt with as two sides of one coin. (p. 14)

This would require agreements that clearly differentiate among individuals, rewarding or punishing them for their individualism. Tuinman *et al.* “... envision that agreements of the future will be centred more than they are now around individual or group contracts, built very likely upon base employment agreements... Agreements which on



the one hand provide some base stability and which on the other hand will place a premium on drive, imagination and marketing skills, will evolve naturally” (p. 16).

### **Remunerate teaching and research separately**

University teaching and research should be seen for what the higher education literature and the great universities in the United States and Europe have long known they are: two nearly independent activities. Large research universities can afford to have a few score of great scholars who choose to devote nearly all their time and energy to world-class research.

These institutions should also be able to accept the presence of great teachers who spend nearly all their time and energy moulding the intellects of undergraduate students. Of course, those who choose to teach full-time to the exclusion of doing research, whether they teach in an exemplary fashion or not, would have their course loads adjusted accordingly. Currently at the U of M, the few professors who have been honourable enough to formally admit that they do no research are given an additional three-credit-hour course to teach, a “punishment” equivalent to 20 percent of their entire teaching load. This represents a gross imbalance to, perhaps even a denigration of, scholarly work which, in a large research-oriented institution like the U of M, generally is considered to be more important than teaching: no one inside or outside the ivory tower believes that university professors are paid \$100,000 a year simply to teach between six and nine hours a week for two 13-week academic sessions. In particular, those who teach to the exclusion of scholarly inquiry should have their teaching loads doubled or suffer at least a 50 percent loss in salary. Likewise, distinguished teachers should be rewarded with monetary increments or other bonuses since offering them less teaching would be a contradiction in terms.

Various combinations of teaching and research should also be permitted, if not encouraged. Given the large number of professors—conservatively 20 to 30 percent of the entire faculty—who do little or no scholarly work, the separate evaluation and remuneration of teaching and research might even save the U of M several millions of dollars annually, monies that could be reallocated to attract, retain, and reward outstanding researchers.

### **Replace tenure with renewable contracts**

In a provocative critique of higher education in the United States, Charles Sykes claims that:

Tenure corrupts, enervates, and dulls higher education. It is, moreover, the academic culture’s ultimate control mechanism to weed out the idiosyncratic, the creative, the nonconformist. The replacement of lifetime tenure with fixed-term renewable contracts would, at one stroke, restore accountability, while potentially freeing the vast untapped energies of the academy that have been locked in the petrified grip of a tenured professoriate. (p. 258)

Several commentators, both inside and outside of academe, have called for the abolition of lifelong tenure on these and other grounds and its replacement with performance-based contracts (see Anderson; Bercuson, *et al*, 1984, 1987; Emberley; Sowell, 1993; and Sykes). They argue that:

1. It is too easy to gain a lifelong appointment at too many institutions;
2. Guaranteed jobs are an open invitation to unlimited self-indulgence;
3. Tenure encourages arcane or trivial research;

4. It is nearly impossible to remove poor performers<sup>34</sup> which means that wrong tenure decisions lock an institution into an intellectually destructive 30 to 40 year contract;
5. In the rare event that a university actually dismisses a tenured professor for cause, it can cost the institution years of arbitration and tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees;
6. Academic freedom, the tirelessly repeated justification for tenure, may be protected in other ways (e.g., by strict academic freedom codes);
7. The tax-paying public increasingly—and rightly—views state-supported tenure as a spurious form of lifelong job security;
8. Tenure is a lop-sided arrangement that forces universities to retain a given person in a given position for life, but allows that person to leave at any time for any reason to take up a position elsewhere;
9. Renewable union contracts have made tenure redundant;
10. Tenure creates an invidious distinction between the haves and have-nots: highly paid, older professors with continuous appointments versus the growing number of younger scholars who must be content with a series of low-paid, eight-month appointments;
11. Tenure stifles creativity by selecting for risk-averse individuals attracted to academe by the security of lifetime employment;
12. Turning a tenure candidate down is a virtual academic death sentence thereby rendering compassion, not performance, as the determining factor in many tenure decisions; and
13. A negative tenure decision can mean the loss of the “budget line” represented by the applicant, an eventuality that encourages committees to downplay the obvious weaknesses of candidates.

Two types of non-tenured employment contracts are already in place at all universities. The first is the “probationary appointment,” a “tenure-stream” appointment of three or more years leading to tenure consideration. Since such appointments always end with a tenure hearing, and since the rare negative tenure decision nearly always leads to dismissal, and since this almost always leads to years of costly litigation, probationary appointments have themselves become quasi-tenure positions. University administrators have reacted to the inflexibility this creates during these times of financial constraint by limiting more and more new appointments to the second type of contract, the eight-month sessional appointment. Those who fill these positions, usually bright, young academics eager for a university career, have less job security than most employees in the private sector. If they hope to obtain a tenure-stream appointment, they must teach well and publish at a high rate. Indeed, many of these young scholars in their late-20s or early-30s already have better publication records and higher teaching ratings than some full professors in their 60s while earning one-third or less of the latter’s salary. The exploitation of sessional lecturers, on the one hand, and the excesses of tenure, on the other, could be addressed by converting most or all faculty positions into individualized performance-based contracts.<sup>35</sup> The institution of tenure need not be completely abolished. It could be limited to truly exceptional

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34 “Persistent neglect of duty, incompetence or gross misconduct,” the normal grounds for dismissal, are so ambiguous that they are nearly impossible to prove except in the most egregious of cases.

scholars, the intellectual elite, to dissuade them from taking positions at other institutions or in the private sector.<sup>36</sup>

### Make sabbaticals competitive

Whether they have earned them or not, year-long sabbaticals at up to 80 percent salary are almost automatically granted to Canadian university professors every seven years. Restricting such leaves to the top 50 percent of annual candidates, a very modest reduction given the highly competitive nature of the research enterprise,<sup>37</sup> would:

1. Raise their stature within the academy;
2. Increase morale among successful applicants;
3. Encourage under-performers to work harder to earn a much coveted leave;
4. Permit universities to function with a smaller faculty complement with no loss of teaching personnel and with little effect on high calibre scholarship; and

5. Answer the often well-founded public criticism that sabbaticals are nothing more than paid holidays. At the U of M, limiting sabbaticals to the top half of annual candidates would save the institution about \$2.5 million every year, a sum that could be allocated to attracting outstanding new scholars and better rewarding existing top performers.

An alternative model would be to open sabbaticals to unrestricted competition by awarding them to the best candidates whenever they apply. For example, super-scholars could compete for them on an annual basis if they were conducting groundbreaking research requiring their full-time attention. There is much precedence for this model because all the world's great universities have scores of scholars who are engaged in full-time research to the exclusion of other activities. Of course, redefining sabbaticals in this way might mean that some faculty would be entirely locked out of the leave process. Since Christmas, mid-term, and summer breaks mean that university professors currently teach for only six months out of every 12, this would not represent an unreasonable hardship for the average academic.

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35 Bercuson *et al*, 1996, p. 147, argue, for example, that: "Instead of tenured jobs without term, what might be more productive for the health of the university system are renewable contracts running for five to seven years, with genuine annual reporting and monitoring of research accomplished and of the quality of teaching.... At the end of a prescribed period, the faculty member would be assessed and a decision made on renewal."

36 Emberley makes a series of parallel recommendations when he argues that: "Under the power of faculty associations, tenure has become job security for a portion of the faculty who neither engage in scholarship nor teach responsibly... [Tenure] should also be subject to periodic review... and if the finding is that no further major work of scholarship [since the initial granting of tenure] has been produced, recourse should be taken in revoking tenure. In the case of those who, despite a want of scholarship, have maintained excellence in teaching, the alternative of renewable contracts should be implemented... The likely effects of these changes is that far fewer faculty will be tenured (as few as one-third) [and] institutions will have the flexibility to undertake serious renewal... The fallout of these changes will not be attractive for those who have taken tenure as a privilege that would never be assailed, or the faculty associations who have protected their weakest members by acting on the belief that equity means sameness" (pp. 259-260).

37 Eighty percent or more of research grant applications are routinely turned down by Canada's national granting agencies, while the top scholarly journals generally turn down 90 percent of the papers sent to them for publication consideration.

## Conclusion

Many commentators both inside and outside of academe have pointed out that Canadian universities are in serious trouble. Declining pedagogical standards and expectations, stultifying speech and behaviour codes, one sexual harassment and “chilly climate” case after another, shrinking budgets and bloated payrolls, threats to university autonomy from government and big business, incompetent professors protected by the security of lifetime tenure, the brain drain of early to mid-career academic stars, the exploitation of sessional lecturers, faculty union militancy, inept university governance, and many other ills are all cracking the foundation of the ivory tower (see Anderson; Bercuson, *et al*, 1996; Emberley; Sowell, 1993; and Sykes).

Many of these problems are interrelated. The lifetime tenure held by several thousand deadwood professors, for example, means that highly qualified young academics must either be content with a series of low-paid eight-month appointments or seek their fortunes in American universities or outside of academe. Likewise, asking university presidents to be tough-minded is asking them to do almost the impossible. Besieged by governments, simultaneously courted and condemned by the private corporate sector, tormented by powerful faculty associations, and paralysed by dysfunctional and self-serving bottom-up decision-making regimens, Canada’s academic CEOs have been reduced to bean counters, ceremonial leaders, fundraisers, and glad-handers.

Given these difficulties, is there any hope of reforming the way Canada’s university professors are rewarded? An oft-mentioned solution to the myriad of problems associated with variable

post-tenure performance is one that has already been discussed here, namely the replacement of tenure with renewable contracts. But this might only work for new job applicants because legal, political, and other constraints might make it too difficult to terminate long-standing agreements with current tenured faculty. The problem, then, is how to enhance the performance of existing tenured professors, especially scholars whose research productivity is unacceptably low, while attracting and competitively rewarding star performers within the context of the extant dysfunctional, albeit collegial, decision-making model. One last-chance solution—if efforts at internal reform fail—would be for the various provincial governments to amend the legislative acts governing their home universities to prohibit tenure and unionization (while still protecting academic freedom and other necessary features of the scholarly enterprise). They could also move to privatize certain institutions and/or allow new low-cost independent providers to grant accredited degrees and diplomas. The threat of such actions alone might be sufficient to force recalcitrant faculty unions and timorous administrations to enact the kinds of reforms suggested here: the more forceful application of existing executive powers; the strengthening of performance bonuses and other rewards; the institution of rigorous performance reviews; the individualization of employment and performance contracts; the separate remuneration of teaching and research; the gradual replacement of tenure with renewable contracts; and the competitive awarding of sabbaticals. Taken together, these policies would do much to give Canadians the kinds of universities they both need and deserve.

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