

EDUCATION

"The editors of this book are to be congratulated for this excellent contribution. In a time of growing international competition among universities, this book can guide countries and higher education institutions all over the world in thinking strategically about the salaries and incentives offered to the academic profession."

—Jamil Salmi, Tertiary Education Coordinator, The World Bank

"This book has given us the most thorough account to date of how the professoriate is being paid in major countries of the world. The rich data and detailed analysis yield significant insights about the realities of the academic profession globally, and should be of great interest and value to both scholars and policy makers."

—Nian Cai Liu, Director, Center for World-Class Universities and Dean, Graduate School of Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University

How are professors paid? Can the "best and brightest" be attracted to the academic profession? With universities facing international competition, which countries compensate their academics best, and which ones lag behind? *Paying the Professoriate* examines these questions and provides key insights into and recommendations for the current state of the academic profession worldwide.

Paying the Professoriate is the first comparative analysis of global faculty salaries, remuneration, and terms of employment. Offering an in-depth international comparison of academic salaries in 28 countries across public, private, research, and nonresearch universities, chapter authors shed light on the conditions and expectations that shape the modern academic profession. The top researchers on the academic profession worldwide analyze common themes, trends, and the impact of these matters on academic quality and research productivity. In a world where higher education capacity is a key driver of national innovation and prosperity, and nations seek to fast-track their economic growth through expansion of higher education systems, policy makers and administrators increasingly seek answers about what actions they should be taking. *Paying the Professoriate* provides a much needed resource, illuminating the key issues and offering recommendations.

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Altbach, Reisberg, Yudkevich,
Androushchak, and Pacheco

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A Global Comparison of Compensation and Contracts

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MEXICAN FACULTY SALARIES TODAY

Once a Bagger, Always a Beggar?

Alma Maldonado-Maldonado

Mexican higher education may currently possess one of the most complex and stratified salary systems in the world. Since the first merit-pay and peer-review programs were established, in the mid-1980s, and especially from the early 1990s, no single faculty in the country earns the base salary established in his or her contract. Most faculty receive additional income—thanks to the existence of different merit-pay and peer-review programs at the institutional, state, or national level. Yet, these programs have created some collateral damage for the Mexican higher education system. Understanding this multifaceted context, this chapter faces several challenges in order to provide an accurate overview and analysis of salaries, remuneration, and contracts in Mexico.

Overview of the System

During recent decades, Mexican higher education has become larger, more diversified, and complex. According to the Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública), the main source of all the national education information in 2009, the country had a total of 2,809 higher education institutions—905 public and 1,904 private (Ministry of Education 2010). The same year, 3,107,713 students were enrolled—3.4 percent in technical education programs (two-year programs), 89.1 percent in undergraduate programs (four years, or more), and about 7.5 percent in graduate education (master's degrees and PhDs). In terms of faculty members, the total number in 2009 was 300,251. The majority of faculty are hired on an hourly basis—86.7 percent at private institutions and 54.9 percent at public institutions. Full-time faculty at private institutions represent only 7.7 percent of the total, but at public institutions they represent 36.7 percent.

Among higher education institutions, the private ones have grown rapidly. In the past 13 years, 1,243 new private higher education institutions and 512 new public institutions were created, with a combined system growth rate of about 81 percent (Ministry of Education 2010). However, the distribution of enrollment between public and private higher education, in the same period, was 68 percent at public institutions and 32 percent at privates. So the largest number of students continues to attend public institutions in Mexico. The number of faculty members at private institutions increased by 116 percent, almost the same expansion as student enrollment. Faculty at public institutions grew by only 44 percent, about 20 percent less than the student-enrollment growth rate, implying an increased student/faculty ratio at public institutions.

From 2000 to 2003, 23.3 faculty positions were created nationally per day (Grediaga et al. 2004). This increase is indicative of the intensity of higher education development in Mexico. Naturally, this accelerated growth has created other issues related to improvisation, lack of experience, and professionalization (Gil-Antón 2002). Additionally, faculty are becoming older. According to two national surveys conducted in 1992 and 2007, the overall mean age of Mexican faculty increased by approximately nine years (Galaz-Fontes et al. 2009, 201). These situations have affected the salary situation of Mexican faculty.

Mexican Academic Salaries

There are at least eight subsystems in Mexican higher education institutions: public universities, private institutions, technological institutes (four-year institutions), polytechnic universities, technological universities (two-year institutions), teacher-training colleges (public and private), intercultural universities, and other public institutions (i.e., military schools). Indeed, the diversity and stratification of the Mexican higher education impacts faculty in terms of their salary, workload, benefits, types of contracts, and prestige. In addition to having a very stratified academic system, an extreme division exists between full-time and part-time faculty, with the latter having less stability, lower salaries, fewer benefits, and worse working conditions (Rontero López 2002, 216–17).

Analyzing faculty salaries within Mexico is difficult enough and not easily compared to salaries in other countries (Rumbley, Pacheco, and Altbach 2008). A major problem has involved obtaining information from private institutions. Information for this study was solicited from 50 institutions belonging to the most important association of private higher education institutions—Federation of Mexican Private Higher Education Institutions (Federación de Instituciones Mexicanas Particulares de Educación Superior); only 15 institutions answered, under the promise of anonymity. This custom created another layer of challenge when trying to make comparisons among private institutions as well as between the public and private sectors. One conclusion, though, is the immense range of salaries. The lowest monthly base salary in public institutions is US\$356, while

Table 21.1 Average salaries in public and private universities (US\$)

Types of institution	Public institutions				Private institutions
	Universities and research centers	Polytechnic universities	Technological institutes	Inter-cultural universities	
No. of institutions	47	17	14	5	15
Faculty categories	Salaries (US\$)	Salaries (US\$)	Salaries (US\$)	Salaries (US\$)	Salaries (US\$)
Level 1 (top)	1,582	1,425	1,355	1,777	2,057
Level 2	1,399	1,306	1,258	1,716	2,218
Level 3	1,241	1,003	1,016	1,528	1,557
Level 4	1,112		923	1,537	1,152
Level 5	968		816	1,384	987
Level 6	887		740	1,225	

Source: Constructed by author, based on the salaries collected for this project. In the cases of polytechnic universities and private institutions, only three and five levels were possible to fulfill.

the highest is US\$2,313—a difference of US\$1,961. For private universities, the disparities are even larger—with the lowest salary at US\$391 and the highest at US\$4,008, a gap of US\$3,617.

Another challenge is generalizing about private and public higher education institutions. Actually, public institutions include only 47 public universities and research centers, even though data on other types of institutions were also collected (see Table 21.1). Data included from private institutions reflect only those that replied on time.

All faculty at public universities and research centers participate in some type of merit pay/peer review programs. A major difference exists between the base salary and the “real salary,” which includes the money received from these programs. So, the salaries included in the general tables do not reflect the total earnings received by faculty at these institutions. A salary that starts at US\$356 monthly, which is also the current salary of a McDonald’s or Wal-Mart employee or a lower-level secretary, is not actually the final salary received by a full-time faculty member. To calculate the real salary, anywhere from 15 percent to 75 percent additional wages would need to be added to the base salary—resulting from the merit-pay and peer-review programs. It is still shocking how low faculty-base salaries are at public institutions. However, the highest salary is US\$2,313, although it does not form the “actual salary”—because faculty members earning this amount receive much more. Still, a base salary of US\$2,313 is an adequate salary in Mexico, similar to what the district manager of a bank or a high-level accountant or administrator earns.

The main difference between public and private university salaries is that most private salaries presented in Table 21.1 are “actual salaries.” Few private

universities have special bonuses that would result in a drastic modification in these tables. Also, of all the private universities listed in 2009 (about 1,900 institutions), a large percentage of them are not able to hire full-time faculty. From the universities that responded to the survey, at least three institutions do not hire full-time faculty. These 15 institutions could be classified in four tiers; the first includes two prestigious national universities and one regional. The second tier numbers three regional universities with important prestige (although not at the top). The third tier contains one national demand-absorbing university and two regional demand-absorbing ones (one in and one outside the Mexico City metropolitan area). At the final tier, there are two lower-prestige universities located in Mexico City and three outside the city. Salaries from the first two groups increase the average for all private institutions. The lowest salary is US\$385 monthly, close to the lowest at public institutions, but the highest is reported as US\$4,008, which corresponds to the salary earned by a general manager of a national or international firm or even by a chief executive officer. The remaining question is: how many full-time faculty members were reported with access to the top salaries? The percentage is likely to be limited.

Finding information about public institutions is also problematic, despite the intention of laws demanding more transparency; there are several public universities that come up short on this obligation. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions based on available numbers, especially in the case of intercultural universities, because the only five institutions that submitted information presented the highest salaries among these modalities.

Another basic problem is that polytechnic universities and intercultural universities do not have merit-pay or peer-review programs; so, most of the base salaries must be perceived as “actual salaries.” Actually, technological institutions, which constitute the third-largest subsystem of higher education institutions in Mexico, present the lowest salaries in comparison to the other institution types. However, they do have merit pay/peer review programs, so this may be why they report lower-basic salaries than the other two.

Merit Pay/Peer Review Programs

Each institution defines its salary policies in general; however, state regulations involve “budget assignment and minimum wage,” which affect both private and public institutions (Rondero López 2002, 211). Whenever an increase to the minimum wage is under way, which is normally a very small amount, the rest of the salaries in the country receive a corresponding increase.

As mentioned, most Mexican faculty members who participated in these merit-pay and peer-review programs received at least 50 percent of additional salary from them (federal or institutional) (Ibarrola 2005; Ordorika 2004; Galaz-Fontes, De la Cruz Santana, and Garcia 2009). The most prestigious of these programs is the National System of Researchers (Sistema Nacional de Investigadores). It was

created in 1984 in response to the terrible economic situation of faculty and to mediate the brain drain, resulting from faculty going abroad or leaving public institutions for private ones. Within this program the productivity of scholars is evaluated periodically, and faculty receive an extra salary monthly.

One of the problems with the National System of Researchers is that only 4.7 percent of all Mexican faculty and 19 percent of full-time faculty belong to it. Among the system’s scholars, only 7.9 percent belong to the highest-ranking level, making it the smallest group of members.

Describing the other merit-pay programs is a quite difficult task, given the diversity of programs; however, most of these programs follow the National System of Research mechanisms. The difference among merit-pay programs affects the level of sophistication in the evaluation of every single activity. Some programs may take into account mostly publications, among them the international ones; whereas others may consider further activities, such as administrative activities or teaching performances.

Many experts have studied the impact of merit-pay and peer-review programs in Mexico. Most of them agree concerning the negative impact of these programs, including that faculty do not consider retirement as a possibility, since they depend on external- or internal-merit-pay programs, which are not part of retirement income (Díaz Barriga 1997; Padilla González 2010; Pallán Figueroa 1994; Gil-Antón 2002).

Benefits

A faculty member in Mexico is hired into one of two categories. First, one can be hired as a wage earner or employee, which allows workers to obtain all the labor rights established in the Mexican Constitution. These labor rights cover social security, participation in a public federal mortgage credit system, participation in the public retirement fund program, eligibility for a Christmas bonus (at least 15 days of paid leave, called *aguinaldo*), vacations, and a respective bonus of 25 percent yearly. The second option is to be hired through “professional services,” which is a type of private contract, similar to what is used when outsourcing services. Under this modality, institutions do not need to provide the labor rights because they are not retaining any tax (the individual has to pay them separately to the state). All faculty at public institutions are hired as wage earners, as well as at most private institutions. Of the 15 private universities that shared salary information for this study, only two report hiring full-time faculty through professional services.

Most faculty members at public institutions receive the benefits established by law, and differences in salary actually relate to the type of public institution. At public institutions, additional benefits are offered—such as coupons for pantry staples, a special bonus for Teacher’s Day, help for child care, and funeral expenses. Professors also have the right to obtain a sabbatical semester or year (depending on seniority). The more prestigious the institution is, the better the benefits. For instance, faculty members can receive private health insurance, given the bad

conditions of the public system; may have the support of research assistants; have a more flexible workload and less teaching; receive more days for the Christmas bonus (40 days); get more days of vacation bonus; and, in a research center, have the right to obtain 8,100 pesos (US\$616) to buy books. A spacious, private office is also often a benefit of working at a research center.

Faculty members at the 13 private universities (of the 15 that answered the questions sent) that hire under the wage-earner system do receive the benefits prescribed by law. As with public institutions, the range of benefits is quite diverse and varied. The size and prestige of an institution matter a lot, with most demand-absorbing universities offering only those benefits required by law. Private institutions participating in this study offer a wide variety of benefits that include receiving two hard-cider bottles and a frozen turkey at Christmas; a celebratory breakfast for Teacher's Day; assistance with funeral services; life insurance; private health insurance; a marriage bonus (for a first marriage); a sabbatical semester (similar terms of the public institutions); or housing help. Benefits at private institutions are as stratified as the institutions themselves.

A more important characteristic, however, is that private institutions do not serve plans similar to the merit-pay/peer-review programs that exist at public institutions, and only five private institutions reported having something similar. One institution uses a point system in which faculty progress annually. Two institutions utilize an evaluation system that is more like faculty classification, and salaries depend on the position where someone is categorized. Among the remaining two institutions, one has a merit-pay system, but it only applies to hourly faculty, and the other has a similar system (more like a productivity system) that offers only a further, exceedingly small addition to the monthly salary. Only one of these institutions reported the percentage of full-time faculty who participate in these programs, which involves only 6.8 percent. This proportion is definitely lower than the average for public institutions. It is significant to mention that faculty at private institutions are able to participate in the National System of Researchers. However, family members' corresponding extra earnings are not provided directly from public funds but from their private universities, which have established that agreement with the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT). Still, these faculty receive the extra salary and the recognition as members of the National System of Researchers.

Faculty Contracts

The main differences among types of contracts include a professor's rank and type of institutions. In most autonomous public universities, faculty contracts are tied to the individual's rank, and every time a faculty member is promoted to another rank, a new contract is signed. The academic career system in Mexico constitutes a complex progression of ranks. Institutions may have six, seven, eight, or more levels, and normally it is not possible to skip levels in the progression through the ranks.

Another serious element to consider, regarding faculty contracts, is tenure (*definitividad*). The tenure system in Mexico has its own particularities. In Mexican tenure, seniority tends to carry more weight than other criteria—such as, demonstrating abilities and improvements in research and teaching or evaluating of the overall academic production and achievements during a particular period of time. Another diversity of tenure systems in other countries is that, in Mexico, *definitividad* is not exclusive to full-time professors at public institutions. An hourly professor may achieve *definitividad* in a single course, which means this faculty member has the right to teach it as long as it is offered at the institution. Part-time faculty are also able to compete to obtain tenure. Finally, with few exceptions, nothing like tenure is available for the majority of faculty who work at the private sector in Mexico.

The diversity among Mexican higher education institutions creates a misconception about faculty contracts and their legal terms. Private higher education institutions may form a homogeneous sector, since most of them do not use any tenure system, and many private universities exercise nine-month contracts to avoid any commitment to their faculty in terms of labor rights.

Conclusion

Among other urgent challenges for Mexican higher education institutions is access for the expanding college-age population in the country. The second issue is to modify and transform evaluation mechanisms to improve the system instead of serving as additional salary providers. The government needs to create more institutional equity, given the tremendous institutional stratification, and to establish programs that not only distribute benefits among the already privileged. Furthermore, a more precise and efficient coordination is needed among institutions and subsystems, with more attention paid to the role of cross-border higher education and the role Mexican higher education plays in current internationalization processes (Maldonado-Maldonado 2006).

The most urgent challenge related to higher education faculty constitutes improving salaries and working conditions, gender equity, decreasing faculty dependence on the merit-pay and peer-review programs for total earnings, and establishing a dignified retirement process. Indeed, the dramatic reduction of Mexican faculty salaries has been documented by many scholars (Díaz Barriga 1997; Gil-Antón 1994; Ibarrola 1992; Ordorika 2004). Faculty salaries at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, one of the most representative universities in the country, were reduced in real terms by about 70 percent from 1976 to 1991 (Ordorika 2004). A slight recovery occurred from 1991 to 2003, with an increase of 6.2 percent, but the loss in purchasing power of these professionals over four decades has been stunning. It has also been estimated that, in 1987, income for full-time faculty reached the lowest point; in real terms (constant pesos), it was 35.4 percent of what they earned in 1981 in the same category, and 33.9 percent

for the lowest categories. In 1991, salaries had recovered to only 46 percent of their value from 1981 (Ibarrola 1992).

To understand the current salary situation requires acknowledging the crisis of the past. Peaceful demonstrations drew public attention to the depth of the crisis nearly two decades ago. In one case, a group of National Autonomous University of Mexico professors, not children or teens, waited on a curb for a red traffic light to stop cars in front of them. A group of photographers also waited. When the cars stopped, the adults began cleaning windshields and accepted coins from the drivers, while the photographers snapped pictures. In a separate demonstration adults bagged groceries at a supermarket. In Mexico, children often do this in exchange for coins. Some of the adult baggers wore signs hanging from their necks; there were cameras flashing around this group, too. These two demonstrations took place in 1993 as part of a series of protests organized by National Autonomous University of Mexico professors. These events were staged to demonstrate just how low their salaries were. Protests over the working conditions and salaries of faculty were common during that period, but some professors found more dramatic ways to make their case to a broader public by conveying that even cleaning car windows or bagging groceries would yield supplemental income, in relation to their low salaries.

It is stimulating that, since 1993, faculty at public institutions have not organized additional protests against salary conditions. This is partly explained by the impact of merit-pay and peer-review programs in Mexico. In the case of private institutions, protests are rare, while they do have concerns about salaries or working conditions. However, the basic problems remain unresolved for faculty in both public and private sectors, and questions remain as to what extent the merit-pay and peer-review programs solved the salary problem and how sustainable the system will be for the long term. Faculty at public institutions have progressed from the need to bag groceries at supermarkets to collecting points for their *curricula vitae* to obtain extra salary, but there must be a better way to establish more dignified working conditions and salary. Publish or perish—plus getting an administrative position or performing activities valued by the merit-pay and peer-review programs—seem to be the current mechanism for survival. Meanwhile, expecting base salaries to be increased seems just a dream, at least for now.

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