Western Washington University

Professional Staff Compensation Survey, Analysis and Recommendations
Salary Survey Methodology

Background

The Human Resources Planning Group (HRPG) was selected by Western Washington University (Western) to conduct a salary survey for its professional staff. The survey’s purpose is to provide leadership with baseline data and analysis from which strategies can be developed to address the competitiveness of employee salaries and supporting salary administration practices. This information may be used in conjunction with other components of Western’s Professional Staff Compensation Program, including internal alignment (including inversion and compression), merit, experience, recruitment issues, and retention concerns for consideration of a salary budget and individual salary adjustments for professional staff employees. The period of this study runs from April-June 2015.

Approach

The timing and extent of this survey required that data be collected from a number of reliable sources, existing surveys and participants that the consultant has previously used with other public sector and college and university clients including several state university employers who have historically provided salary data to Western. Additional data was provided by the consultant from a database of recently completed surveys from specific public sector employers and other related (public sector) data sources.

The key was to be sure that reasonable job matches could be made from the data and that its effective date was within a six month period dating from June 2015. Western’s interest was to utilize relevant data, however obtained, to determine the competitiveness of their professional staff salaries. It is acknowledged that the development of this salary survey is an ongoing process and that this effort was the beginning of that process.

Organizing for Success:

1. Identify and select labor market(s) segments and survey participants.
   - Key Considerations:
     - Where does the University go to attract quality candidates?
     - Where do employees go who leave Western for job-related reasons?
     - What is the scope of work that Western is involved in and how is Western organized to accomplish that work?

2. Select common payroll titles (benchmarks) to be surveyed. Establish:
   - Clear relationship to job titles of survey participants; and
   - A description that is easy to understand and match to.

Selection of Payroll Titles (Benchmarks)

Ninety-six market points, representing 72 professional staff payroll titles, were identified for surveying (benchmarks).
A decision was made by Human Resources that all payroll titles be surveyed in order to obtain a broader based picture of the labor market for all professional staff positions. Comparisons or job matches were made between a participant’s or survey’s job title and Western’s payroll title, as well as short job descriptions (“descriptors”) for each payroll title. In some cases, more detailed job descriptions were available and utilized.

All data was carefully reviewed by the consultant and in many cases, particularly at the start of the survey, by Western’s Human Resources team. When there was uncertainty in a job match, the consultant made a personal contact with the participant or data source administrator in order to clarify specific job titles, duties and responsibilities to identify a match.

**Selection of Market Segments, Survey Participants and Other Sources**

Determining the competitiveness of employee salaries requires a consistent analysis of the labor markets in which the employer competes to recruit and retain talent. Competitors can be grouped in general industry segments, called market segments, in order to better analyze competitive positions in specific markets and make more informed comparisons to specific employers within those markets.

The establishment and consensus approval of “comparators” is important to ensure that the most relevant market segments and/or specific employers are selected for surveying; to establish credibility for the data and subsequent analysis; and to take specific action(s) to implement survey results.

Working with Western’s HR team, five separate, but related, markets were identified for surveying and analysis. These markets were chosen for one or more of the following reasons:

- Employers having employees performing like or similar work to that performed by Western’s employees;
- A relevant and diverse blend of public sector employers and other survey sources; and
- The most relevant employers, labor markets, location and payroll titles to be surveyed.

Participants (employers) were selected based on these factors:

- Availability of data;
- Ability to allocate and be relevant to a selected market segment;
- Determination that the participant would have jobs that could be reasonably matched up with Western’s payroll titles;
- Location in Western’s market area; and
- Competitive factor in Western’s recruitment and retention experience.

Other sources used were selected based on:

- Timeframe when data was collected (within last 6 months);
- Types of jobs, and amount and relevance of data;
- The consultant’s experience using the data; and
- The data’s ability to be accurately matched to Western’s jobs and salaries.
Market Segments

State Public Universities
This market includes some of the state’s public colleges and universities:

- Central Washington University;
- Eastern Washington University; and
- The Evergreen State College.

These public schools are all affected by the state’s higher education budget and process and offer very similar academic programs. Their own financial and administrative rules and regulations are also quite similar which makes the jobs and work performed by employees similar to each other and to Western. This aids job matches and salary comparisons.

State Community and Technical Colleges
This market includes some of the state’s community and technical colleges:

- Bellevue College
- Bellingham Technical College
- Edmonds Community College
- Everett Community College
- Olympic College
- Skagit Valley Community College
- Tacoma Community College
- Whatcom Community College

These community and technical colleges have generally smaller enrollments but offer academic programs and individual courses that are very similar to the state’s larger public colleges and universities and many of them provide access to the 4-year schools’ programs and courses on their campuses. They also work within similar financial and administrative constraints and regulations to the state’s larger public colleges and universities. The work, jobs and job responsibilities are also similar to the state’s larger public colleges and universities. Indeed, entry and middle level jobs in these schools tend to be very much alike. However, higher-level management jobs usually do not match up well due to a larger scope of work.

Washington Public Sector
This market includes employers of city/county and port jurisdictions:

- City of Everett
- City of Mount Vernon
- Port of Seattle
- Port of Tacoma
- Snohomish County
- Whatcom County
While this market does not perform academic-based work, their work matches up well in all the other classification categories. While the pay levels and regulations in this market vary from that of other public sector employers, the benefit plans are nearly identical making them a good comparator from a total rewards standpoint. They also have similar influences on pay from their bargaining units.

**State of Washington**

This market is made up of over sixty individual agencies (employers) that are responsible for a very broad and diverse set of responsibilities. The work and type of positions employed are quite similar to that of Western. Like budget processes, financial regulations, compensation and classification constraints and overall work scope make it a strong fit for job comparisons. Additionally, the work they do covers the entire state with concentration in the markets and location that Western is influenced by.

**College and University Personnel Administration**

The College and University Personnel Administration Survey (CUPA) is used by many colleges and universities to determine what pay levels and salary ranges should be allocated to specific management and non-management jobs. The survey administrators provide data breakouts by school size, number of students, total operating budget, location and type of school. It is a useful tool in that it has rigor in its job matching, is conducted annually, has a broad range (location and school type) of colleges/universities it reports on, and offers a certain level of analysis and support to participants. However, not all payroll titles used by Western are surveyed.

**Milliman 2014 Administrative and Technical Survey**

Milliman’s salary surveys are a premier source for compensation, salary, and benefits data. Consultants work with an advisory board when structuring each survey, collecting and processing the returned data, and compiling the results—ensuring that you have access to the most accurate and timely data. They conduct comprehensive surveys of compensation and benefits—and make the results available so we can see how Western compares. The survey consultant has many years of experience and exceptional contacts in the use of Milliman surveys.
**Survey Information Collected**

Base salary data was collected from participants. Bonuses, stipends and other cash and non-cash awards were excluded to assure that all salary comparisons could be made on a consistent basis. Due to the number of benchmarks (payroll titles) surveyed, simple averages were used to determine percentage differences in salary, thereby eliminating the bias of larger employers contributing much larger amounts of data (reported salaries).

Additionally, the data **do not include** the state legislature-approved general wage adjustment that was effective July 1, 2015 or other related wage adjustments approved by the legislature. The general wage adjustment affects employers and market segments that come under the state’s personnel laws and guidelines, including Western.