

## A&M releases data on faculty

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Texas A&M faculty members pull their weight financially, but some departments and professors are operating "in the red," according to a controversial new measurement created by the A&M System.

It takes what a faculty member generates by teaching -- tuition paid by students and formula funding by the state based on weighted semester credit hours -- and subtracts from that the faculty member's salary and estimated cost of benefits.

It doesn't take research dollars generated into account, as *The Eagle* reported earlier this month based on how officials described the document. However, they appear in an adjacent column.

The measure comes amid a budget crunch when the public's desire for more accountability in higher education has intensified, Frank Ashley, the A&M System's vice chancellor of academic affairs and the person put in charge of this effort, said earlier this month.

The document -- released following an open-records request filed by *The Eagle* -- is called crude and simplistic by critics, who say it doesn't factor for service or time spent outside the classroom such as grading papers or preparing for lectures. They say it represents a push to treat higher education institutions more like businesses.

"The measure shows that some of our best, most prestigious faculty come out in the red," said Antonio Cepeda-Benito, dean of faculties. "Those are the people that other universities would pay money to take away from us. They're in high demand."

A statement released by the A&M System Tuesday afternoon said the measure won't be used against faculty.

Several faculty members, including Peter Hugill, the head of the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors, are skeptical.

"Once a country has a weapon, does it not use it?" said Hugill, who, because he teaches many students, was \$304,000 in the black. "Once you have a measurement technique, are you going to not use it? In the end, somebody's going to use it. The temptation to apply it, especially in a recessionary economy, is going to be too high."

### A defense of higher education

Faculty and deans approached the document from a different angle than Chancellor Mike McKinney, the head of the 11-university A&M System. He highlighted that it shows the system's universities, taken as a whole, are in fact efficient.

"The reports show that the faculty at each university generate revenue in excess of their payroll costs," wrote McKinney in a memo to the Board of Regents, dated Monday, that accompanied the document. Regents requested the measure.

"University literally means totality," McKinney continued. "Our faculties work together, some teaching many undergraduates, some teaching fewer graduate students and some providing new knowledge through research. Together we provide the universe of undergraduate, graduate and professional education."

In fact, at the College Station campus, the document shows that faculty members brought in nearly

\$75 million more than the \$315 million spent on their salaries and benefits. In addition, they generated an additional \$226 million through research.

"Even though we're only measuring one part of what faculty do," said Joseph Newton, dean of the College of Science, "we're, even by this simple measure, pulling our weight."

On Tuesday, as the campus community scoured through the data, several people identified major flaws, such as faculty members not being listed and wrong salary and research dollar information. An A&M System statement said the column on externally funded research continues to be refined, so the report is not yet complete.

The information was culled from various reports that are already reported to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. It is for the 2009 fiscal year, which began September 2008.

### The idea's origins

Critics such as Hugill and others view the measure as originating from the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative Austin think tank whose board has several major financial donors to Gov. Rick Perry, including A&M regent Phil Adams, a Bryan businessman.

"I think this is all in the spirit of what we proposed," said Bill Peacock, the vice president for research of the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

"We believe that this type of transparency is needed to help parents and taxpayers evaluate the work being done at Texas universities. This kind of effort is especially important in light of the pending \$12 [billion] to \$18 billion shortfall the Legislature will be facing the next session."

The group had proposed seven "solutions" to higher education reform, ideas that the A&M System Board of Regents and Perry have publicly embraced. Most famously, the group's idea to give instructors awards of between \$2,500 and \$10,000 based on anonymous student evaluations was implemented at the College Station campus in fall 2008 and eventually all the other A&M campuses.

The foundation advocates for limited government, and, for higher education, more faculty accountability measures.

One of the group's solutions called for improving "the quality of teaching by providing legislators and governing boards with a simple tool to measure faculty teaching performance." The reform called for dividing the teacher's employment cost by the number of students taught, "and force rank from highest cost per student taught to lowest cost per student taught."

The A&M System's new measurement has a column that includes exactly such a measure.

Hugill, a geography professor, did so well under the measure because he taught 561 students that year in large classes. He generated more than twice his salary in just student tuition dollars.

"If they want to use this model, pay us according to what we bring in," Hugill said. "It's stupid, frankly, but it would be one way to do it. These clowns -- and you've got to call them clowns -- they want the market to work and then they won't let it work."

### Campus reaction

Several deans will tell you that they haven't been able to find a faculty member or campus administrator who believes the measurement is a wise idea.

At a Faculty Senate meeting last week after several faculty members raised concerns about the measurement, Interim Provost Karan Watson said, "We have a System and the leadership there often surprises us with new things they have decided to be particularly valuable, even in spite of the fact that we may have told them we don't really see the value in what you're doing."

Jerry Strawser, dean of the Mays Business School and convener of the Council of Deans, said faculty members generally teach what their department heads tell them to teach that semester, sometimes big classes, other times not.

"According to this measure, it's going to look like one's doing a lot, and the other's not, and that's just totally and completely misleading, because they're doing what they've been asked to do," Strawser said.

"It's like judging a manufacturing process by how many units they produce. Not anything else. Not whether the customers buy the units. Not whether the units have defects in them. It just says, 'Here's how many units we've produced.'"

Jorge Vanegas, dean of the College of Architecture, said the metric naturally favors faculty who teach more, but that's flawed because Texas A&M is a research university. He's a rarity: Even as an administrator, he's in the black because he teaches a class with roughly 240 students.

"When numbers are taken out of their full context and they feed into misconceptions or explicit lack of recognition of what the full spectrum of academia should be, it causes a demoralizing effect on faculty," Vanegas said. "And the good faculty are going to pay the price the most."

Texas A&M Regent Gene Stallings, who was not aware of the specifics of the project, said the best person to talk to would be Morris Foster, the board's chairman. Foster declined an interview request, as he did for a story two weeks ago about the same topic.

"I would doubt very seriously that anyone would be hired or fired based on this information," Stallings said. "It sounds like Frank [Ashley] is trying to gather as much information as he can so he can tell the Legislature what we do with our money. Why would that be a threat to anyone?"

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