

The Washington Times

MURCHISON: Big business in big universities

School bosses' salaries escalate but student achievement doesn't follow suit

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If Americans have heard one yarn about the salaries, incentive packages and lifestyles of top business executives, they've likely heard 1,000. There's always room, of course, for another. Except this one comes from an unlikely source: the Chronicle of Higher Education.

The Chronicle recently released a survey of the compensation packages available at 185 public universities. At the top we find [Ohio State University\(/topics/ohio-state-university/\)](#) President [E. Gordon Gee\(/topics/e-gordon-gee/\)](#), whose employers judge him to be worth \$1.3 million a year. One can only hope he is.

Who's No. 2? University of Texas Chancellor [Francisco G. Cigarroa\(/topics/francisco-g-cigarroa/\)](#) at a princely \$750,000. (It seems princely to most taxpayers, I expect.)

In place No. 3 we find the president of the University of Texas at Austin, [William C. Powers Jr.\(/topics/william-c-powers-jr/\)](#), who receives \$746,738. You've always heard about us rich Texans.

Other compensation packages in the top 10 range from \$728,504 to \$633,631. The talented and able recipients of these salaries might do better on Wall Street, but academia isn't Wall Street - a point often lost on toilers in the academic factories called modern universities.

Universities are big business now. However, they didn't start that way.

The university's classic mission is the formation of minds and character. A state's public university was always deemed especially responsible to the taxpayers who kept its doors open and its faculty paid. It wasn't a business; it was a public service.

One didn't enter public service with the aim of getting rich. A president or chancellor might live in a special house owned by the university, but the idea of a bonus (bonus for what - increasing law school admissions?) or a deferred compensation package was foreign to the whole enterprise. Monetary incentives were the cold-tipped tools of Wall Street.

Speaking of Wall Street, an odd aspect to the reports about university compensation packages is what could be called the outrage deficit. With tuitions soaring, wouldn't one expect more indignation from the paying public? Or has someone sold us on high administrative pay as one of modern life's necessities?

If so, things really get odd here. One finds that in the corporate model, as applied to academia, incentives don't always match outcomes.

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