

## It's a bit less tough at the top

According to an annual survey of executive compensation, the president of Boston's Suffolk University was paid \$2.8 million (£1.89 million) last year, while the presidents of Northwestern University and Columbia University made \$1.7 million and \$1.4 million respectively.

Tuition fees are rising, hiring is being frozen, and cuts are deepening in core areas of US universities. Yet the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* survey found that pay and benefits for senior managers increased 7.6 per cent from 2007 to 2008, averaging \$427,000 for presidents of public research universities. Fourteen earned more than \$700,000 in total compensation. And 59, nearly a third of those surveyed, earned more than \$500,000.

"The study shows that the executive suite seems insulated from budget crunches," Charles Grassley said in a statement. As the ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, Mr Grassley has been conducting hearings on the millions of dollars in unreported payments made by the pharmaceutical industry to researchers. The hearings are devastating the reputation of academic medicine.

Will Mr Grassley turn his attention to higher education? "In these hard economic times, apparently belt-tightening is for families and students, not university presidents," he said.

Amy Gutman, president of the University of Pennsylvania, is one of a number of executives who have decided to return some of the money. According to *The New York Times*, Professor Gutman, whose salary has risen 40 per cent, said the day after the *Chronicle*

released its survey that she would donate \$100,000 to her university's fund for undergraduate research. Mark S. Wrighton, chancellor of Washington University in St Louis,

announced that he would cut his base salary of \$560,000 by 5 per cent from 1 January. The second-highest-paid president at a public university, Mark Emmert of the University of Washington, said he would decline to take a pay rise this year. Professor Emmert is paid \$900,000 a year and receives \$340,000 in fees for service on corporate boards. The presidents of the University of Connecticut, Rutgers University and the University of Louisville returned raises or bonuses when they have not refused them outright.

These unusual measures suggest that university presidents are better at public relations than their counterparts in the insurance, banking and automobile industries. "The problem isn't so much that college presidents can afford a Lexus," writes Marc Bousquet, an associate professor of cultural studies at Santa Clara University. "It's that they expect everyone else to work for free." Relatively free, he means, when compared with the adjunct teachers who do more and more of the teaching.

How much money do university presidents deserve? The reigning managerial ideology teaches them to compare their pay packages with peers elsewhere. A revived union movement would force them to establish relations of fairness within their own universities. Collective bargaining on US campuses has been relatively successful; non-academic staff and faculty unions have set broad standards for healthcare coverage, wage differentials and pensions. If the Obama Administration meets expectations and reverses the National Labor Relations Board's 2004 decision to disallow graduate students and teaching assistants from forming unions, then the pressure from below should increase.

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