

Faculty Merit Raises

Regents Give Professors Brighter Salary Picture

LAST fall the public suddenly became aware of a situation that had been haunting University administrators for years. The University of Oklahoma was being drained of its most promising and most renowned faculty members.

The world's authority on John Milton, Kester Svendsen, resigned from O. U.'s English staff. Stephan Borhegyi, dynamic director of Stovall museum, had better offers elsewhere—and accepted one. Dozens of young men, who were on the way toward attaining the eminence of these scholars, could no longer wait for the salary crisis to improve.

To hold these persons O. U. could not afford to lose nor to replace, the Board of Regents hit upon the merit raise policy. The first of these annual salary-morale boosts came in September when more than \$257,000 was doled out to a large percentage of faculty members.

All this was made possible by a \$4 million increase which brought the legislature's appropriation for state universities and colleges to \$27 million. O.U.'s share of \$5,925,477 for the Norman campus is an increase of \$825,584 over 1958-1959's \$5,099,893. Faculty salaries was the University's No. 1 problem and it is into this category that a good portion of the increase is going.

A few of the raises amounted to as much as 35%, the others averaging 8.35%. Many faculty members received more than they expected; others felt their share could have been a bit more, and several were disappointed at not making the list this year. In

general, however, the professors can find little argument against the merit policy in theory.

The difficulty, as seen by both those receiving and those awarding the raises, is in defining "merit." The deans, the Budget Council (a faculty-administration group) and the administration proper could only evaluate "merit" by teaching records, research, articles and books published, standing in the field—an extremely nebulous thing at best.

WHO can really judge the effectiveness, the value of a classroom teacher? Those who concentrate on this area alone may never achieve research recognition or be lauded for their articles—but in the long run their contribution to the University and education generally may be of more value than countless laboratory triumphs.

It is in this area that faculty members could be overlooked. The only test of their "merit" is in the students they turn out, and the effects may be years in the coming—too late for this year's merit raise.

But with all these objections—and they are not being voiced very loudly at this point—the Regents seem to have chosen the best method for correcting a bad situation.

The raises bring the range of salaries (from \$7,500 to \$14,000 for full professors) into line with other Big Eight schools. But the average salary at each faculty level—instructor to full professor—at \$7,000 is still below that of neighboring states.

The weak end of the scale is the lack of

a sufficient number of men at the top salary level. It simply takes more money for more highly paid employees. With three professors now drawing \$14,000, the University's "respectable" salary range is far from Big Ten schools, such as Illinois, paying its professors from \$10,500 to \$20,000.

In spite of what individual faculty members may feel at this particular moment, the value in these raises is not in the immediate increase in take-home pay. The important fact, which may be overlooked, is that now the faculty can see definite prospects for improvement in their situation.

THE real loss to the university is in the bright young men and women who get their academic feet wet at the University of Oklahoma, begin to show the promise of future greatness, then give the fruits of this promise to better financed universities or moneyed positions in private industry.

The sad part of this picture is that many of the 200 who left the faculty in the past 9 years would rather remain professors—and more than that, University of Oklahoma professors.

The Regents anticipate concentration on annual merit raises as the form for future pay hikes. Last July a basic 5%, across-the-board increase was added to faculty salaries and a few small merit raises approved to bring the long-neglected base salary into line. But from here on there will be less emphasis on cost-of-living raises and more attention to rewarding those who deserve the rewards.