This agenda item covers one motion that was received at the MLA office this year by the 1 October deadline stipulated in Delegate Assembly bylaw 7. The motion presented below may be discussed and voted on by the assembly this year.

**MOTION 2020-1**

*Proposer of record:* Pamela Lothspeich

*Background information:* Information proved by the proposer is available in the Delegate Assembly’s document area on the MLA Web site.

I propose that MLA investigate the availability of data on staffing in Asian and Middle Eastern language and literature programs in the United States and Canada, and report back to the Council and the Delegate Assembly on any findings with respect to inequities in terms of gender, ethnicity/race, rank, pay, and full-time/part-time labor. Some data, like salaries at public universities, may already be publicly available. Certain data may also be readily available from professional organizations such as the Association for Asian Studies, Middle East Studies Association, American Association for Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies Association, American Institute of Indian Studies, and American Association of Teachers of Arabic.

**Action:** ____________________________________________
MOTION 2020-1: Supporting materials from the proposer

Supporting materials

Recognizing the significance of Asia and the Middle East, and encouraged by strong enrollments in courses related to these regions, many universities are eager to build Asian and Middle Eastern programs, including by teaching major Asian and Middle Eastern languages. Despite an emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion at many universities, many existing programs seem to replicate the same racial and gender hierarchies and power structures that were consolidated in our imperialist past, in ways that impact fixed-term and tenure-track faculty differently.

The fixed-term faculty who teach Asian and Middle Eastern languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish are, like other contingent faculty, undervalued and underpaid in academia. However, there may be other gender- and ethnicity/race-based inequities affecting these faculty—ones that cannot be explained simply by perceived market forces (supply and demand) in the academic job market. Even within Asian and Middle Eastern programs themselves, there may be disparities. In particular language programs where women and especially women of color predominate and teach in greater numbers than in other language programs—for example, there are often more women in East Asian programs than in Middle Eastern and South Asian ones—the faculty, as a group, may be receiving lower salaries, more part-time contracts, and more unfavorable working conditions generally, then in other language programs. At the same time, women and especially women of color, as individuals, are likely facing significant inequities vis-à-vis their male colleagues, regardless of their particular language program.

With respect to tenure-track faculty, problematically, many Asian and Middle-East programs have a faculty profile in which half or more of professors at all ranks are white, even though tenure-track searches often yield pools in which there are disproportionately many more candidates of Asian and Middle Eastern heritage.

While such inequities are a huge problem across the board in academia, they may be especially pronounced in Asian and Middle Eastern programs. In many such programs, the highest paid and highest ranking, as a group, are white men (on the tenure-track) and the lowest paid and lowest ranking, as a group, are Asian women (on the fixed-term track). At first glance, median salaries of different cohorts may seem equitable, yet there is also scope for the “outlier
phenomenon,” whereby a few privileged individuals, often white men, receive much higher salaries and greater professional opportunities than everyone else at the same rank. Also, other racial and ethnic groups are vastly underrepresented in these programs, as virtually everywhere in academia, yet because of the relatively high numbers of faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern heritage overall in these programs, there may be greater institutional complacency to address inequities in Asian and Middle Eastern programs than in other programs.


See especially Karen Booth’s comments on p. 2 (highlighted).
Assistant professor Yoah Eisenkraft authored a report, presented at the COSOW meeting in March, on the gender pay equity at the University and found that men on the UNC faculty earned 28 percent more than women in 2017. The gap is at its highest in the medical school and lowest in the school of nursing. He concluded that the gender pay gap is an ongoing problem and that most gender pay inequity can be explained by historical, occupational and selection-promotion biases.

Becker said that in the meeting, Strauss talked about how the university addressed this issue several years ago but it has risen in conversation again. She said Strauss was interested in discussing the topic further.

He had already spoken with Lynn Willford, assistant provost for Institutional Research and Assessment, about undertaking a new analysis of the current status of the gender pay gap on campus.

Becker said Willford also showed interest in tackling the present challenges with the gender pay gap. Those present at the meeting said women tend to be in lower paying disciplines, but they believe the University can make an effort to undo those kinds of inequities.

The committee said it is important to keep the issue on people’s minds, especially department leaders. Because chairpeople have the power to determine individual raises within their departments, any mandate for reducing gender salary inequity in the annual raise process would need to be communicated to them.

One of the committee’s primary goals earlier in the year was to initiate a task force that would work to recognize, research, explain and repair the gender inequity in pay -- presented as the four “Rs.” Among other recommendations to address the gap, COSOW calls the administration and faculty members to recognize that there is a gender pay gap among faculty at the University.

Among other goals, the task force hopes to develop a strategic plan to form and implement policies to improve conditions for women at the University. For the review and repair process, they recommend all departments undergo a detailed review of their compensation criteria and philosophy.

Those at the meeting said research should continue with collaboration from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. Continuing the conversation is key to furthering action towards closing the gender pay gap, meeting attendees said.

‘Even if we get a task force, people have to recognize that there is a legitimate problem before we can do anything,’ Sarah Brinen, assistant professor in health policy and management, said.

Karen Booth, a professor in the department of women’s and gender studies, said that linguistics, Asian studies and women’s and gender studies are consistently the lowest paid departments — and they happen to be the departments with the most female employees, as well.

“The calculations of individual salaries is one thing, but there’s another level,” Booth said. “In women’s and gender studies we’re almost all women, so you can’t compare a man’s salary and a woman’s salary, but we do know that departments that are primarily women are paid less.”

The committee’s next steps will be to meet with other administrators to get an update on what strides have been made to resolve this issue.

“This is a great opportunity for UNC to be a real leader in erasing some of these institutional problems around salary inequity,” Becker said.

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