# Salary Equity: A Case Study Joan McConkey, Susan Anthes, Ellen Robertson, and Barbara Bintliff 


#### Abstract

Salary equity has been a major employment issue in academia for the last decade. This case study describes a successful library salary equity campaign in the context of a general salary equity program for all women and minority faculty at a state university. Establishing a method for determining gender-based salary inequities proved to be more complex for librarians than for the general faculty. Finally, a male counterpart study similar to the method used for the teaching faculty was developed. The six-year effort involved several committees, turnover among administrators, and, eventually, a higher level of awareness of and attention to women and minority issues at the university.



alary equity, also referred to as pay equity, has been called the "employment issue of the 1980s. ${ }^{\prime 1}$ Yet as Janice Kirkland points out, "a curious observer perusing Library Literature for the past five years for evidence of active and visible pay equity campaigns in academic libraries would find limited information. ${ }^{12}$ This case study is an attempt to add to the discussion of pay equity for academic librarians. At the University of Colorado (CU), the process of developing and implementing a salary equity review for women and minority library faculty members spanned most of the 1980 s and did not result in an evaluation of salaries or salary adjustments until 1991.

Like most universities, CU has long been dominated in its faculty and administrative ranks by white males. Recently $C U$ has begun to recognize the importance of a more diverse faculty, and has taken action to improve recruitment and retention of women and minority faculty members. But, like most universities, CU has had mixed success.

One of the biggest problems facing the university in its efforts to enhance faculty diversity has been its salary scale. Salaries are set at the department level and the salary-setting process has been variously described as uncoordinated, arbitrary, and discriminatory. Historically, faculty compensation has been below comparable institutions. CU also suffers from the widespread problem of salary compression. This situation occurs when, because of market pressures, new faculty members are brought in at a salary level equal to or greater than other faculty members who are senior in length of service, rank, and sometimes, even reputation.

In the early 1980 s, following several years of informal discussion among faculty groups and the university administration, a universitywide committee was appointed to examine the salary system as applied to women and minority faculty. After extensive deliberations, the committee proposed that a salary equity review using a counterpart method be undertaken in order to investigate the
relationships between the salaries of women and minority faculty and those of white males. Salary equity is a broad term used to describe the concept of alleviating discrimination in salary. Salary equity requires fair and equitable compensation for work performed. The salary equity movement is based on two principles: salary discrimination by gender is illegal, and equal access to jobs and equal pay for equal work are fundamental rights of all citizens. Salary equity recognizes that issues of merit, seniority, and quality and quantity of work produced must enter into salary determination and will account for a degree of difference in compensation.

Several women library faculty members were involved in the development of the university's salary equity review process from the beginning. While it seemed incongruous to some that there would be gender-based salary inequities in a predominately female occupation, the librarians successfully insisted that library faculty salaries be reviewed with those of other faculty members. Their insistence was based on experiences at CU and on the growing literature documenting salary disparities throughout the library field. For example, Jean Ray and Angela Rubin report that the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Annual Salary Survey from 1976-77 to 1983-84 found that in academic libraries "women constituted a majority at almost every level (except administrative positions) and earned less in every category." ${ }^{3}$ There was a small decline in women's relative economic condition through the seven years of the survey.

CU's inclusion of librarians in its salary equity review was not the first attempt by a university to review and correct salary disparities of librarians. As early as 1971, the University of California, Berkeley Libraries carried out a comparable worth study. Comparable worth is one method used to rectify salarybased employment discrimination. ${ }^{4}$ Some academic libraries, including Temple University's in 1978, have worked to correct salary inequities through union negotiations and/or class action sex discrimina-
tion suits. ${ }^{5}$ However, accounts of these efforts have been sketchy.

## HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

CU is a four-campus system, with its central administration located in Boulder, Colorado. The Boulder Campus (UCB) is considered the flagship of the university; it is a major research university, maintaining membership in the Association of American Universities (AAU). It is also the largest campus in terms of student and faculty size and physical space. The other campuses are located in Denver (UCD) and Colorado Springs (UCCS). These campuses are primarily undergraduate institutions. A separate Health Sciences Center (HSC) is also located in Denver.

The administration of the CU system is headed by a president, who is assisted by several vice-presidents, associate and assistant vice-presidents, and directors of universitywide programs. Each campus is headed by a chancellor and one or more vice chancellors. Each campus is responsible for the administration of its library system. The Boulder campus has a main library called Norlin Library and five branch libraries, which are collectively referred to as the University Libraries. Also, there is an administratively autonomous law library. Faculty governance includes a universitywide faculty council and campus faculty assemblies. All have standing committees on women and on minority affairs.

In the 1982-83 academic year, the University Faculty Council Committee on Women began to discuss the issue of salary equity for women. The Boulder Faculty Assembly Committee on Women was asked to join in these discussions. Both committees felt that the statistical studies (regression analyses) done annually by the university administration to monitor salaries did not accurately reflect the gender and minority bias perceived in the salary schedule. The regression analyses identified only the most extreme cases of salary inequity.

The joint committee looked at salary comparisons between CU and similar universities. The results showed lower
salaries for women and men at CU, but women and minority faculty members were further behind than the white males. The joint committee began to negotiate with the then president of the university to find a way to correct the perceived injustices.

In 1984, the joint committee proposed a counterpart study, following a model used by the University of Georgia. The president had refused to consider a statistical model, but agreed to negotiate a counterpart model after the committee consulted a lawyer about a class action suit. Negotiations were delayed when the president resigned to accept the presidency of another university. In 1985, the new president agreed to accept the committee's proposed model.

The president had refused to consider a statistical model, but agreed to negotiate a counterpart model after the committee consulted a lawyer about a class action suit.

The agreed-upon version of the salary equity review counterpart procedure, as set out in a December 1985 letter from the president, included several important provisions. Only full-time tenured and tenure-track women and minority faculty were included. The part-time and nonregular instructional faculty were to be reviewed in a separate process. As of the end of November, 1992, that process had not begun. The president noted that the counterpart approach had limited value for library faculty and nursing faculty because of the lack of suitable male counterparts. He asked that separate procedures be developed and submitted to the appropriate campus administrative officers for these faculties.

Several issues related to salary equity were specifically excluded from the review process. Salary compression was not to be considered. The procedures could not address the issue of the low pay for faculty at CU in comparison to other universities across the country, nor could the issue of comparable worth be
considered. The review was to be confined to gender- and minority-based inequities.

## PROCEDURES

The procedures specified that women and minority faculty members (subjects) were to choose up to three white male counterparts, from their own departments, if at all possible. Department chairs were required to obtain and to make available to the subjects the curriculum vitae, teaching evaluations, and any other relevant materials of every faculty member in their department. The counterparts had to be mutually agreed upon by the subject and department chair. A Boulder campus committee of eighteen members appointed by the administration reviewed each case individually, comparing the subject and the counterparts to determine if any gender- or minority-based inequity in salary existed. An ombudsperson was appointed to oversee the process and handle complaints, grievances, and problems. While there were some difficulties, the process for classroom faculty was finished in less than a year, and settlements were received by about half of the subjects in 1986. The process for library faculty did not go so smoothly.

The directors of the three campus libraries asked their elected faculty personnel committees to appoint three representatives each to a universitywide committee. The committee was charged with developing procedures, to be sent to the president's office, for a salary equity review for library faculty. The librarians at the Health Sciences Library were excluded from the study because they were state personnel system employees and not faculty. The universitywide committee first met in February 1986.

The Library Salary Equity Committee's members looked at several different ways to define the extent of salary inequity. The committee also explored ways to review librarians' salaries, including: (1) comparing CUlibrarians' salaries to the salaries of librarians at universities in their respective comparison groups; (2) comparing CU librarians' salaries to the salaries of state
personnel system librarians whose automatic step system was theoretically less vulnerable to gender discrimination; (3) comparing CU librarians' salaries with those of the paraprofessionals on their staffs; and (4) comparing the average salaries of CU librarians and teaching faculty on their respective campuses. While each comparison pointed out problems within the salary structure, none was specifically gender- or minority-based. Therefore, these comparisons were not acceptable to the university administration.

The committee then pursued several other options. A study of CU's public salary and appointment figures clearly showed a high number of male library administrators with correspondingly higher salaries. Various salary formulas were considered but found not to include the merit component mandated by the university administration. CU academic departments with strong service components were also considered for comparison, but differences in terminal degrees, length of appointment, and responsibilities made reasonable comparisons difficult.

## OUTCOMES

The committee soon realized that salary inequity conditions varied from campus to campus and that no single procedure would serve to address inequities in all three libraries. The joint committee disbanded, but members continued to work on procedures for their campuses. The Denver and Colorado Springs campuses developed procedures that were implemented after receiving administrative approval.

In 1987, the UCD library developed a model in which a review committee compared the salaries of the library faculty to the salaries of the teaching faculty. Final salary adjustments were negotiated with the UCD chancellor and approximately $\$ 30,000$ was distributed to ten female library faculty members. Just after the UCD settlement, the librarians at UCCS developed a procedure by which they compared their salaries to their standard comparison group. According to this comparison, the librari-
ans were underpaid by 15.6 percent. Corresponding salary adjustments were approved by the UCCS chancellor and over $\$ 24,000$ was distributed to seven female librarians.

Concurrently, the Boulder Campus Library Salary Equity Committee sought to develop a procedure that would be acceptable to the librarians and the Boulder campus administration. The committee worked with the university's vice-president for human resources, who was able to provide information and feedback but had no authority to approve a plan. Several proposals were considered, including (1) across-theboard equity adjustments for men and women because of the unequal appointment period (eleven months for librarians versus nine months for classroom faculty) and unequal working conditions, and (2) comparison of average salaries at peer institutions. Neither of these proposals satisfied the campus administration. Finally, at the request of the administration, the committee agreed to review the feasibility of using a counterpart procedure. Since there was only one male in a nonsupervisory position at the time, the committee concluded that a counterpart study was still not feasible.

In late 1987, after these proposals were rejected, the vice-chancellor for academic affairs met with the Boulder committee for the first time. His stated reasons for not accepting any of the proposals included the concern that they were not gender- or minority-based and that, in reality, they were based on the principle of comparable worth. The vicechancellor asked that the associate director of the University Libraries be involved in future meetings. The committee found this problematic because department administrators were specifically excluded from the process by the president's original memo. The associate director did attend one meeting, but was also unable to provide a plan acceptable to the vicechancellor. At the request of the vicechancellor, the matter was turned over to the University Libraries' elected Faculty Personnel Committee (FPC). It was now spring 1988.

After reviewing the work of the previous committees, and consulting again with the vice-president for human resources, the FPC decided to approach the salary equity matter by comparing the University of Colorado with its AAU and ARL comparison groups. This study was done in terms of such factors as size of collection, size of professional staff, size of nonprofessional staff, and student body size. This comparison showed that the libraries with equivalent collection size and student body population had significantly larger professional and nonprofessional staffs.

Using this information, the FPC prepared a draft proposal recommending that librarians' salaries should at least meet the ARL average. The rationale for this suggestion was that the UCB librarians were offering the same services and performing the same duties as librarians at better staffed and better supported university libraries. Therefore, the salaries of the UCB librarians should at least be equal to the average salaries at peer institutions.

The committee did not pursue this proposal. As a result, the salary equity issue for the Boulder campus libraries was dormant until the spring of 1989, when it was revived with the creation of a new pay equity committee. The fact that the issue was revived and actually completed was due to a series of administrative turnovers and political events involving women and minority faculty on the Boulder campus.

## THE HARMONIC CONVERGENCE

With the hiring of new administrators, and the high level of awareness of women and minority issues at the university, the Boulder campus libraries salary equity review finally got off the ground in 1989 and was completed in 1991. During the period from 1985 to 1990, there was an unusual turnover among those administrators who had either the responsibility for, or an effect on, the salary equity review process. During this time period, new or reconfirmed occupants were seen in the positions of university president $(1985,1991)$
and vice-president for human resources (1988), and Boulder campus positions of chancellor $(1986,1989)$ and vice-chancellor for academic affairs $(1986,1990)$, University Libraries director (dean) (1988) and Law Library director (1989), and deans of the law school (1988) and arts and sciences (1989). For various reasons, all the new administrators were willing to institute, or reinstitute, discussions of salary equity for librarians.

National searches for the chancellor, vice-chancellor for academic affairs, and dean of arts and sciences resulted in the appointment of the same white male administrators who had been filling the positions on a temporary basis. This move generated heavy criticism from university constituencies and the press. The chancellor and vice-chancellor made public pledges to further the goals of hiring and retaining women and minority faculty on the Boulder campus.

Furthermore, women and minority issues were in the fore of the university's collective consciousness during this period. Minority students and faculty publicly complained of an inhospitable atmosphere on the campus. Even before his arrival in 1985, the new president was under fire for a possibly sexist remark regarding his wife. In 1988, the law school refused an appointment to a former justice of the Colorado Supreme Court, saying that she was not qualified. Between 1989 and 1990, at least four women faculty members from several campuses filed sex discrimination claims with the U.S. Office of Federal Contract Compliance against the university. Controversy also swirled around the 1990 resignation of the high-est-ranking female administrator on the Boulder campus.

In December 1988, when the associate vice-president for human resources resigned, one of her last official acts was to send a memo to Boulder's vice-chancellor for academic affairs stating that the salary equity review for librarians had not yet been completed. In the memo, she also reminded him that he was responsible for seeing that it was done. The vice-chancellor notified the new director of the University Libraries that the
process should be investigated. The director, who generally supported the concept, appointed a new salary equity committee.

The new committee was chaired by a female assistant director and included a member of the former three-campus committee, a member of the Faculty Personnel Committee, which had also addressed the issue, the Law Library director, whose faculty was not included in the law school review, a library faculty member, and a Women's Studies faculty member who had been active from the beginning of the university's salary equity process.

The committee reviewed past attempts at salary equity for librarians. The methodology involving peer institutions, which was used by one of the other campuses, appeared to be the most viable. It called for a special study comparing UCB librarians' salaries with salaries of librarians in public institutions belonging to the AAU, the peer group for the campus. The study was commissioned from the ARL. Salary data for the libraries' women faculty was compared to AAU averages for both men and women with similar positions and years of experience. Next, tables were developed by the committee. The tables listed each faculty woman, her position by ARL category, years of experience, and the AAU average salary for her position and years of experience. Adjustments were made for campus variations from average peer group salaries by rank as reported in campus studies. Retroactive salary adjustments for the previous two years were projected on the basis of the average annual salary increase in the libraries. The committee's proposal included a total request of \$112,677 in current salary adjustments and $\$ 211,535$ in retroactive pay.

The next step was to present the new proposal to university and campus administrators. A letter was addressed to the university president, who had initiated the universitywide process, requesting action on salary equity for library faculty on the Boulder campus. Copies were sent to the campus admin-
istrators and the new associate vicepresident for personnel and human resources. For three months, no one responded. The committee chair called the president's office and eventually talked with the associate vice-president. He said it was a matter for the Boulder campus administration and was not his responsibility. He did agree to review the files on the subject, and he eventually sent the chancellor a memo which appeared to question the veracity of the committee. The memo stated, "It is clear to me that at the very least, there is disagreement between the . . . committee and the Office of Academic Affairs about whether they ever received expected salary equity adjustments as a result of the 1985-86 process." The committee responded, "All previous salary equity reports from the Libraries to the Boulder campus administrators have met with no response, and we are hopeful that [the president] will take action on the matter once he is fully informed of the situation. . . . Let us assure you that there has been no adjustment."

Meanwhile, several other faculty women's groups were meeting on equity issues. In some cases, gains made in the 1985-86 adjustments had been wiped out in subsequent salary allocations. There had been no reviews of how the process was working, nor had the process been extended to part-time and nontenure track faculty as promised. In May 1990, the chair of the Boulder Faculty Assembly Committee on Women received a letter from the president in which he expressed commitment to resolving the salary equity problems. He further stated that he had instructed the UCB chancellor to work with the Library Salary Equity Committee in the development and implementation of an acceptable salary equity review procedure.

Boulder campus administrators did little to facilitate the salary equity review for librarians. In May and June, the library committee met with the chancellor and vice-chancellor separately. Both criticized the lack of merit factors in the proposal. Objections were raised regarding the procedures developed by the new committee, based on AAU comparisons. Critics said
that the procedures did not conform to those used in 1985-86 for evaluating the instructional faculty. The chancellor did promise, however, that there would be a resolution by July 1, 1990, or that he would personally step in if no agreement was reached with the vice-chancellor.

The vice-chancellor and an associate vice-chancellor proposed a multiple regression formula, similar to the university one that had contributed to the original dissatisfaction with the method used to determine inequities in the early 1980s. They also proposed a method which involved constructing a continuum of white male librarians, and fitting the women in at appropriate places based on responsibilities and years of experience. Despite the committee's reservations, the vice-chancellor was insistent on using male counterparts, citing the increase of white males on the libraries' faculty.

The committee agreed to go back to the women and minority faculty in the libraries to discuss using counterparts, a methodology the university administration had ruled out for librarians in the 1985-86 discussions. The vice-chancellor appointed an assistant vice-chancellor as liaison between his office and the committee. At a meeting of the women faculty, the women agreed to try the internal counterpart method but they also voiced their strong support for the AAU comparison method.
The rest of the summer included several meetings with the vice-chancellor's representative to outline a methodology and to establish a mutually acceptable committee to review the information provided by the libraries and the individuals. This information included vitae, position descriptions, evaluations, five-year salary information when available, the AAU comparison information, and a statement from each woman describing her closest counterparts. The five members of the review committee included two recently appointed but senior faculty members from the University Libraries and the Law Library, the deans of the other CU campus libraries involved in the university equity study, and a member of the Boulder Faculty Assembly Libraries Committee.

The review procedure specified that each affected woman or minority librarian was given the opportunity to choose one or more counterparts from among the white male librarians at the same institution. Counterparts were to be similarly situated to the woman librarian in such areas as records of performance in librarianship, scholarship and service, educational background, years of experience, and specialization. Salaries of the woman and her counterpart(s) were then compared. If no clear reason for salary differences could be determined, the assumption was made that genderbased discrimination existed, and a salary readjustment was recommended.

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Once the procedures were agreed on and a committee was selected, the salary equity review progressed smoothly. The new committee began its work in October 1990 and made its recommendations for equity adjustments to current salaries in December 1990. Each woman was given an opportunity to agree or disagree with the committee's recommendation. The deans of the libraries and the law school also reviewed the recommendations and were given the same opportunity to agree or disagree, although this was outside the scope of the agreed upon procedures. In the meantime, the vice-chancellor's staff calculated retroactive payment amounts for those women employed since 1985-86. The payment was based on the committee's current salary recommendations. The salary recommendations were reviewed by the vice-chancellor in March 1991. Adjustments were made in the April 1991 salary checks for those who accepted the committee's recommendation as approved by the vice-chancellor. Continuing adjustments totaled \$73,069 and
retroactive pay amounted to $\$ 398,430$. At that time, the few women who disagreed with their individual awards, or whose awards were disapproved by the vice-chancellor, were given one week to appeal to the chancellor. Notification of the chancellor's disapproval of all appeals was received in September 1991. Final appeals to the President's Oversight Committee were considered in January 1992. The president's decision due the next month, was received in April and resulted in increases and back pay awards to the appellants.

## ADVICE TO THE NOVICE SALARY EQUITY SEEKER

As is obvious from the authors' case, the trail to a salary equity review is fraught with roadblocks. While the review finally did occur, the final procedure and timetable were far from what was originally envisioned. Along the way the authors learned many lessons, which can be fairly well summarized as four rules: be realistic, flexible, persistent, and watchful.

## Be Realistic

Start with a proposal and a timetable to give to the administration, but be prepared to make changes. Decide what is most important or nonnegotiable and what you are willing to cut or change as a compromise. Get a nonlibrarian, preferably someone perceived by the administration as having some degree of authority or credibility, to work with you. It helps to have a broad base of support from campus faculty governance and other recognized campus groups with equity concerns. You are trying to institute a process to which, chances are, many in your institution are opposed. Recognize this and be ready to involve the press, either by writing letters or informing a sympathetic reporter of what's going on, to go over the head of the administrator with whom you have been dealing, or to call in influential faculty or outsiders. Keep in mind that campus, city, and even state politics may influence the process. Be informed of the history of the salary review
issue and keep up with its current status. Most important of all, keep your primary constituency informed. Without their support, any proposed procedure will die in the bureaucratic quagmire.

## Be Flexible

Again, be prepared to compromise on your original plan and accept the fact that your timetable may not be met. If you become too insistent on compliance with any one detail, it can derail the entire process. Be willing to work with whomever the administration assigns to the project. You have to develop a working relationship, and some degree of trust, with someone who has the ear of the administration. Be attuned to the political realities inherent in the academic hierarchy.

## Be Persistent

Create your own opportunities. Take advantage of turnovers in administrative ranks by making your cause known to newcomers. Enlist the aid of campus groups or organizations with similar objectives. Establish an internal time line for your committee and stick to it. Enlist your library director's support for your cause, and persuade him or her to make salary equity a constant topic of conversation with administrators.

## Be Watchful

Record the proceedings of each meeting, and immediately transcribe them. Create a paper trail by following up all interviews and meetings with memoranda summarizing the conversation and reminding parties of what they agreed to do. Ask for responses in writing. Keep notes on telephone conversations.

## CONCLUSION

After six years of effort by various groups, a salary equity review for librarians was completed at UCB. Despite major snags along the way, the results were well received by most of the women involved. Ironically, the amount of the equity payments proved to be higher than it would have been under earlier proposals.

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