

Who's the Best Compensated of them All?

An analysis of New Mexico's Two Year Independent College Presidents' Compensation

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Introduction

When it comes to executive compensation, whatever can be negotiated will be. In the case of publicly-financed higher education in New Mexico, salary negotiations between top-level executives at New Mexico's two-year independent institutions and the taxpayers are negotiated by governing boards or the regents of a parent school.

No matter who negotiates with top-level executives, the interested parties in these negotiations are not balanced. An individual negotiating on their own behalf is likely to be far more aggressive in advancing their own interests than is a group of caretakers who are negotiating with taxpayer dollars (most of which are not their own).

The salaries of college presidents are publicly-available. In the ongoing interest of transparency and in order to better understand how compensation at New Mexico's two-year independent institutes of higher education work, the Rio Grande Foundation requested and has made available the contracts of all presidents at the state's 2 year institutes. This is the first instance we know of in which any cross-institutional comparisons have been made.

Understanding Pay and Benefits at NM's Independent Two-Year Institutes of Higher Learning

We requested the contracts of the presidents of the following institute. These contracts are linked directly to this document when viewed online:

[Central New Mexico Community College \(CNM\);](#)

[Clovis Community College;](#)

[Luna Community College;](#)

[Mesalands Community College;](#)

[New Mexico Junior College](#) plus [addendum](#)

[New Mexico Military Institute \(NMMI\);](#)

[San Juan College;](#)

[Santa Fe Community College;](#)

After carefully examining the contracts of each school leader, there are several noteworthy items of interest. These items include:

The base salaries of presidents at New Mexico colleges receive salaries in a relatively narrow band starting at approximately \$150,000, ranging to nearly \$215,000. The big money and most prized benefits for college presidents are found in incentives, bonuses, and other benefits which vary dramatically. These benefits, depending on the individual contract, may include: generous leave schedules, paid housing or housing reimbursements, vehicle or vehicle reimbursements, bonuses, and retirement contributions.

While efforts were undertaken to accurately understand these contracts and their provisions, the contract provisions were not always clear or were based on variables such as years of service or performance bonuses.

Generous vacation, personal, and sick time allowances when negotiated: of the four institutes where vacation days were a separately-negotiated item, the number of vacation days averaged 25.75, ranging from as high as 30 down to 22. When vacation was not negotiated, vacation days allowed were significantly fewer such as the 15 days allowed at Luna Community College.

By way of comparison, the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics provides data for “Professional, Technical, and Related Employees,” the top earners listed in the report. After 25 years, the average number of paid vacation days among these workers was 17.8.¹ That’s 45 percent more vacation among leaders at New Mexico’s two-year independent institutes of higher education than among the highest-paid and best-trained workers in the United States.

In terms of sick leave, three institutes negotiated them with Dr. Steve McCleery of New Mexico Junior College negotiating a generous 20 days of sick time to complement his 30 days of vacation.² The average among the three institutes was 14.3 when negotiated and the average according to the BLS for “Professional, Technical, and Related Employees” was 10.6. In this case, it is the generous benefits provided by New Mexico Junior College that stands out.

Generous Auto and Housing Allowances: Six of the eight institutes negotiated specific housing and automobile allowances for their institutional leaders. Uniquely, Clovis Community College provides both a house and an automobile for its president, Becky Rowley. While information on the house is tough to come by, according to Realtor.com, the estimated value of the house is in excess of \$555,000.³ This is a very nice house when one considers that the average single family home is \$116,078 according to the website city-data.com.⁴ In addition, Rowley receives a leased automobile of an indeterminate value provided by the school every 24 months.

Rowley’s housing was somewhat unique, but other school heads receive anywhere from \$6,000 to \$15,000 for an automobile and up to \$18,000 for housing. Total housing and automobile benefits totaled \$30,000 in two cases (San Juan College and Santa Fe Community College).

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Average paid holidays and days of vacation and sick leave for full-time employees,” <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ebs.t05.htm>.

² According to a subsequent letter sent by the NMJC Board, “Dr. Steve McCleery *did not* negotiate the terms of his contract.” The letter went on to state that, “McCleery’s (sick) benefits are exactly the same as those enjoyed by every single fulltime staff at New Mexico Junior College.”

³ Realtor.com, 1621 E. 21st, Clovis, NM, http://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-detail/1621-E-21-St-St_Clovis_NM_88101_M10674-71628?source=web

⁴ City-Data.com, “Mean Detached House Prices,” <http://www.city-data.com/city/Clovis-New-Mexico.html>.

Annual Retention/Performance Bonus: Bonus and performance pay is the final way in which college presidents can negotiate their way to more generous benefits. Packages range from \$2,500 to over \$53,000 annually. The details of what incentives are given and when varies from institute to institute.

The following chart is based on our analysis of the contracts of each college president. Contracts do not always specifically reference each aspect. This could mean that there is no relevant benefit or, in the case of time off, for example, that the relevant issue is covered in the school's handbook. In such cases, the space is left blank.

Conclusions

When it comes to New Mexico's independent, two-year institutes of higher learning, the benefit packages vary widely. In terms of overall benefits, the presidents of Mesalands, Luna, and NMMI are at the low end of the spectrum. The middle of the pack is represented by San Juan Community College and Santa Fe Community College. The most generous packages are at CNM, Clovis, and New Mexico Junior College. Notably, however, CNM is by far the largest two-year institute in the state with a student population far bigger than any other similar school in the state.

What should policymakers and the public take from this information? For starters, there seems to be little rhyme or reason to these salaries and benefits. Hopefully, greater transparency and information-sharing will lead to more uniformity and a more rational approach for the public and negotiators on all sides. As positions come available, we hope that policymakers, negotiators, and the general public will find this information useful.

Appendix

Community College Presidents	Central New Mexico -- Katharine Winograd	Clovis Community College -- Becky Rowley	Luna Community College -- Pete Campos	Mesalands Community College -- Dr. Thomas Newsom
Number of Students	28,000	3,914	1,866	869
Annual Base Salary	\$212,180	\$145,000	\$150,000	\$156,000
Annual Retention/Performance Bonus	\$21,218			
Retirement Contribution	\$21,218			
Housing?		Provided		
Automobile?	\$12,000	Provided: Replaced every 2 years	\$9,000	
Paid Leave Days	27 vacation + 10 sick		15 vacation (per handbook)	24 vacation + 2 personal + 13 sick

Community College Presidents	New Mexico Junior College -- Dr. Steve McCleery	New Mexico Military Institute -- MG Jerry Grizzle	Santa Fe Community College -- Dr. Ana Guzman	San Juan College -- Toni Pendergrass
Number of Students	3,160	960	6,689	18,456
Annual Base Salary	\$214,000	\$185,857	\$196,000	\$175,000
Annual Retention/Performance Bonus	\$53,200*		\$2,500	\$10,500
Retirement Contribution				
Housing?	\$6,000		\$15,000	\$18,000
Automobile?	\$6,000		\$15,000	\$12,000
Paid Leave Days	30 vacation + 20 sick			22 vacation

*Calculations involve years of service