

Some university employees may see a summer raise

- Ashlyn Campbell | The Breeze
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The change would impact the pay of about 3,086 full-time JMU employees.

The budget proposal for Virginia, if approved by Gov. Ralph Northam (D), includes a 5% pay increase for state employees including university and adjunct faculty.

If the proposal is approved, the salary increase would go into effect July 1, 2021, according to a Virginia House Appropriations Committee Budget Briefing meeting held [Feb. 26](#). Mary-Hope Vass, director of communications and university spokesperson, who declined a phone interview, wrote in an email to The Breeze that the pay increase would impact about 3,086 full-time employees at JMU.

“The General Assembly’s pay adjustments are wonderful news for university employees, especially since employees did not receive a pay increases this year,” Vass wrote.

State employees were originally slated to receive a pay raise last April, but those plans were put on hold because of COVID-19, according to the [Washington Post](#). In February, Gov. Northam announced that an extra \$730.2 million dollars would be available for the 2021-22 state budget because of an increase in projected General Fund resources, according to a [press release](#).

Val Larsen, the speaker for the JMU faculty senate, who declined a phone interview, wrote in an email to The Breeze that this increase in salary keeps JMU “competitive for academic talent” while lowering the need for tuition from students to cover the increase in salary raises.

“The raise helps faculty meet additional expenses some have faced as it has become necessary to equip home offices,” Larsen wrote. “And of course, inflation continually erodes the buying power of faculty and staff salaries unless periodic raises offset the effects of inflation.”

Vass wrote that JMU is required to cover a share of the cost of salary through auxiliary functions like housing, recreation, student unions and athletics. She wrote that JMU is looking into options in creating revenue for its share of the budget.

Doe Polanz, president of the JMU chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), said the increase was encouraging but didn’t account for the constant rise in inflation or the challenges for faculty with COVID-19.

"I would rather have a communication and discussion happening than a random number assigned as a raise," Polanz said. "This should not overshadow the fact that we still need to have a bigger voice and speak as faculty."

Polanz said she's felt the impact of COVID-19 personally, with her class size increasing from 15 students to 25 or 30. She also said many professors weren't prepared to teach online and may have issues with internet access like many students have experienced.

"Whenever we're concerned about student's rights we should also be looking at faculty's rights," Polanz said.

Polanz also said that access to vaccines was a concern for faculty members. She said students she teaches have gotten their vaccines and were surprised that she was unable to get hers.

"That's why we advocate because you have to be serious," Polanz said. "If you really value your student and your faculty, put in the work."

Vass wrote that a final decision on how increases would be implemented hasn't been made, and JMU doesn't typically receive guidance from the Virginia Department of Human Resources until closer to when the pay raise would take effect. Vass said in order for employees to receive a pay adjustment they must receive an acceptable rating on their performance evaluation, and JMU routinely monitors pay increases to ensure equity depending on the type of pay modification.

Larsen said adjunct faculty aren't usually included in these bills that support university employees because their work varies more widely, including teaching larger classes at multiple institutions and working other jobs to make ends meet.

"The support the state is giving for adjunct faculty is unprecedented and very, very welcome," Larsen wrote. "Never before has the state provided this kind of support for these important members of the academic community."

Larsen said that focusing more on adjunct faculty employment should be more involved at the state and university level. He said JMU has been a leader in increasing the role of adjunct faculty by adding adjunct faculty to the faculty senate and steering committee.

"We could not be more delighted that the state is finally including adjunct faculty in their appropriation for a salary increase," Larsen said. "We hope this attention to the needs of adjunct faculty continues."

Polanz said the raise including adjunct faculty was encouraging because they "suffer" the most. The AAUP will continue to fight for adjunct faculty because they're the most vulnerable of university faculty.

"We're more concerned about is again, not specifically numbering increase, but looking at more transparency," Polanz said. "What we're trying to do here is to just have a voice at the table when decisions are made."

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