

f POST GUILD UNIT forum



Local 32035

The Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild

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Merit Pay at The Washington Post

All of us who are Guild-covered employees at The Post are guaranteed certain minimum salaries and periodic wage increases because they've been negotiated and spelled out in a labor contract.

But outside the boundaries of our contract there exists an additional salary system. It is a system of rewards for individuals selected at the discretion of the publisher.

For most of us it's called merit pay, and management often invokes it to justify its insistence on low contractual raises. It suggests that those who deserve more than they're getting need not worry. Help is on the way. Good deeds are noticed. The system works.

The system does work, but not like that. The Guild has been studying the merit pay system for several months, analyzing the data that management is contractually required to provide periodically. The Guild's review shows that the merit pay system is quirky and uneven. For the vast majority it is completely off limits. For others, it depends more on what you are — whether, for example, you are a man or a woman — than on how well you perform. The system also works differently depending on how much you earn, with the biggest share of merit pay going to those who already earn the most.

The company provides data without employee names, so this is not about who's getting exactly what. But the data are broken out by race, age, sex, department and a few other categories. In a series of Bulletins starting with this one, the Guild will lay out those details so all can see where they fit into The Post's pay scheme.

For many the facts will be hard to accept, though most already know the disheartening truth: For the majority of Guild-covered employees, the next wage increase is coming not from a merit raise but from the terms of our contract, which is bargained anew every few years.

We who are active in the Guild are not coy about why we share this information. Contract negotiations are only about 18 months away. And during these strange economic and political times, when companies claim a need for belt-tightening even as stock prices soar, Post management is unlikely to spontaneously make up for what it held back from us last time: a solid package of guaranteed pay raises. We will have to fight together for that.

There are 1,400 of us employed in the Washington Post unit of the Newspaper Guild. We are by far the biggest unionized group of employees at The Post and we could head into talks next year stronger than ever despite the buy-out that thinned our ranks. **But some non-members make the mistake of thinking they can get the benefits of a union job for free. They don't understand that by not stepping up to the plate and joining, they actually weaken our collective voice at the bargaining table. That makes it harder to hold The Post accountable and the Guild wins less for everybody.**

The Guild does not oppose any form of wage increase, including merit pay, as long as it is administered fairly. (We do think there ought to be more clearly stated criteria for merit pay, to help employees work towards those rewards, as we have sought in bargaining. And we think The Post should heed our repeated requests to give us the required data in electronic form, instead of crude paper printouts as it does now, which, as management is aware, makes analysis difficult.) But merit pay is no substitute for a system of contractual raises guaranteed for all employees, the vast majority of whom do excellent work, day in and day out.

If you are a nonmember, you probably think you're saving money. You are mistaken, and your mistake is affecting all of us. If the Guild's analysis of The Post's merit pay system helps inspire you to invest in a strong union instead of gambling on or praying for a merit raise, then we have succeeded.

— Rick Weiss

Part 1: Wages at The Post

Before getting into the details of merit pay it's helpful to get a lay of the land and see where basic salaries are. The Guild's analysis covers the period from December 1998 through December 2001, the most recent three-year period for which figures have been provided. We'll get fresh data in the fall of 2005.

OVER

POST GUILD UNIT

Average salaries for full-timers and part-timers

<u>Status</u>	<u>No. Employees</u>	<u>Hourly</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Annual</u>
Full Time	1,314	\$31.32	\$1174	\$61,074
Part time	342	\$21.27	\$798	\$41,476 *

*Annualized as though working 37.5 hrs/wk, for comparison purposes

Average full-time salaries by department*

<u>Dept.</u>	<u>No. Employees</u>	<u>Hourly</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Annual</u>
Accounting	89	\$18.95	\$711	\$37,142
Advertising	611	\$21.52	\$806	\$41,964
Marketing	20	\$25.47	\$956	\$49,666
Misc**	21	\$24.49	\$919	\$47,756
Sys. & Eng	84	\$30.15	\$1,131	\$58,792
News	822	\$36.24	\$1,359	\$70,668

* Data for circulation unavailable at this time but will be in a later bulletin.

** Includes a few employees in news, purchasing, centrex, mail desk and print shop

Average full-time salaries by sex

<u>Sex</u>	<u>Hourly</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Annual</u>
Female	\$26.79	\$1,005	\$52,240
Male	\$31.96	\$1,198	\$62,322

Average full-time salaries by race*

(Native American data not included because of small number of employees, which could reveal personal information.)

<u>Race</u>	<u>No. Employees</u>	<u>Hourly</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Annual</u>
Asian	81	\$28.82	\$1,081	\$56,199
African American	548	\$22.07	\$828	\$43,036
Hispanic	48	\$28.61	\$1,073	\$55,790
White	954	\$33.48	\$1,256	\$65,286

* It is difficult to tease apart the reasons for lower salaries among minority employees. One reason minorities may make less than their white counterparts is that, on average, they may have fewer years of service (this may also explain some of the difference by gender). The Guild will consider the effect of years of service on pay and merit pay in an upcoming bulletin in this series. Salary differences by race are certainly due in part to the fact that departments with lower contractual salary scales — including most departments on the commercial side — tend to have a higher percentage of minorities, which brings down the average salary for minorities. Of course, that raises the question of why minorities are disproportionately hired in lower paid departments.

To try to clarify the issue, the Guild broke out salaries by race within individual departments. That analysis shows that in most cases, even within a given single department where contractual pay scales apply uniformly to all, Blacks and Hispanics tend to earn less than their white and Asian counterparts.

Average Hourly Pay Rates by Race and Department*

<u>Department</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>White</u>
Accounting	\$24.14	\$17.48	[<5 emp.]	\$19.51
Advertising	\$23.56	\$19.11	\$21.06	\$24.88
Marketing	[<5 emp.]	[<5 emp.]	[none]	\$26.48
Misc**	[none]	\$18.16	[<5 emp.]	\$33.36
Sys. & Eng.	\$34.44	\$23.86	\$30.70	\$32.34
News	\$32.19	\$31.82	\$34.09	\$37.39

[<5 emp.] means fewer than five employees in this category, so data omitted by Guild to protect individuals' privacy.

* and ** see notes above.

Thanks to Patrick Bracken for important help with analysis.

Coming Next: Merit Pay by the Numbers — How Much and to Whom?