

# The State

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10 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2009

## OPINION

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### Editorial

# Administrative pay raises send wrong message

**W**E EXPECT OUR research universities to drive our transition to the knowledge economy that is essential for South Carolina's prosperity. To do that, Clemson, USC and MUSC must attract the best and brightest researchers, who can put us on the cutting edge of wealth-creating innovation. That isn't cheap. Neither is overall academic excellence.

The problem is that South Carolina always has tried to do higher education on the cheap, spending far too few tax dollars per student. And by maintaining too many independently operated colleges, we push too many of those meager higher-ed dollars into overhead.

Fortunately, the research university presidents have been more committed than our Legislature to the mission we need them to perform, doing whatever it takes to strive for excellence and innovation. That has led to some of the highest tuition rates in the nation and, more recently, stepped-up campaigns to get students and their families to make donations.

That's a lot to ask of students who are attending what are becoming, but are not yet, top-tier universities. Still, they've been willing to sacrifice, which says quite a lot about the faith S.C. students have in the future of our universities — and our state.

But faith is a fragile thing, and officials at Clemson, and to a lesser extent, USC, have not been treating it with the care it deserves. As *The State's* Wayne Washington recently reported, the schools have been giving hefty raises to their ... administrators.

Over the past two years, Clemson gave pay raises ranging from 10 percent to 100 percent to 99 people — only 46 of whom were faculty members; the majority of those raises went to administrators, coaches and extension employees. The university also has come under fire — rightly so — for hiring the president's son and giving a 24 percent raise to a lawyer whose father is vice chairman of the Board of Trustees.

USC gave out 224 raises ranging from 10 percent to 106 percent, with 58 percent of them going to faculty members. The numbers were better for the largest increases: Faculty received seven out of 10 of the 20-percent-and-higher raises.

College officials note that the raises were given before the economy tanked and say many were designed to compensate administrators for taking on additional tasks. But the raises didn't precede tuition hikes. Besides, out here in the real world, people take on more work every day, with no extra pay. In fact, a lot of people are seeing their work increased while their pay is being cut.

Clemson and USC both have ordered employees to take several days off without pay, and Clemson is encouraging higher-paid employees to contribute to a "furlough fund" to help lower-paid employees. That's a good move, but it's not enough. Both schools should rescind or at least reduce the recent administrative pay raises, or else order additional furloughs for top administrators. They might have to ask the Legislature to change the law to allow this, but we doubt they'd be denied. These pay raises account for a minuscule amount of the colleges' budgets, so scaling them back won't solve the schools' financial problems, won't let them avoid future tuition increases, won't even let them avoid program cuts. But it will send an important message to people who are sacrificing a lot because they believe in the mission of the universities — a mission that is, above all, academic.