

# Women and Minorities Negotiating Salaries

By [Lee Kass](#), [Kathleen Gale](#) Sep. 27, 2002 , 8:00 AM

The objective of this article is to heighten awareness for women and minorities about the effect of starting salary on career earnings and the materials available for assessing your potential employer. The bottom line is that a low starting salary will haunt you throughout your academic career. In general, the salaries of women are significantly lower than their male counterparts in academia, as most recently reported by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in its 2002 [Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession](#) --although the discrepancies have existed for at least 30 years. One explanation is that male and female candidates have different behaviors and expectations in the job application and interview process. There may also be systemic sexism in academia (Rossiter 1982, 1995). Similarly, minority persons may also interview differently than those in the majority, and they may face covert institutional racism. In hopes that it may help counteract prevailing trends and behaviors, we offer our own experiences and advice to people interviewing for the first time.

The interviews and salary negotiations that we describe took place at a small liberal arts college in the early 1980s. One of us already had a job and felt secure in negotiating a new contract, whereas the other was delighted simply to be interviewed and did not consider negotiating. This job would provide a secondary income, so salary was less critical. Neither of us considered that the future might require our financial independence, which it ultimately did. Both of our starting salaries were low, but a minimal negotiation significantly raised the initial salary for one of us.

Ten years later, by examining the pattern of salaries by gender at our institution and by looking at the data published in [Academe](#) , the journal of

the AAUP, we realized the consequences of our failure to adequately bargain fair and comparable starting salaries. Not only were our salaries unfairly low, but so were those of other women in our institution. By examining national averages at all levels of colleges and universities, we learned that this was a national pattern. If a class of people starts with a low base rate salary, even high percentage raises will not allow them to catch up with peers in other groups.

In view of our experience, we offer the following advice to young women and minorities who are applying and interviewing for academic jobs:

- Consult *Academe* for the average salaries of the institution in question.
- Know your worth in your field.
- Ask your interviewer about the salary range for the position that you hope to be offered.
- Discover other aspects of the institution.
- Before going to the campus, talk to other faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates about the treatment and feelings of minorities on campus.
- Include the salary you expect in your cover letter.
- Be aware that you may get a stock reaction from a discriminatory institution, in that they will not meet your fair salary request.

We found AAUP's publications most valuable for ascertaining average salaries in universities and colleges. This source is especially valuable for data on private institutions because details of their salaries are not generally available. To our knowledge, since the early 1970s, the [March/April issues](#) of AAUP publications have reported on the economic status of the professions. For example, in Table 5 of the [2002 report](#), you will find evidence of apparent salary discrimination based on sex in the aggregate data for all colleges and universities listed.

To find an approximation of your worth, examine the salary ranges published in the job advertisements in your field in the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#) and in your professional journals. This will give you an idea of what is being

offered in the market. You may also talk with graduate student or postdoctoral colleagues about their interviewing experiences to learn whether the salary you have been offered is commensurate with what they have received.

We suggest you avoid applying to or interviewing at institutions that have been sanctioned or that have administrations that have been censured by the AAUP. Such organizations are listed on AAUP's Web sites. The AAUP committee on governance investigates *serious* infringement of governance standards recognized by the association. If an institution fails to meet these standards, AAUP may sanction that institution to force compliance with its guidelines as set forth in its Statement on Government of College and Universities and derivative governance documents. Three institutions are currently on AAUP sanctioned list, one first cited almost [10 years ago](#). The AAUP Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure censures administrations that are not observing the generally recognized principles of academic freedom and tenure endorsed by the association in its [1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#). A surprisingly large number of administrations--53 at this writing--are currently under censure because of infringement or violation of faculty freedom to teach, conduct research, or publish. You may want to refrain from accepting an appointment with a censured administration.

To determine the environment for women and minorities on the campus in question, first find the university's or college's Web site or get a copy of its bulletin. Locate the department to which you are applying, review the names of faculty listed in that department, and note the diversity of its faculty members. Contact a few of them by e-mail or by phone and discuss their attitudes towards women and minorities. Ask for the names of their best graduate, undergraduate, and minority students and contact those students. If they fail to mention outstanding minority or female students, this could be an indication of the departmental and institutional climate regarding underrepresented populations.

Our experience on search committees has taught us that it is usually effective to ask for the salary you expect. We observed that white males are more assertive in this regard than are women or minorities. However, if you are qualified for the job and have asked for a salary that is reasonable in terms of the data you collected, but you don't get an interview or receive a job offer, you may be experiencing institutional discrimination. We know of an interview at which a well-qualified woman asked for a salary at the top of the range. Her request was unequivocally denied and her interview was immediately terminated. However, the man who was eventually hired for that position was less qualified but was given the uppermost salary. You may wish to notify AAUP in writing if you believe you have been unfairly treated during your interview process. Such documentation is valuable if the AAUP investigates that institution.

We invite you to use our checklist when you apply and interview for jobs. We urge you to document and discuss your experiences with your colleagues. You can influence the outcome of your interview by being well prepared, assertive, confident, and knowledgeable. However, only excellent documentation and collective action can identify institutional racism and sexism. We wish you successful negotiating.

#### Recommended References

Rossiter, M. W., 1982. *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Rossiter, M. W., 1995 *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action, 1940-1972*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

*Dr. Lee Kass is a Visiting Research Professor at Cornell University. Dr. Kathleen Gale conducts research as an independent scholar. For further information, e-mail Lee Kass at [lbk7@cornell.edu](mailto:lbk7@cornell.edu) and Kathleen Gale at [Prrts@aol.com](mailto:Prrts@aol.com).*