

Endorsement of the Council on Language Instruction's letter (Appendix A) to NU Administration and WCAS Dean Randolph

We senators strongly endorse the concerns and requests expressed in the attached letter regarding faculty compensation. The sustained gap between salary increases and inflation, combined with the absence of cost-of-living adjustments, has created a growing and unsustainable financial strain, especially for lower-paid non-tenure eligible faculty in the arts and humanities across schools. Addressing this issue through a meaningful cost-of-living adjustment, alongside merit-based increases, is both a necessary and equitable step. Taking action now will help restore financial stability, reinforce institutional trust, and demonstrate a genuine commitment to valuing faculty contributions.

Appendix A

March 1, 2026

Dear President Bienen, dear Provost Hagerty, dear Provost Eric Luijten, dear Vice President Distel, dear Dean Randolph:

We are writing as members of the language teaching-track faculty at Northwestern to express serious concern regarding the ongoing lack of inflation adjustment to faculty compensation and the withdrawal of merit-based increases. While we understand that the political and institutional climate has created momentary budgetary constraints, the combined effect of these developments has resulted in a real loss of income and financial stability especially for language teaching-track faculty members.

In recent years, annual increases have not kept pace with inflation. As a result, faculty salaries have declined in purchasing power, and the impact has accumulated. To illustrate this, we attach a chart that summarizes the salary development for NTE faculty between 2017 and 2025 in which the salaries are expressed in 2025 Dollar amounts (i.e. inflation-adjusted) to provide easy comparisons. Because increases in compensation at Northwestern operate through a merit-raise structure rather than automatic cost-of-living adjustments, when annual increases fall below inflation, faculty effectively absorb the difference. A standard increase within the usual range this year would not nearly restore what has been lost.

At WCAS, the CLI NTE salaries are most frequently in the lower quartile. The absolute amounts at which average CLI NTE salaries for some of us have by now arrived (~\$68k-\$70k) barely match the Chicago area median income limits for 4-person households in the low-income 60% bracket (cf. https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/doh/provdrs/renters/svcs/ami_chart.html). According to US Dept of Housing and Urban Development, 80% of Area Median Income is low income and 50% is very low income. Earners at or below 60% of AMI qualify for rent assistance in Chicago (cf. <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/affordable-requirements-ordinance/home/for-prospective-renters/income-qualifications.html>). This effectively means that, as many of us are experiencing increased day-to-day financial pressures, it has become significantly more difficult to make ends meet. While the situation is especially pressing for us as among the lowest-earning faculty, our situation is not an isolated phenomenon. We are aware that the Provost's Office has identified from the 2025 Non-Tenure Eligible Faculty Survey that the level of compensation is a major stressor across NTE faculty at large. Our present letter is only to confirm and reinforce this finding for the especially exposed CLI faculty.

This issue is particularly urgent for language teaching-track faculty members, whose contractual compensation is already lower than that of other academic categories. For colleagues in this position, the combined effects of below-inflation increase and rising benefit costs have been, as we illustrated above, especially damaging. When compensation is already compressed in some instances, these pressures are felt most acutely, disproportionately affecting those with the least financial flexibility. In this situation it is additionally ironic that the lower salaries (and consequently: increases) are often those fixed from times of higher purchasing-power at a lower nominal Dollar-base rate; that is, from some of the most loyal and long-time members of CLI. It

feels to these colleagues as if the current system effectively penalizes loyalty to Northwestern as an employer.

For these reasons, we believe that this year's increase should, at least for the lower quartiles on the faculty payroll that are at or below the 60% threshold of Area Median Income, combine an at-large cost-of-living adjustment for everyone in this group regardless of merit with the usual merit-based percentages in individual salaries in order to address both current conditions and the cumulative shortfall, as well as to recognize the differential merits of individual faculty. Without such a prior correction, the Moreover, as was reported at the University Budget Update to the Faculty Senate on January 21, 2026, Northwestern has the capacity to act with its substantial increasing or additional revenue streams. The university's materials also emphasize the scale of recent philanthropic momentum placing Northwestern among the leading institutions nationally and reflecting significant financial stability entering FY2026 and beyond.

Taken together, these official data suggest that Northwestern is operating from a position of substantial strength. In that context, we respectfully request and expect that the university will take meaningful steps this year to address the accumulated shortfall in faculty compensation. We respectfully request and expect to be provided, prior to the usual merit-based increase, a cost-of-living adjustment for those among the NTE faculty whose salaries have reached the tipping point of barely covering basic cost-of-living for faculty. Only in this way do we see a chance to catch up, by a raise which meaningfully responds to current economic realities.

Such action is not only financially important; it is also essential for maintaining trust between faculty and the institution. Northwestern's success depends on the continued commitment of its faculty members, including those in language instruction who serve a vital role in the university's educational mission. Demonstrating responsiveness now would reaffirm that the institution values equity, sustainability, and good-faith partnership with its faculty. Only in this way can we secure the best education for our students, which is ultimately our highest, mutual goal. In light of President Bienen's, Provost Hagerty's and CFO Distel's announcements that adjustments for the faculty's 'resilience' in the face of budgetary bottlenecks in the recent past were a priority in this year's budgetary considerations, as expressed in the 2026 Annual Financial Update shared with the community (<https://www.northwestern.edu/leadership-notes/2026/2026-financial-update.html>), we trust that our request and expectations will find open ears.

Thank you for giving these concerns careful consideration and addressing them. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

The Majority of the Members of the Council on Language Instruction