

UW owes back pay to profs, suit alleges

Faculty never got merit raises in 2002-03, it says

By JAKE ELLISON, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER Updated 10:00 pm, Monday, October 18, 2004

University of Washington professors are owed more than \$12 million in back pay because a promised 2 percent merit pay raise didn't materialize in the 2002-2003 academic year, according to a lawsuit filed yesterday.

Attorney Stephen Strong filed suit in King County Superior Court on behalf of UW engineering professor Duane Storti.

Storti, who helped develop UW's salary policy, said the raise could only be canceled if there was a financial emergency, and none was declared.

The suit, which seeks class-action status and covers a three-year period, could cost the university roughly \$4.2 million a year, Strong said.

The university has about 3,500 teaching faculty members.

The university never promised to give faculty a raise every year, former UW provost Lee Huntsman said. He said the agreement was to raise salaries only when there was adequate funding to do so.

Storti claims in the suit that in 1999 UW officials wrote a clear promise in the "University Handbook" that it would provide faculty with the 2 percent raises.

"The faculty received this minimum raise every year except 2002-2003, when it was unilaterally skipped by the administration even though the faculty had completed the required meritorious performance and were subject to the annual performance review," the suit states.

Both sides agree that faculty salaries have fallen behind salaries at peer universities. UW officials reported that for the 2002-2003 academic year, salaries had fallen behind by an average of 12 percent.

The two sides also agree that university policies created an imbalance between salaries earned by longtime UW professors and new faculty.

"When we hired new people, we hired at market level, but we didn't have money to reward the people we had," Huntsman said.

The state and university "systematically underfunded salary increases for both faculty and staff over many years to sort of hold things together until a better day," he said.

The university has 10 days to respond to the suit. After that, the judge will have to certify that the suit does cover all faculty members.