
Formal Submission to the University of Notre Dame Recommending Compensation and Labor Policies That Reduce Economic Hardship

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**FORMAL SUBMISSION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
RECOMMENDING COMPENSATION AND LABOR POLICIES
THAT REDUCE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP**

**RECOMMENDATION SUBMITTED BY
THE RAISING THE STANDARD CAMPAIGN**

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Policy Recommendations	3
Section 2: Contextual Background	4
Section 3: Policy Recommendations' Descriptions	8
Increase student wages to \$15 per hour	8
Institute a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for Notre Dame workers	9
Create a Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board	10
Enhance Educational Benefits	13
Revisit Retirement Benefits	14
Celebrate Employee Appreciation Week	14
Improve Notre Dame's Use of Contracted Workers	14
Section 4: Conclusion	16

Policy Recommendations

In order to ensure that the University of Notre Dame supports its employees with fair wage policies in the future, the Raising the Standard Campaign proposes that the University of Notre Dame adopt the following policies:

- Increase Student Wages to \$15 per hour

Student wages will match the minimum pay rate for other positions at the university by instituting a minimum \$15 per hour wage for all student workers.

- Institute a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for all Notre Dame Workers

The Cost of Living Adjustment will be a built in compensation adjustment to increase wages and benefits according to the Consumer Prices Index to counteract inflation.

- Create a Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board

The Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board will be a diverse committee that advocates for the dignity of workers as decisions are made during the university budgetary and strategic planning processes. Their responsibilities would include: accepting input from current university employees and community members on their employment experience; monitoring wages, benefits, and employment practices for employees; determining a living wage for Notre Dame employees based on economic and demographic data; ensuring the implementation of a living wage; and recommending policies to Notre Dame's Budget Working Group.

- Enhance Educational Benefits

Educational Benefits will be expanded to provide realistic opportunities for worker development, such as by reimbursing more than one class per semester.

- Revisit Retirement Benefits

Retirement Benefits will be reevaluated to avoid negative consequences such as decreasing workers' take home pay by 5% after one year.

- Celebrate Employee Appreciation Week

The university will publicly recognize the value of its workers by planning an annual Employee Appreciation Week.

- Improve Notre Dame's Use of Contracted Workers

The university will prioritize contracting companies that pay its workers a living wage as determined by the Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board.

Contextual Background

The University of Notre Dame is the largest employer in both South Bend and St. Joseph County, with 3,500 full-time and part-time employees in South Bend alone. As such, they are increasingly understood to be an integral part of the region's future competitiveness, a driver of economic growth, and a large-scale producer of local and state tax revenues.

The university's size allows it to lead and set the standard for the local and regional economy. Notre Dame's 2018 economic impact report explains, "As a large anchor institution, [Notre Dame] understands that it is a major driver in the success of the immediate neighborhood and broader region it inhabits. In turn, the university's success depends in large part on the vibrancy and productivity of the surrounding community and institutions." Given this shared commitment to the South Bend region and our standing as a Catholic institution, the University of Notre Dame has both a strategic motivation and moral obligation to ensure that residents of the community are able to support themselves financially.

In past years, the university has frequently touted its dedication to investing in the development of the South Bend economy. Father John I. Jenkins, University President, promised the local community that, "Notre Dame is doubling-down on South Bend, Mishawaka, on Elkhart, on Indiana, and on the unsurpassed promise of higher education done well. With you as partners, we are doubling-down on the future." Who we are as a university is driven by our values – by our desire to build a community that teaches respect, love, and service – and our call to be a shining light of those values around the world.

The university's mission statement proclaims that "the university seeks to cultivate in its students not only an appreciation for the great achievements of human beings, but also a disciplined sensibility to the poverty, injustice, and oppression that burden the lives of so many. The aim is to create a sense of human solidarity and concern for the common good that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice." This profound and meaningful mission informs all that we do. We are constantly seeking to meet its high standard, and when it is upheld we catch a glimpse of the powerful force for good our university really can be in the world. Yet, sometimes we fall short.

Notre Dame is situated in South Bend, Indiana, one of the poorest cities in the U.S. Despite outreach efforts from the university, the overall poverty rate in South Bend is 23.6%.¹ A large percentage of that poverty is concentrated among Black households with a poverty rate of 32.7%. In the neighborhood in which university development has been most intensive (Eddy Street Commons and nearby), there has been a 29% drop in Black population over the last 10 years.² In other words, there are about 400 fewer Black residents near the south of campus (Census Tract

¹ Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimate.

² U.S. Census Bureau. 2020 US Census.

10) in 2020 than there were in 2010. Another neighborhood (Census Tract 8) adjacent to campus lost 51% of its Black residents. Notre Dame's current development approach has excluded preexisting members of the South Bend community. In a meeting last August with South Bend civil rights leaders and community activists, a self-organized group of Notre Dame professors working under the name "Justice ND" asked what Notre Dame could do to alleviate poverty and racism in the community. The local leaders replied simply and earnestly: "Pay your staff a living wage."

The Indiana Institute for Working Families developed a Self-Sufficiency Standard for Indiana, a measure that defines the income working families need to meet their most basic needs (housing, food, child care, health care, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses like clothing but excluding entertainment, fast food, savings, or emergency expenses) without private or public assistance. It found that in St. Joseph County it is impossible to be self-sufficient when paid the minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour.³ A single parent compensated at minimum wage would have to work 121 hours and 54 minutes per week to support two children, while two working parents would have to each work 69 hours and 48 minutes each week to support two children without aid. MIT provides a living wage calculation that is county and family type specific and is based on a minimal budget. It calculated the living wage in St. Joseph County for one adult supporting two kids as \$32.74 per hour and the living wage for two working adults supporting two kids as \$18.24 per hour.

Additionally, the South Bend-Elkhart 2021 Wages and Benefits Report provides a summary of the regional annual salary and benefits for different occupations in the region. The data provided indicated that cooks (institution and cafeteria), food preparation workers, and dining room and cafeteria attendants make a median yearly income of \$25,616, \$22,152, and \$20,353 respectively.⁴ MIT's living wage calculation paints a disheartening picture of poverty for St. Joseph County's employees in the aforementioned service occupations. The required annual income before taxes for a single individual without any children is \$28,081 – a living wage unmet by essential service jobs in the Michiana area. Wages paid to many non-exempt⁵ staff at the University of Notre Dame in past years have not met the threshold of a living wage, including the university's recent wage increase to \$15 per hour for full-time hourly employees according to a meeting with Fr. Jenkins. Such a wage structure is not sustainable, and it does not allow for the self-sufficiency of workers or uphold the dignity of the individual.

³ "St. Joseph County Fact Sheet." *Self Sufficiency Standard*, Indiana Institute for Working Families, 22 Nov. 2021, <https://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/indiana/>.

⁴ "2021 Wages and Benefits Report." 2021 Wages and Benefits Report, South Bend - Elkhart Regional Partnership, 15 Sept. 2021, <https://southbendelkhart.org/2021-wages-and-benefits-report/>.

⁵ Non-exempt staff are those who receive hourly wages, while exempt staff are paid annual salaries.

Students also struggle with low wages from the university on campus. Since 2019, student wages have not increased enough to offset the rate of inflation, meaning that in terms of actual purchasing power, student wages have decreased. This represents a financial barrier to many students and especially those who are low-income. With limited access to other jobs while living on-campus, these students rely on earnings from on-campus jobs to cover expenses throughout the school year. When wages are low, they find themselves forced to work more hours, sacrificing time that could otherwise be spent on their studies or engaging with the campus community. At a university already struggling to welcome students from all income levels, this is of particular importance. Despite its mission and desire to be aligned with Catholic Social Teaching, a 2017 study revealed that the University of Notre Dame drew 1.5 times more students from the top 1% of family income (15.4%) than from the entire bottom 60% by family income (10%).⁶ Part of combatting this inequality and being supportive of low-income students requires providing them with the necessary earning opportunities once they arrive on campus. Conversations between the Raising the Standard Campaign (RSC) and student workers in a variety of jobs have revealed frustrations with current wage rates. Current wages limit students' ability to pursue opportunities both inside and outside the classroom as they are unable to build savings or cover non-tuition expenses while on campus.

As a leader in Catholic education, we strive to lead the way nationally in all of our endeavors, but we have fallen behind on campus wage policies. Besides universities in states who already enforce \$15 per hour minimum wages, many institutions – including Clarke University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Rochester, Case Western Reserve University, Columbia University, Duquesne University, Georgetown University, Harvard University, the University of Colorado, the University of Memphis, the University of Michigan, the University of Washington, and the University of Kentucky – have implemented plans to bring their own institutional minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

In addition to wage level concerns, an underlying issue feeding these wage inequalities is that employees at Notre Dame are wary of having conversations about their experiences for fear of facing repercussions from their managers or the administration. A lack of transparency from the university on wage policies has fostered an unequal power dynamic. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate*, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work “because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.”⁷ Without a safe avenue to talk about their experiences and low-self expectations from constantly receiving a substandard living wage, workers are never able to feel secure in their positions and tensions between workers and administration only increase. Even when workers do feel supported in

⁶ “Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility”, by Raj Chetty, John Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner and Danny Yagan, The Equality of Opportunity Project

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth [Caritas in Veritate]*, no. 63

coming forward, it is unrealistic to place the burden on employees to constantly demand and petition the university to offer fair compensation. There must be an easier way to have these conversations.

Catholic Social Teaching attests that worker solidarity and a committed dedication to the realization of workers' rights is necessary to bring about profound change. In his papal encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II reflected that,

“there must be continued study of the subject of work and of the subject's living conditions. In order to achieve social justice in the various parts of the world, in the various countries, and in the relationships between them, there is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers. This solidarity must be present whenever it is called for by the social degrading of the subject of work, by exploitation of the workers, and by the growing areas of poverty and even hunger. The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity to Christ, so that she can truly be the "Church of the poor". And the "poor" appear under various forms; they appear in various places and at various times; in many cases they appear as a result of the violation of the dignity of human work: either because the opportunities for human work are limited as a result of the scourge of unemployment, or because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family.”⁸

As believers in Father Sorin's vision of the “powerful means for doing good,” that Notre Dame can be, we must confront the shortcomings of our own university's practices. Members of the Notre Dame community have a remarkable and beautiful drive to use our knowledge and abilities to serve our neighbors around the world. But, in that mission, we must not forget to also serve our nearby neighbors, living here with us.

⁸ *Laborem Exercens*. Pope John Paul II. September 14 1981.

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html

Policy Recommendations' Descriptions

Increase Student Wages to \$15 per hour

Student wage guidelines from the Office of Financial Aid for the 2021-22 school year have been \$8.53 per hour for “basic” positions, \$8.97 per hour for “intermediate positions,” and \$9.40 per hour for “skilled positions.” The RSC proposes that all student workers should receive a starting minimum wage of \$15 per hour, up from the existing minimum wage.

In 2021, the University of Notre Dame raised the minimum wage of all full-time, non-salary employees to \$15 per hour. This change represents progress in its own right, but simultaneously reveals that Notre Dame’s student workers are being offered jobs well below the starting market wage. In nearly all on-campus jobs, students must work alongside their adult co-workers who receive a higher wage for doing the same task. Furthermore, multiple employers within a mile of campus already offer higher comparable starting wages. For example, Notre Dame Federal Credit Union offers a \$17 per hour starting wage, Culver's offers \$17 per hour, and Aldi offers \$16 per hour. Notre Dame excluding its on-campus student workers from this \$15 per hour wage for positions requiring similar skills suggests that the university is taking advantage of the convenience of student labor and the uncompetitive market on-campus to avoid paying students the wages they truly deserve.

Some challengers claim that students should be paid less than full-time employees because they have 100% of their financial need met by Notre Dame. However, this argument ignores the additional costs Notre Dame students must incur to participate and feel included in campus life, a burden which predominantly falls on low-income students. The ability to attend off campus events, donate to their hall’s charity, buy season football tickets, or travel home over winter break are all expenses limited by income and not covered by university tuition and fees. As a result, Notre Dame’s 2020 Inclusive Campus Survey finds that 11% of students reported experiencing adverse treatment due to their socioeconomic status, with the second most frequent manifestation of this adversity being exclusion or isolation from regular activities and opportunities.⁹ Furthermore, 30% of students cited their academic performance as being somewhat or severely negatively affected by their socioeconomic status, likely due to financial stress or the time limitations of working the full 20 hours permitted by campus-employment or federal work study. Furthermore, without a car to work off-campus, students are forced to settle for the lower wages available to them at school. In confidential interviews, student workers have voiced feelings that the university “takes advantage of” and “doesn’t value” student labor.

It should be noted that campus minimum wages used to do more for students. According to the Urban Institute, in the 1960s and 1970s a student “working part time during the school year and

⁹ 2020 Inclusive Campus Student Survey Report. University of Notre Dame

full time during the summer at the minimum wage could pay for tuition and fees and most of the room and board cost.”¹⁰ For many, it is disheartening to see campus wages so far below the level of even other entry-level positions off-campus. When interviewed, students reflected that they would much more seriously consider jobs on campus if the wage was higher. Otherwise, they feel undervalued and used.

Some student positions have recently announced that their minimum wage will be increasing to \$11 per hour. Though this is movement in the right direction, it remains inadequate. Now, working the maximum 20 hours per week for 30 weeks at \$11 per hour, a Notre Dame student would only be able to earn \$6,600 per school year, paying merely 8.2% of their cost of attendance. The increase to \$11 per hour falls short of national standards, local trends, and of solving the demonstrated predicament of student workers.

Adopting a \$15 per hour minimum wage policy would affect the approximately 40% of undergraduate students who work on campus every year. Historically, adopting a \$15 per hour minimum wage has increased university application rates, alleviated stress, improved academic performance, and removed barriers for students to go out and volunteer in their community. Achieving these benefits for low-income students will be increasingly urgent as Notre Dame continues to accept classes with record rates of socio-economic diversity each year, and strives to live up to its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.¹¹ It is time we adjust our wage structure to reflect the needs of an ever changing student body, and let our students’ dignity be reflected in their paycheck.

Institute a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for Notre Dame Workers

In addition to Notre Dame creating a \$15 per hour minimum wage for all full-time, non-salary employees, it is important the university moves away from a stagnant wage structure and incorporates a COLA to maintain its workers’ purchasing power amid inflation. This COLA should be recalculated and published annually to apply to all non-student worker classifications, including Temp/On-Call workers.

COLAs are used to increase wages, benefits, and salaries to counteract inflation. Separate from merit-based raises, a COLA is given to all workers, regardless of performance, and everyone receives the same percentage increase. Though employers are free to use their own cost-of-living metric, we recommend that Notre Dame releases an annual COLA concurrent with the prior year's rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This is because the CPI is a common metric used to understand the impact of inflation using baskets of commonly purchased household items.

¹⁰ UNDERSTANDING COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY: How Students, Institutions, and the Public Pay for Higher Education. The Urban Institute. <http://collegeaffordability.urban.org/covering-expenses/working-during-college/#/>

¹¹ First-generation, Pell Grant and students with family incomes under \$65,000 make up 20.3% of the first-year class. In addition, U.S. students of color and international students are 38.8% of the class.

However, it is understandable if Notre Dame opts to use regional data when determining its annual COLA, as opposed to national inflationary data through the CPI.

The need for a COLA is reflected in Notre Dame's current student wage structure. Using the CPI standard to adjust non-exempt employees' wages, assuming the \$15 per hour minimum wage was imposed at the beginning of 2021, the minimum wage in 2022 should be \$16.12 per hour, a \$1.12 increase. By including a COLA in Notre Dame's employee handbook and contracts, workers can be assured that as the cost of living increases in St. Joseph County, they will still be able to afford the basic necessities and receive the full purchasing power of their wage. This purchasing power will be even greater when student minimum wages are increased to \$15 per hour and non-exempt employees' pay is revaluated and raised by the RSC's proposed Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board [discussed below].

Create a Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board

According to nearly all sources, a \$15 per hour minimum wage is not enough to support a family in South Bend. The following are necessary hourly wage rates for family classifications in St. Joseph County:

	1 Adult 1 Child	1 Adult 2 Children	2 Adults 1 Child	2 Adults 2 Children
Indiana Institute for Working Families' Self Sufficiency Report (2016)	N/A	\$22.10	N/A	\$12.66
MIT's Living Wage Calculation (2022)	\$26.98	\$32.74	\$14.86	\$18.24
UNITED WAY Alice Report (2020)	\$33	N/A	N/A	\$26.39

As South Bend's largest employer, one of the nation's richest universities, and a global leader in Catholic education, Notre Dame should be setting the standard for a just and equitable wage structure. Notre Dame is by far the dominating employer in the South Bend region, which significantly decreases the competitiveness of the market. With that market power comes great

responsibility; we share responsibility for setting what the competitive wage is in the South Bend market. Raising the standard of Notre Dame wages could raise the standard for surrounding employers as well. By not paying their workers a living wage, Notre Dame forces employees to survive by relying on local non-profits or government support. As University of Rochester President Sarah Mangelsdorf stated when they raised their campus minimum wage, “It’s great to be a big employer, but I’d like to be a great employer, too. I’d like to be an employer that isn’t a place people work at because that’s the only place. I hope it’s a place they want to work at.”¹²

It is essential that Notre Dame establishes a Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board. This board's role would be to examine issues related to the economic welfare and opportunities of its employees. These issue areas would include workers employed directly by Notre Dame – undergraduate students, graduate students, adjunct faculty, exempt and non-exempt employees, Temp/On-Call – and contracted employees. The purpose of this board would be to (1) receive input from current university employees and community members on their employment experience, (2) compile and publish accurate data regarding employment, wages, and benefits of lower-paid workers in a way that is easily comprehensible to the public, (3) determine what a living wage looks like for Notre Dame employees, and (4) recommend the best economic and moral policies for employment to Notre Dame’s Budget Working Group. Such a board will also adopt an advocacy role, seeking that a just wage be instituted by the university during its budgetary and strategic planning processes.

To ensure this advocacy is well informed, the board should have access to the University of Notre Dame’s wage and benefit information. This way, when the board publishes its data, transparency will be assured to the general public who themselves can provide additional accountability over the board’s recommendations. This system of internal accountability which prevents paying workers an unsustainable wage is best demonstrated by the precedent of the Harvard Committee on Employment and Contracting Policies (HCECP). In 2001, the HCECP had a very comparable role and purpose to the proposed Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board. Ultimately, the Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board would propose necessary recommendations that improve the conditions of low-wage workers and increase transparency around the university’s wage structure.

A pivotal part of improving transparency would be to publish all announced changes to employees’ wages and benefits through a central portal available to the public. Currently, it is difficult to find information regarding Notre Dame’s wage structure. For instance, Human Resources has declined to provide information regarding the differences in hourly pay for non-exempt workers, how employees can improve their status, how student workers can improve

¹² Burke, Lilah. “Raising the Floor.” Inside Higher Ed. June 10, 2021.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/06/10/universities-raise-minimum-wage-employees-15#:~:text=This%20year%2C%20a%20number%20of,institutional%20minimum%20wage%20to%20%2415.>

their wages from basic to skilled, pay range information, information about the 2020 pandemic wage freeze, the quantity of students working specialized student wages, information regarding the companies workers are contracted from, and data on non-exempt employees benefits. A Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board would increase transparency regarding these questions and those concerning lower-paid workers' employment in general.

Using the successes of the HCECP as a precedent, Notre Dame can implement a successful Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board. The HCECP successfully improved wages, benefits, and the university's ability to monitor and implement these improvements. For example, the HCECP recommended a 50 cent wage boost and fair wage negotiations. Additionally, HCECP recommended comparable benefits between directly hired and contracted workers and more affordable health benefit co-payments. Finally, HCECP recommended the publication of annual data regarding low-wage workers and the monitoring of low-wage worker conditions. With this information made public, various student and outside groups were able to identify insufficiencies that still existed in the university's wage structure and make recommendations to the university through a clear line of communication. Rather than a one-time wage increase, requests were made that wages should reflect the cost of living and that co-payments and required hours to receive benefits should be reduced.

Most importantly, a Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board must be a systemic organization that reviews and establishes what a living wage is in our community annually. This could be, for example, a committee of faculty experts, priests, university administrators, local civil rights and business leaders, and students who meet to assess the costs of basic goods and services and adjust the wage floor accordingly. It is imperative this board not be a rubber stamp institution for the administration. Rather, it must represent a systemic change rooted in Catholic Social Teaching and university sponsored metrics like the Center for Social Concerns' Just Wage Tool which requires the objective "checking" of wages to test that they do in fact provide for all basic costs of living.¹³

The RSC is unequivocally advocating for the wage floor to be raised to match the living wage for the area as determined by the Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board. However, without being shared employee demographics from HR such as family size, we are unable to accurately say what a living wage would be for the average Notre Dame non-student worker. There are variations between living wage calculators, which is why it is necessary for the Notre Dame Just Wages and Fair Employment Board to be established in order to work with HR based on actual employee information to determine a living wage for Notre Dame workers in the St. Joseph Community.

¹³ "A Just Wage Tool." Center for Social Concerns. University of Notre Dame.
<https://socialconcerns.nd.edu/higgins-labor-program/just-wage-tool>

Additionally, this systemic change would also be an excellent teaching tool and model for Notre Dame students. It would particularly demonstrate to those in the business school how justice requires specific and consistent monitoring of wages according to what workers require to live, and not mere "market" based approaches. As the county's largest employer and a leader in Catholic higher education, this board should ensure that the salaries are at or above the median levels for peer Indiana institutions and serve as a standard for others in the private market. This board must be racially and economically diverse, reflecting the racial and economic diversity of the employees this board serves to protect.

Enhance Educational Benefits for Workers

In meetings regarding current Notre Dame employment practices, Fr. Jenkins has reflected that he envisions minimum wage level staff at Notre Dame as short-term, entry-level workers looking for a start to their career, and then using their job with the university as a launch pad to pursue other, higher-paying opportunities. In following this reasoning, he mentioned that he imagined workers would use the benefits package offered by Notre Dame as a tool for gaining more skills, stronger qualifications, and better jobs.

A closer reflection on the current educational benefits offered by the university reveals that they are lacking in their ability to further workers' long-term career development. Notre Dame currently offers tuition remission benefits that cover 90% of tuition expenses for one undergraduate three credit course or 100% of tuition expenses for one three credit graduate course per semester.¹⁴ Furthermore, non-Notre Dame courses must be reasonably related to present or future work assignments at Notre Dame or must be in pursuit of a post-secondary education to achieve an undergraduate or a graduate degree at an accredited institution.¹⁵

One class per semester is not a realistic option for workers to gain any level of degree. That pace of study would require years of time working for the university which does not fit into Fr. Jenkins' vision of the positions being short-term and career developing jobs.

Notre Dame's educational benefits are also not competitive when compared with other peer institutions. For instance, Georgetown University offers benefits for two courses (six credits) instead of only one course (three credits).¹⁶ As a leader in Catholic higher education, the University of Notre Dame should commit to providing competitive educational benefits that allow for realistic credential attainment to all its employees.

¹⁴ Office of the Executive Vice President, "Educational Benefits | Benefits & Compensation | Human Resources," University of Notre Dame, 2022, <https://hr.nd.edu/benefits-compensation/educational-benefits/>.

¹⁵ https://nd.service-now.com/hr_portal?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0020957&sys_kb_id=404dce151b1c010d655b912cd4bcb93&spa=1

¹⁶ Office of Faculty & Staff Benefits, "Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), Georgetown University, 2022, <https://benefits.georgetown.edu/tap/>.

Revisit Retirement Benefits for Workers

Under the university's current benefits and compensation packages, upon attaining eligibility, the university contributes 10% of an individual's regular salary to their retirement plan. If they are a contribution eligible faculty or staff, then they are required to also contribute 5% of their "Regular Salary" to the retirement plan. Employees must begin making these Mandatory Employee Contributions following their completion of "one year of service."¹⁷ This means that after one year of working, each worker's take home pay decreases by 5%. Especially for those already receiving low wages and fighting to cover expenses, this is a dramatic pay cut.

While retirement savings are a vital part of long-term financial security, the university should adopt practices that ensure that a person's take home pay does not decrease as a result of retirement incentives. For example, Notre Dame could pair the 5% retirement savings requirement after one year of work with a 5% wage raise after one year. This would allow the worker to continue to put savings towards retirement without coming at the expense of their ability to make ends meet now.

Celebrate Employee Appreciation Week

It is important that the university shows its employees they are a valued and supported part of the Notre Dame community. An annual Employee Appreciation Week celebrating the hard work and dedication of our workers with various campus events, thank yous, and recognitions would go a long way in embracing the value of employees and affirming Catholic Social Teaching on the need for dignity and respect for workers. Employee Appreciation Weeks are a vibrant tradition at many universities across the country already. Many of them include event programming such as an address by the President, staff awards, free giveaways, and campus wide events with both student and non-student employees. Besides meeting the economic standards demanded by our university's mission, adopting these policies will help Notre Dame develop a healthy and supportive work environment where employees feel recognized and affirmed in the dignity of their work.

Improve Notre Dame's Use of Contracted Workers

It is imperative that Notre Dame prioritizes hiring companies that pay their workers a living wage. There is no Notre Dame wage structure associated with contracted workers nor are there public statistics on the number of contracted workers the university hires for short-term projects. All contracts pertaining to the University of Notre Dame must be signed and approved by the Office of the General Counsel. The only information made public are the hundreds of contracts

¹⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cn5DKXFWt4B7JDMA3iggrobs1cWZkquE/view>

Notre Dame has with specific businesses for the purchasing of goods and services at discounted rates in exchange for exclusive agreements with these companies.

Contracted workers must pay their own taxes on their received payments, use their own equipment and supplies to complete the work, and provide the invoice to the client. This often makes contracted workers a cost effective labor source for the university, yet at the cost of lower worker pay and out-of-state corporate profits. It is imperative that Notre Dame conducts a thorough audit of its contracted services, and ensures that it is prioritizing hiring from local companies that grow the South Bend economy, and pay its workers a living wage with fair labor protections.

Conclusion

The university strives for all aspects of its operations – academic, research, service, and athletics – to be infused with an ethos of social impact and engagement. As an institution, Notre Dame is not void of beliefs; it is part of what makes us distinct and good. It also means that we have accepted the greater responsibility of ensuring our institution’s practices reflect those beliefs. The university’s 2018 Economic Impact Report explained this dual function well in declaring that, “the university’s economic role cannot be untangled from the core tenets it pursues as a Catholic institution.”¹⁸ We must encourage ourselves to reflect on the community around us and push ourselves to uphold this mission, for the sake of ourselves and our neighbors who are part of the Notre Dame family.

One of the core themes within Catholic Social Teaching is the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops explains that:

“The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.”¹⁹

Despite this statement, Notre Dame has fallen short in upholding the dignity of work for its employees in its policies, resulting in discrepancies between Catholic Social Teaching and the university’s actions. With wages failing to increase to account for the rise in inflation and many employees failing to receive a wage that would be considered a living wage for their family context, as the Notre Dame community, we must raise that standard of what we declare to be a fair wage on campus. We must raise the standard of how we are going to live out our university’s mission. Most of all, we must raise the standard of how we expect workers to be treated.

¹⁸ “Faith, Scholarship and Engagement: The University of Notre Dame as an Economic Engine.” Econsult Solutions. The University of Notre Dame. https://publicaffairs.nd.edu/assets/292740/final_report_2018_08_09_compressed.pdf

¹⁹ “The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/the-dignity-of-work-and-the-rights-of-workers>