

---

---

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

Annemarie Foy, Bridget Schippers, Caroline Aey, Edward Brunicardi, Isabelle Grace, Jacob Sherer, Jordan Lydon, Quinnlan Murray

### Publication Date

09-12-2023

### License

This work is made available under a Exclusive rights in copyrighted work license and should only be used in accordance with that license.

### Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

Foy, A., Schippers, B., Aey, C., Brunicardi, E., Grace, I., Sherer, J., Lydon, J., & Murray, Q. (2022). *Formal Submission to the University of Notre Dame Recommending Compensation and Labor Policies That Reduce Economic Hardship* (Version 1). University of Notre Dame. <https://doi.org/10.7274/24738789.v1>

This work was downloaded from CurateND, the University of Notre Dame's institutional repository.

For more information about this work, to report or an issue, or to preserve and share your original work, please contact the CurateND team for assistance at [curate@nd.edu](mailto:curate@nd.edu).

Edward Brunicardi  
Class of 2023

### Group Submission for the Notre Dame Library Research Award

23% of South Bend residents are in poverty, nearly double the national average.

Because Notre Dame is the largest employer in South Bend, this key statistic motivated myself and a group of seven students to come together in the Spring of 2022 and explore the inequalities in the university's wage structure, if any existed at all. This creative endeavor translated into a 16-page report titled the *Formal Submission to the University of Notre Dame Recommending Compensation and Labor Policies that Reduce Economic Hardship*. In this report, my team identified several aspects where Notre Dame's wage structure did not live up to its Catholic ethos of providing workers a "wage sufficient enough to support him and his Family" (Pope Pius XI, Quadragesimo Anno). Subsequently, our report listed seven key recommendations to create a more just wage structure and reduce economic hardship among Notre Dame's employees and student workers.

Resources provided through the Hesburgh Library were critical for completing this creative endeavor. Our team's first task was to identify what, if any, inequalities existed in the way our university pays its employees and student workers. Since this inquiry cannot be accomplished without identifying what constitutes an "inequality", our team conducted a literature review of just wage theories provided through the Hesburgh Library OneSearch database. This led us to several works such as *Distributive Justice* by Josh A. Ryan and *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* by Notre Dame's very own, Alasdair MacIntyre.<sup>1</sup> These works gave us the foundation to understand that Catholic Social Teaching and its statements on a just wage should be the standard used when evaluating the shortcomings in Notre Dame's wage structure – a standard especially pertinent given the university's own Catholic mission.

After identifying what constitutes an inequality and reviewing available materials on current university practices, our team sought to determine if workers were experiencing those inequalities. This required our team to conduct various interviews with student workers and campus employees in a confidential manner, where they would share their experiences living on the university's current wage structure. Reservations at Hesburgh Library's study rooms provided the best location for such interviews, as they allowed for a private space to speak on a consistent

---

<sup>1</sup> In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre explains that ethics presupposes sociology, which means that moral concepts lose their very meaning if they cannot be shown to be liveable. And so if we use phrases such as "common good" and "creating justice," we must look at how they apply, or fail to, across our social lives. When it comes to work, MacIntyre writes, "It is because of the common goods served by productive work that justice is so important for the relationships of the workplace. What elementary justice requires is that the wages paid for a week's work are sufficient to support the worker and her or his family, that the hours worked allow the worker adequate time with her or his family to pursue worthwhile activities, and that work is done in safe and secure conditions."

basis. They also were near the employees' place of work, serving as a familiar and easy location for workers to travel to after their shift.

Interviewing employees and student workers was crucial in determining what changes should be made to Notre Dame's wage structure. Interviews were also critical since most of the literature on just wage movements stress the importance of rooting all policy recommendations in the grievances of workers themselves. It would be a poor policy if all reforms were not actually needed by the workers – for instance, at other universities, sometimes workers wanted more consistent shifts, not a pay raise. Consequently, most of our interviews focused on what the worker was struggling with and what changes they thought should be made to reduce those struggles.

On the topic of human subjects, it should be noted even though our research did not require IRB approval (confirmed by the Notre Dame Director of Research Compliance), we took every precaution to ensure that the privacy of our interviewees was protected. This was done by storing all data on third party systems, informing employees of the risks of interviewing, informing employees of all the steps we used to store and destroy their data, obtaining verbal consent, ensuring interviews were not conducted during work hours, and ensuring no identifiable information would be included in our final report.

The final step in our endeavor was to understand the counterarguments Notre Dame would offer to our recommendations. This was important as our team aimed to offer recommendations that would both produce benefits for our campus workers and also have minimal negative outcomes (for instance, low-skilled layoffs or higher tuition). To accomplish this, we looked at past university responses to similar labor efforts. Using the university's archives, we collected various statements Notre Dame made in response to previous calls for higher campus wages, such as the 2005 Campus Labor Action Project (CLAP). My team also identified key organizers of the CLAP movement and reached out to hear their side of the story. The CLAP organizers also recommended we reach out to other universities who implemented just wage reforms too. We followed this advice and examined 15 other universities who made just wage reforms, what their reforms were, and if those reforms had negative or positive outcomes. This exploration allowed our team to collate sources that informed us whether or not Notre Dame's concerns about incorporating just wage reforms were justified.

As it turns out, most were not. To give one example, despite layoffs being a major concern for every university confronted with demands to raise wages, the opposite effect usually happens.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> UC Berkeley, a non-religious institution with a smaller endowment than Notre Dame, was the [first](#) university to raise its wage to \$15/hour in 2015 because “it was the right thing to do”. Preliminary reports show that, as a result of their wage increase, the local unemployment rate dropped from 4.6% to 2.8% (2014-2018). Because of this, UC Berkeley raised its wage again in 2019 to \$15.59/hour, tied its wages to the CPI, and gave all employees paid sick leave. An economist from the university [stated](#) that “for the increase in minimum wage we have seen, we haven't

While such responses were not included directly in our report, they gave us the confidence to conclude that our recommendations would have minimal negative effects on Notre Dame's workers.

Since releasing our report, we found that this just wage issue is deeply important to the entire Notre Dame community. 110 faculty signed an open letter calling on the administration to respond to our proposal and begin good faith negotiations for reform. Over 550 students and alumni signed an online petition, asking that our seven recommendations be considered. The Notre Dame Student Senate unanimously passed a resolution calling on the administration to take action and make just wage reforms a priority. This is not to mention the countless workers we talked to who struggle every day and stressed the need for better wages. My entire team has been heartened by these responses, and we hope this group project will help our university move closer to actualizing its Mission Statement: to instill a "sense of human solidarity and concern for the common good that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice."

---

really found any large job losses [...] but we can definitely expect to see decreases in poverty." We have seen little evidence to suggest that Notre Dame, with more ample resources than UC Berkeley, will see different results.