

Top Wright State official gets \$60,000 extra for debate prep

NATIONAL GOVT & POLITICS

By [Lynn Hulsey](#) - Staff Writer



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Updated: 4:57 p.m. Friday, June 17, 2016 | Posted: 1:07 p.m. Friday, June 17, 2016

A high-ranking Wright State University administrator is getting paid an extra \$60,000 on top of his six-figure salary to direct preparations for the presidential debate the university will host on Sept. 26.

In all, Vice President for Planning Robert. J. Sweeney received three stipends in 2015. That brought his compensation to \$364,432 and made him the eighth highest paid employee at Wright State, which has raised tuition, cut staff and dipped into reserves because of a budget shortfall.

The bulk of Sweeney's debate stipend will be paid out this year.

"I think that there are legitimate questions that the people in the public could ask, most especially about this extra amount being paid for the debate," said Greg Lawson, senior policy analyst for The Buckeye Institute for Public Policy, a Columbus-based conservative think tank.

"Wouldn't (that) in a certain sense be an element of what you are already being compensated for? Everybody always says you need to do more with less."



At a kickoff event in April, Wright State University President David Hopkins told Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce members that hosting ... [Read More](#)

Martin Kich, faculty union president, also raised questions about the stipend payments while the university is grappling with a **\$27.7 million operating budget shortfall**. The shortfall caught many by

surprise and university officials blame it on unplanned expenses and a decline in revenue, particularly on investment returns.

“I think spending any large amount of money in the current environment is an issue,” said Kich, an English professor who is president of the American Association of University Professors, which represents 650 to 700 full-time faculty at WSU.

“There is belt-tightening by everybody, but every time an administrator gets extra responsibility they get well-compensated for it. That’s not necessarily the same with faculty and staff.”





Robert J. Sweeney, Executive Vice President for Planning and Secretary to the Board of Trustees Wright State University

Three stipends

Sweeney's 2015 compensation includes three stipends totaling \$99,248 along with a \$53,700 bonus and a \$7,200 annual car allowance, said Seth Bauguess, WSU director of communications.

Sweeney, a vice president since 2007 when David R. Hopkins became president and promoted him, also serves as secretary to the board of trustees. Sweeney received one of his stipends for his three-month stint last year as interim chief operating officer.



Administrators, including Robert J. Sweeney, work at University Hall at Wright State University. LYNN HULSEY/STAFF

Michael Bridges, chairman of the board of trustees, said stipends historically have been used as part of the compensation process for department chairpersons and other jobs.

“The board absolutely understands we have a budget issue at the university and we are working diligently with the administration on that,” Bridges said. “However, it is not up to the board to begin managing the stipends of the university. That is the administration’s role.”

Sweeney and Hopkins did not respond to requests for comment. Bauguess said Hopkins will address questions about the debate at a later date.



Wright State University will host the first presidential debate of 2016 on September 26.

Debate costs

Sweeney is being assisted in debate preparations by two new full-time employees hired in January under one-year contracts. John McCance will be paid \$108,000 annually to serve as a liaison with the Commission on Presidential Debates, which oversees the debates, and with elected officials. McCance was already working as a consultant for more than a year assisting in preparation of the debate application.

Steven Warden will get \$80,000 in pay annually and a \$75 per month car allowance as corporate and community giving officer, charged with raising money to fund the debate. WSU documents indicate he may be kept on after a year to work on the university's 50th anniversary celebration.

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Presidential debate to be hosted by Wright State

All other university staff assigned to work on the debate will do so without stipend compensation, including those involved in security, cybersecurity, construction, media relations, academics, student activities and other jobs, Bauguess said.

The debate is the first one scheduled for the fall General Election and Hopkins has estimated it could cost up to \$8 million. Hopkins said in May that about \$2.5 million had been raised through cash and sponsorships, in-kind contributions and what the university expects to receive in charge-back fees assessed to media outlets and others during the event. Cash donations total about \$500,000 and the state legislature awarded a \$220,000 security grant.

Bridges said university funds will be used to pay upfront costs but would be reimbursed from fundraising.

“We do not want to use any base budget funds from the university for the debate,” Bridges said.

Bonuses

Sweeney remains a tenured finance professor and formerly served as director of Wright State's Kettering Center for Continuing Education. He also is former chair of the department of finance, insurance and real estate.

Bauguess said Sweeney does not teach classes but could return to teaching if he leaves the administration. As a professor-turned-administrator he currently receives a \$70,523 administrative stipend on top of his annual base pay of \$208,044. The other two stipends last year were \$15,000 for filling in as the school's chief operating officer and \$15,000 for the first three months of his debate work.

Last July he received a 3.75 percent raise, boosting both his base pay and administrative stipend.

His \$53,700 bonus was the second highest awarded in 2015, according to this newspaper's analysis of payroll data provided by the university. Hopkins had the highest bonus, a \$354,560 payment that brought his total cash compensation to \$854,220.

Last year, 92 of the university's 3,704 employees received bonuses, including five people who received \$19,000 or more. Of the \$640,518 in bonus payments, more than 55 percent of the total went to Hopkins, according to the university's payroll data.

The total employee payroll was \$196 million.

Bauguess said the school's payroll data for total gross pay is accurate but that some retroactive payments to employees may not be captured in the bonus and stipend fields.

Wright State gave a total of \$5.5 million in stipends to 346 employees last year, according to the data the university provided the newspaper.

Historic event

Both Kich and Lawson said they understand it is **a big deal for Wright State to host a presidential debate**, the first in Ohio since 1980 when President Jimmy Carter debated former California Gov. Ronald Reagan in Cleveland.

But Lawson said the school should explain the justification for Sweeney's extra compensation.

"There's no reason to be hiding anything about that," he said. "Even when individual cases aren't what breaks the bank it makes normal people scratch their head and say to themselves, 'I don't get to do that. I don't have that kind of advantage.'"

Wright State's highest-paid employees, 2015

Wright State University - 2015 - Highest paid employees : Sheet1

Professor	Human Factors Engineering	\$388,202
Deputy president for Planning/secretary to board of Trustees/professor	President Administration	\$364,432
General counsel	Office of General Counsel	\$353,143
Deputy president for curriculum and instruction/professor	Provost	\$309,635
Professor/chair	Emergency Medicine	\$303,316
Professor/LexisNexis eminent scholar	Computer Science	\$295,212
Professor/chair	Geriatrics	\$290,677
Deputy president business and financial affairs	Business & Finance Administration	\$288,028
Deputy president for university advancement	University Advancement Administration	\$281,462
Professor/chair	Family Medicine	\$281,451
Deputy president for research and graduate studies	Administration	\$281,052
Public Bowler Properties chief operating officer	President Administration	\$273,806
Professor	Surgery	\$273,730
Professor/chair	Orthopedic Surgery	\$272,068

Sheet1

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Wright State's biggest bonuses, 2015

Wright State University - 2015 - Highest bonus pay

	University Management Administration	\$200,700	\$19,000
	Wright State Nutter Center	\$156,774	\$19,484
football coach	Intercollegiate Athletics	\$175,553	\$8,753
account	Intercollegiate Athletics	\$26,123	\$8,500
	Pediatrics	\$160,094	\$8,000
ent for	Human Resources	\$198,036	\$7,500
	Computer Science	\$245,726	\$5,034
ent for operations	Business and Finance Administration	\$190,195	\$5,000
mpus	Business Services Administration	\$132,887	\$4,000
ent of nt and service	Engineering and Construction	\$154,492	\$4,000
all coach	Intercollegiate Athletics	\$264,841	\$3,647
coach	Intercollegiate Athletics	\$84,338	\$2,918
	History	\$60,942	\$2,562
	Center for Service-Learning and Civic	\$115,204	\$2,562
	English Language and Literatures	\$96,530	\$2,469
ball coach	Intercollegiate Athletics	\$39,552	\$2,188
ball coach	Intercollegiate Athletics	\$37,632	\$2,188

WSU2015HighestBonusPay

[Sheet2](#)

[Sheet3](#)

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Wright State's biggest stipends, 2015

Wright State University - 2015 - Highest stipend pay : WSU2015 Highest stipend pay

Name	Title	Department	G
Margaret M. Dunn	Professor/associate dean	Surgery	\$
Glen D. Solomon	Professor/chair	Medicine	\$
Mary C. McCarthy	Professor/chair	Surgery	\$
Richard T. Laughlin	Professor/chair	Orthopedic Surgery	\$
Jerome Lumetta Yaklic	Associate professor/chair	Obstetrics and Gynecology	\$
Akpofure P. Ekeh	Professor	Surgery	\$
James E. Brown	Professor/chair	Emergency Medicine	\$
Robert J. Sweeney	Vice president for planning/secretary to board of trustees/professor	President Administration	\$
Therese M. Zink	Professor/chair	Family Medicine	\$
Michael Joseph Prayson	Professor	Orthopedic Surgery	\$
Paul G Koles	Associate professor/chair	Pathology	\$
Arun Aggarwal	Assistant professor	Pediatrics	\$
Larry Wayne Lawhorne	Professor/chair	Geriatrics	\$
Gregory Paul Boivin	Professor	Research Affairs	\$
Randy J. Woods	Associate professor	Surgery	\$
Jeffrey Bryant Travers	Chair	Pharmacology and Toxicology	\$
Linda M. Barney	Associate professor	Surgery	\$
Teresa W. Zryd	Associate professor	Family Medicine	\$
James Ray Ebert	Associate professor/chair	Community Health	\$
Gregorv J. Toussaint	Med Dir. Inpt. Attending-Assoc	Student Affairs and Admissions	\$
WSU2015 Highest stipend pay			> <

Robert J. Sweeney 2015 compensation - \$364,432

- Wright State University vice president of planning and secretary to board of trustees.

- Base pay - \$204,284

- Administrative stipend - \$69,248

- Bonus - \$53,700

- Executive director of debate stipend - \$15,000

- Interim chief operating officer stipend - \$15,000

- Car allowance - \$7,200

Source: Wright State University

Wright State University Payroll 2015 - By the Numbers

Employees - 3,704

Total payroll - \$196 million

Stipends - \$5.5 million to 346 people

Bonuses - \$640,518 to 92 people

Overtime - \$245,396 to 327 people

Class overload pay - \$1.3 million to 297 people

Adjunct pay - \$4.1 million to 772 people

Source: Wright State University

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