CSUEU Vice President Jessica Dalton Response to CSU Salary Study

August 13, 2026

The Data Doesn't Support a 1% Salary Structure Adjustment

CSU has a well-documented structural compensation problem. This was never just about whether employees need annual COLAs. The 2022 Mercer study identified wage stagnation, inadequate salary structures, limited pay advancement, and insufficient career progression, and concluded the compensation system needed structural correction. It did not envision a one-time fix. It recommended step progression, ongoing annual funding, regular market reviews, and salary structure adjustments to maintain competitiveness estimating roughly 3% annually (about 2.03% for step progression plus at least 1% for market movement) just to keep pace.

The gap narrowed because we bargained, not because CSU acted alone

Between the Mercer study and the 2026 Segal report, CSUEU negotiated a 7% GSI in 2022, a 5% GSI in 2023, a 5% GSI in 2024, and Salary Step implementation in October 2025. The improvement Segal now documents is evidence that those investments worked, not evidence that the underlying problem is solved.

	Mercer 2022	Segal 2026	CSU 2026 Proposal
Gap	12% below market	6% below blended market; CSUEU base salary 4% below higher-ed market	1% Salary Structure Adjustment

CSU cannot characterize this as "at market"

Segal does not say CSUEU wages are at market; it says CSUEU base wages are 4% below market. Staff overall are 6% below the 50/50 blended market, 10% below general industry, and roughly 1% below higher education alone. Segal defines its "competitive range" as 85%-115% of market median, meaning an employee can be 15% below market and still be called "competitive." Competitive range is not the same as "at market," and neither is total compensation the same as base salary. CSU's benefits are valuable, but they don't erase the documented wage gap. We are bargaining wages.

The gap also isn't evenly distributed: among staff earning below $80,000, 66% fall below the higher-education market median, compared with just 36% of those earning $80,000 or more. The average understates how bad the problem is at the bottom of the salary structure.

The contrast is simple: CSUEU's documented base-salary gap is 4%. CSU's proposed adjustment is 1%. For staff overall, the gap is 6%, even larger.

Investment works, which is the argument for more of it, not less

Segal reports that CSU faculty and staff received 17% in cumulative compensation increases, and that staff competitiveness improved by roughly six percentage points as a result. If 17% in negotiated increases bought six points of competitiveness, the answer is to finish the correction and maintain market position not to stop at 1%. If CSU believes its own compensation studies, a 1% SSA cannot be the answer to a documented, larger deficit.

Across both studies, CSU consistently struggles to compete for staff against the broader labor market, directly relevant to recruitment and retention.

What we're proposing, and why it takes three parts

A salary adjustment, a targeted structural adjustment, and step progression each do different work, and none of them substitutes for the others:

1. A meaningful SSA. Everyone gets a real increase, because everyone has absorbed wage stagnation, everyone needs to keep pace with a market that keeps moving, and everyone needs protection from falling behind again.

2. Targeted salary structure adjustments. Separate funding for classifications still furthest behind: CSUEU classifications below market, lower-paid classifications, classifications with recruitment/retention problems, classifications outside the current step structure, compression created by step implementation, and employees substantially below their target market position.

3. Guaranteed, meaningful step progression. A salary adjustment fixes where salaries start; step progression governs how employees move once they're there. CSU has not agreed to guarantee that progression continues; it still depends on a Satisfactory-or-higher performance evaluation, leaving the opportunity subject to being reopened or denied. Simply having a step structure doesn't solve wage progression if employees can get stuck inside it. Mercer's recommendation for ongoing investment in step progression confirms this isn't optional; it's a fundamental component of a competitive compensation system.

Without progression, a salary adjustment just gives employees a higher floor to be stuck at. Without an adequate structure, progression just moves employees through a system that's still below market. We need both.

Bottom line

We are not bargaining to sit within 15% of market. We're bargaining to reach market and stay there. The data shows we're behind. The bargaining history shows collective action is what moves us forward. And a 1% proposal -- one that doesn't touch step progression at all -- shows CSU isn't yet serious about finishing the job it documented itself.

Close the gap. Fix the salary structure. Establish meaningful progression. Give the employees who built this system the compensation the data demands.