

W07 – Education writing

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Waterfront houses, cars and bonuses fill contracts of college presidents in Hampton Roads

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When Norfolk State University's new president, Javaune Adams-Gaston, steps into her role this summer, she'll also get keys to an all-expenses paid, two-story house on campus and a car to drive.

That's on top of her \$400,000 base salary.

Sound like a lot? The salary actually falls right in line with her peers at other southeastern Virginia universities, whose contracts also include perks like waterfront houses and cars. One gets a three-month summer vacation. Another can nab bonuses in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

It's all part of how universities compensate their top people and ensure that when they're seeking a leader, as Norfolk State did this past year, the right candidate lands in the role.

"This person needs to be able to walk on water," said K. Johnson Bowles, vice president for college advancement of the State University of New York's Geneseo campus.

University presidents lead budget decisions, manage the needs of students, faculty, staff and alumni, and serve as the point person when catastrophe strikes on campus, Bowles said.

"No one can do all of that, but you have to be able to swim and balance all those things."

The Virginian-Pilot looked at president contracts for the four public universities in the area — Norfolk State, Christopher Newport, and Old Dominion universities, and the College of William and Mary.

It's hard to compare apples to apples because each school is different. While many of the stakeholders are the same, differences range from university culture to alumni bases. ODU is the largest, with about 25,000 students. CNU has about 5,100.

Experience levels vary among the presidents, too. CNU's Paul Tribble Jr. has been in his role 22 years, and John Broderick has led ODU for the past 10 years. Katherine Rowe is finishing up her first year at William and Mary, and Adams-Gaston will begin her first year of presidency July 1.

James Finkelstein, a retired public policy professor at George Mason University who has done extensive research on contracts of college presidents, said any comparison needs to look at the total value of the contract, not just the annual salary.

The four locally fall in a close cluster, between \$400,000 and \$500,000, but yearly bonuses are all over the map. Tribble can receive up to a \$200,000 bonus if the "university's progress towards the goal of the six-year strategic plan" is deemed satisfactory by CNU's board of visitors, while Broderick's bonus can reach \$25,000.

Finkelstein said without specific criteria outlined in each contract, it's easy for board members to approve the full amount each year.

Deferred compensation — a portion of their salary paid at a later date — is another not-so-obvious payout to the president, Finkelstein said.

"The hope there is that when you're paid that deferred amount you'll be in a lower tax bracket, so you'll end up paying less taxes," he said. Those amounts aren't reported publicly until they're paid, he said, which often gives the perception that a president is paid less than they actually are.

Finkelstein and Judith Wilde, a policy and government professor at George Mason University, said while many details of the four contracts are commonly seen, some aren't. Tribble, for example, is guaranteed a built-in, fully-paid summer vacation every three years that can last up to 90 days, in addition to his sabbatical and any accrued vacation time.

"This is very clearly at the far end of what we have seen of how boards deal with vacations," Finkelstein said.

Each president is able to teach during and after their term ends, but Broderick's contract includes six months of sabbatical and at least a 4½-year faculty position. He'll have to teach two graduate-level courses each year — one of which is over the summer — and he's paid to do so at about 83 percent of his presidential salary, or just under \$392,000.

Wilde said this is the kind of thing she and Finkelstein rail against: a president going back to teaching at a very high salary with a teaching load significantly lighter than that of his peers. Finkelstein said it raises a question: How does continuing to provide perks for these state employees benefit the universities or their communities?

"Someone has to pay for these things. If not the taxpayers, then it has to be the donors or the students."

Bowles, who wrote an essay on presidential compensation for Insider Higher Ed, said there are reasons for the perks. A house on campus puts a college president at the center of the action. A large one isn't just a living space, but used for university entertaining as well. Taking care of needs allows presidents to focus solely on the job in front of them.

There are several misconceptions about college presidents, that they are just figureheads or their positions are largely social, Bowles said. It's more than that.

"It is trying to be all things to all people and that's one of the most stressful jobs I've ever witnessed," she said. And the job comes with sacrifices.

"You're giving your whole life. You're giving your waking and not waking time to want to help other people. In general, that's not only a selfless act, but one that is all-consuming because you wouldn't do the job unless you cared."

College president contracts at a glance:

Katherine Rowe, College of William and Mary

Base pay: \$500,000

Deferred compensation: \$75,000 annually

Potential bonus: Up to \$75,000 annually

Car allowance: \$20,000 each year

Travel and expenses: Business class travel for Rowe and her spouse and university credit card provided

Paul Trible Jr., Christopher Newport University

Base pay: \$429,241

Deferred compensation: \$100,000

Potential bonus: \$200,000

Continued long-term care insurance after presidency

Javaune Adams-Gaston, Norfolk State University

Base pay: \$400,000

Deferred compensation: Amount not specified in contract

Potential bonus: Up to \$8,000 per year

John Broderick, Old Dominion University

Base pay: \$469,916

Deferred compensation: \$150,250 in most recent contract

Potential bonus: \$25,000

Move-out expenses covered upon leaving presidency

Access to car in post-presidency

Executive physical exam paid for even after presidency ends

Hampton Roads teachers turn to crowdsourcing sites for classroom supplies

<https://www.pilotonline.com/news/education/vp-nw-teacher-donations-20190821-jrksgo62cfhr7gompszztrpafi-story.html>

Science teacher Heather Overkamp has her eye on biotechnology kits that will help her teach medical health lessons this coming school year.

The field changes fast, she said, and her independent research students need to keep up with the newest technologies.

But the price tag — \$500 — is one her district likely won't pay. So she's crowdsourcing.

The website she's using, Donors Choose, is one of several that teachers are increasingly using to fill the gap between classroom supplies they want and how much their schools can afford. As teachers prepare for the school year to begin, the scene is heating up.

In Hampton Roads, nearly 6,000 projects have been funded for a total of more than \$2.9 million since 2007, according to Donors Choose. Norfolk teachers have had the most projects funded in the area, about 1,700, the company said.

Teachers propose a project, spell out the cost and then post it, and the website helps them craft a compelling message. Sometimes the donations are matched or doubled by large corporations. Some teachers also use GoFundMe and Amazon, which lets teachers create wish lists. All are easier than constantly applying for grants, which may take a significant amount of time and documentation.

"It gives you that freedom to pick whatever it is you need and you're not constrained by budget line items," said Overkamp, who teaches science and engineering at I.C. Norcom High School in Portsmouth. In the past she's successfully crowdfunded 3D printers, 3D doodler pens and other high-tech gadgets.

At most school systems around Hampton Roads, teachers are required to get approval from their principals or supervisors before soliciting donations. But for the most part, they are supportive, several teachers said.

Hampton Roads school divisions vary on how they help teachers with school supplies. Norfolk gives \$100 stipends while some others give gift cards or leave decisions up to principals. Teachers are also eligible for a \$250 tax deduction for classroom expenses that have not been reimbursed.

But most still reach into their own pockets.

Ninety-four percent of public school teachers spend their own money on supplies, according to a federal Department of Education study cited by The New York Times. Teachers spend nearly \$500 of their own money, according to the story.

In Virginia Beach, there's a room at Newtown Elementary that teachers call "the Christmas room."

It has a 65-inch interactive screen, a Lego wall, a video studio and tables that fold up to move so there's more space for Lego robotics. Instructional technologist Kevin Rickard made it into a maker space funded by projects on Donors Choose.

He also created a science lab with donated tables, magnets, shelving units, blenders and other supplies. And he helped create two garden spaces stocked with hoses, rain barrels, compost bins, umbrellas and even bird baths.

Rickard said he wants to get moving on projects faster than the district is able to fund them. He uses social media to engage in discussions with teachers around the country, find donors and put a spotlight on projects that need attention.

He's led training sessions for colleagues, including teacher Amanda Lewis, who has netted more activities and games for her classroom at Newtown through crowdsourcing.

"It's nice for the extra things that make school more fun," Lewis said. "It's for those extra things to make it more meaningful for them." She also said parents will stock classrooms in the beginning of the year, but as time goes on, the supplies run low.

Molly Loch, who teaches art at Providence Elementary in Virginia Beach, has had nine projects funded through Donors Choose. This year she's after cameras, a wireless compact photo printer and printer paper, which will all cost about \$700. She wants them so students can learn how to compose a picture and document their work.

Her school is "on the generous side" she said, and she has a "fantastic principal who rarely tells me no." But she also doesn't want to keep going back to ask for more.

Jennie Paden, who teaches first grade at Providence, said it can be eye-opening for people beyond the school community to see teachers' needs in a list format. She's used Donors Choose and Amazon wish lists in the past, and this year is asking for books that focus on social and emotional growth and development.

"It gives you the feeling that I'm not asking someone to donate but can give back, too," she said. "It's nice to be able to do something for somebody else. We all kind of benefit from it."

He's an author, a TEDX speaker and he's still got a year left of college at Norfolk State University

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When Isaiah Swift was about six years old, he spent a weekend with his grandmother when she wasn't feeling well.

He got up and made a full breakfast for her: eggs, toast with butter, oatmeal and even grits. He poured a glass of juice and cranked up the coffee maker.

She scolded him for cooking by himself. But she ate it anyway.

"It was delectable," his grandmother, Jessie L. Laughton, recalled. She remembers how he laughed and told her that he knew what he was doing from watching his mom at home.

Swift, now 21, has always been independent and knowledgeable, Laughton said. So much so, the Norfolk native landed \$108,000 in scholarships as he finished up high school, then wrote a book a year ago and gave a TEDX talk in California in March.

And he still has a year left at Norfolk State University, where he studies finance.

His talk, "Awaken the Greatness Within You" was for high school students. He talked about how his mother, a single parent, encouraged him to apply for scholarships because she wouldn't be able to pay his tuition.

It lit a fire under him and soon he was applying for dozens of them.

"The whole scholarship world is really about who you know, in terms of local scholarships," he said.

He worked at the student-run credit union at Maury High School and earned a scholarship there.

That first one was for \$125.

"When you're 16, that feels like a thousand dollars," he said. "You feel so excited. That's what kept me going." After that, he said, he became "the scholarship guy."

Cherilyn Nobles, who runs the credit union, said Swift helped make it a success. She's not surprised to see him doing well.

"I'm just in awe of him and all of the things he does," she said. "He just has no limits. He will push to the max and try any and everything he can to succeed. That's what amazes me about him."

Getting on the TED stage also took perseverance: Swift applied all over the East Coast and had no luck. But when he reached out to the organizers in Palo Alto, Calif., they were receptive. Being a published author and a college student helped.

He's been told his message resonated with not just the high school students, but older folks as well.

Nobles said Swift wants to give back and share what he knows with everybody.

"He thinks, 'If I can do, it so can you,' " she said.

Swift says he's always been interested in entrepreneurship and loved studying the economy. It's what lead him to studying finance. He also "wanted to make a lot of money" and thought about which degree would help with that.

His book, "Unlock Your Greatness: 8 Ways to be Successful in High School and Beyond," isn't related to finance. He talks about where to find scholarships locally and tells his own story. It's about setting goals, figuring out what gifts you have to offer the world, and making the most of the time you have. And he knows there will always be an audience for it: high schoolers applying to college.

For him, it was about being a college student and starting his entrepreneurial journey. He thinks writing the book is reflective of his generation: taking risks and being hands-on.

This summer, he's interning for a bank in Charlotte, N.C. He met someone from the bank at a Shark Tank-style competition who was impressed by his work and offered him the internship in consumer banking.

"I want to be able to travel and network and build those relationships," he said.