Reflecting on academic salary policy

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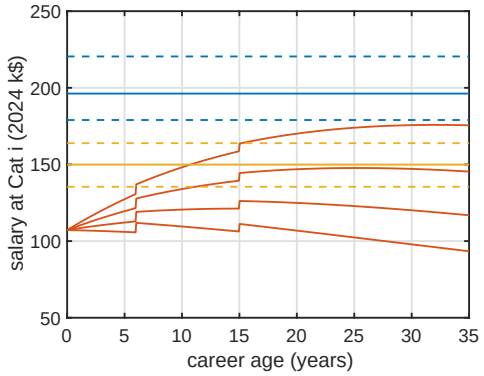
As another year comes to an end, the Committee on Academic Staff Compensation (CASC)[1] is moving toward a 2026 academic salary policy. In anticipation of the Provost's recommendation to the Board of Governor's in the new year, I would like to share some of my considerations on how the salary policy may impact our members, not just in the short term, but over the span of a career. These are my personal views, based on publicly available information; they are intended to spark discussion, and do not represent an official position of the CASC, MAUT, or McGill University.

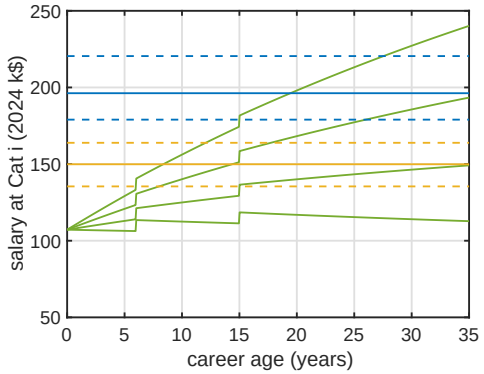
Principal quantitative components of the salary policy include (i) the across-the-board percentage, (ii) the Category 1-4 merit amounts, and (iii) promotional increases. Our recent fall newsletter showed that Category 1-4 merit amounts have fluctuated tremendously over the last decade, averaging out to practically zero overall increase (in Category merit amounts) for the ten years. The across-the-board percentage has varied between 0.75 and 1.35% ($>$1% for only one of the last ten years), and the promotional increases were fixed at 5 k$ for seven of the last ten years. The annual rate of inflation for Montreal for the past decade was about 2.5%.

Figure 1(a) shows the salary of an assistant professor (starting at the 25th percentile for an assistant professor in 2015) evolving under a salary policy with Category 1-4 merit, promotion and across-the-board percentage fixed at the 10-year averages from McGill's academic salary policies, inflation fixed at the 10-year average for Montreal (2.5%). The model shows that academic staff who consistently perform at Category 1 for an entire career (the highest red curve) fail to reach the 25th percentile for full professors of their generation (lower blue dashed line); professors performing at Category 2 and below eventually experience declines in the purchasing power of their salaries (lower red curves trending downward), failing to reach the median salary for an associate professor of their generation (solid yellow line).

Next, Figure 1(b) shows career advancements un-



(a) Merit and promotional increases fixed at their respective 2015-2025 averages.



(b) Merit and promotional increases incremented according to the 10-year averaged inflation rate.

Figure 1: Model projections of career salary progressions at Category 1-4 merit (red, green curves) under a '10-year averaged McGill salary policy' with static (panel a) and floating (panel b) merit and promotional increases. Progressions start at the 25th percentile for an assistant professor in 2015, adopting the 10-year averaged inflation rate for Montreal (2.5%). Horizontal lines show the 25/50/75th percentiles for full (blue) and associate (yellow) professors in 2015, expressed in 2024 dollars. Calculations do not include anomaly and retention benefits, stipends.

[1] CASC is recognized in the Terms of Reference of the Human Resources Committee as fulfilling a formal role in the consultation process related to academic staff compensation at McGill University.

der a salary policy for which the across-the-board percentage is fixed at the 10-year average, but now merit and promotional increases are systematically adjusted according to the 10-year averaged inflation rate (2.5%). This model demonstrates incremental changes in merit and promotional salary components yielding positive outcomes, rewarding high performance without relying on anomaly and retention benefits.[2] For example, Category 2 performance (second to highest green curve) enables academic staff to reach the median salary for full professors of their generation (solid blue line) in about 35 years.

McGill's academic salary policies of the last decade appear to be yielding outcomes closer to those in Figure 1(a) than those in Figure 1(b); negative outcomes are exacerbated by the very high inflation rates of recent years, and will likely be further impacted by McGill's present budgetary crisis. Indeed, following our recent fall newsletter, some colleagues have noted their inflation-adjusted salaries in 2025 being some 10 k$ lower than in 2020, even when having achieved Category 1 merit in every year.

MAUT has been developing an academic salary-policy proposal that is intended to be proactive and sustainable, aligned with the priorities endorsed by MAUT Council.[3] The proposal calls for systematic adjustments to merit and promotional increases that will enable salaries for performance at Category 2 over a 35-year career to reach the median for full professors. It also sets a floor by which performance at Category 4 maintains constant salary-purchasing power.

When expressed in inflation adjusted dollars (as in Figures 1 and 2), MAUT's salary progression model [4] depends on the inflation rate only as it stands relative to the across-the-board percentage, Δ = IR% - ATB%. Recognizing that the Bank of Canada and the Canadian Government seek to maintain total CPI inflation at the mid-point of 1–3%, one may set Δ = 1%. This would offer protection for academic staff who achieve high performance during periods of high inflation (higher ATB, lower merit); otherwise reverting to a merit-focussed policy in times of low inflation (higher merit, lower ATB). Given that inflation in recent years has averaged more than 4% in Montreal (twice the Bank of Canada's inflation-control target of 2%), this would call for an across-the-board allocation of about 3% in 2026, an amount that would likely decrease as we move further from the pandemic.

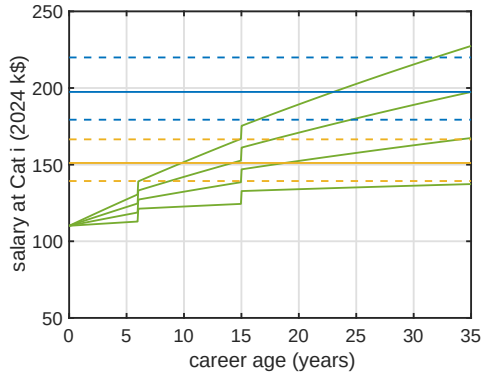


Figure 2: Career salary progressions at Category 1-4 merit (green curves) under MAUT's proposed 2026 salary policy, starting at the 25th percentile for an assistant professor in 2024. Horizontal lines show the 25/50/75th percentiles for full (blue) and associate (yellow) professors in 2024. Category 1 (highest green curve) furnishes an upper bound that enables academic staff to reach the 75th percentile for full professors in about 32 years; Category 2 reaches the median salary for a full professor in 35 years; and Category 4 (lowest green curve) sets a hypothetical floor.

Figure 2 shows career salary progressions under MAUT's proposal. The model furnishes an upper bound on salaries for performance at Category 1 (highest green curve), e.g., reaching the present 75th percentile for full professors in about 32 years. Performance at Category 2 (second highest green curve) furnishes salaries that reach the present median salary for full professors in 35 years. Category 3 performance reaches the present 75th percentile for associate professors in about 35 years. The floor for meeting expectations is set by Category 4; this maintains constant salary purchasing power without promotions. Accordingly, the lowest green curve in Figure 2 is a progression for an assistant professor who, perhaps hypothetically, is promoted twice with all merit increases at Category 4; such marginal gains are attributed solely to promotions under this model.

I hope you may reflect on these considerations, and share with us your thoughts. Which of the progressions in Figure 1 are closest to yours, and how reasonable are the progressions in Figure 2 in light of those in Figure 1?

Wishing all restful holidays, and the very best for 2026.

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[2] An anomaly and retention budget was 600 k$ for the last nine years prior to 2023-24, increasing to 750 k$ in 2023. On an academic staff headcount of 2000, this represents $<$0.24% of the present median salary ($\approx$158 k$), but likely has a significant impact on the salaries of a minority portion of the academic staff.

[3] "A Framework for Transparent and Competitive Academic Salaries", MAUT CASC Salary Policy Brief 2025-26 Cycle (September 24, 2025).

[4] "A few considerations informing discussion of salary policy" (from President Elect's report to the MAUT Council, September 24, 2025).