

Ex-Fresno State president Welty's new job raises eyebrows on campus, social media

By Hannah
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John Welty at a 2012 news conference.

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Former Fresno State President John Welty's new lucrative professor job in Palm Desert is creating buzz among his old colleagues — and riling suspicions of nepotism since his wife is employed as dean there.

Welty, who retired in 2013 after a 22-year career in Fresno, was appointed last summer for a special “trustee professorship” at the [California State University, San Bernardino, satellite campus in Palm Desert](#). The job pays \$148,752, [The Desert Sun reported](#) this week in an article outlining the deal. In his year between jobs, Welty was paid a \$223,000 transition salary.

The professorship is a benefit guaranteed as part of the retirement package for CSU presidents and vice chancellors hired before 1992. Welty was picked as Fresno State's president in 1991 and is the only former president employed under the special title, CSU spokesman Mike Uhlenkamp said. In an interview with The Bee on Thursday, Welty said he plans to retire from the job at the end of the semester.

Only one more CSU president, Sonoma State's Ruben Armiñana, will be eligible for the benefit, but Uhlenkamp said the system's 22 other presidents will receive similar, more limited executive transition perks when they step down.

Welty's job has stirred conversation among Fresno State faculty, some concerned about his pay, and others who say Welty and his wife Sharon Brown-Welty's new jobs recall the controversial 2011 hire of Brown-Welty to Fresno State's graduate studies dean position. Back then, Brown-Welty was appointed to the graduate dean job without a formal search process and less than a week after her predecessor left. Brown-Welty was hired as dean at the Palm Desert campus in May.

Andrew Fiala, director of Fresno State's Ethics Center and chair of the philosophy department, said even a perception of preferential treatment "makes people think there's something broken in the institution."

"I think it's perfectly legal. There were no laws broken, but again, it's this issue of the appearance of things," he said.

Welty said suggestion of nepotism is an "inaccurate perception" and that strict policies were followed back in 2011 and now. He also said it's not uncommon for married couples to work at the same university.

Uhlenkamp said Welty's latest appointment was entirely aboveboard and well within the limits of his original benefits package. Uhlenkamp said since CSU administrative pay is typically lower than that at comparable public universities, the extra perks make top CSU jobs more attractive to the best candidates. The trustee professorships also benefit the CSU system, he said, since former presidents have strong business and community networks to help with fundraising and other activities.

Uhlenkamp also defended Brown-Welty's new job, noting she was picked for her Palm Desert dean position through a formal search after her husband stepped into his trustee professorship role.

Welty's job description includes fundraising duties and aiding the campus as it develops a strategic plan, among other things, a report to the CSU Board of Trustees from November shows. Welty reports directly to CSU Chancellor Timothy White and the CSU San Bernadino president, Uhlenkamp said.

He's also required to teach one college course. The Desert Sun reported the class is called "Lessons from Legends" and described it as a once-a-week speaker series. Some Fresno State faculty bristled at the requirement, noting most Fresno State professors take on heavy courseloads.

"None of us have had a raise. They're throwing more students at us and giving us more work," Fiala said, noting Fresno State faculty salaries have stayed nearly flat over the past decade. He added that Welty's situation "doesn't make us feel like our concerns are being addressed."

Lisa Weston, chair of Fresno State's English department and vice president of Fresno State's faculty union, called Welty's setup in Palm Desert "shameful."

"That's way more money than a full professor makes on any campus who has been teaching for 30, 35, 40 years," she said. "To coordinate one class, really? That's on top of the retirement salary and the retirement package."

Over the past week, several Fresno State faculty have taken to Twitter and Facebook to express their concerns.

"How comforting to know that @Fresno_State's ex-president has 'transitioned' into a cushy @calstate job in retirement!" Madhusudan Katti, associate professor of biology, tweeted on Thursday.

"A lot of the faculty are unhappy, to put it mildly," he said in an interview Thursday. "Think about how many classes could be filled with that kind of money, or how much tuition could be provided to students who are struggling."

Welty said he understands faculty members' unease.

"The faculty and administrators have gone without raises for a long period of time up until two years ago. On the other hand, the policies that I was hired under, the compensation package I agreed to, impacted my decision to stay in the system," said Welty, 70, noting he's since received other offers.

As part of his new job, Welty's official duties include chairing the board of trustees for a local private pharmacy school — [California Health Sciences University](#) in Clovis.

Uhlenkamp said that while California Health Sciences University is not affiliated with the CSU system, part of Welty's responsibility "is to work with other agencies in the area, California, who seek to reduce education disparities and address major workforce needs in the region."

Richele Kleiser, spokeswoman for California Health Sciences University, said Welty has served as chair, an unpaid position, for two years. She said she was not aware the role was included in Welty's new job description.

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