WSU paid $1M for president in 2014

Wright State University spent more than $1 million to compensate president David Hopkins last year, or the equivalent of the full-time tuition of more than 119 undergraduate students, an I-Team investigation found.

This is because of provisions in his contract that spiked his pay last year — and will again this year — well above his $400,000 annual salary. This put his gross pay above other Ohio public university presidents.

University trustees last year gave Hopkins $360,000 to buy himself a long-term care insurance plan, as required by his contract. School officials say they priced plans and decided that amount was fair.

While the university doesn’t buy long-term care insurance for its other employees, that’s a typical perk for CEOs and presidents of hospitals and universities, according to WSU trustee president Larry Klaben.

“We’ve been very cognizant of what we compensate our president and other key executives,” he said, noting that Hopkins’ base salary is at about the mid-point of Ohio’s 12 public universities.

“We look to keep his total compensation around that middle level when we look at all universities,” he said.

Richard Vedder, an economics professor at Ohio University who specializes in college affordability, said Hopkins’ base pay does sound typical. But he said the total pay sounds “very much on the high side.”

“A package that reaches to a million dollars, you’ll find that at the biggest and most prestigious private schools,” Vedder said.

Hopkins’ base pay and $104,000 bonus were more than Miami University President David Hodge received ($422,484) and less than University of Cincinnati President Santa Ono ($525,000). Ohio State University President Michael Drake was paid $410,496 last year, but he only started the job in June.
Hopkins, who declined to comment for this story, tops all three with the one-time long-term care payout. And this year he will get another $275,000 as a reward for sticking out his contract from 2010 through June 2015.

Other items boosted Hopkins’ contract to a total of $1,045,690. These include a $50,000 annual housing allowance because he opted to not live in the on-campus presidential mansion; a $12,690 car allowance; and $69,000 paid into retirement plans.

Other items are paid for with private donations to the Wright State Foundation, including a $35,000 salary for the president’s wife, Angelia, to serve as a university “ambassador,” and a $7,490 membership to the Sycamore Creek Country Club.

In addition to his pay, Hopkins receives vacation and sick leave the same as other university employees and his contract guarantees him: “an additional two weeks a year for a personal retreat for reflection and planning.”

Many of these perks are common for college professors — the University of Toledo is using donated money to buy its president a new $922,000 mansion — and their cost is growing, Vedder said.

“The trend is toward the million dollar college president,” he said. “(With) all of these extra bonuses and everything, they’re trying to disguise what the compensation package is. It shows a lack of transparency.”

Wright State is budgeted to get more than $80 million in state funding this year. Undergraduate tuition for a full-time, in-state student currently is $8,730 per year.

Students on campus between classes last week had mixed emotions when Hopkins’ pay package was put in front of them.

“That’s insane,” said early childhood education major Mechelle Wheeler. “It really hurts because I’m thinking about how much it costs for me to pay my tuition and I’m struggling with that.”
“Tuition is rising and rising and rising. It doesn’t look very good when your university president makes more than $1 million,” said Jason Stelzer, a political science major.

Others were less quick to criticize.

“I’m sure he works a lot for it,” said Mitch Hubbs, a mechanical engineering major.

Hopkins’ pay makes him Wright State’s highest paid employee. He is one of six WSU employees who made more than $300,000 last year and one of 471 paid more than $100,000, according to university payroll data obtained by the I-Team using Ohio public records laws.

WSU trustee president Klaben noted that Wright State offers among the lowest-cost degrees in the state, and credited Hopkins for helping keep that cost down.

“Running a university is comparable to running one of the largest hospital systems. It’s more complex than some of the largest corporations,” Klaben said. “As a university and as a board, we pride ourselves on trying to provide the highest-quality education at low cost.”