

# How **Smith College** modernized its compensation program for clarity and transparency with Payscale



## Company

The Trustees of the Smith College

## Industry

Higher Education

## Employees

1,300+ employees

## Headquarters

Northampton, MA



## Payscale Solution

Payfactors Advanced

Peer Data

## Overview

At Smith College, compensation is more than a financial transaction. It is a reflection of institutional values, stewardship, and fairness. While the college had strong intentions around equity and transparency, its compensation structure had become difficult to manage and explain over time. Processes were varied, managers did not always feel confident navigating pay conversations, and employees wanted clearer insight into how decisions were made.

The HR team set out to modernize its compensation philosophy and practices. To accomplish these goals, they partnered with Payscale to enhance the effectiveness of managing market data and implement stronger data analytic practices. What began as a structural redesign evolved into a broader transformation — one that repositioned compensation as a strategic lever for equity, retention, and long-term workforce planning.



“We wanted to evolve from being reactive to having a scalable compensation strategy and structure that supports institutional and employee needs now and in the future. This wasn't just a compensation project. It was about enhancing understanding and transparency around jobs, pay and career growth. Payscale was instrumental in helping us achieve key goals.”



### Katie Bowling

Head of Total Rewards

## Results

- ✓ Improved efficiency and effectiveness of aligning internal jobs to external market data in support of paying competitively
- ✓ Enhanced transparency into pay practices, which in turn increased trust in those practices
- ✓ Improved visibility into placement of pay in range to support equity
- ✓ Strengthened audit readiness and documentation practices
- ✓ Increased leadership visibility into pay equity and market alignment

## Challenge

Compensation processes at Smith College had grown increasingly complex over time and required more robust and specific practices and tools. The College had outgrown its decades-old general job classifications and salary grades. Managers needed clear guidance on pay positioning or market alignment, and employees wanted greater transparency into how decisions were made.

Operationally, the absence of standardized governance created inefficiencies. HR spent significant time reconciling compensation data, reviewing historical decisions, and responding to ad hoc pay questions. Leadership also lacked streamlined visibility into compensation trends, limiting strategic and long-term workforce planning.

The college needed a structure that would reduce ambiguity, improve data integrity, and enable confident compensation conversations at every level.



## Solution

Smith College partnered with Payscale to bring structure, market intelligence, and governance to its compensation program. Priorities included:



### Rebuilding the compensation framework

Newly designed job architecture, leveling methodology, and market-based salary ranges created a common language around compensation.



### Strengthening data utilization and governance

Emphasized consistent data definitions, structured review processes, and alignment between practice and policy to support more transparent decisions.



### Prioritizing training and communication

Invested in manager and employee training with a focus on understanding market-based salary ranges and how performance-based decisions exemplified that compensation is not a system, but a shared responsibility.



### Aligning compensation with institutional strategy

Treated compensation as a strategic lever that can impact talent attraction and retention, workforce planning, and long-term financial sustainability.

Using Payfactors compensation intelligence software, the college revitalized its job architecture and realigned salary ranges to ensure clearer internal equity and competitive positioning. Roles were evaluated against reliable market benchmarks, providing leadership with dependable data to guide decisions.

Payfactors centralized numerous sources of market data, which reduced inconsistencies and improved reporting visibility. HR gained the ability to analyze pay trends, review range placement, and support leadership discussions with accurate, real-time insights.

Equally important, Payscale enabled greater transparency. Defined pay ranges, consistent leveling methodology, and market-backed positioning created a shared language for compensation. Managers were trained to interpret the data, understand pay range positioning, and confidently communicate pay decisions.

With Payscale's software and data as the foundation, the team at Smith College was able to modernize compensation decisions that were standardized, transparent, and aligned with institutional policy.

## Outcome

The partnership with Payscale allowed Smith College to move compensation from a decentralized, explanation-heavy process to a centralized, data-driven strategy.

Operational efficiencies freed HR capacity for higher-value initiatives, including workforce planning and equity analysis. Leadership discussions shifted from debating data accuracy to focusing on strategic outcomes. Compensation became a forward-looking tool rather than a reactive administrative burden.

Most importantly, the college established a sustainable framework designed to evolve alongside changing market conditions and employee expectations.



"With Payscale, we've been able to achieve clarity and transparency that is meaningful and actionable because of the market data and compensation intelligence we have available to us. The access to reporting and analytics and having a better handle on administrative tasks is the thread that connects external data to internal jobs and employees and helps us put our pay philosophy and practices into motion."



### **Katie Bowling**

Head of Total Rewards



"There was a pay transparency law that rolled out at the end of October, and I heard from some of my peers at other institutions that really struggled with trying to articulate their ranges or answer employee questions about their pay. Because of all the career framework, benchmarking, and structure work that we did with Payscale, we had just a few employees reach out with questions and they were as simple as – 'can you send me the range for my job again?'"

### **Katie Bowling**

Head of Total Rewards

## Looking ahead

For Smith College, modernizing compensation was not a one-time project. It was a long-term commitment to clarity, meaningfulness, and institutional trust. By rebuilding its structural framework, strengthening data utilization, and investing in manager capability, the college created a compensation strategy that supports both its people and its mission.

In higher education, where values matter deeply, compensation transparency is more than a policy. It's a signal of integrity. Smith College now has a system designed not only to manage pay, but to sustain trust for years to come.

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“Changing career framework and compensation structures is deeply personal to employees. Collaborating early and often, gathering feedback, developing communications and training, and preparing leadership and managers may take time and energy, but it has immeasurable dividends to supporting your people and making sure they feel confident in whatever new process is rolled out. Through our partnership with Payscale, we know we have solid market data and compensation intelligence that drives and supports these decisions.”

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**Katie Bowling**

Head of Total Rewards

## About Payscale

Payscale is the original compensation innovator for organizations who want to scale their business with pay and transform their largest investment into their greatest advantage. With decades of innovation in sourcing reputable data and developing AI-powered tools, Payscale delivers actionable insights that turn pay from a cost to a catalyst. Its suite of solutions — Payfactors, Marketpay, and Paycycle — empower 65% of the top companies in the U.S. and businesses like Panasonic, ZoomInfo, Chipotle, Quest Diagnostics, University of Washington, American Airlines, and TJX Companies.

**Create confidence in your compensation. Payscale.** To learn more, visit [www.payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com).

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