



DataOnDemand

How-To Guide

Identifying the Prevailing Wage
for H-1B Employees

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Identifying the Prevailing Wage for H-1B Employees

What is a prevailing wage and when would I use this information?

Prevailing wage is defined by the Department of Labor (DOL) as “the average wage paid to similarly employed workers in a specific occupation in the area of intended employment.”¹ Within higher education, prevailing wages are typically used when an employer hires an employee who is a foreign worker and has H-1B status. Prevailing wages are also used to determine pay for H-1B employees during nonproductive times.

How can I use DataOnDemand to obtain prevailing wage information?

CUPA-HR’s DataOnDemand tool can be used to identify the prevailing wage for specific positions, as CUPA-HR’s data collection procedures follow all DOL requirements for reporting a prevailing wage.

DataOnDemand allows you to identify the prevailing wage for any position within minutes. This guide will help you answer questions like:

- **What standards does CUPA-HR follow to ensure all required DOL requirements specific to prevailing wage are being followed?**
- **What is the prevailing wage pay requirement for H-1B employees during nonproductive times?**
- **How do I identify the prevailing wage for specific administrative, professional, and faculty positions within my institution?**

What standards does CUPA-HR follow to ensure all required DOL requirements specific to prevailing wage are being followed?

DOL has strict guidelines for setting a prevailing wage. CUPA-HR’s survey procedures follow all DOL guidelines in identifying and setting a prevailing wage.² Specifically, CUPA-HR collects data annually, allows for comparisons by location to help determine the appropriate prevailing wage, includes job titles and descriptions within CUPA-HR’s [Survey Participation and Information Templates](#), follows all guidelines for agencies stated in the American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act, and calculates arithmetic (weighted) averages within CUPA-HR salary data.³

What is the prevailing wage pay requirement for H-1B employees during nonproductive times?

Employees are placed in a nonproductive, unpaid status in conditions related to their employment (e.g., furloughs, lack of assigned work, lack of a permit, or studying for a licensing exam).⁴ However, per DOL, H-1B employees are required to be paid the prevailing wage during nonproductive times.⁵

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration. (2020, January). [H-1B, H-1B1 and E-3 Specialty \(Professional\) Workers](#). (Online Article).

² To review each DOL prevailing wage guideline and compare to CUPA-HR’s survey procedures, please review [CUPA-HR’s Comparison of DOL OES Wage Guidelines and CUPA-HR Survey Procedures](#) fact sheet.

³ Hahm, J.S. (2000). American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act of 1998: Balancing Economic and Labor Interests Under the New H-1B Visa Program. *Cornell Law Review*, 85(6), 1673-1702. Retrieved from <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/clr/vol85/iss6/3/>

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division. (2016, November). [Fact Sheet #621: Must an H1-B employer pay for nonproductive time?](#) (Online Article).

⁵ Ibid.

How do I identify the prevailing wage for specific administrative, professional, and faculty positions within my institution?

DataOnDemand allows you to create comparison groups based on several factors, including state, region, and control. Using the New Group Wizard, you will create a comparison group of non-profit institutions in a physical area that includes the location of your institution. You can start as specific as your institution's metropolitan statistical area (MSA). It is uncommon for data to be available at the MSA level, so you can then expand as necessary by creating a comparison group of institutions that are in your state, Census division, or Census region.

Important: Per DOL guidelines, you cannot filter a prevailing wage comparison group on any criteria other than location (and ensuring you only include non-profit institutions of higher education). The comparison groups you usually use for your typical benchmarking needs are likely inappropriate for use with prevailing wage.



Step 1: Prepare for the Analysis

To identify a prevailing wage, you will make use of the *Prevailing Wage Report* (for administrators, professionals, or faculty) in DataOnDemand. Before beginning your analysis, you will need to gather:

- **Information on which positions you need a prevailing wage for within your institution.** To match your positions to CUPA-HR positions, refer to the [Survey Participation and Information Templates](#) for position numbers and descriptions. If your institution participates in CUPA-HR surveys, your institution's position matches are already in DataOnDemand.
- **Information on the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), state, or census division of your institution.** To construct appropriate comparison groups, you'll need to create a comparison group of non-profit institutions within your institution's Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), state, census division, or other appropriate geographical region. **The prevailing wage report will not allow you to select a comparison group that includes private for-profit institutions.**



Example: Tenured/Tenure Track Associate Professor of Mathematics at an institution in the Detroit/Warren/Dearborn metropolitan statistical area (MSA).

Throughout this guide, we'll use an example to illustrate the process of identifying the prevailing wage for a specific position within a specific region. Let's say you are at an institution in the Detroit/Warren/Dearborn MSA and need to identify the prevailing wage for a tenured/tenure-track associate professor of mathematics who is an H-1B status employee.

First, you will need to review the "Position Descriptions" tab or "CIP Codes" tab of the corresponding [Survey Participation and Information Template](#) to identify the position or discipline where you need to determine the prevailing wage.


Now that you know the positions or CIP codes for which you wish to identify a prevailing wage, you can proceed to DataOnDemand to begin setting up your comparison group and reports.





Step 2: Create a Comparison Group


The easiest way to create a comparison group is to make use of the *New Group Wizard* in DataOnDemand. Once logged in to **Surveys Online**, navigate through the menu to *DataOnDemand > Comparison Groups*. Click the *New Group Wizard* button to get started.


Comparison Groups

 A **Comparison Group** is a set of higher ed institutions that you create for benchmarking.

Create New Comparison Groups

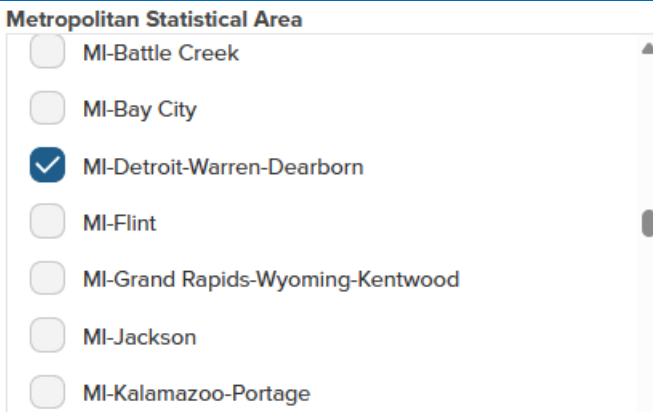
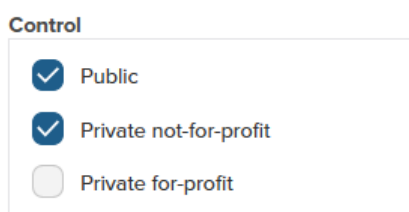
 **New Group Wizard**  Use **New Group Wizard** when you want to create a comparison group based on institutional characteristics (e.g., size, classification, research activity, operating expenses, location, etc.) or survey participation.

New Group From Scratch  Use **New Group From Scratch** when you already know the names or IPEDS UnitIDs of the institutions you'd like to include in your comparison group.

Combine Groups  Use **Combine Groups** when you want to combine two comparison groups you have created into one large group.



Our example institution is located in the Detroit/Warren/Dearborn MSA. To adhere to DOL guidelines, we want to create a comparison group that includes only non-profit institutions located in this state. Do not filter on any other criteria such as student enrollment or Carnegie classification; DOL allows only filtering by location. Use the settings below in the *New Group Wizard* to create a comparison group based on this characteristic.

Criteria	Location in Wizard	Selection	Example Screenshot
Include only institutions in the Detroit-Warren-Dearborn MSA	<i>Location Variables > Metropolitan Statistical Area</i>	MI-Detroit-Warren-Dearborn	
Include only non-profit institutions	<i>Control</i>	Public and Private not-for-profit	

After completing these selections, click the *Search* button to refresh the page and view the table of results at the bottom of the screen.

When using the *New Group Wizard*, always review the institutions identified in the search and verify that the number of institutions is large enough. In general, the more institutions in your group, the more reliable data you can generate.

9 Institutions Meeting Filter Criteria

Institution Name	2025 Classification	Control	Highest Degree Awarded	Award Level Focus	Affiliation	Student FTE	Faculty FTE	Staff FTE	HR FTE	FT Faculty Union	Adjunct/PT Faculty Union	...
Cranbrook Academy of Art (Bloomfield Hills, MI)	Special Focus: Arts, Music, and Design	Private not-for-profit	Master's	Graduate-focused	Private Independent	140.0	10.0	39.0	5.0	No	No	N
Henry Ford College (Dearborn, MI)	Professions-focused Associate Large/Medium	Public	Bachelor's	Associate	Public	9659.0	4377	276.0	6.0	Yes	Yes	Y
Rochester Christian University (Rochester Hills, MI)	Professions-focused Baccalaureate Small	Private not-for-profit	Bachelor's	Baccalaureate	Private Independent							
Oakland University (Rochester, MI)	Professions-focused Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate Medium	Public	Doctorate	Undergraduate/Graduate-Doctorate	Public	13412.0	802.0	1168.7	15.0	Yes	Yes	Y

Once you are satisfied with your comparison group, add a name and detailed description of your selection criteria in the boxes below the results, then save your comparison group. This group will now appear in *Your Personal Groups*. Make sure that the white check shows in the blue box as shown below – this means that your group (as long as it only includes non-profit institutions) will appear in the dropdown menu when you go to run your report.

▼ Your Personal Groups ⓘ

Actions	Comparison Group
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Detroit/Warren/Dearborn MSA
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mountain Census Division
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NY-NJ MSA

Once this group has been used to run a report it becomes “locked” and cannot be changed by fewer than three institutions at a time. This is a privacy protection to ensure data confidentiality. *Therefore, it is important to ensure that your comparison group contains exactly the institutions you want before you go to the next step.*⁶

⁶ 6 U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration. (2015, December). Effects of the 2016 Department of Labor Appropriations Act. (Online Article).

To prepare for the possibility that there is insufficient data to determine a prevailing wage at the MSA level, repeat Step 2 to create a comparison group of non-profit institutions in the next smallest geographic area – in our example, non-profit institutions in the state of Michigan.

TIP: DOL **strongly prefers** that your wage is based on at least 30 individuals' salaries from at least 3 institutions. Our prevailing wage reports will not display salary statistics that are based on fewer than 30 individuals' salaries or from fewer than 3 institutions.

If you have insufficient data, broaden your search criteria to be the next smallest geographic area (e.g., state from MSA, from state to Census Region).



Step 3: Run Your Report(s)

To identify the prevailing wage for a specific position, you'll run the *Prevailing Wage Report* (available for administrative, professional, and faculty positions) in DataOnDemand.

Navigate to *DataOnDemand* > *Survey Reports*, expand the menu for your survey of interest. In our example, we will expand the Faculty survey menu, locate *Obtain data for a prevailing wage for DOL*, and click the prevailing wage report.

Survey Reports

Expand All Collapse All

> Administrators

2025 DOD Subscriptions **expire** February 9, 2026.

> Professionals

2025 DOD Subscriptions **expire** February 9, 2026.

> Staff

2025 DOD Subscriptions **expire** February 9, 2026.

∨ Faculty

2025 DOD Subscriptions **expire** February 9, 2026.

> Get detailed salary information for a single discipline

> Compare salary data across a range of disciplines

∨ Obtain data for a prevailing wage for DOL



[Faculty: Prevailing Wage Report](#)

When you click on your desired report, you will arrive at the *Reports Parameters* page. Most settings default to our recommended settings (e.g., most recent year, output format). To run your report, you will need to select your comparison groups and position.

For *Comparison Group*, select the new groups you created in Step 2. The first comparison group you select should be the smallest geographic area (i.e., non-profit institutions in the metropolitan statistical area of Detroit/Warren/Dearborn). The second comparison group you select should be the next smallest geographic area (i.e., non-profit institutions in the state of Michigan). **Note: If your group does have a checkbox next to it on the comparison groups page, but does not appear when you go to select the group, it is likely that you forgot to exclude private for-profit institutions. The report will not allow the selection of any comparison group that includes private for-profit institutions.**

Your final documentation submitted to the DOL should use the two comparison group functionality of the report to show the DOL that you're using the group you selected because it is the smallest geographical area possible that returned sufficient data. For instance, if you use the state of Michigan comparison group for your final submission, you need to show the DOL that the next smallest geographical area (i.e., Detroit/Warren/Dearborn MSA) had too few incumbents when you attempted to use that comparison group for the report.

To choose which position to run a prevailing wage for, you'll need to set the position setting (if you are running a prevailing wage for an Administrative or Professional position), or you will need to set the *Rank, Tenure, and Discipline* settings (if you are running a prevailing wage for a Faculty position) within the *Report Parameters* page. Click the *Go to Report* button at the bottom of the settings page to run the report.



Returning to our example, you are interested in identifying the prevailing wage for a tenured/tenure-track associate professor of mathematics in the Detroit/Warren/Dearborn MSA. You will now run the *Prevailing Wage Report* for faculty. After setting *Comparison Group 1* to your MSA group and *Comparison Group 2* to your state of Michigan group created in Step 2, you will choose *Associate Professor* from the *Rank* drop-down menu, choose *Tenured/Tenure Track (2 digit)* from the *Faculty Type* drop-down menu, select *27: Mathematics and Statistics* from the *Discipline* drop-down menu, and click *Go to Report* to find the prevailing wage for this specific faculty rank, tenure status, and discipline.

Faculty: Prevailing Wage Report

Report Parameters

Comparison Group 1
Detroit/Warren/Dearborn MSA

Comparison Group 2 (Optional)
State of Michigan - DOL

Year
2024-25

Output Format
 HTML (Standard Web Page) PDF

Faculty Type
Tenured/Tenure Track (2 digit)

Discipline
[27] MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS.

Rank
Associate Professor

[Go to Report](#)

In this example, the *Comparison Group*, *Rank*, *Faculty Type*, and *Discipline* settings are the only changes that need to be made. This will run the report with the recommended default settings for other options. When ready to proceed, you will simply scroll to the bottom of the report settings page and click the *Go to Report* button.



Step 4: Interpreting Your Results

The *Prevailing Wage Report* produces the following tables, which includes the arithmetic (weighted) mean salary, the number of incumbents reported for this specific position, and the number of institutions that reported data for this specific position. Your prevailing wage determination should be based on the arithmetic (weighted) mean salary. If the data are unbalanced and no arithmetic (weighted) mean salary is shown, your prevailing wage determination should be based on the median wage.

You can save this report as a PDF file, print it, and include it as a supporting document in connection with the H-1B application. This data may also be used to determine the DOL’s nonproductive pay requirement for H-1B status employees during nonproductive times.⁷ When exporting any prevailing wage report to PDF format, the report will automatically append two important documents you should include to your submission to the DOL: a comparison of DOL EOS wage guidelines and CUPA-HR survey procedures and the methodology of the given survey for the most recent year of data.

Prevailing Wage Report

College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Source: CUPA-HR Faculty in Higher Education Survey (2025)

Position Type

Faculty. Faculty conduct research and/or teach courses at the postsecondary level in their specified discipline. They also typically advise students, serve on committees, and perform other service. Non-tenure research faculty primarily conduct research, teaching faculty primarily instruct, and tenure-track faculty typically do both in varying ratios depending on their contract.

Discipline

[27.] MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS.: Instructional programs that focus on the systematic study of logical symbolic language and its applications.

Faculty Type

Tenured/Tenure Track

Level (Rank)

Associate Professor

The second comparison group's results and list of members follow the first comparison group's results and list of members.

Comparison Group 1 Name

Detroit/Warren/Dearborn MSA

Comparison Group 1 Description

Non-profit institutions in the Detroit / Warren / Dearborn, Michigan MSA

Statistics

All faculty salaries are standardized to 9-10 month contracts.

Statistics	
Arithmetic (Weighted) Mean Salary	Too few data
Median Employee Salary	Too few data
Number of Employees	17
Number of Institutions	2

Neither the arithmetic (weighted) mean salary nor the median employee salary will be displayed when the number of institutions contributing data is less than 3 or when the number of employees is less than 30. If one institution's data comprises more than 25% of the total (unbalanced data), only the median employee salary will be displayed.

Institutions in Comparison Group 1 That Provided Data For Salary Statistics

- o Oakland University (Rochester, MI)
- o University of Michigan-Dearborn (Dearborn, MI)

⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division. (2016, November). [Fact Sheet #621: Must an H1-B employer pay for nonproductive time?](#) (Online Article).

Comparison Group 2 Name

State of Michigan - DOL

Comparison Group 2 Description

Non-profit institutions in Michigan for H1B visa application.

Statistics

All faculty salaries are standardized to 9-10 month contracts.

Statistics	
Arithmetic (Weighted) Mean Salary	\$97,224
Median Employee Salary	\$90,597
Number of Employees	89
Number of Institutions	18

Neither the arithmetic (weighted) mean salary nor the median employee salary will be displayed when the number of institutions contributing data is less than 3 or when the number of employees is less than 30. If one institution's data comprises more than 25% of the total (unbalanced data), only the median employee salary will be displayed.

Institutions in Comparison Group 2 That Provided Data For Salary Statistics

- o Albion College (Albion, MI)
- o Andrews University (Berrien Springs, MI)
- o Calvin University (Grand Rapids, MI)
- o Central Michigan University (Mount Pleasant, MI)
- o Eastern Michigan University (Ypsilanti, MI)

**Considerations**

You may be required to provide documentation for how CUPA-HR's surveys meet DOL guidelines. When you export the report to PDF, CUPA-HR's [Comparison of DOL EOS Wage Guidelines and CUPA-HR Survey Procedures](#) document and the survey's methodology are automatically appended to the end of the report. For more details on the statistics generated in each DataOnDemand report, or for detailed information about the variety of report settings options available, consult CUPA-HR's [Comparison of DOL EOS Wage Guidelines and CUPA-HR Survey Procedures](#) document in DataOnDemand's Resources page or visit the [Using DataOnDemand page](#) on the CUPA-HR website.