

February 23, 2023

Employee Benefits Committee Meeting

Attendees: Judy Alford, Richard Ashley, LaTawnya Burleson, Amy Haislip, Lauren Asher, Leisa Shelor

Richard Ashley shared that he had reported the dependent tuition initiative to the Faculty Senate. The group was not opposed but shared concerns about securing funding to support the expanded benefit. He suggested exploring how other state agencies are funding (if providing the benefit). He stated that UVA uses an endowment (need to confirm that UVA is providing a dependent tuition benefit) and suggested a scholarship-type fund. Leisa Shelor shared that VT does have an Employee spouse and dependent scholarship - [Employees' Spouse and Dependent Scholarship | Human Resources | Virginia Tech \(vt.edu\)](#). The group discussed the need to identify ways to increase contributions to the dependent scholarship fund. Richard also raised the question of providing the expanded benefit and whether or not this creates an additional expense to the university.

Judy Alford: Is the existing tuition benefits provided to employees (i.e. tuition waiver) or tuition reimbursement funded with state funds? Leisa Shelor will consult with the Budget Office for more information related to funding for employee tuition assistance benefits and will ask whether or not auxiliary departments are assessed a charge for employees utilizing the tuition waiver benefit. Depending on how the department charges are handled, will invite a budget representative to a future meeting so the committee can benefit from hearing about the process.

Lauren Pollard pointed out that an expanded tuition benefit for employee dependents could result in a non-cash taxable benefit to the employee.

What should we do? (LaTawnya)

Leisa Shelor suggested we need to benchmark peer universities (in Virginia and beyond), begin with 10 and expand if necessary. Lauren Pollard shared the APLU has a list of land grants. Leisa reminded that some states have a dependent tuition benefit (i.e. Pennsylvania, Alabama and South Carolina (scholarship lottery)). Universities mentioned to consider for benchmarking: ODU, VCU, JMU, GMU, UVA, Purdue (land grant). The committee would need to finalize any recommendations by April in order to move through the prescribed process for recommendations.

Leisa offered to consult with the HR Comp Team to ask what universities they identified to benchmark for compensation analysis/review. She will also reach out to Rachel Gabriel in the Provost Office to ask if they have received any feedback related to the impact of the lack of an employee dependent tuition benefit on retention and/or recruiting for faculty.

LaTawnya will follow-up with Matt Holt to ask if he has any information to share.

Richard said maybe the committee is getting ahead of ourselves and should perhaps focus on gauging and securing support from the right level within the university instead of researching. He also cited this is a retention issue.

LaTawnya informed the committee that Staff Senate is fully on board.

Lauren Pollard shared the following links in the chat:

<https://www.hr.vt.edu/benefits/optional-benefits/continuing-education/scholarship.html>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings>

<https://udc.vt.edu/spm/data/talent/fs/salary>

Judy Alford is part of a group with other Virginia state agencies and will poll these contacts to ask if their agency provides a tuition benefit for dependents of employees.

If the initiative to expand tuition benefits to employee dependents gains support and moves forward, it will likely take a minimum of 5 years to implement. This is a huge ask and will require a lot of planning. The more this topic is brought to the table the more likely it is to advance.

LaTawnya said she could talk to Ken McCrery about tuition assistance funding in the Division of IT employees.