

Employee Benefits Committee Monthly Meeting

September 9, 2020

Attendees:

- LaTawnya Burleson, Chair
- Marie Bliss, ex officio
- Leisa Shelor, ex officio
- Brad Klein, Faculty Senate
- Richard Shryock, Faculty Senate
- Richard Ashley, Faculty Senate
- Robert Weiss, Commission on Faculty Affairs Representative
- Pamela Stell, Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs (CSPA) Representative
- Jennifer Earley, Staff Senate
- Brittany Guill May, Staff Senate
- Amanda Hill, Administrative Support

Opening:

The regular meeting of the Employee Benefits Committee was called to order at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 9, 2020 by Chairperson LaTawnya Burleson. Committee member Sara Leftwich was absent, and a vacancy remains for a representative from the Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs.

Introductions

LaTawnya Burleson introduced herself as the new chairperson for the committee this year, and the committee members briefly introduced themselves.

Agenda setting for this year

Prior to today's meeting, LaTawnya sent the recommendation report made by last year's committee to the group for review, and she asked for suggestions for topics to pursue this year.

Brad Klein mentioned that he had been part of the committee previously when Winter Break leave requirements were being discussed and asked if any progress has been made with that issue. Leisa Shelor shared that a survey was sent to employees regarding moving holidays, including Lee Jackson Day, to cover the winter closure, and that option was opposed. On a related note, Lee Jackson Day is being replaced as a holiday with Election Day this year and moving forward. This change will be communicated soon via VT News and the website along with a reminder about the leave requirements for winter closing.

Rick Ashley mentioned the insurance policy that applies to employees using the faculty sick leave plan and some restricted faculty that has mandatory participation but does not pay benefits to individuals of a certain age. Rick brought this to the committee's attention last year as an action item. Leisa followed up on the income portion of the policy and stated that the calculation for the benefit is not applied to the amount over the salary cap and will follow up on the age portion of the policy.

Pamela Stell asked what happens with recommendations that were sent to Bryan Garey, Vice President of Human Resources and suggested tracking the status of recommendations. LaTawnya reviewed the recommendations made by last year's committee that were sent to Mr. Garey. While some of the recommendations did receive a response, LaTawnya noted that the recommendations made by the committee require time and effort and are impossible to change overnight. Pamela also asked about how this information is reported to the employee constituency of the committee. LaTawnya shared that identified stakeholders (including Faculty and Staff Senate presidents) were copied on the recommendation report to Mr. Garey, and that she reports back to various groups she is part of, including Staff Senate to keep employees up-to-date about the status of committee initiatives.

Brittany Guill May asked if the committee typically focuses on one issue and how issues to address are selected. Leisa replied that the committee brainstorms ideas to prioritize then evaluates feasibility and resource availability.

Brad suggested addressing a step-by-step "how-to" for those exploring possible retirement. Leisa mentioned the retirement workshops and Social Security seminars that are held during the year and communicated via VT News and emails. Rick suggested addressing phased retirement and issues specific to that by possibly scattering retirement seminars throughout year and communicating in other ways since not everyone reads VT News daily. Leisa shared that notices are repeatedly placed in VT News, and that transitional retirement is specific to tenured faculty with a minimum of 15 years, and there is a policy with requirements and needs particular approvals. This is a program available to a very select group of employees, and a one-on-one meeting would probably be best for those types of questions. Rick wondered if this group could be identified and targeted with an email letting them know that one-on-ones can be scheduled and if there is enough interest, a session scheduled to give parameters and let people who are eligible know what the general policies are. Leisa stated that type of outreach would likely be done by provost office and that she can discuss with Jack Finney. Rick agreed that reaching out to Jack Finney would be the best approach.

Leisa shared that this committee tries to stick to issues that apply to a greater number of overall employees rather than specific or small groups. LaTawnya stated that HR did a great job with personalizing and planning the retirement portion of the McCommas Leadership Seminar in the Spring. Leisa stated that all retirement sessions include this personalized retirement information. LaTawnya questioned if retirement should be an issue prioritized by the committee this year, and Leisa mentioned that there are limitations as to what could be changed, but addressing communication around retirement issues, sessions, etc. could be explored as a side issue. Pamela suggested defining employee groups as early career, mid-point, or in retirement phase and targeting them with specific information. Leisa stated that HR uses a variety of methods to communicate with employees, including through department reps and HR Practitioner meetings.

Marie stated she will talk with Leisa about creating online/on demand trainings for different programs available for groups of employees, and Leisa mentioned exploring if there is a better way to communicate to departments about benefits available to employees that they may not know they are eligible for. Robert added that most faculty are not aware that if they receive summer funding they do not contribute to retirement unless you do a conversion, and that this is something that could be better communicated.

Agenda for Next Meeting

Committee members will continue brainstorming for possible issues the committee can work on this year between now and the next meeting to present for discussion.

Adjournment:

Meeting was adjourned at 1:56 p.m. by Chairperson LaTawnya Burleson. The next general meeting will be at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 14, 2020.