

Minutes of the Employee Benefits Committee
May 16, 2017

I. Call to Order

Chairman Dwight Viehland called to order the regular meeting of the Employee Benefits Committee at 11:00 AM in room 4390 at NEC. The following persons were present: Dwight Viehland, Godmar Back, Bradley Klein, Patricia Rodgers, Susan Hughes, and Zach Harris.

II. Approval of minutes from last meeting

Minutes from the previous meeting on March 29, 2017 were approved.

III. New Business

Discussion began on the single agenda item of mandated Holiday leave, a topic that had been briefly discussed in previous committee meetings. It was the intent of the Committee to dialogue about the issue and potentially include any position taken by the Committee in the annual report to President Sands, along with other recommendations regarding employee benefits. Several members of the committee shared comments from colleagues from different religious backgrounds that resented being forced to take leave. It was also discussed that the university doesn't entirely close during this time (between the holidays of Christmas and New Years Day), and that limited classes are now scheduled during winter session, requiring that some employees work. Susan Hughes noted that the original reasoning behind the policy was that historically the majority of employees opted to take leave at this time anyway, and that there had been an anticipated energy savings that would be realized if the University closed at this time. Since the winter session now requires some facilities to remain open, it's possible that the anticipated savings have not actually been realized. Patricia Rodgers suggested that the data be retrieved from the office of sustainability to determine if these energy savings are still relevant. Susan Hughes mentioned that the question of the policy had been raised at a recent staff senate meeting, indicating there was some interest in revisiting the matter. Discussion followed with a general sentiment that employees should be entitled to take their earned leave when those chose to do so, not as mandated by the current University policy. Godmar Back mentioned that there should be protections in place for employees who want to take leave at this time from being forced to work. Bradley Klein suggested that as a university with a diverse workforce, these specific days should not be treated as special by the university. Patricia Rodgers mentioned that Faculty get extra leave, and staff have extra holidays to help compensate for being forced to take leave. Godmar Back suggested that flexible work arrangements could be made in this time period. The committee went on to discuss how the different employee statuses have different leave plans. Dwight mentioned the possibility of distributing a university wide survey to assess the importance of this to the VT community. Zach Harris offered that employees at Germanna Community College were given PTO for this time frame, and did not have to use their own accrued leave. The committee discussed the possibility for those who did not want to use leave in this time frame to have the ability to bank the days for later use. Patricia Rodgers commented that this policy affects both AP faculty and staff negatively. Based on the discussion, Dwight offered to draft a recommendation for review by the Committee members, requesting that the policy be reconsidered. It will be included in his annual report to the President along with the other recommendations from the Committee.

The committee then went on to briefly discuss topics of the new faculty class and the Open Enrollment process for health insurance. It was noted that the requirements put in place by the state (paper forms and Employee Direct/self serve online method not being available) was a clunky experience from an employee perspective.

IV. Adjournment

Chairman Dwight Viehland adjourned the meeting at 12:00 PM.