

Employee Benefits Committee Monthly Meeting

November 20, 2019

2:00 p.m. – NEC Room 3600

Attendees:

- Jennifer Earley, Staff Senate
- Marie Bliss, ex officio
- LaTawnya Burleson, Staff Senate
- Samuel Doak, Faculty Senate
- Patricia Donovan, Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs (CSPA) Representative
- Sara Leftwich, ex officio (absent for at least first half of meeting)
- Leisa Shelor, ex officio
- Eric Smith, Faculty Senate
- Sue Teel, Staff Senate
- Amanda Hill, Administrative Support

Richard Ashley and Margaret Radcliffe were absent with advance notice.

Opening:

The regular meeting of the Employee Benefits Committee was called to order at 2:00 pm on Wednesday, November 20, 2019 in North End Center room 3600 by Jennifer Earley, who is serving as Chair for this meeting in the absence of Margaret Radcliffe.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on October 16, 2019 were unanimously approved as distributed via email and are available on the EBC SharePoint site.

Introduction

Patricia Donovan was introduced as a new member of the Employee Benefits Committee representing the Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs (CSPA).

Discussion

The committee reviewed the write-ups that were compiled based on the discussion from last month's meeting. The three areas chosen to review were tuition, leave, and improved overall benefits.

- **Tuition:** The discussion began by focusing on tuition waivers and reimbursements. The tuition benefit for spouses and dependents is very limited. LaTawnya Burleson mentioned

that it is only for incoming freshmen and excludes transfers, and it is a very small amount of money dependent upon donations. Eric Smith suggested asking the Foundation why this is not a priority. Eric questioned why reimbursements would be an issue the committee would need to take up. Leisa Shelor stated the benefit is already in place. Sue Teel asked if employees had to select a program that was job-specific since she understood that it did, yet the policy did not read that way. Leisa does not believe it does need to be job-specific but can prepare you to be promoted, though there may be some issue if an employee chose a field that was very different than their current one.

Waivers are not anything the department has to actually pay out, but reimbursements are money that departments need to budget for. LaTawnya stated that budgets are not equal across campus, so some are denied opportunities. Samuel Doak reiterated that waivers are only good at Virginia Tech, while reimbursements can be used at other institutions. There are still questions about whether other institutions in Virginia are able to waive tuition for other state institutions. Leisa offered that there may be some limitations under the guidelines of the Commonwealth. Eric asked if there are any reciprocity agreements within the state. Patricia Donovan shared that there are very strict and specific common market agreements that depend on the number of seats in a specific program. If the seats are filled and there is a shortage, there may be agreements made with other institutions in the region to accommodate students. This is very limited but works well for specific programs. Sue understands there are some transfer agreements with community colleges, and Jennifer Earley would like to explore gathering more information on these transfer agreements. Leisa would be willing to reach out to April Myers, Associate Director of Governance, regarding what research may have already been done on the topic of reciprocity.

- **Leave:** Leisa brought up the leave issue focus on staff accruals (8 hours per month) vs. faculty accruals (16 hours per month). It takes staff 20 years to accrue at the level of faculty at day one. Policies regarding classified staff leave is dictated by DHRM. Sue asked if there is any latitude for university staff, and Leisa said she believed there is. Right now, there is an estimated 700-800 classified staff, and currently there are not any known plans to revise the accrual rate for staff. Eric asked if staff uses the designated community service hours. Leisa stated that only about 20% of the community service hours are used, and there is a committee moving forward with promoting a resolution to allot community service leave to AP faculty. LaTawnya said that is because some people simply are not allowed to use it because of the nature of their jobs or department rules, or people use it during the holiday to cover winter closing. It was agreed that is a management issue.

Eric asked for clarification on paid parental leave, and Leisa confirmed that it is the same for both faculty and staff. Restricted faculty leave is not as robust as AP faculty, per Leisa. Sue asked if research faculty must submit leave reports. Leisa said they are required to per the handbook, but it is difficult to enforce. Eric asked about research faculty repaying grants. Leisa said most grants have annual leave time built in, but if any time is spent on administration, it should not be charged to a grant.

Should the committee decide to advance the leave issue, the focus would be on annual accrual rate for staff rather than sick leave, etc. Marie clarified that when sick leave is removed, both faculty and staff basically have 30 days. Faculty gets two sick days per

month, so the distributed spreadsheet should read 24 sick days total. Eric asked whether new vice presidents would be called faculty or AP faculty. Leisa presumes they would be called AP faculty unless they were on the research side.

- **Improved overall benefits package:** LaTawnya mentioned that staff work longer because they cannot afford to pay the cost of health insurance upon retirement due to the current benefit (\$4 per month per year of service after at least 15 years of service). There is a policy for faculty called transitional phased retirement, and under policy 4410, there is a benefit that covers healthcare costs, but there is no provision for staff. Current healthcare premiums are low due to being offered under the Commonwealth, per Leisa. Employees defined as 0.75 FTE are eligible for full-time benefits. This is not prorated.

Regarding the cash match program, which is followed by the state, anyone can make pre- or post- tax contributions, but not everyone may be eligible for the cash match, per Leisa.

When discussing how to prioritize these issues, Eric stated tuition seems to be the easiest to address, while the improved overall benefits package may be too broad. It was decided that the focus moving forward will be to prioritize tuition and leave, with subcommittees assigned as follows:

Tuition: Sue, Jennifer, Sara, Eric, and Leisa (Leisa will reach out to peer institutions in Virginia regarding spouse and dependent benefits)

Leave (specifically accrual rate and amount): LaTawnya and Patricia

The next meeting date and time agreed upon and will proceed as scheduled.

Adjournment:

Meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m. by Jennifer Earley. The next general meeting will be at 2:00 p.m. on December 18, 2019 in NEC Room 3600.