

Employee Benefits Committee Monthly Meeting

December 18, 2019

Attendees:

Margaret Radcliffe, Chair
LaTawnya Burlison, Staff Senate
Samuel Doak, Faculty Senate
Patricia Donovan, Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs (CSPA) Representative
Sara Leftwich, ex officio
Leisa Shelor, ex officio
Amanda Hill, Administrative Support

Committee members Sue Teel, Marie Bliss, Jennifer Earley, Richard Ashley, and Eric Smith were absent with notice.

Opening:

The regular meeting of the Employee Benefits Committee was called to order at 2:02 p.m. on Wednesday, December 18, 2019 in North End Center room 3600 by Chairperson Margaret Radcliffe.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held November 20, 2019 were unanimously approved as distributed via email and are available on the EBC SharePoint site.

Subcommittee Reports

Tuition:

Margaret shared that Eric informed her via email that he made contact with the VT Foundation regarding the dependent scholarship and is waiting for someone to get back to him. It appears nothing further has been done regarding the tuition issue.

Sara mentioned gathering info for other Tier 3 schools to see what their policies/procedures are to compare/benchmark with VT's policies. Margaret stated schools outside of the state should be researched as well, because while it is important to be consistent with peers, the committee should also evaluate schools that are competition for hiring talent.

Leisa stated that in Pennsylvania, if you are a higher education employee there is a reciprocity agreement with all other state schools. She believes that state code disallows this in Virginia, but she will consult with legal counsel to confirm. Sam mentioned that reciprocity agreements have previously been in the works in state legislature but have always died in committee.

Regarding the dependent scholarship, Margaret inquired about setting up an endowment with the Foundation to support the benefit, and she wondered how much money would have to be raised to make this benefit more useful. Sara stated the benefit is very small and only good for the first semester of a student's first year. Leisa said she is on the committee for this scholarship and will raise to the chair what options there are to boost the benefit.

Leave:

LaTawnya presented a handout based on research conducted previously and new research she and Pat had completed. Classified staff leave cannot be changed as it is mandated by the Commonwealth. The University of Virginia (UVA) has university staff vs classified staff leave. Leisa shared that UVA implements PTO, so they do not have allotments of sick leave/annual leave accrual. LaTawnya says UVA will pay out 50% at the end of each leave year in the form of either a tax-deferred annuity or a straight payout. They can also carry over larger amounts of time, so they do not have to burn days to avoid losing them like here. She does not know if this is worth continuing since it will only benefit university staff. Margaret asked about the number of classified versus university staff. Leisa says 700-800 but will confirm for next meeting. Following the meeting, Leisa sent (via email) the counts as follows:

	Count	%
Total Staff	3468	
University	2600	75%
Classified	868	25%

Sara asked about employees switching classifications from classified staff to university staff. Leisa stated that leave is the issue that keeps people from wanting to switch - classified staff remain on a sick leave plan with no carryover limits and can use a portion of that as family sick, which is a benefit. Some employees also do not want to give up the status for grievance/protection reasons. Margaret shared that when offered the option to convert status, there was also the option to bank sick leave and use for disability purposes.

Margaret mentioned unhappiness of some among AP Faculty who have to use leave for community service rather than the dedicated community service hours granted to staff. Those with lengthy service can end up with less leave overall than some senior classified staff, and that is just one inconsistency. CAPFA is currently working on a resolution to give AP Faculty community service leave comparable to staff, consistent with the state policy which only mentions "employees" in general rather than restricting it to certain types of employees. Pat mentioned the differences in types of leave accruals for different classifications of faculty (i.e. restricted and non-restricted) as well as the disparities between faculty and staff accrual rates, specifically that it takes staff 20 years to accrue at the rate faculty do in their first year.

LaTawnya asked if university staff in their first year have any short-term disability, and Leisa answered no. LaTawnya shared that a housekeeping employee only had two weeks of leave after childbirth. Leisa mentioned that employees are eligible for paid parental leave, but they must have been employed here for a year. There are also additional optional benefits that are offered, including for hospitalization. LaTawnya asked if there was something similar to what UVA does that would be beneficial to those who do not retire due to the cost of healthcare.

Leisa again shared that there have been discussions of changing leave to paid time off (PTO), which would mean administering another leave program, and eliminating the current "buckets" of leave, but thinks there may be pushback from university staff who prefer the separate buckets of leave types. There may be a better chance to change leave accrual amounts. Sara shared that when

recruiting talent, some employees who choose VT are happy to have the various buckets of leave rather than PTO, and that is important.

Margaret mentioned that the only employee category that cannot be changed is classified staff, which must adhere to state policy. Leisa offered that VT is considered a Tier 3 school, and has more autonomy given that status. UVA created a new employee category and eliminated AP Faculty. Pat asked if that would be an option here. Leisa stated that VT pay bands 5 and higher are able to convert to AP Faculty, so that would be unlikely. Margaret wondered how that would affect accreditation since that may mean employees lacking graduate degrees would be in positions that would generally require one.

It was decided that both the leave and tuition groups will collect more information to present to the committee to see if there are draft recommendations that can be drafted by April. Specifically, the tuition group will work on comparisons to other institutions to see what can be done, and the leave report compiled by LaTawnya and Pat will be circulated amongst the committee. Margaret will work on a comparison of leave for faculty and staff at various numbers of years of service to deeper analyze leave accrual rates. Margaret also questioned whether there are any experts in tuition or leave who should come present to the committee. Leisa said there are several people, including herself who could make a presentation on VT leave assistance.

Other Business

Leisa shared that she and Marie received an email from Ellen Banks regarding the authorized closing policies. There is a push from the office of Kim O'Rourke, Vice President for Policy and Governance, for all areas to update and review their policies regarding authorized closings, especially since numerous people are unhappy about the handling of last week's authorized closing. Leisa will work on scheduling a presentation regarding this policy to be put on the agenda for a future meeting.

Margaret shared that she received a request from the Committee on University Support to make a presentation on January 16 regarding the research on winter closing that was previously done; Dani McNeil will do this presentation and Margaret will attend.

Margaret stated that the current EBC meeting schedule will continue for the 2020 meetings as there were no objections from members of the committee.

Next Meeting

The next general meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 15, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. in North End Center room 3600.

Adjournment:

Meeting was adjourned at 2:48 p.m. by Chairperson Margaret Radcliffe.