

Faculty/Staff Benefits Committee Report to Faculty Senate

***Provided by Senator Woodbury
(Meeting Date: 10/12/2000)***

Charlotte Harris (Human Resources) began by summarizing her findings from an apparently thorough investigation into DP benefits in general. She said that there are 3,572 Colleges/Universities/Corporations/States that presently offer these benefits. According to Harris, many familiar corporate names are in the list: GM, Ford, Subaru, Coca-Cola, General Mills, Pillsbury, Boeing, and Honeywell. Harris stated that many companies are compelled to offer these benefits in response to a 1977 San Francisco ordinance that requires any firm having contracts with San Francisco to offer DP benefits, and that recently Los Angeles and Seattle have passed similar legislation. Harris' research revealed that most companies offer benefits to both same sex and opposite sex domestic partners, but most universities only offer benefits to same sex partners. She concluded by saying that over 300 colleges offer DP benefits, including University of Tennessee, University of Florida, and University of Georgia.

At the suggestion of Dr. Chuck Evces, the Committee went through the proposal point-by-point and heard comments from all members who wished to speak on each point. I can say that the deliberations were very civil and that there were no strong objections raised on any point. Three concerns were raised during the proposal evaluation:

1) regarding possibility of fraud if DP Benefits are offered: The Committee endorsed a recommendation that any Domestic Partners should be required to file a confidential affidavit with the Benefits Office before the benefits could be received. The Committee similarly endorsed a recommendation that any Domestic Partner "divorce" (separation/termination) would need to be documented in the Benefits Office, and that a six-month waiting period would apply to the employee before a new Domestic Partner relationship could be established (similar to the waiting period required on divorced couples before they can legally remarry).

2) regarding the possibility of fraud if DP benefits are or are not offered: during the discussions it was pointed out by Sandra Abrams (Benefits Office) that during open enrollment periods each year employees are not required to show documentation to add or remove dependents from benefits policies. The Committee endorsed the idea that EVERYONE should show appropriate documentation at all times, even during open enrollment. This would of course apply to DPs if they received benefits.

3) ????? (I don't remember the third at this point as my notes are incomplete - but it was not a significant concern)

Some other comments that were offered during the discussion:

- many employees have dependents (parents, sisters-in-law, etc) whom they would like to have covered by benefits. If we extend benefits to DPs, then these other groups will also want benefit coverage.
- if the issue is equality of compensation (as is indicated in the proposal), extending benefits to DPs will not eliminate the inequality of compensation, as singles will still be undercompensated relative to their married

and DPed colleagues.

- even if UA extends benefits to DPs, they still may not be granted benefits under voluntary policies (Dental, Term Life, etc) as the only the companies that underwrite these policies have the power to change who is covered under their policies.
- BC/BS of Alabama does not currently insure any groups in Alabama that offer DP benefits (according to John Kasberg, his contact at BC/BS maintained the rationale is that DPs are in violation of Alabama law).
- DPs will not be eligible for COBRA upon separation/termination of relationship, whereas divorced persons are.
- DPs will continue to have different federal tax status and hence there are tax implications for DPs if they receive "married" benefits.

After going through the proposal point-by-point, a motion was made and seconded to endorse the proposal and attach the three points (above) as concerns that should be addressed. The show-of-hands vote was 5-7 (for-against).

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