

2005-06 Report of UT Senate Faculty Staff Benefits Committee
Committee goals and actions to date Submitted by Nancy Howell 4/21/05

Committee members:

Connie Baskette (Retirement Services)
Grady Bogue (Educational Psychology & Counseling)
Bruce Bomar (Tullahoma)
Hui Chang (Economics)
Alan Chesney (Human Resources)
Karla Edwards (Social Work)
Ron Gilmour (Library)

Tom Hood, UT Retirees Association
Nancy Howell, Chair (Veterinary Medicine)
Syed Islam (Engineering)
Patricia Kerschier (Chemistry)
Bonnie Ownley (Entomology/Plant Pathology)
Butch Peccolo (Vice President & Treasurer)
John Preston (Nursing)
Fred Weber (Engineering)

The Faculty-Staff Benefits Committee met prior to each Senate meeting to discuss issues and develop action plans. Issues raised by the committee or directed to the chair by others in the UT community included the following.

Medicare Part D: Discussion of the new Medicare Part D drug benefit was the topic of several meetings. The process of notifying UT retirees appeared to be slow at the state level. As a result, the University and many retirees were attempting to learn about options in a compressed time period. From this discussion, however, it was determined that including a person from the UT Retirees Association would be beneficial to this committee. As a result, Dr. Tom Hood joined the committee in February.

Flexible Medical Benefits promotion: The UTIA Advisory Council developed a memo to employees from the Vice President for Agriculture. Bonnie Ownley shared the letter with this committee, which was then modified and sent to all UT Knoxville deans to email to college faculty and staff. The thought was that an email reminding employees of this benefit may have more impact than the blanket memo which goes out from payroll services. The emphasis of the letter was the inclusion of over-the-counter medical supplies; UT agreed to provide links to useful web sites with lists of possible products. Previously there was little information on the UT site regarding this. The committee was appreciative of the assistance by Les Mathews. Follow-up with him revealed, however, no sizable increase in the numbers of enrollees in the program, despite these efforts.

Impact of Adoptions/births on Tenure Timetable: This issue relates to the possible impact on the "tenure clock" of tenure-track faculty who take time off for adoptions or births. The committee discussion centered around whether 3 months (Family Leave Time) had a significant impact on the tenure process. It was suggested that the Faculty Affairs Committee review the issue to determine its significance.

Implementation of Spousal/Partner Hiring Policy: Although the committee passed this policy a year ago, no action has occurred in creating a director position to oversee spousal/partner hiring. Provost Mayhew and assistant chancellor Martin have indicated in Senate meetings that they use the policy in such a hiring. The committee still urges that the process be formalized by hiring a director and promoted the policy to candidates, including information available on the UT web.

Cashability resolution to Senate: Baskette reported that this continuing issue was discussed in December during a meeting involving the officials from the Tennessee Consolidate Retirement System. There was no support expressed for increasing the ORP cashability

percentage from 50% to 100%. Background: In 2000 the Faculty Senate approved a resolution to request the state enact legislation to increase the cashability percentage from 10% to 50%. The legislation was enacted May 2001.

A suggestion was made to provide information on the Senate website regarding this issue and that the committee chair write a letter to Jill Bachus, director of TCRS, requesting an explanation of the state's concerns regarding 100% cashability. This issue is topical in other U.S. universities. The chair will attempt to determine if other UT system or Board of Regents institutions are pursuing an increase in the cashability percentage. Unless there is additional interest throughout the state, the committee will not pursue a resolution, but will attempt to gain clarification from TCRS and post that information.

UT-Controlled Benefits for Domestic Partners: Several meeting related to the issue of extending those benefits provided to employees' spouses to domestic partners, either same sex or opposite sex. After research of such policies at several other universities, the committee agreed to a resolution to be presented to the Senate. With some modification during the Senate Executive Committee meeting Apr. 17, the resolution will be reported to the Senate May 1.

Acknowledgement of Dr. Thompson's death: Finally, the committee acknowledged the contributions made by Dr. Charles Thompson, professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling, who died in December. He was former chair of this committee several years ago and very helpful in providing the committee with perspective