

Benefits Committee Meeting

December 1, 2015, 9:30-11 am

OHR 220

Attendees: Wayne Book, Brandon Conkle (OHR), Michael Elliott, Leslie Hall (Staff Council Rep.), Athena Jones (OHR Guest) Raquel Lieberman, Tommie Little (Staff Council Rep.), Michelle Powell, Stella Richardson (Secretary), Professor Finn, Chair, Chemistry

ADMINISTRATIVE

- Jason was out of town so the meeting was facilitated by Raquel Lieberman
- The minutes from the October 27, 2015 meeting were approved without changes.

UPDATES

Leave Policies

- Maternity Leave – Raquel stated that a recent candidate, who they had made an offer to, asked about maternity leave and what Georgia Tech offers in that respect. Almost every candidate asks this question. It is a major factor for prospective employees. Raquel would like to have a list of policies from HR and the Provost's office. A long discussion followed regarding concerns about the lack of maternity leave at Georgia Tech and the inconsistencies in the way leave is handled by different departments.
- Brandon stated that this is a BOR policy. He added that any statistical information that can be taken to the board would be helpful in making a case for this issue.
- Raquel stated that NSF would like to have unified policies across their programs to help diversify the scientific workforce. Michelle said she would speak to John Leonard, who is the faculty representative at the federal demonstration partnership, where they discuss compliance burden. He could check R-200, the federal requirements faculty who have federal awards have to work within. It states that funded organizations have to have 'family friendly' policies. We do not have those here at Georgia Tech.
- Athena added that GT doesn't have a separate maternity leave policy. Maternity leave falls under FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act), which provides up to 12 weeks of protected leave during a 12 month period. Employees must have been employed for a year and have worked at least 1250 hours to be eligible for FMLA. Sick and vacation leave can be used to get paid during such a leave period. Since faculty do not accrue vacation leave, they can use sick time. If they are enrolled in short-term or long term disability, they can use that after the elimination period instead of using sick leave. Brandon interjected that the standard for paid disability leave for normal pregnancy is 6 weeks. So there is a

disconnection between that time and FMLA, which is a 12 week, unpaid job protection policy. The standard for disability pay after the elimination period is 6 weeks for a normal pregnancy. The elimination period is 2 weeks. So for a healthy pregnancy, there is an opportunity for 8 weeks of pay in some form. Disability is at 60%, which means 8 weeks out of 12 would typically be paid leave.

- Athena explained that there are two different circumstances for disability. Enrollment in disability is available for new hires or converting from temporary to permanent status. There is no pre-existing exclusion when enrollment occurs when first eligible. Employees can elect on open enrollment but are subject to health screening for eligibility. Employees are strongly encouraged to enroll when hired.
- Raquel reminded us that new hires are not eligible for FMLA. Arrangements have been made in some departments for this type situation. Brandon strongly discouraged this because it could become a liability issue. He stated that Athena's position was created to help put together information that can be passed on to departments. Athena also expressed concern with the pay issue and lack of consistency that could become liability issues. It was agreed upon that the office of faculty affairs has a vested interest in keeping faculty happy.
- Athena stated that we want to make sure of a consistency when making special arrangements.
- Professor Finn, Chair of Chemistry and Biochemistry came as a guest to speak on this issue. The two important things that he wanted to point out were that we have a perceived reputation of being family friendly from the outside community. He stated that FMLA doesn't help relative to competitors, it's the barest minimum. The second is that we need to be able to be flexible. There is flexibility within units, but they get inconsistent information from HR – depending on who they talk to. HR representatives are not always knowledgeable and sometimes give information that is unhelpful and unfriendly. He wants to have a contact person within HR who can be referred to for accurate, consistent information. He is supportive and wants to work with the committee on this issue as much as possible.
- Brandon stated that Athena is central point person for leave in OHR. Specifically regarding FMLA, he wants to make sure that there is consistency and that correct handling of the process in every case. He also said that we do want to be flexible within USG guidelines. There have been conversations with USG about paid leave; their concern is cost. There is a draft proposal to amend the sick leave policy that would allow limited paid leave for maternity and paternity leave to be paid from the sick leave donated pool for a limited amount of time. Policies in place now are inadequate. Currently there is over 8000 hours of donated sick leave. USG draft states that for any FMLA related leave, one could use donated leave. One would have to deplete their leave, both sick and vacation, before applying for donated leave.
- Brandon and Athena explained that the cap of 80 hours that can be donated to the sick leave pool is because of the financial obligations that the hours represent.

- Brandon stated that ultimately we should try to partner with GSU and UGA to build a case, over time, to show that research schools recruit and compete for a different pool of talent and that maternity leave is expected from our type of employer. Athena added that if we could build a case showing that we could recruit faculty who could win grants, etc., and report statistics on that, it may help improve the leave policies. If we could show that recruits have been lost or not attained because of the maternity leave issue it would help build a favorable case to make some good progress towards getting a maternity leave benefit instituted. Michael stated that the provost needs to build a case along with other high level administrators. Raquel suggested that a leave policy document be put together that can be shared with department chairs so that everyone can operate consistently and to clear up misconceptions.
- Athena passed out a document that she is working on about “what to expect when expecting”. She stated that they (HR) need to better educate their staff to ensure that everyone gives consistent information.
- Raquel reported that she and Jason recently spoke to Jennifer Herazy in the Provost’s office. Jennifer said that the maternity leave issue needs to be presented when there is a window of opportunity when all the right people are ready to pitch it to the politicians. The Provost has to find the right time to pitch it to the people who can make it happen.
- Professor Finn said that he can get information that we need and will do what he can to solicit support from other chairs. Brandon is open to speaking to different departments. Michelle will contact the federal relations office to see how we can frame it from that prospective.
- Athena asked for the definition of ‘family friendly’ policies from NSF and NHA. Michelle will pull together what information that she can. She will speak to John Lennard to see what information can be gathered from him.
- Athena asked for feedback on the sheet she distributed. She would like for the committee to be more specific about the differences between academic and research faculty.
- Athena stated that HR has a FMLA fact sheet. She will review it to make sure it’s specific to 9 month employees, etc.
- As of July 1st everyone can get 8 hours over the year for education related absences. It has not been set up in time-out yet. For now it has to be reported as “other”.
- HR wants to have something set up for faculty who do not accrue vacation leave. They are looking at spreading 9 month employee pay over 12 months so they can be treated as 12 month employees. Extra contracts over summer would be considered ‘additional pay’. The proposal is up to allow faculty to ‘opt in’ to be paid over 12 months.

Updates from OHR

Open enrollment – Brandon reported that 88% of employees enrolled in benefits. Enrollment was passive so there was no need to resubmit except for FSA benefits. Vision and dental

enrollment increased about 10% each. That includes GT dental. Michelle stats that HMO is more valuable for pregnancy. It is a – better long term.

c. Brandon: Aon open enrollment is continuing – intermittently. (health exchange for retirees) Wayne stated that he has registered with them. He would grade them a B. One problem is that it drags out over a long time. He's had to make repeated calls to them and spend lots of time listening to same thing over and over. When he got disconnected he couldn't reconnect. Also could not leave messages once connected. It took about 2 1/2 hours of phone calls to complete the process. There was a question about whether retirees could do an online enrollment. Brandon stated that some places have that process but Georgia Tech doesn't.

Per Brandon, Aon also sells dental and vision plans. This could cause some confusion for them. Human Resources is not getting confirmations of who enrolled in what plans – just that they enrolled in something. So they're considering it medical, not dental and vision. They are sending separate email to retirees that confirms enrollment. Brandon gave some statistic on how many retirees had enrolled so far. Most had but a significant number had not. HR will be reaching out to those who have not enrolled.

Staff Council –Tommy gave a brief update. They met with Karin Elliott to discuss changes in health care. There was no new information from what she discussed in our Benefits Committee meeting last year. She gave some stats on open enrollment. The pricing strategy for the defined contribution will be centered around a comprehensive plan. They asked if Georgia Tech would be allowed to subsidize any of the plans and the answer was no. The BOR apparently will not support cost of living increases but is committed to merit compensation.

The BOR is establishing subcommittee on wellness. They will review the 70% subsidy for defined contributions each year but there is no guarantee that it will keep up with health care rises. One reason for increases is high drug costs.

Other discussion on health benefits followed for a short period prior to the end of the meeting,

The following items were tabled for later discussion.

- Balance of Teaching / Research Responsibilities / Enrollment Growth
- Transition from Full-time Faculty to Retirement