



Notes from Staff Senate Special Meeting on Education Benefits of October 13, 2016

Location: Newcomb Hall

Time: 10:00 AM–11:00 AM

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Announcements	Jessica Wenger , Co-Chair
Education Benefits Pilot	Alison Miller , Director of Total Rewards

Welcome and Announcements

Jess Wenger, Co-Chair

- Parking passes available
- Flu shots offered in the Commonwealth Room nearby
- **Action:** Remember to attend the next regularly scheduled Staff Senate meeting next week on Thursday, Oct. 20

Guest Speaker

Alison Miller, Director of Total Rewards *(see Alison's slide presentation for additional info)*

Intro: Alison had been in communication with the Staff Senate Advocacy Committee regarding the UVA Education Benefits.

- The Advocacy Committee has done good work on sharing feedback on behalf of constituents.
- Alison put together a proposal based on feedback and shared it with others, including Kelley Stuck, UVA's new chief human resources officer (CHRO), who will oversee HR for the Academic Division, Medical Center, and University Physicians Group.

A Little History: *(see slide 4)*

- Used to have the tuition waiver option only
- The Education Benefit, funded out of fringe rate, was added
- \$2,000 available for Education Benefit *(just talking about for Academic Division)*
- Budgeted at \$2 million in fringe
- 2,600 employees (roughly 1 in 5) took advantage of Ed. Benefit
- 70% staff users, 30% faculty
- 10% of funds went to personal enrichment activities
- 88% used for professional development, conferences, etc.

- 2% spent on for-credit coursework at accredited institutions (54 employees)
- Alison asked if there was interest in an Education Benefit that would better support those pursuing a degree and those present overwhelmingly agreed

Compliance Review: *(see slide 5)*

- Maximum amount allowable tax-free by IRS is \$5,350 annually for tuition paid for for-credit coursework at an accredited institution
- UVA needs to be compliant with tax code but it need not apply to the entire Education Benefit
- Grant-funded and other employees must have the same access to the benefit
- Our benefit cannot extend, as a public institution, to dependents or spouses
- UVA unable to pay for items for personal use, so books and other course materials will not be paid for
 - *Ex. If an employee buys books for a class with UVA funds, the University does not want to have to monitor what happens with the books after a class ends, such as an employee selling the book and retaining the funds.*

Strategic Alignment: *(see slides 6 & 7)*

- The Education Benefit, from the CHRO's perspective, aligns with the UVA Cornerstone Plan, specifically with regard to stewarding resources
- Goals are to have an affordable benefit for employees and from the University's perspective be sure that dollars are funneled to where employees get the most benefit from them
- Ufirst, over several years, will be aligning the approach on Education Benefits across the Academic Division, Medical Center, and University Physicians Group
 - Specifically, UVA currently has 20+ employee categories governed by 152 HR policies
 - With modifications to the Education Benefit Pilot, we don't want to do anything too different from other existing programs at the University or potential future directions
 - **Medical Center**
 - \$350 for Continuing Education Units (CEUs)/conference attendance
 - \$2,000 for approved for-credit courses only
 - \$5,250 for employee's in hard to fill roles (or who wish to move into hard to fill roles) toward for-credit coursework toward a degree (*such as for nurses/nursing degrees*)
 - **University Physicians Group (UPG)**
 - Has a looser program; more between manager and employee
- Susan Carkeek, previous CHRO, wanted to get away from Education Benefits being variable or unfairly administered

Data Gathering and Feedback: *(see slide 8)*

- Staff Senate Advocacy Committee did a comparison with other university programs and also provided a wish list of desired program aspects
- Alison and her team reviewed and researched compliance concerns
- Communication occurred about ideas and information was gathered
- Alison discussed with Bryan Garey, interim VP for HR, and then school and unit HR directors, accessing their knowledge of staff pain points with the Education Benefit

- Around October 1, the proposal was reviewed with the Staff Senate Advocacy Committee
- After that meeting, Alison shared the proposal with Kelley, Bryan, and Melody Bianchetto (VP of Finance)
 - Kelley and Melody reshaped the proposal. Opportunities for employees to do skill-building, refresh their skills, and have access to ongoing learning is important to both of them.

Pain Points: *(see slide 9)*

- Different conferences would be approved for some employees based on their role/certification/need for CEUs while the same conference would not be approved for another; approval varied widely and the process didn't seem transparent
- The Education Benefit program needs to have a plan document to be clear for the IRS and crystal clear for employees
 - What's the program?
 - What are the employee's eligibility requirements?
- Need a benefit amount adjustment strategy to match changing tuition/professional development costs as they increase over time; Advocacy Committee reinforced this as a pain point

Education Benefits One-Year Pilot (Academic): *(see slides 10-12)*

- Benefit adjusts over time, helps degree-seeking or for-credit certificate seeking employees
- Courses must be taken at an accredited institution, for example UVA, PVCC, and University of Phoenix are accredited
 - Click here to see access [information about accredited institutions](#)
 - From research the Advocacy Committee did, other universities approve benefits for degrees within one's line of work or within reason to attain an area of expertise
 - These determinations have been subjective in the past, with Greg Freshour having to make determinations
 - The pilot, if approved, has aspects that are open to interpretation; part of the plan is to use the pilot year to evaluate
 - Discussion of what degree programs and graduate certificates will be allowed in the benefit; a list will be provided as part of the FAQs
- Part of the reason the updated benefit will remain a pilot is we'll see greater alignment in programs across different university areas as Ufirst coordinates efforts
 - During the pilot, we'll assess use of resources, use of the program, costs, etc.
 - In addition to the tuition portion of the program, the \$2,000 professional development amount remains for job-related, career-growth related, and/or development opportunities identified in employees' Lead@ proposals
 - Personal enrichment does go away but the proposed pilot will decrease the likelihood that a class will be approved for one employee and not another
 - Alison and others presumed that money for these opportunities would still be wanted up front; meeting attendees confirmed this
 - The combined maximum for the Education Benefit, for for-credit coursework and professional development, is \$4,360/employee

- The spirit of the Education Benefit is the enhance career growth
- There are benefits going away in this revised program, primarily personal enrichment programming, but the big increase (more than doubling the benefit) for those pursuing degrees or certificates is a plus
- The Advocacy Committee identified the that the current program does not benchmark for tuition benefit practices in other higher education organizations
- Employees can use any mix of for-credit coursework and professional development within the maximum benefit amount
- The cap is based on the cost of two 3-credit hour undergraduate courses/semester
- Departments can (and often do) support staff pursuing education in areas that will directly be applied in their role in their current work location
- The maximum benefit amount is proposed to be indexed annually to continue to rise to cover tuition and professional development cost increases over time.
- **Next Steps:**
 - After incorporating feedback, Kelley will take the pilot plan to Pat Hogan
 - Once final approval attained, the updated plan will be communicated to the University community in time to be considered while budgeting
 - Previously, 10% generally spent on personal enrichment will be used to pay additional tuition—if more people begin to use the benefit, costs will be considered going forward
 - The proposed rollout of the new program is Jan. 1, 2017
 - Monitoring of if people are adequately progressing toward their degrees or certificates will fall to the individual programs/schools
 - Ed. Benefit subcommittee of Advocacy Committee identified that in the current version of the benefit, the tuition aspect is really lacking. The hybrid will cover a lot and will be a good program compared to those offered elsewhere.

Q & A and Concerns from the Senate:

Q: Can people just be approved to use the benefit for any degree, to remove the subjectivity and support education of staff in the business of education?

A: Acceptable degree/certificate programs will continue to be reviewed during the pilot.

Q: What if an electrician wants to become a nurse. Does this benefit apply to them?

A: Any associates or bachelor's degree in any subject will be covered. Further review will occur of whether master's and doctorate degrees will be approved for all regardless of subject area.

Q: Can someone use Financial Aid and the Education Benefit?

A: Depends on how they do it. Need based financial aid may be impacted by use of the Education Benefit. This point will be followed-up on. (Use of the Ed. Benefit wouldn't affect federal eligibility for financial aid, but it would affect UVA need-based funds.) With rollout, better guidance will be provided.

Q: What if you already have a degree? An employee already has a degree but has attended a number of interesting classes, such as Eastern religion courses, that inform his work. Also, he's the on-call person in his building for CPR and First Aid—currently his recertification in those skills is not paid for by UVA.

A: With the combined parts of the benefit, the CPR/First Aid recertification could be included in the employee's development plan for the next year and covered out of the \$2,000 allotted for professional development costs. Personal enrichment programs/classes will not be paid for by this program.

Q: How does this change impact enrichment courses like Creative Writing?

A: Covered education needs to have a connection to one's job and has to be provided by a recognized educational provider.

Q: After a class in the past, the employee needed to provide documentation that the course was completed adequately or conference participated in. Still necessary in the revised program?

A: Yes, employees will still need to provide documentation. Information about what kind of documentation to provide for different offerings will be spelled out in the FAQs.

Q: If not everyone is using the benefit, can there be a way for others to access unused funds, similar to a sick leave bank?

A: The money budgeted in fringe for this is based on previous funds used, not by multiplying out the benefit maximum for eligible employees.

Q: What if a person needs to pay back the money for a course, due to something like receiving a grade below the minimum acceptable—can the reimbursement be spread out over time?

A: Yes, we can work out payment plans.

Q: What if an employee does something like data management, an area of expertise that is constantly evolving? Employees cannot always anticipate changes in the subject matter area far enough in advance for requests to make it to their development plans?

A: Employees, if in agreement with their managers, can go back and add things to their development plan up to a certain point. Also, there will be concessions made to approve appropriate education opportunities as needed.

Concerns Raised at Meeting:

- What if a person wants to take courses to support a career/role change? Can't got to supervisor about that.
- What does this revised pilot do for those who already have a degree? Graduate coursework costs more.

Next Regular Staff Senate Meeting:

Thursday, October 20, 2016

Newcomb Hall, South Meeting Room

11:00 AM–1:00 PM

NO GUEST SPEAKER – Working Meeting