UNIVERSITY BENEFITS COMMITTEE

APPROVED MINUTES: May 5, 2011

Members Present: Sonya Armstrong, Virginia Cassidy, Dennis Davito, Ray Foster, Deborah Haliczer, Amy Levin, Pam Rosenberg, Simon Song, Sherilyn Spear

Deborah Haliczer called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. The agenda was approved. The March 31, 2011 minutes were approved.

Old Business:

A. Pension and Benefit Update: Dennis Davito reported that while many changes in pensions have been proposed, most of the legislation has not yet passed, and NIU administrators and benefits staff are closely monitoring activity. The number of employees filing retirement applications is almost double the normal number for this time of year. Committee members discussed the negative impact of the pension system on recruiting new employees, particularly among tenure-track faculty. As always, the best source of current information comes from the Annuitants Association, and from the NIU Budget and Pension page on the NIU Web site.

A concern to the committee is the proposed change in the SURS actuarial calculation, which will be implemented either January or July of 2012. From a university perspective, a July implementation would have less impact on staffing classes than potentially losing faculty in the middle of the academic year, when it would not be possible to participate in the usual annual recruiting times.

Davito also reported on the Benefits Choice period, which started May 1, and will continue until sometime in June, perhaps the second week. This vague end date has caused concern among faculty and staff. At this time, it is not clear what health plans will be available. Several HMOs have been dropped, though there are court and committee challenges to these decisions. Two new Open Access Plans (OAPs) have been introduced around the State, though the court challenges also might affect these plans. The Insurance and Benefits Office plans to hold informational meetings on campus when definite information is known.

B. Annuitants Update: Sherie Spear, Haliczer and Davito led a discussion of annuitant concerns about proposals to “reform” pensions for current employees, and some proposals to alter pension benefits for retirees. Key areas could be the COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment), and to Retiree health insurance, which is still premium-free, with the exception of dental benefits. A number of legislators persist in talking about shifting significant premiums to annuitants. SUAA and our NIU Annuitants (NIUAA) are discussing a possible legal challenge and a legal defense fund against this possibility. These will be discussed by the NIUAA board, and will be discussed at the June annual NIUAA meeting.
C. **UBC Web site:*** Is up and functioning. The Web site was used as the portal for participants to take the benefits survey.

D. **Civil Unions / Domestic Partner Benefits:** Haliczer reported that the State will start providing benefits to partners in civil unions when the law becomes effective June 1. At that time, CMS will no longer provide insurance benefits to domestic partners, though employees who currently provide for domestic partners will be “grandfathered.” NIU Board of Trustees regulations are being updated to assure that the university is in compliance with the new Civil Unions law.

E. **Dependent Tuition Waiver Challenges:** Legislation has been proposed to eliminate the employee dependent tuition waiver. The bill has not been passed. Another piece of legislation addresses legislative tuition waivers.

F. **Benefits Survey Results:** A summary of the Benefits Survey results was distributed and discussed. Results will be posted on the UBC Web site. 1549 employees responded to the survey. 273 annuitants responded. (1822 in total). We were not surprised to learn that of those who responded, 1286 said that all, or some of their payments to providers had been delayed due to the State of Illinois delays in reimbursements. Comments on the survey described difficult experiences and financial pressures.

**New Business:**

A. **Benefits Choice Update:** Summarized above.

B. **Temporary SPS proposal:** The Supportive Professional Staff Council will be presenting a proposal to make some changes to how temporary SPS can carry over vacation benefits. This will be presented at the fall meeting.

C. **Committee members whose terms are ending were recognized.** All members were thanked for their service.

D. **Annual Report:** Will be presented at the first meeting of the year.

**Next Meeting: September 2, 2011.**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Haliczer