UNIVERSITY BENEFITS COMMITTEE
January 30, 2014 Minutes

Members Present: Terry Borg, Cliff Bottiglieri, Dennis Davito, Liz Guess, Deborah Haliczer, Brian May, Sue Mini, Pamela Rosenberg, Gina Shannon, George Slotsve, Sherilynn Spear

I. The meeting was called to order at 12:09 pm. The agenda was approved (Spear motion, Rosenberg second) without changes, and the minutes of the November 21, 2013 meeting were approved (Borg motion, Shannon second), also without changes.

II. Old Business:

A. Insurance and Benefits report (Davito and Guess)

Guess discussed the issue of retiree dependent eligibility verification. The deadline for self-initiated completion of dependent auditing (which will involve providing facsimiles of the birth certificates of dependents), scheduled for January, will be delayed until August. Soon a clearly-labeled letter (“read this! don’t burn this”) will be sent announcing the new requirement, getting into the details, and mentioning how assistance in completing this task (which will require proficiency on a personal computer) will be made available as the deadline approaches.

Guess also reported on the recent CMS meeting of benefit managers (where the “high-deductible” health plan was discussed and information about it and its scheduled implementation was distributed).

Davito discussed the possible fate(s) of the old “30 and out” provision, as it was popularly known, should the recently-passed pension reform bill stand up to its imminent court challenges and become the law of the land. Davito mentioned how many of the old provisions apparently untouched by the new pension plan will in fact be transformed by it and how, therefore, it has become exceedingly difficult to give sound retirement advice (for example, to fashion “retirement estimates”) in the current situation.

As Davito explained, the employees visiting him these days tend to fall into two categories, 1) the first group tend to have 20 or more years of service and are more interested in defending existing investments than in maximizing future ones. Of the two types they are easier to counsel; 2) the second group are hard to advise simply because information about the future is more limited even than usual.

Counseling in general is more difficult these days because only one counseling session per employee will be permitted per calendar year—and yet things on the ground are changing more often than ever. It is also the case that it is hard to know what to say to new hires.

Haliczer reported on the issue of faculty and staff raises—and on how difficult it is to see good signs on the horizon, as Steven Cunningham has noted. A memo will be coming out soon announcing that HR will be having counseling sessions (SURS counseling on 4/22-24, with the 4/24 am session devoted to an attempt to make sense of the new pension provision) this spring. This meeting will be intended for employees rather than retirees; retirees will get their own meeting at a later date.

B. Pension Issues (Steve Cunningham)

As it turned out, Mr. Cunningham was unavailable and did not attend the meeting.
C. Annuitants Association report

Spear reported on recent measures to ensure that legal action taken against the state of Illinois in opposition to the new pension plan.

It was also reported that the Annuitants Association will have a booth at the 3/26 Wellness Fair.

Finally, Spear noted that the Association is contemplating various means of increasing its membership.

[At this time, Haliczer thanked Spear as well as our other UBC representatives (Shannon, Slotsve, and Bottiglieri) to various committees and groups “for representing us so well.”]

D. Other benefit updates

Guess noted that HR will be notifying all affected employees that the university’s list of approved 403B-plan vendors will soon be narrowed to two (Fidelity and TIAA-CREF). These two vendors have agreed to lower fees for their services, they have been so approved, and they will be coming to campus soon to meet with interested parties. Other vendors, however, those which have been available in the past but which have not been invited to campus, will be preserved in some form (“grandfathered”) for some time.

E. Morale and workloads

1. “Unintended consequences” letter: we have received no official response
2. Parking letter. After slight editing, the letter was approved to be sent along as so amended (Spear motion, Bottigliero second).
3. What can we do about morale and workload concerns? (See II.F below.)

F. Salaries and increments

Discussion of E.3 above, the issue of workplace morale, bled over into a discussion of salaries and increments. Rumors have arisen that certain high-ranking or high-placed individuals have been getting significant incremental raises to the salaries even as others languish. Also discussed were some employee recognition concerns – currently faculty and SPS staff wait 25 years to be recognized. These two groups will now have to wait just ten years.

G. SPS “Odd Contracts”

Haliczer reported that no movement on this front has been detected, though 50% of the 20 or so employees who possess such contracts have been interviewed.

H. Dual Career issues.

We can report no new information concerning the Dual Career issue, though it was reported that the Provost and President have been approached with the question, could we somehow use a good “dual career” policy as a faculty/staff recruitment/retention tool?

III. New Business:

A. Affordable Care Act
The question arose, will the new law have any impact on NIU student workers? The answer is that we will have to cover all students who work more than 30 hours per week. We will have to track all students (as well as all GA’s) who would seem to approach that level of employment to make sure that we offer them health plan opportunities as specified by the law. This need could lead to a change in how many hours of employment we allow students and GA’s to accrue. A measure of the complexity of the new situation created by the passing of the ACA is that the following question has arisen: after all, just what are these students and GA’s, et al., NIU employees or STATE employees? As one might guess, the lawyers are now involved in the process of answering some of these questions.

B. Other New Business.

It was moved (Shannon, Rosenberg second) that we send President Baker a note of thanks for notifying the university community early on (Sunday afternoon) of the decision to close NIU on a Monday and Tuesday earlier in the semester.

It was decided that the next meeting of the University Benefits Committee will be held March 6, 2014, with another meeting to follow 4/10. The meeting place will be decided at a later date, but Bottiglieri moved to have the 3/6 meeting begin at noon, and Rosenberg seconded the motion (passed by unanimous vote).

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian May, Co-Secretary