

Northern Illinois University
University Benefits Committee
Annual Report 2015-2016

The University Benefits Committee (UBC) met seven times during the 2015-2016 academic year (September 3, October 1, November 5, 2015; February 4, March 3, April 7, and May 5, 2016). The 2015-2016 committee membership included:

Faculty (2)	George Slotsve	Wendell Johnson
Committee on the Economic Status of the Profession representative (from Faculty Senate)	Fall-Therese Arado Spring-vacant	
Operating Staff (2)	Mary Wyzard	John Hulseberg
Supportive Professional Staff (2)	*Terry Borg	**Samantha McCarron
Executive Vice President & Provost representative	Murali Krishnamurthi	
Senior administrator responsible for Human Resource Services or designee	Celeste Latham	
Annuitants Association representative	Sherilynn Spear	
@Manager of Insurance and Employee Benefits	Liz Guess	

*Chair

**Secretary

@Ex Officio

In 2015-2016 the UBC focused on the following benefit related areas:

1. Pension issues (including money purchase formula and actuarial table changes)
2. Affordable Care Act implementation
3. CMS Dependent Audit
4. Roth 457 supplemental retirement option addition
5. Encouragement of all NIU employees and annuitants to join the NIU Annuitants Association
6. Morale and workload issues
7. FMLA and Tenure Clock impact
8. Employee and dependent tuition waiver challenges by state government
9. Work at home guidance
10. Medical/Dental providers (PPOs/OAPs/self-insured) delayed/no payments by CMS due to the state's ongoing budget deliberations
11. Dual Career Draft Policy review
12. Centralized Disability Accommodation Fund information
13. Emeritus title issuance - timing request increase from once per year
14. Wellness Fair input/review
15. Benefits Choice update
16. SPS Council request for guidance on (1) salary increment for degree completion/professional certification policy and (2) a proposed policy of university service.
17. Parking permit fee increase response.

While many of the discussions of the above areas focused on information clarification, sharing and dissemination, a few select areas had greater significance for employees. These areas of greater significance and meaning for employees included:

1. Pension issues: The uncertainty of the State University Retirement System has resulted in employees opting for earlier retirements in the expectation/hope that they will receive the benefits promised. The pace of retirements was further accelerated with a change in the actuarial tables on January 4, 2016. The resultant impact on the university is fewer employees doing more as the university's budget situation has not permitted employee replacement. This situation has resulted in morale and workload issues.
2. Morale and workload issues: University employee morale continues to sink to levels not experienced by NIU ever before, as demonstrated by the formation of two employee bargaining groups, i.e. faculty and operating staff. While morale sinks, workload increases. The UBC concluded that there is no reason to further explore NIU low morale issues, as employees have no control over the root causes. These root causes include: (1) no increments/general pay increases since January 2012, (2) the vilification of state employees by the Governor's Office, along with the budget stalemate between the Governor and Legislature causing significant uncertainty in Illinois higher education, (3) the outflow of youth to other states for higher education, (4) the attack on state pensions, (5) the attack on state employee benefits including employee and dependent tuition waiver challenges by state government, (6) Medical/Dental providers (PPOs/OAPs/self-insured) delayed/no payments by CMS due to the state's ongoing budget deliberations, and (7) the potential for significant health insurance premium increases pending AFSCME negotiations.
3. Parking permit fee increase: University employees voiced that they have not only been beaten down by the State of Illinois, and public opinion, but now NIU itself is no longer being sensitive to its own people. The imposition of an increase in parking fees, the second (FY 2014 and FY 2017) since the last general increment was provided in January, 2012, has meant a further erosion in employee compensation. The UBC advised President Baker to reconsider the parking fee increase in light of the financial impact it has on NIU employees and the resultant impact on employee morale. Such action would serve as a symbol demonstrating that the university recognizes the plight of its employees, since this action, unlike other CMS related benefit costs, is clearly in the control of NIU. President Baker referred the matter to Vice President Alan Phillips. Vice President Phillips or his designee will attend a future UBC meeting.

The 2015 – 2016 academic year proved to be a continuation and amplification of the challenges of past years experienced by NIU employees seeking secure employment with reasonable remuneration and benefits. Continued attention on quality benefits, compensation, workload, and workplace conditions is essential in retaining faculty and staff, to make Northern Illinois University a welcoming and desired place for students to learn. Furthermore, our focus on employee benefits is critical in keeping NIU competitive in hiring the faculty and staff needed to compete nationally and internationally. The University Benefits Committee will continue to maintain a pulse on NIU employees' concerns and interests as it fulfills the duties of the University Council's Bylaws Article 17.2.2 in advising the "president on any and all employee benefits...", reviewing "present benefit plans and proposals...", and making "recommendations to the president concerning employee benefits."

Respectfully submitted,

Terry E. Borg, Ph.D.
Chair, University Benefits Committee 2015-2016