New Idea to Extend Family Leave Options

The UF has been putting Family Leave on the table for the past couple of years seeking to expand coverage for faculty who miss work to care for a sick child or parent. This year, we think we have made a breakthrough. One stumbling block has been the cost of replacing faculty who would use more sick leave for family illnesses. So we started looking for an existing source of funds. For example, we might draw money at the end of each year from an under-used $50,000 fund set aside to reimburse faculty for medical copays in excess of $500. Faculty who exhaust current Family Leave options could then apply for an additional week of Family Leave on a first-come, first-served basis until the fund was exhausted. We have discussed a two-year trial program to see how many faculty apply and whether the funds will be adequate. The UF estimates that the plan would allow 30 or 40 faculty to use an additional week of Sick Leave as Family Leave each year.

Intellectual Property Rights Agreement Taking Time

Although we reached a straw design on Intellectual Property Rights at our first meeting, the details are proving difficult, and we're not sure at this point whether IPR will be part of this year's agreement or next year's. The UF hired a copyright specialist, lawyer and DVC part-time faculty member Michael Aczon, to review the straw design, and we have incorporated his suggestions into a revision of the agreement. The sticking points include issues related to electronic media (a fast-changing field) and general questions about what constitutes a work-for-hire, and what rights, if any, the District should gain when it invests in faculty work (by stipend or sabbatical).

Compensation Agreement Hinges, for UF, on PT Parity

Even more than the State's unsettled budget picture, compensation this year is made tricky for the UF by cuts to part-time pay parity. Last year, the State cut about 50% of the funds provided for part-time compensation, and this year, the Governor's budget includes even more cuts. These categorical reductions are affecting the general funds for most districts that long ago added parity money to salary schedules, but in our district, where parity money is still distributed at the end of every semester to part-time lecturers and professors of English Composition as a direct pass-through from the State, the cuts will come right out of faculty pay. Last semester, therefore, we agreed to spend 100% of the State money to avoid any pay cuts for part-time lecturers. But this spring, it will take reserve dollars to avoid salary cuts. And in the long run, we need to find revenue to cover the cost of parity.

The UF has asked the District to consider parity pay in much the same way we treat full-time/part-time ratios. We would like to improve over time, if we can find new money. But recognizing that these are areas where we lag behind most districts, we should all agree that whatever it takes, we should not allow our ratios to get worse. We employ a higher percentage of part-time lecturers than most districts, and we pay them less too. We see these facts as linked; and the solutions are linked as well. So we're seeking a salary formula that will not allow salaries for part-time lecturers to drop below current levels. In these tight times, however, replacing the $500,000 or more in ongoing funds that the State has cut so far in this area will not be easy.

UF President Elected to CCCI and FACCC Leadership

This month, UF President Jeff Michels was elected to the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges Board of Governors. He was also elected Executive Secretary (Vice President) of the California Community Colleges Independents (CCCI). Michels' stated aims in running for both offices were to increase and improve advocacy efforts for community college faculty in Sacramento, as well as to give CCCCD faculty a stronger voice on statewide issues. One of Michels' new responsibilities will be participating in "Consultation Council," regular meetings with the State Chancellor of California Community Colleges as well as CFT, CTA, CCCI and FACCC leaders to discuss issues of importance to community college faculty.

Know Your Contract: "Cash in Lieu of Benefits"

Are you a full-timer whose spouse has medical benefits that would cover you and your family? Do you have "double coverage"? Our district offers a "cash in lieu" program that would pay you an additional $425.04 per month (the Kaiser single rate) if you declined medical coverage through the District. For details, contact Reed Rawlinson at the District Office (ext. 1294) or call the UF Office (ext. 2502).

President's Message

I recall that before I decided to run for UF president, I used to feel frustrated that I didn't really know who was representing me in negotiations. So I've been wanting for some time to introduce our team.

In Interest-Based-Bargaining, we don't really have a "lead negotiator," but to the extent that we do have a chief strategist and main contact person with the District, I play that role. My counterpart is Vice Chancellor of HR Gene Huff, who leads the District team. Our group also includes our three vice presidents: Glenn Appell from DVC (Music; author of a textbook on American Popular Music); Rudy Zeller from CCC (PE; Soccer Coach; Golf Pro); and Michael Zilber from LMC (Music; composer/performer of a new Jazz CD putting Billy Collins' poetry to music).

To these we add: Deborah Dahl-Shanks, our Part-Time Faculty Advocate (Music, DVC; past winner of FACCC prizes for both Part-Time Faculty Member of the Year and Part-Time Advocate of the Year; STRS expert); Brendan Brown, former President of the UF, from LMC/Brentwood (Math; Brendan is retiring this year, but will continue to teach part-time and work with the UF); Jill DeStefano, former UF VP from LMC/Brentwood (Math; mother of teen-agers); Michael Anker, our Budget Analyst from CCC (Philosophy; now retired teaching part-time; former Statewide Academic Senate President); and Stuart Lichter, our Benefits Chair from CCC (counseling). So we're a big group! We're musical and mathematical. And most of us have been on the team now for years, so we work well together. Next fall, we will hold new elections. We will have open E-Board spots. I'll be up for reelection too. (I think I'll run again.) Consider joining us!

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UF

Table Talk

The Newsletter of the United Faculty of Contra Costa Community College District

May 18, 2010

News at a Glance

Good News and Bad in Governor's "May Revise"

Every year in May, the Governor revises his January budget proposal to reflect California's finances and to begin the Legislature's budget process in earnest. This year's revised budget made few changes for community colleges, but the news is not all bad. There is still 2.21% enrollment growth ($126 million) in the budget (which would mean a little less than 1% funded growth for our District, based on the State distribution formula). There is no proposed fee hike for students. And the Governor has withdrawn his proposal to suspend the Competitive Cal Grants program ($45.5 million in student financial aid).

On the downside, the Governor is still proposing more cuts to EOPS ($10 million) and part-time-faculty parity funding ($10 million), as well as a small, -0.39%, "negative COLA" (a $22.9 million reduction in general apportionment). The Governor also wants to suspend mandates like the Faculty Obligation Number and the Fifty Percent Law (rules that ensure that districts meet minimum standards for employing full-time faculty and spending in the classroom).

Clearly, a long budget battle is looming, made much more difficult for community college advocates by the Governor's devastating proposals to cut health and welfare programs. Since the budget negotiations take place during the summer, when community college faculty tend to be less plugged in, the UF strongly urges all our members to check in regularly with the FACCC web page at www.faccc.org. FACCC has an excellent new point-and-click system for emailing your legislators and weighing in on key issues, including the budget. This is a quick, easy way you can contribute to our advocacy efforts. Our friends in the legislature tell us often that their voice is strengthened when they can point to a flood of emails from constituents on a subject. Whether it's to fight a cuts-only approach or to advocate for specific programs, like EOPS, our legislators need to hear from us.

Closer to home, the bleak budget picture and "workload reduction" cuts continue to affect teaching and learning conditions. Part-time faculty are being laid off; schedules are being reduced. Full-time faculty positions are being eliminated as retirees are not replaced. Three managers were laid off in March, and several other positions have been eliminated or consolidated. And last week at a special Governing Board meeting, more than 40 classified staff positions were either reduced or eliminated. Many affected classified employees will see their contracts reduced from 12 months to 10 or 11 (a significant pay cut!), and some will be laid off completely. Local 1 will be working with the District over the summer to work out the exact details and save as many jobs as possible.

Unfortunately, there is not much in the May Revise to suggest that things will get better next year. The budget picture could be worse, but in the short run, we expect another year of tough choices and downsizing.

Evaluation Agreement Ratified: Implementation in the Fall

By a vote of 266-16, UF members ratified on April 26 our Tentative Agreement to revise the faculty evaluation forms and procedures, and the Governing Board ratified the Agreement as well on April 28. Changes in Appendix X will thus go into effect at the start of the fall semester, and a UF/District workgroup will be meeting over the summer to create electronic forms and guidebooks, and also to devise an on-line training module and an in-person training road show. Our plan is to offer training at every campus during fall flex and also at several other times during the first month of the semester. UF reps will also be available to meet with departments or divisions by invitation, and of course, we will be available to answer questions.

Negotiations Report: TA Expected in Early Fall

Collective Bargaining is set to conclude next Friday, May 21, and while we won't have reached a Tentative Agreement on any subject, both sides think we have made enough progress that we'll be able to fine tune our straw designs over the summer and settle on a TA with just one or two more meetings in the fall. Compensation may be our last piece, since we may not be able to reach agreement until the State's budget is set. Most analysts think it will take at least until early August, but some pessimists think it may drag out even longer. On other issues, however, we think we will be ready for a Tentative Agreement some time in September. And we have mostly agreed that if issues are still unresolved at that point, they will become part of next year's negotiations.

Both sides have made a general commitment to reach agreement and conclude negotiations on time every year (or close to it), so that outstanding issues get pushed forward and don't become stumbling blocks. This approach has seemed particularly effective this year, as we take small steps towards addressing large issues, like the yearly increases in benefits costs that have become unsupportable. It's worth noting as well that our interest-based approach has kept the UF and District negotiating collaboratively where many districts that bargain positionally have seen tensions rise rapidly in a way that has impeded progress. In short, we have done better this year than most.

Benefits Costs Pose Biggest Challenge

Despite federal health care reform, our benefits costs seem poised to rise again this year with no end in sight. And without cost-of-living increases and new money from the State, there is simply no way for the District to indefinitely afford double-digit increases in medical premiums. The benefits black hole hurts us in other ways too: since we negotiate "total compensation" formulas, increased spending on benefits means less money for salaries. And where salary increases compound and also affect retirement, benefits increases offer nothing new or improved. The only winners are the insurance companies.

That said, like all District employees, we faculty appreciate our medical benefits, and we don't want to give them up. If anything, we'd like to see coverage expanded (to cover more part-timers, for example). Plus, faculty already contribute 6% of our medical premiums, and ours is one of the few districts in the State to charge employees a percentage and not a flat fee. Thus we contribute to cost increases, and we're skeptical of any cuts that would realize a short-term savings only to land us back in the upward cost-spiral.

So what are our options and what can we expect? First, the UF is strongly in favor of adopting a **wellness program**. Insurance premium increases are connected to utilization; if we can become a healthier group that takes less medication and needs fewer trips to the hospital, our increases will go down. We are looking at one wellness program now with the District that would offer a financial incentive for employees to participate (by monitoring and reporting on personal health, with privacy protections). There is a lot of potential upside in such a program, though results may come too slowly to help us through the current crisis. Other ways to decrease utilization include increased copays or deductibles (if it costs more, the theory goes, folks will use it less), but so far this is not a direction we've been pursuing.

It is important to note that at this point as we begin to address benefits, nothing is off the table. HealthNet Elect costs the District an additional $2988 each year for employee plus family over the HMO rate. The employee pays an additional $179 a year. Yet most "elect" members never use the elect part of the program by going out of network even once. Is this worth it? Is there some other way we could organize coverage that would spend our money more effectively? Faculty should rest assured: there is no push underway to eliminate HealthNet Elect. But we have been trying to take a global look at our benefits to ask where we might save money without giving much up.

Some ideas that we have tabled for now include switching from a two-tier to a three-tier drug plan (we're not convinced that the savings would be worth the sacrifice); adding a PPO or changing health care providers (not feasible right now). Since rates depend in part on the size of our group and since surprisingly few insurance carriers serve our entire area, our options sometimes seem limited.

One idea on which we will likely agree involves clarifying the expectation for future retirees that to be reimbursed for Medicare Part B, a member must join a Medicare-coordinated program with either Kaiser or HealthNet. Premium costs decrease significantly for retirees who have assigned Medicare coverage to Kaiser or HealthNet ($4000-$6000 per year or more, depending on age & program). Thus the savings are substantial, and the effect on coverage is minimal (retirees in coordinated plans have the same coverage they had as employees).

It is likely that an agreement on Medicare-coordinated plans and perhaps a wellness program are the only major changes to benefits that will come out of this year's agreement, but faculty should know that we are at the start of what may be a long process of reviewing and reconsidering benefits costs. If you have ideas or suggestions, of course, we would appreciate hearing from you. The results of our recent Benefits Survey (as well as our General UF Survey and Part-Time Faculty Survey) are now available on the UF Website: www.uf4cd.org.

Vision Plan for Part-Timers in the Works

One nice result from negotiating benefits this year has been that it has allowed us to explore some revenue-neutral ways we might improve coverage. For example, we think we may be able to offer a vision plan, starting next year, to benefits-eligible part-timers. The plan would be fully funded by employees, and the coverage would be comparable to what full-time employees have covering eye exams and glasses (though a little different in places). We are still negotiating rates and working out the details. We will need at least 50 part-timers to enroll to make the plan viable. Look for details in the fall.

Banked Load Agreement Limits Liability, Preserves Benefit

Banked load is another difficult issue that we've been negotiating this year, and it has clearly been a District priority as evidenced by the addition to the District negotiating team of two college presidents: CCC's McKinley Williams and LMC's Peter Garcia. The District claims a $9 million "banked load liability," and beyond that there is concern about how faculty who take semesters or years off on banked load are replaced. Faculty as well as managers have complained to the UF that replacing full-timers for extended periods with part-timers is not practical (especially in small departments with just one or two full-timers).

We have not yet concluded a straw design on this issue; it's the main topic again next Friday, May 21, when we meet for the last time this fall, but the shape of an agreement has mostly come into focus. One part will probably involve capping banked load in several ways: how much load one can bank; how much can be used at one time; and how often one take a full semester or year off. We will also seek to grandfather in those who currently have banked load and ensure that the District lives up to the promises it made by allowing some faculty to bank several years worth of load in the past. Plus we expect to agree on some changes to AC restrictions so that faculty who teach overload during the day (while still fulfilling their professional responsibilities) aren't precluded from choosing AC pay rather than banked load. We're still working out the details and talking about a range of other load-related issues, from underloads to on-line office hours, but the central issues have been about caps and AC rules.