Registration Open for UF Benefits Conference April 12

Don't miss the 2013 UF/FACCC Health, Benefits and Retirement Conference on Friday, April 12 from 9am to 3:30pm at DVC in the Diablo Room (cafeteria). The UF will provide breakfast and lunch for all attendees. We'll have vendors from investment groups, health organizations and retirement groups. Assemblymember Susan Bonilla (D-Concord) will headline as our keynote speaker addressing state education, budget and CCC reform. Other topics will include: CalSTRS/CalPERS Retirement; Investing Strategies; Social Security; Long Term Health; Healthcare Options; Health Care Exchanges. Up to 5 hours of flex credit for faculty is available, and the event is FREE to all faculty, classified staff and managers! See the full schedule or register on-line at www.faccc.org before the April 10 deadline.

Health Care Benefits for Same Sex Couples Taxed Unfairly

by Lisa Orta

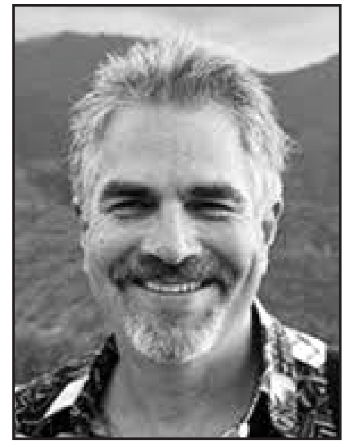
CCCCD Health care benefits extended to non-dependent same-sex partners (or any who meet the definition of domestic partners as described in Article 21.6.5 of the UF contract) are not the same as benefits extended to married different-sex spouses. Federal law requires that the value of the employer's financial contribution towards health insurance coverage for domestic partners be reported as taxable wages earned. That means that if CCCCD employees want to include their same-sex partner or spouse in their health care plan, whether they qualify for a family coverage plan or not, the district contribution to their partner's heath care coverage is treated as taxable wages.

In my case, my wife and I are legally married in California, and I am enrolled in a family plan that covers my two dependent children and myself. So while adding my wife to my family plan doesn't increase the district contribution to our health coverage, the amount the district would contribute should I be enrolled in a 2-party plan that covers my wife, $10,879.44, was entered on my 2012 W-2 as taxable income. This is typical for any domestic partnership in our District. The annual imputed income for a same-sex couple without dependents is approximately $10,032.36. At a 35% tax rate, this comes to approximately $3,511 in additional taxes, or around $300 per month.

The Supreme Court is currently considering two relevant cases, one that would strike down DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act), and one questioning who has the right to marry (challenging Proposition 8, the California ballot initiative banning same-sex marriage). Even if DOMA is gone, the court's decision may or may not grant same-sex couples access to all federal benefits. Should both decisions be favorable to same-sex couples accessing equal benefits, it will still take some time before those decisions are implemented.

While we wait for these court decisions, there is a way CCCCD could equalize unfair taxes related to health care benefits imposed by federal law on same-sex couples. Many employers (including Google, Apple, and Bank of America), follow the practice of "grossing-up" an employee's salary. The amount of the salary "gross-up" is also taxed, but it is possible to make calculations that would equalize the amount of taxes same-sex couples incur when enrolled for benefits.

President's Message



Greetings Colleagues! As we enter the second half of this spring semester, we are all facing the usual "California Community College Chaos Blues" of grow, shrink, under cap, over cap, add more classes, cut sections, take extra students, stick to class maximums. Hmmm, sounds like potential material for a new UF song. It is a sad state of affairs that we have such constant confusion regarding our funding and consequently our working conditions and student learning conditions, and I'm afraid that there are no fast fixes in sight. However, there is room for optimism regarding the ongoing improvements in our financial status as a district and at the State level where our funding begins. We have started negotiations for 2013-14, and so far the tone is decidedly less gloomy than in years past. Our hope is that soon we will all be able put a little new money towards those bills we know have been growing at home.

We are entering a period of economic growth for the State that many economists predict will continue for the next five years. As the picture in Sacramento improves, opportunities to work on some of the long-range issues in our district also improve. Of course, this is the first year in the last five where our district is expecting new money, and there are many competing priorities. The UF has stood with Local 1 in asking that classified-staff positions that were reduced to 10 or 11 months during the recent cutbacks now be restored. We have continued the push for more full-time faculty jobs (and note progress at CCC). Part-time parity continues to be a huge issue, as our pay for adjuncts has dropped against the Bay 10 far worse than for full-timers. We'd also like to address lecture-lab inequities and a host of issues you probably saw on the recent UF survey. (We will share those results soon, by the way.) Plus, our faculty have not had a raise or cost-of-living-adjustment in four years.

We can't do everything at once, and big changes start with small steps, but we see our first goal as following through on past promises (especially competitive top-third-of-the-Bay-10 salaries). We know many issues have been languishing for too long, and we hear you when you write, call, or stop us in the hall to express your concerns; additional release time for specific areas such as speech and coaching, compensation for CTE coordinators, a distance-education policy, and more. Our recent survey is helping us to prioritize these issues. Over the next few years we plan to dive in and fix as many problems as possible, always aware that you, the faculty, are the Union. Our job is to work with you to improve wages and working conditions but this takes patience since our work is far from finished.

Our state-level work also continues as we push for COLA, restoration of funding for EOPS, DSPS and Part-Time Parity/Office Hours. Want to help? Email me: gappell@sbcglobal.net.

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Table Talk

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

March 26, 2013

News at a Glance

- Ratification Vote Begins Today for DVC to Lengthen Fall Classes
- UF Also Asking Faculty to Vote on Electronic Balloting
- Dates Set for Wellness-Plan and Blue-Cross-Bid Roadshows
- Registration Open for UF Benefits Conference April 12 at DVC
- Same-Sex Couples Forced to Pay More for Benefits
- President's Message: Negotiations Underway for 2013/2014

Ratification Vote Starts Today!

MOU needs fast vote to allow DVC to add 5 minutes/day to fall 2-day-per-week classes.

In a recent review of attendance accounting procedures, DVC discovered that a minor change to its scheduling practices could allow the college to generate substantially more FTES without adding any additional instruction costs. Apparently, DVC had changed practices many years ago to offer 2-day-a-week classes for 1 hour and 15 minutes each meeting (as opposed to 1 hour and 20 minutes, which is still the norm at CCC and LMC). While entirely acceptable as far as units offered for time in the class, the shorter courses generate less revenue because of state accounting rules.

New revenue/savings will be factored into 2013/14 compensation formula aimed at generating our first salary increase in four years.

So the UF and District entered into negotiations to discuss adding five minutes to DVC classes that meet twice weekly, and we were making good progress. We had already been discussing reviving our salary formula from 2008/09 (the last time faculty salaries increased), and both sides agreed that revenues or savings from adding the five minutes should be factored into our formula as new, ongoing money. But we ran out of time. For DVC to make this change in the fall, they need the green light in time to put their schedule to press next week. And with the whole district struggling to meet FTES goals, delaying the schedule was not an option. So we have written a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) allowing DVC to add the minutes in the fall only, with the understanding that we will continue to negotiate the details and an ongoing plan. This MOU must be ratified by a vote of all UF members, and ballots (and a copy of the MOU) are now in faculty mailboxes. We need a fast turnaround: ballots are due in the UF office by Wednesday, April 3, at 12noon. As always, faculty may vote by phone (925-680-1771) or email (uf@uf4cd.org). Just include the number from the green dot on your paper ballot.

The MOU puts in writing the intention of both the District and UF to negotiate the details and to use new money towards a salary increase. It does not guarantee faculty a raise in 2013/14, since the specifics of our formula still need to be worked out (and since the State budget is still not set). But the UF team is confident that this MOU will help in the short run as well as down the road.

If even part of the new money in the Governor's budget comes to the District as growth or restoration, as we expect, the District will need to add FTES to get the money. Our District would not automatically receive the revenue, the way it does with a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). The District would need to earn new money by growing. But we know that bringing back students who left our system over the past few years when classes were being cut is not as easy as just opening new sections. Plus the fee increases may have turned some students away. We believe that adding five minutes to 2-day-a-week classes at DVC may generate as many as 450 FTES next year. (There is no reason or proposal, at the moment, to change any other classes at DVC or at CCC or LMC.) At a time when our negotiating teams are discussing plans to devote the major part of new ongoing money to improving compensation (as we seek not only for salaries to recover against the cost of living but also for progress towards the top-third-of-the-Bay-10), not to take advantage of this opportunity would seem to run against faculty interests.

The UF E-Board has thus voted unanimously to recommend ratification of the MOU, as has the UF negotiating team. It may seem a little strange to be giving up our extra labor without knowing yet how exactly we will be compensated for it, but the risk is minimal. The MOU makes the change only for one semester (with an option to extend for one more, just in case negotiations stall but the UF team still trusts in the ultimate outcome). Mostly, we see the District's willingness to prioritize salaries and to seek creative ways of generating revenue as a hopeful sign that past promises have not been forgotten and that we may genuinely be back on the road to recovery.

The UF has scheduled meetings on each campus this week to discuss the MOU, and both UF President Glenn Appell (gappell@sbcglobal.net) and Executive Director Jeff Michels (ufjeffmichels@gmail.com) will be happy to field questions by email. We know this is short notice, but the issue came up quickly, and we want to capture the revenue for next year.

UF Meetings to Discuss MOU

CCC: Wednesday, March 27, 12:30pm-1:30pm, AA 216
DVC: Wednesday, March 27, 2:15pm-3:30pm, L-151
LMC: Monday, April 1, 12noon-1pm, CORE 420

UF Considers Switching to Electronic Voting

On the MOU-ratification ballot, we are also asking faculty to vote on switching to electronic ballots for future UF elections. 92% of faculty in our recent survey expressed support for electronic voting, but of course, tech-adverse faculty may participate less in electronic surveys. So we're asking for a non-binding advisory vote to direct the E-Board. If faculty agree, and if we can reasonably ensure election integrity, we could save staff time and money by switching to on-line elections.

Blue-Cross-Bid / Wellness Roadshows Scheduled

Blue-Cross Bid / Wellness Roadshow Schedule
(note that anyone may attend any meeting)

Contra Costa College
Tuesday, April 9, 2-4pm, LA-100
Monday, April 29, 10am-12noon, LA-100

Diablo Valley College
Monday, April 1, 2-4pm, Trophy Room
Thursday, April 25, 10am-12noon, Trophy Room

District Office
Tuesday, April 2, 2-4pm, Board Room

Los Medanos College
Monday, April 1, 10am-12noon, L109
Tuesday, April 30, 1-3pm, L109

In collaboration with the UF, Local 1, and Management Council, the District has scheduled seven informational meetings to review both a wellness plan offered by Engagement Health that the negotiating teams have been discussing for several years, and a bid by Anthem Blue Cross to replace HealthNet as our non-Kaiser health-insurance provider. We will also videotape at least one meeting so that faculty who are unable to attend will have a chance to see the presentation.

These meetings will provide an opportunity for employees to learn more about the programs being considered as well as to ask questions and provide feedback. There has been no decision made yet to switch to Blue Cross or to adopt the Engagement Health wellness program, and either would need to be negotiated and then ratified by faculty as part of a Tentative Agreement. By way of brief overview, we have organized some facts below in response to frequently asked questions.

Anthem Blue Cross Bid FAQs

Q: Is the District definitely switching to Anthem Blue Cross?
A: No. Article 21.6.4.1 specifies that health plans may be changed only by "mutual agreement of the District and United Faculty." The UF has not yet agreed to change insurance companies, but we are considering it as part of current negotiations (as are other employee groups).

Q: Why are we considering making a change right now?
A: The UF and District, along with Local 1, have been talking about possible changes in benefits for several years. Rising health insurance costs have been draining resources. What has changed of late is that we have a competitive bid on the table. In the past, because of our size and the number of our employees who opt for Kaiser, we have had trouble attracting insurance companies to compete with HealthNet.

Q: Is there a rush to make a decision about Blue Cross?
A: We have had this bid for nearly two years, so it would be hard to say we've been rushing, but Blue Cross won't let us keep their bid on the table forever. We've come to the point where we need to decide.

Q: Will the Blue Cross bid save the District money?
A: Yes, but we're looking at the bid as a "teaser rate" to get our business. We will save money in year one. After that, we don't know.

Q: Are there other reasons besides money to switch to Blue Cross?
A: Yes. For one thing, Blue Cross will provide us with more data than HealthNet, which will help us make decisions in the future. More importantly, their best plan is better in many respects than Healthnet's best plan. Lastly, HealthNet has been an increasing source of problems for our employees, especially retirees.

Q: What's different about the Blue Cross plan?
A: There are two plans: an HMO and a second plan to replace HealthNet Elect called an EPO. The HMO is nearly identical to the HealthNet version. The EPO gives members access to the whole national Blue Cross PPO network, but without the big copays of a regular PPO, and with no need for referrals. Members are not restricted to just one medical group (such as Hill Physicians or John Muir). And one doesn't need a referral to see a specialist. Out of state is covered too.

Q: Will I have to change my doctor if we switch to Blue Cross?
A: You might, but it isn't likely. Blue Cross has a larger network than HealthNet, and most Bay Area doctors and hospitals take Blue Cross. To find out for sure, call your doctor and ask if she takes Blue Cross HMO and PPO. If you get a no, please let the UF know.

Wellness Program FAQs

Q: What is a wellness program?
A: There are several kinds; the one we are considering would ask employees to pick one of eight areas and then report regularly on activities in that area. This might mean sending a weekly email about your exercise (or lack of exercise), and four 15-minute phone conversations each year with a nurse.


"Just the FAQs"

Q: Would there be a penalty for not participating?
A: The plan works by creating either an incentive (where employees are paid for participating) or a disincentive (where employees must pay if they don't participate). We would need to negotiate with the District for either. To get maximum participation (which is necessary for the program to affect our group's use of health care enough to lower our insurance premiums), Engagement Health recommends an incentive or disincentive of $600/year per covered adult (including spouses but not including dependent children).

Q: Don't wellness plans discriminate against healthy people?
A: Not really. Unlike outcomes-based plans (that pay employees to lose weight, for example), this program offers equal incentives for everyone who gets District insurance.

Q: Does this mean the District would get my private health data?
A: No. Engagement Health does not share private information.

Q: Is the District definitely going to adopt a wellness plan?
A: No. This would need to be negotiated and ratified.