

UI Ad-Hoc Domestic Partnership Task Force Meeting
September 10, 2008

Present: Bernie Santarsiero, Patrick Finnessy, Ray Cunha, Elizabeth Thomson, Becky Lowery, Scott Shippy, Maureen Parks, Larry Mann, Lydia Khuri, Leslie Morrow, Joe Bohn, Allan Cook, Tyler Tanak, Nithyakala Karuppaswamy.

- Maureen Parks, Assistant Vice President of Human Resources, chaired the meeting. She acknowledged Joe Bohn, UI Human Resources Coordinator, who indicated that U of I system-wide FMLA procedures for same-sex partners are now in effect. This procedure has been piloted and approved. If anyone needs same-sex FMLA support, or difficulties with the UI Domestic Partnership Benefits plan, they should contact Joe. All forms are ready to implement and all HR representatives should have been reminded as to this inclusive policy. Further, it should be clearly communicated on NESSIE to insure consistent and accurate widespread implementation.

- Rita Hunt, former Director of Human Resources, left the UI system in June 2008. Dave Stewart also retired. Much of the past year has been reworking documents and communicating with new leadership. This includes Meena Rao, Vice President for Academic Affairs; Walter Knorr, UI CFO and Comptroller; President Joe White; and all three campuses Chancellor's. Each Chancellor and President White have said they are in favor of supporting full equity on DPB issues.

- 7 people are currently enrolled in the UI Domestic Partnership Benefit plan while about 55 people are enrolled in the CMS Plan. The UI plan will be discontinued after the UI Board of Trustees is notified of such decision. As a result, a new affidavit for domestic partners will be crafted and simplified. Feedback and input is encouraged. FYI: Marriage licenses from another state and/or country will be considered a supporting document but not a stand-alone document (this was rightly criticized as a heterosexual marriage license is the sole document needed to acquire spousal privileges).

- Tuition wavers: Children of domestic partners will be eligible for a tuition waver which parallels opposite-sex relationships/children's tuition waiver rights. This policy will likely go into effect as of the Fall 2009. More clarification is needed on who qualifies but the intent is to model what heterosexual married couples and their children receive. There remains a question as to whether or not this is a taxable benefit.

- Issues with SURS was discussed, primarily regarding survivorship. This issue is unresolved and SURS appears uncooperative, claiming Illinois' participation in the Defense of Marriage Act. More education needs to occur. DPs are not covered for a Social Security Survivor's Benefit. However, an individual is free to name who she/he wants as a beneficiary. The DP would get a lump sum at the time of the partner's demise, but no annuity is possible. This needs to be further lobbied with SURS.

- The question was raised regarding payroll deduction and the need for individual's to write a check each month as opposed to having the DPBenefit removed from payroll as it is on heterosexual's insurance plans. There is a question as to who this issue lies with: the University or with CMS. More clarification is necessary. (In June 2008, it appeared this was going to be an option but as of October 2008 it has not yet been implemented.)

- There was wide discussion on a benefit equity plan to compensate for the taxation on Domestic Partnership Benefits. Nationally, numerous corporations do so but there are few to no universities that publicly do this. It is worse when two dependents are taxed, and the domestic partner counts as a dependent. There was a narrative or two shared that some faculty members even negotiate an increased hiring salary to offset this tax reality; an option not afforded current faculty and staff members. A survey was conducted to determine how individuals are impacted by this inequity. Only eight people responded to the survey (available as a separate document). However, the ad-hoc domestic partnership task force agreed that this needs to be a higher priority, if not the top priority regarding the future of DPBs throughout UI.

- The question was posed as to why payroll cannot identify the individual's involved in the DPB plan and then assess how they are impacted by the tax inequities.

- The residency requirement for domestic partnership has been altered. Domestic partners are now able to reside in separate residences to mirror the fact that married couples also sometimes must live in separate residences for employment and other reasons.

- Another question posed was as to whether or not the benefits office staff gets training on same-sex partnership issues and/or benefits. There appear to be inconsistencies with personal experiences. There is no official training, and this was proposed to be done. It has further been repeatedly encouraged to include the UI nondiscrimination policy on all printed University materials. Further, a web site has been suggested that elaborates on how DPBs work and what is and is not covered that all department managers could review.

- All three UI student trustees are aware that there is a movement to provide gender-neutral washrooms for newly constructed buildings on each UI campus. The goal is to make sure that UI moves toward being more gender neutral for all students.

- It was agreed to have this ad-hoc committee meet once a semester and the next meeting will occur in January or February 2009. As Patrick Finnessy, the UIC's Gender and Sexuality Center's Director and the individual who has spearheaded these meetings for the past five years departs his position, new leadership will be necessary.