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AAAP Advocate

Association of Academic Professionals
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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APs Already Enjoy Good Union Benefits

By Peter Miller

Insurance benefits for university employees are pretty good, thanks to a large public employee union. AFSCME (the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees) has been negotiating benefit packages received by state university employees since about 1985, the year that collective bargaining for state employees was first allowed.

The union has won numerous benefit improvements in the past 16 years, according to Hank Scheff, the benefits negotiation specialist for AFSCME Council 31. When AFSCME first brought employee concerns to the negotiating table, public employees received no vision or dental plans. They paid 20 percent of all prescription costs instead of a co-payment ranging from \$7 to \$28, as today. Life insurance had half of its current value. The standard health plan didn't pay for regular checkups or other preventive care, and there was no option of joining a paid preferred-provider network to reduce individual costs.

Today, that's all different. There is even a transplant PPO that assures employees of complete coverage for organ transplants at institutions known for excellence in this area.

Scheff says, "Over the years through collective bargaining the benefit plans have been improved in significant respects. Those benefit costs have been borne mainly by the state and not by the employees." In other words, employees have paid a share—but only their fair share—for benefits improvements.

How Does This Work?

State employees chose to form a union with AFSCME shortly after a state law giving them that option was passed in 1983. Today, the union represents 44,000 state employees. Employee representatives negotiate with the Governor's representative—Central Management Services (CMS)—to reach a contract defining the terms and conditions of their employment, including benefits. Because AFSCME-represented employees constitute the largest single group covered by CMS, when the state reaches an agreement with AFSCME, it grants the benefits to other state employees as well.

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The Association of Academic Professionals

is a group of academic professional employees at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign that is attempting to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining. The AAP is affiliated with the Illinois Education Association and the National Education Association. We are part of a national movement of academic professionals who seek collective bargaining rights.

In order to maintain and improve on the benefits of working at this great university, we believe that we need to organize so that our voice commands attention when administrators make decisions that affect our jobs.

The AAP seeks to ensure certain rights such as:

- ☆ clear paths for career development and advancement
- ☆ third-party resolution of disputes with supervisors
- ☆ fair, timely, and consistent evaluation procedures
- ☆ safeguards against arbitrary dismissal
- ☆ rewards for good job performance
- ☆ compensation for mandatory overtime
- ☆ paid and unpaid leaves
- ☆ *a meaningful voice in decisions that affect our employment*

AAP Advocate—UIUC Association of Academic Professionals

STEERING COMMITTEE:

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IEA STAFF: Peter Miller

Union Benefits, continued from page 1

Thanks to AFSCME, 44,000 state employees represented by the union, plus 120,000 employees at state universities and various public agencies (even state legislators!) enjoy strong AFSCME-negotiated benefits.

So even without being members of the union, many state employees, including academic professionals at the University of Illinois, receive benefits of collective bargaining.

Union contracts contain an important dispute resolution clause that can affect benefits. Known as the grievance procedure, this clause lays out the steps for resolving disagreements over any aspect of the contract, from work hours to prescription co-payment amounts. The grievance procedure ensures that the employee and supervisor try to settle the disagreement informally, but in case they can't, it lays out an appeals route designed to

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resolve the conflict. Failing all other alternatives, a third-party arbitrator can be called in to help reach a solution.

Only union members have access to the grievance procedure, and Scheff says it has been useful in controlling employee benefits costs. For example, the union filed a grievance that the state was underpaying dental reimbursement costs. A solution was reached wherein the state will increase its reimbursement rates over the life of the four-year contract, reducing employee costs along the way. Without the union, employees would have continued to shoulder the extra cost.

Employees Guide Plan Changes

Priorities for benefits changes are set by state employees who return bargaining surveys prior to the start of contract negotiations. The bargaining team then negotiates with CMS to reach those goals. Scheff notes that AFSCME's process is unusually open, negotiating in hotel ballrooms with a 300-member bargaining team, making it one of the largest and most open negotiations in the nation. After completing the process, which usually takes a few months, union members vote to either approve the contract or send the team back for further negotiations. The current contract expires in 2004.

While APs have benefitted when it comes to health insurance, life insurance, and other "hard money benefits" that AFSCME negotiates, only APs can address their specific interests in career paths, pay equity, increases in parking fees, and other issues. As AFSCME has shown, speaking with a unified voice, employees can accomplish a great deal. ■

Recent U.S. Supreme Court Rulings Limit State Employee Rights

- *April 2001*: A ruling making it much harder for victims of discrimination to win suits against federally funded agencies.
- *February 2001*: A ruling that state employees—including university employees—cannot sue under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.
- *January 2000*: A ruling that state employees aren't protected by the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967.

APs Should Know: Through collective bargaining agreements, employees can restore protections against employment discrimination and ensure that these complaints are resolved without the time and expense of federal lawsuits.

Speak Up!: APs Need to Voice Their Concerns

By Chris Beauoy

If you're like me, you are generally happy with your job at the University and have a supportive supervisor. But you also see ways that benefits and career paths could improve here. And you know that other APs have poor supervisors and no means of protection from arbitrary actions.

For these reasons I became active in the Association of Academic Professionals 2 years ago, working to raise awareness across campus about issues related to APs' employment conditions, such as the need for fair dispute settlement and a voice in policy decisions that affect us.

These reasons also led me to run for election to the Professional Advisory Committee, a group of 10 academic professionals selected to represent APs campus-wide and serve as "a communication channel between academic professionals and administrative officers of the University." Unlike AAP, which has no formal ties to the administration, PAC meets regularly with upper-level administrators.

In May I was elected to PAC by APs who work in District 5, which includes the Colleges of ACES, Applied Life Studies, and Veterinary Medicine. During the 10-day balloting period, I and my campaign team spoke with more than 80 APs in my district, and I was dismayed by how few were aware of PAC and its responsibilities.

For the record, here is a quick comparison of AAP and PAC:

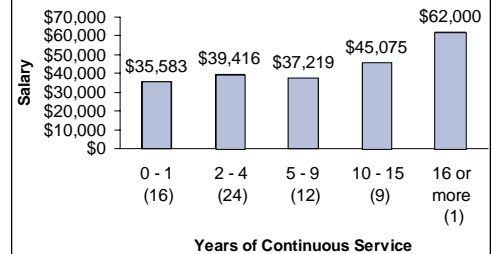
AAP	PAC
Formed by APs, AAP is independent of UI and affiliated with the Illinois Education Association-NEA	The UI Statutes created PAC
Works on and off campus for changes to help APs	Responds to policy/makes suggestions "in the best interest of the University"
Informs APs about issues affecting employment and encourages APs to become involved	Appoints liaisons to Faculty Senate and campus committees
Helps people with grievances understand their options for internal grievances and off-campus solutions	Impartially evaluates the merits of a complaint; sends grievance recommendations to campus officers

I believe that APs need a powerful external organization such as AAP devoted exclusively to representing our interests. At the same time, I firmly believe that the changes we advocate to improve AP work conditions are compatible with what's "in the best interest of the University" and fit within the mandate of PAC.

It's my hope that these two organizations can work together to improve the work lives of APs. After all, isn't it in the interest of the institution to have employees who feel valued, secure, and motivated to perform?

Neither AAP nor PAC can operate effectively without involvement from APs. You have to voice your opinions and needs to make this a better University. Give your feedback by contacting AAP at www.shout.net/~aap/ or your PAC representative at webster.uihr.uiuc.edu/pac/. ■

UIUC Salary Snapshot: Media/Communications Specialists



The sample includes all FY2001 full-time APs with the titles Media Communications Specialist, Visiting Communications Specialist, and Senior Media Communications Specialist. Less than full-time, 12-month appointments were prorated. The number in parentheses indicates the sample size for the category. The total sample size is 62.

Legislative Update

House Bill 901, which would have expanded tuition waiver benefits from 50 to 100 percent for University employees, was killed in the Senate by a vote of 27 to 10, with 15 senators voting present. The bill needed 30 votes to pass.

After opposing a similar bill in the early 1990s, the University of Illinois remained neutral on HB901. The Illinois Education Association supported the bill.

IEA executive director Clay Marquardt noted that the bill would have helped address university employees' relatively low total compensation. "Employees have dedicated themselves to the University, and House Bill 901 is a way for the state to show its appreciation. We're disappointed that the Senate voted it down."

The bill cannot be reintroduced until next spring. ■

Ask AAP

Parking Fees Take a Hike

Q: The Board of Trustees decided at its May 23 meeting to raise parking fees from \$305 in 2001-02 to \$750 in 2008-09 to fund its plan to build new parking decks on the Urbana campus. Is there any way we can protest this move?

A: The June 7 *Inside Illinois* quotes Pam Voitik, director of Parking and Transportation, as saying, “Administrators hope that campus employees will accept the increase in permit fees.” This statement implies that employees have a choice. Unfortunately, APs currently have no voice in these decisions. The University makes decisions affecting our employment without consulting us. The parking decision is only one example.

APs at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville faced a similar situation—with one very big difference. As members of the Illinois Education Association, they decided to challenge the university’s decision to increase parking fees to pay for road and parking projects because they felt the fee increase violated the terms of their contract. The Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board concluded that SIUE did violate the contract, and that SIUE should have negotiated the price increase with the AP association, not simply impose it. As a result, SIUE administrators and academic professionals reached a compromise that included payment of a rebate to all APs and an agreement on terms for future fee increases.

With a contract of our own, APs at the University of Illinois would also be able to negotiate the conditions of our employment. Something needs to be done about the parking situation, and wouldn’t it be nice if the University was obligated to consult us on the matter? ■

— *This month’s answer provided by Seth Bush.*

If you want to join other people who are working to address the parking fee increase, please contact the AAP at aap@shout.net.



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Check out AAP’s “compendium of information for academic professionals” at www.shout.net/~aap/