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Educational Benefits  
Workgroup Report

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## **Executive Summary**

CUCSA has a long history of advocating for employee educational benefits and educational benefits for their dependents. These issues are critical to the University's ability to recruit and retain a talented workforce, which is vital in fulfilling its mission in research and teaching. The current economic climate, with an increasing cost of living and decreasing benefits subsidies for UC employees, in addition to the uncertain work environment, makes this an even more important benefit for staff development and morale.

If UC can provide enhanced educational opportunities to our employees, we will have more highly educated, satisfied employees. Programs such as these can save the University millions of dollars currently wasted because high quality employees leave for positions with better pay and benefits. Hiring and training new employees is much more expensive than educating existing employees. Many years of stagnant salaries and increasing workloads has left employees with very low morale. Adding a benefit such as this would be a great first step in turning that trend around. Improved skills and an increase in morale translate to better productivity. CUCSA feels that by redesigning the employee education benefit we cannot only save the University money while expanding the resource, but we can improve the quality of employees, as well as help retain excellent employees. If education is one product UC produces, it only makes sense to offer it as a benefit to its employees.

The 2011-12 CUCSA Educational Benefits Workgroup focused on three areas: analyzing the current UCOP Reduced Fee Enrollment Policy (PPSM 51 and Regental Policy 7502), comparing UC's policies with best practices among comparative universities, and investigating UC Extension educational options.

First, the workgroup reviewed the past reports and recommendations by former CUCSA workgroups, as well as Academic Senate reports to the Regents. Many valid recommendations were made, and in most cases would have been supported by the Regents – if funding were available. The workgroup followed-up on the critical issues raised in previous reports: 1) The inconsistent implementation of the current policy across UC locations was a major issue in the 2008-09 report, and this issue remains. 2) There are no central tracking metrics or identified persons responsible for managing the program. 3) The structure of the current policy is not well designed for today's workforce: Confining the benefit to degree-seeking students debars most staff. Further, as we explain below, the current 2/3 reduction of full-time tuition for full-time status is not functionally or financially sound; changing how the benefit is calculated will both make the program more affordable and allow more access.

The workgroup then reviewed the educational benefits for employees and their dependents at the eight universities frequently compared to the UC system. All of the comparator universities had programs with clearly defined documentation on their websites and a program contact person. Most of the universities within the Comparator Eight had educational benefits of varying depth and scope for employees' dependents.

The workgroup also conducted an extensive analysis of the California State Universities (CSU) policy since they have a similar organizational structure and adhere to the same California tax code. The CSU has a strong tuition fee waiver program for staff and faculty that is overseen by the Office of the Chancellor's Human Resources department and has program coordinators at each of the 23 campuses. This fee waiver benefit can be transferred to an employee's dependent by the employee, if the employee does not want to use the program.

UC Extension and employee development programs were also investigated at the different UC locations. These programs are inconsistently implemented, and only some campuses offer fee waivers for extension classes and employee development classes.

Thus CUCSA recommends that UC should alter their current Reduced Fee Enrollment Programs (RFEP) to include:

- Centralized program administration to track metrics and review usage data
- Elimination of the admission requirements for employees, enabling them to register for one to three classes per semester/quarter as long as they do not displace an admitted student,
- Fee waivers for all courses offered by UC, UC Extension and staff development offices
- The ability for UC employees to register for courses at any UC location
- A similar model to the CSU program that allows employees to transfer their benefit to dependents

## History of Efforts to Expand UC Educational Benefits

### *Current Education Policies/Practices for UC Employees*

The University of California has two policies that support a UC employee's professional or personal development, Personnel Policy for Staff Members 51 ([PPSM 51](#)) and [Regental Policy 7502](#). These policies bestow a 2/3 fee reduction for the enrollment of regular status employees who meet the admission requirements of the University. In our research, the implementation of these policies varies amongst campuses. Other UC education benefits include reduced fees at the University Extension Centers; however, the percentage of the reduction varies from campus to campus.

### *Past Efforts to Expand the Educational Benefits Policies*

Over the past 12 years, the Council on University of California Staff Assemblies, the Academic Council, and the University Committee on Faculty Welfare have submitted and endorsed a number of proposals to expand the educational benefits program at UC. While the proposals varied in percentage of waiver and beneficiaries, they all highlight how the University would benefit from such a program.

- January 2000 –UCFW requested a full waiver of the educational fees for undergraduate and graduate education at the University of California for qualified children, spouses, and domestic partners of University of California employees vested and active in the University of California Retirement System, up to a maximum of 12 person years per eligible employee.
  - The waiver would not include selected professional school students or the University registration fee.
- September 2002 – The Academic Council requested that President Atkinson consider a Educational Fee Waiver Program for UC students who are dependents of UC employees. The President stated his concern that carving out \$5-6 million for the program, instead of allocating more money to salaries or health benefits, would not be prudent or well received by the legislature.
  - At the time, only about 2% of the career staff and academic employees would benefit from such program. During that year, 1,905 employees had 2,044 student dependents in the UC System.
- January/April 2004 – the Academic Council adopted the Resolution on Education Fee Waiver. UCFW proposed a schedule for implementation that was to minimize the initial costs and allow for expansion as budgets normalized over four years: In the first year, newly hired faculty would receive a 50% educational fee reduction. The plan would then

open to all faculty, annuitants, and eligible employees in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and in the 4<sup>th</sup> year, the educational fee reduction would be increased to 100%.

- The University Committee on Faculty Welfare's proposal for a new Education Fee Waiver program was rejected by President Dynes because the program would reduce revenue even further and exacerbate the current budget problems.
- June 2006 – The CUCSA Educational Fee Waiver Workgroup endorsed the Academic Council's January 2000 recommendation to implement a full waiver of the UC annual educational fee for undergraduate and graduate education for qualified dependents of employees fully vested in UCRS. The workgroup also examined the various fee waiver and tuition remission programs offered by four of the Comparator Eight institutions.
- March 2007 – The UC Davis Senate Faculty Welfare Committee submitted a Proposal for Fee-Waiver of Dependents. The UCD Faculty Welfare Committee proposed that dependents of Senate faculty at the University of California receive a fee waiver of 50% of current fees for undergraduate programs within the UC system. The proposal did not include staff, non-senate faculty, or annuitants. However, they did recommend that the program be expanded to include other beneficiaries, and to increase the benefit to 100% coverage and comparable support for dependents attending universities outside of the UC system, when the funding status of the University improved. The UCD Faculty Welfare Committee argued that salary inequity, and the lack of an Educational Fee Waiver Program have been cited as reasons by Senate faculty who leave the University. The estimated cost of the program was roughly \$2 million.
- June 2008 – The CUCSA Educational Fee Waiver for Dependents Workgroup reiterated their support for a full waiver of UC annual educational fees for undergraduate and graduate education for qualified dependents of employees fully vested in UCRS.
- September 2009 – President Yudof addressed UCFW's proposal for the plan that would offer a 50% fee waiver for undergraduate programs only, for dependent children of UC Senate faculty. He acknowledged that it would be a modest expenditure, but he did not foresee that it would be possible to secure such a program in the current budget climate. The letter also addressed previous suggestions to create a dedicated pre-tax educational fund, with or without contributions from the University. The President noted that there are no mechanisms for individuals to place funds on a pre-tax basis into dedicated accounts for such purposes.
- August 2010 – Howard Pripas, then-UC Director of Employee Relations, drafted the Employee Relations Report on Reduced Fee Enrollment Programs (RFEP) as a response to

the various recommendations to extend the fee waiver program to dependents. The report addressed the recommendations to: (1) clarify language in the PPSM policy, (2) standardize the application form for the program, (3) add a system-wide question and answer section on the policy, and (3) clarify usage with respect to graduate/professional schools and summer sessions.

Since the inception of the proposal to expand Education Benefits program in the year 2000, UCOP has expressed favorable interest in the concept of expanding the program to dependents, however the projected cost of such a program was not deemed feasible in the economic climate. Therefore, the current workgroup investigated models that might be more financially appealing to the Office of the President.

## **Employee Education Benefits at UC are Necessary**

After decades of “business as usual” with our employee benefits package, there are compelling reasons why UC may not continue to be an obvious employer of choice. The time has passed when UC as an employer had a benefits package that was beyond compare. Along with the attractive benefit package was the possibility that an employee could stay in the same job from date of hire to retirement. Careers were different.

In adapting to the rapid pace of change in the world and the workplace, two things have had to change in UC employment:

- The types of jobs UC offers, and
- The UC workforce members now need to keep up-to-date on new business processes because they, in fact, often have a hand in designing new ways to get the work done.

These two fundamental challenges to UC employment, and the need for UC as an employer to respond to the current trends in the work environment, require a new strategy.

We believe that at this time and in this particular budget climate where employees have seen little salary increases along with benefit degradation and increased medical costs, that *this* is the time to focus on and restructure how employees can train and develop for the jobs they will do next year and beyond, to keep the best at UC.

### *Meeting New Needs*

This report is a call to action to each staff member and the governing bodies planning the gateway to the UC future. Employees have heard the message that their own professional development is an integral part of their performance cycle. We suggest that the educational benefit should be seen by the institution and individual managers as an investment in the workforce of the near future and by the employee as a reason to choose UC and stay with UC.

No employee wants to stay with an employer who is not investing in him, and no employer wants employees who are complacent. No one can afford to slip behind the times and become unemployable, and no employer wants employees who do not keep up with current trends.

Past CUCSA workgroup reports related to educational benefit strategies were written at a time when revamping the existing educational benefit for enrollment in a degree program may have seemed like a good idea. Today, the focus needs to shift to attract, retain and continually prepare our incumbent workforce.



Organizational shifts on every campus mean no one can be sure the current job will exist in upcoming academic cycles. With employees now opting to stay in the job market longer due, perhaps, to increases in life expectancy, people can work during what was formerly thought of as “the golden years”. The hope for employees to stay at UC until retirement is at risk unless we plan to take action to attract new talent and keep the best.

As we organize to improve administrative efficiencies and streamline processes, it is wise to remember that we are only as good as our employees. Now is the time to create reasonable and affordable plans of action to attract the kind of workers that are needed, provide avenues for existing staff to grow in ways never done before, and incentivize and recognize employees.

For example, UC Berkeley has introduced a calendar-year long opportunity for employees to enroll in up to three Extension classes from a detailed list composed by leaders in areas of skills anticipated for performing in the current workplace. The offer was open to all staff, both represented and non-represented. Results from this pilot will provide statistical data on who enrolled, who completed, and what courses were taken. During the pilot year, functional area experts met to plan in-depth forecasting for potential campus need and offerings going forward.

Another example involves utilization of the UC Learning tool which enables managers to track training for employees. Questions have arisen around this such as:

- How well have we trained managers in using the UC Learning tool to invest in direct reports?
- How has the learning summary been integrated into the conversation with employees during performance discussions?

## **A Comparison of UC's Education Benefits Policy**

The workgroup conducted an investigation of educational benefits offered at six of UC's comparator institutions including the California State University system (see Appendix A). In looking at these comparator institutions, we found that all had an educational benefit program for staff. At CSU, this included both full- and part-time employees with no limitations based on pay title or salary. CSU refer to their program as "learn while you earn". Classes can be taken for career development on an academic track in which the employee has an identified academic goal, and employees are required to complete an academic plan with an advisor. Employees can also take classes on a job-related track; these classes are taken to enhance the employee's knowledge for performing duties in their current position. These types of courses are also used for professional development to help the employee develop skills to acquire new duties and responsibilities.

One particularly positive aspect of the comparators' educational benefits programs is that each of these institutions has a coordinator responsible for the oversight of the program. This information was easily located on the institutions' websites, as were the details regarding the benefit. The coordinator fields phone and email inquires about the program. This is unlike UC's current educational benefit program. The workgroup had trouble finding someone at our respective campuses that could answer our questions about use of the current program, and information is not available on the campuses' websites.

Two of the institutions, CSU and University of Illinois, allowed enrollment at any campus in their system, while the others allowed attendance at any accredited university. The flexibility to take courses at a campus other than the one on which the employee works is appealing particularly at a time when online courses are becoming popular. This also allows employees to take a course at a campus that may be closer to their home than the one at which they are employed.

The actual "cash value" of the benefit varied among the institutions. Two had a cap of \$5,250 per year based on a tax law to exclude the benefit from being considered earned income (Internal Revenue Code Section 127, which excludes the value of graduate-level tuition waivers from taxable income up to \$5,250 per year). CSU limits the number of units per quarter in which an employee can enroll: A maximum of two courses, or six units, is allowed, but employees can enroll in more units or courses by paying any additional fees at the regular rate. At CSU, the fee waiver program does not apply to self-supported programs, which includes Extension, Open University and Summer Sessions.

The process for the payment of the fees also varied. Three institutions provided a waiver of the fees for which the employee applied prior to registration; this is the process used at CSU. At the

other institutions, employees are reimbursed for the fees. At Stanford, the benefit had to be repaid if the course was failed, and at the University of Michigan, a grade of at least a “B” was required to receive the reimbursement.

Four of the six comparator institutions extended the educational benefit to children, including biological, adopted, foster and step-children, and one extended the benefit to spouses and domestic partners. At CSU, they were not separate programs; rather, the employee transferred the benefit to a dependent. At MIT, Stanford and Illinois, there are actually separate programs for employees and for dependents. Although only one person could use the benefit at a time at CSU, there was no lifetime maximum on the number of people who could use the benefit. CSU also allows two employees to transfer the benefit to a joint dependent who would then receive a 100% waiver of fees.

At CSU there is no money that changes hands for the payment of the fees. Rather, the waiver of the fees is a revenue loss to the campus at which the employee is enrolled. Overall, we found the CSU educational benefit to be a good model upon which to begin developing a UC educational benefit.

## Proposed Education Benefit Redesign for UC Employees

### *The Benefit Costing Formula Should Change*

We propose to change how the benefit is calculated. Currently employees receive 2/3 off full-time tuition for full-time education benefits. This makes little sense since a working employee cannot take advantage of full-time student status.

The current discount costs the University \$3,049, which is 2/3 of full-time tuition and fees (\$4,620) – no matter how many units are taken. However, if calculated on a *per unit* basis, the most a quarter would cost is \$2,970 (\$330/unit x 9 units): If the average full-time student takes 14 units per quarter, then the cost of tuition/fees is approximately \$330 per unit. Currently, employees may only take up to nine units (full-time). If you consider 16 units full-time this number drops accordingly, and savings increase. We note that CSU charges per unit. (This cost analysis is only applicable to academic courses.)

### *All Courses Should be Open to All Staff*

In addition to changing how the discount is calculated, we propose that the employee benefit on academic programs should be for any employee and any class, not just degree-seeking students. While we agree that the degree-seeking students are an important part of our UC culture, employees with an interest in subject matter – whether it is work related or not – should not be excluded from this benefit. The current offering of a discount only applies to a degree program, which both reduces the audience of our academic courses and prevents employees from utilizing a great resource. UC schools have incredible faculty that are experts in their field, yet we do not take advantage of that to make our institution better. Allowing employees to learn from the content experts would greatly enhance their work and personal lives. Currently employees not enrolled in a degree program only have access to academic courses through University Extension Open Campus programs. The University Extension discount on Open Campus or other UNEX classes is much less than the degree-seeking academic courses. As discussed earlier, UC Berkeley is currently experimenting by subsidizing some University Extension classes that fit within “Operational Excellence”. It is forward thinking like this which will assist in creating a better, more educated UC work force.

We further propose that employees have access to all avenues of education through UC, no matter where the content originates. Whether academic courses, professional development or University Extension, each offers different types of education that can be beneficial to employees in both the work environment and at home. As noted earlier, more flexible registration guidelines would enable staff to take courses at UC locations that may be closer to their place of residence than their place of employment. Further, the expected increase in e-learning options makes system

enrollment a logical step. If dependents are added to the benefit, system enrollment eligibility would enable more families to participate.

#### *Proposed Program Administration*

As previously stated in this report, our comparator schools all had programs in place to assist employees in taking advantage of an educational benefit. UC already has multiple groups administering instructional programs. If we were to consolidate some of these programs we could save money, as well as reduce bureaucracy and duplication. The three areas that seem to exist independently of each other are UC academic registrars offices, University Extension, and employee development and professional services. All of these programs work to ensure its clientele are enrolled in classes, have paid appropriate fees, and provide some online content or learning management. If we could leverage one group to administer this staff program combined with the new method of charging for classes, we could likely save enough money to offer the free education benefit to all employees, including University Extension classes, on a cost-neutral basis.

#### *Proposed Benefits for Dependents*

Once the employee program is codified, it will be time to follow California State University's model and make the benefit transferable to employees' dependents. While we feel the proposed changes to the employee program are essential, a benefit that is transferrable would be more narrowly defined. For the purposes of transferring the education benefit to a dependent, the dependent will be required to fulfill all prerequisites of being enrolled in a degree-seeking program at UC. Additionally, the program will only be available after federal and state education funding programs have been exhausted. This will reduce the financial liability of UC and will offer some measure of assistance to the middle class. Thanks to the Blue and Gold Program, California families with a household income less than \$80,000 annually have their dependents' systemwide fees fully covered. CUCSA proposes that UC employees with a household income between \$80,000 and \$200,000 be allowed to transfer their education benefit to their dependent. This would equate to nine units per quarter, or half of their fees, being paid. Like CSU, we would also request that if both parents work at the UC, then the benefit could be combined to have full fees covered. Many of our competitors offer this benefit, and we need to start competing head-on with them, otherwise UC employees will continue to leave, and the quality of UC will suffer.

## Conclusion

The data presented in this report, and in previous CUCSA reports, clearly indicate a gap in UC benefits when compared to similar institutions and the CSU system. CUCSA feels the lack in benefits will increasingly negatively impact recruitment and retention efforts and increase employee turnover at UC locations. It is a critical time for UC to make changes to the RFEP program so that the system does not lose highly skilled employees as the economy improves and job markets become more competitive.

The new educational benefit program should:

- Allow employees access to all avenues of education offered by UC
- Be administered and tracked by a centralized process
- Provide detailed online information about the program
- Have a contact person at every location to assist employees

Including the CSU program model of a transferable educational benefit would add flexibility to the employee benefit without increased cost to UC. This is a fair compromise that can significantly increase employee morale in a time when campus climates are at an all time low. The CSU system model has been proven successful and can assist with recruitment and retention of talented staff.

CUCSA feels that a change in the current Reduced Fee Enrollment Program is due and necessary to be competitive in the field of higher education. If UC does not act, it is at risk of losing talented employees to other organizations that are providing better benefits. UC is an educational supplier and it makes sense to leverage this resource by affording its employees and potential employees this benefit to improve the quality of service and talent pool at all of the UC locations.

# Appendix A: UC Comparators with Education Benefits

	CSU	MIT tuition assistance	MIT Children's scholarship	Stanford	Univ of Illinois	Univ of Michigan	Univ of Virginia
<b>Privilege of benefit</b>	staff, spouse, registered domestic partners, dependents	Employee only	children of paid MIT employees	employee and children	staff, faculty, children, retirees	Staff only	Staff and faculty
<b>Which schools?</b>	Any CSU	any college or university course that meets requirements	MIT and accredited universities	employee--accredited US institution; children can attend foreign schools	all 3 Univ of Illinois campuses, civil service employees can attend any State University	Any university	Univ of VA and other accredited universities
<b>What is covered?</b>	maximum of 2 courses or 6 units per term	calendar-year maximum of \$5250, prorated for part time employee	100% 4 year tuition	partial or full tuition cost up to \$5250 per fiscal year	tuition (\$11000/year)	tuition, 75% up to 4 credits per term for Unich	\$2000/year in tuition benefits including vocational and professional development opportunities
<b>Reimbursement or waiver?</b>	waiver	reimbursement	waiver	reimbursement	waiver	reimbursement (must get B or better)	reimbursement
<b>Can benefit be shared with dependent?</b>	Yes	No	n/a	No	No, children can only use 50% benefit of 1 parent	No	
<b>Who pays for the benefit?</b>	cost loss to campus				cost loss to campus	department pays (can deny reimbursement based on lack of funds)	Central funds, Department can add to benefit
<b>salary cap or pay title limitation</b>	none	\$5250 in calendar year	at least 50% time		no salary cap but percentage requirements (varied)	none	at least 50% time
<b>Maximum people who can use benefit</b>	1 person at a time, two parents can give to child to use simultaneously, no lifetime maximum	n/a			no	n/a	

## Sources

### *UC Documents*

Memo from Richard C. Atkinson, UC President – re. Educational Fee Waiver Program for UC students who are dependents of UC employees, September 2002

Memo from Lawrence Pitts, Academic Council – re. Academic Council Resolution on Educational Fee Waiver, January 23, 2004

Council on UC Staff Assemblies – Educational Fee Waiver Workgroup Report, 2006

UC Davis Senate Faculty Welfare Committee Proposal for Fee-Waiver of Dependents, March 2007

Council on UC Staff Assemblies – Retention Workgroup Report, 2008

Email Responses from Mark Yudof, UC President – re. Fee waivers, September-December 2009

UC Committee on Faculty Welfare Minutes, November 2009

Employee Relations Report on Reduced Fee Enrollment Program, August 2010

### *Other Resources*

Cal State University

[https://www.calstate.edu/benefits/other\\_benes/fwp.page.shtml](https://www.calstate.edu/benefits/other_benes/fwp.page.shtml)

CSU Channel Islands

<http://www.csuci.edu/hr/feewaiver.htm>

Stanford University

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/dms/hrdata/eap/strp.html>

University of Illinois

[https://nessie.uihr.uillinois.edu/cf/events/index.cfm?Item\\_id=1121&rlink=1116](https://nessie.uihr.uillinois.edu/cf/events/index.cfm?Item_id=1121&rlink=1116)

San Francisco State University

<http://www.sfsu.edu/~hrwww/>

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

<http://hrweb.mit.edu/>