

## **Ad hoc Committee on Staff Benefits**

### **A joint committee of Vanderbilt's staff advisory councils**

Statement of purpose: "To examine benefits provided to staff of Vanderbilt University and compare them to those provided by area employers and peer institutions. To report results of the research, along with our recommendations, to the staff councils."

#### **Report of the committee**

##### **June 1996**

Our survey of major area employers and peer institutions revealed that Vanderbilt is noncompetitive in several key benefits programs. Because we believe these programs, in particular, are indispensable aids in attracting and keeping high quality staff, we recommend institution of a short term disability plan, expansion of educational benefits for staff professional development, improvements to the retirement plan, and an increase in the number of paid holidays.

#### **Short term disability**

Eleven years, three months of uninterrupted service would be required to accrue enough sick leave to sustain a Vanderbilt staff member's salary through the waiting period for long term benefits. This is a significant potential exposure for the vast majority of employees. Vanderbilt is in the bottom quartile of this category among employers we surveyed, and is the only local employer surveyed that does not offer short term disability benefits. We recommend that Vanderbilt facilitate a group rate for short term disability insurance.

#### **Educational benefits for staff professional development**

Although Vanderbilt's mission is education, staff have limited opportunities to take advantage of those resources. Improved educational benefits for professional development would not only improve employee retention, but would result in further educated, more effective staff. Our survey revealed several more liberal and innovative programs than Vanderbilt's. Vanderbilt's tuition prevents many from taking advantage of the educational opportunities even at the present discount. We recommend that Vanderbilt institute a program in which tuition for job-related curricula is fully paid at any accredited institution, in return for a contracted period of employment service from staff members who participate in the program.

#### **Retirement**

Vanderbilt's retirement program does not offer enough flexibility for many lower-paid employees, who feel they cannot set aside the 5% required for matching funds. Most companies we surveyed offered greater flexibility than Vanderbilt in their retirement contribution requirements. We recommend that Vanderbilt match any employee contribution up to 5%, and that a plan not requiring employee contribution be considered as an option. In addition, we recommend that retirees be extended perquisites such as discounts on tickets to Vanderbilt athletic events, library privileges, and identification as a Vanderbilt retiree to enable participation in the PERQS program

with local businesses. Many academic institutions we surveyed continue such programs for their retirees.

### **Holidays**

Vanderbilt, providing only nine paid holidays, falls in the bottom quartile of this category among employers we surveyed. We recommend that Vanderbilt add some of the same paid holidays offered by other employers: the day after Thanksgiving, Veteran's Day, Columbus Day, Good Friday, and the period between Christmas Day and New Year's Day. We particularly urge that both Martin Luther King Birthday and President's Day be paid holidays, so that employees are not forced to choose one and thus slight the other.

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**[Terrie Spetalnick](#), chair**

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