R04.06.010. Employee Education Benefits.

Regular employees, spouses and dependents are authorized a waiver of course charges under the following conditions:

A. Regular employees and employee dependents are education benefits eligible after the employee completes an employment probationary period. Any waiver of this requirement must be in writing with document coordination between the chancellor or president, as appropriate, and SW Human Resources.

B. Eligible regular employees of the university may have a maximum of eight credit hours waived in each fall and spring semester.

C. Eligible regular employees may have a maximum of four non-credit courses waived in each fall and spring semester. The non-credit course must be chosen from a UA-approved list of acceptable courses. This waiver requires prior written approval by the employee's supervisor.

D. In an academic year a maximum of sixteen credit hours and eight non-credit courses may be waived. An academic year begins with the fall semester and ends with the summer term. Prior to the start of each academic term, the list of UA-approved non-credit courses will be provided by the Statewide Office of Human Resources.

E. Eligible regular employees with an employment agreement with the university for the following academic year, but who are off contract during the summer, may have up to sixteen graduate or undergraduate course credit hour charges waived per summer session. That same category of employees may have up to eight non-credit courses waived from a UA-approved list per summer session. In all cases these waivers, combined with fall and spring semesters, cannot exceed the sixteen credit and eight non-credit course limitation in each academic year.

F. Eligible regular employees may take up to three credit hours during working hours with prior written approval by the supervisor. Employees are not required to make up the time if the supervisor believes the coursework will directly benefit the university.

G. Eligible regular employees may take UA-approved non-credit courses during working hours with prior written approval by the supervisor. Employees are not required to make up the time for their attendance at UA-approved non-credit courses.
H. Eligible regular employees may attend credit courses that do not directly benefit the university during working hours with prior written approval by the supervisor. The employee will use accrued leave time or be responsible for making up lost work time through a flexible work schedule requested through and approved by the supervisor.

I. Spouses, financially interdependent partners, and dependent children under the age of 24 of eligible regular employees will have course credit hour charges waived. Course charges for non-credit courses will not be waived for spouses, financially interdependent partners, and dependent children of employees.

J. An individual who qualifies for permanent disability during his/her regular employment under the University of Alaska's long-term disability plan will have course credit hour charges waived for a period of three academic years following qualification. Similarly, dependent children who meet the requirements of permanent disability under the university's health plan will have course credit hour charges waived up to age 27.

K. An employee who has included university coursework as part of an approved leave of absence is entitled to the same education benefits as an eligible regular employee.

L. 500 level courses and year-long courses are not eligible for the education benefit.

M. Employees and dependents receiving undergraduate education benefits must maintain a GPA of 2.0 or better cumulative GPA in the waived courses. Employees and dependents receiving graduate level education benefits must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better cumulative GPA in the waived courses. Appeals will be handled through the normal academic channels as per normal.

N. University employees who by virtue of their employment status qualify for the education benefit cannot also claim spouse or dependent education benefits.

O. Education benefits cease upon termination of employment except for those courses in which the employee, spouse or dependent(s), are currently enrolled and classes are in session at the time of termination.

P. Education benefits provided by this section apply to the total number of credit hours attempted in the term in which the employee, spouse, and/or dependent enrollment waiver is applied.

Q. An employee is responsible for any tax liability generated from employee education benefits.

R. With the exception of non-credit UA-approved courses taken by employees, other self-support course charges are not eligible to be waived under this benefit.

S. For a student enrolled in the WWAMI Medical Program the education benefit is applicable only for University of Alaska-provided coursework.
DATE: June 13, 2012
TO: Pat Gamble, President
FROM: Juella Sparks, Staff Alliance Chair
       Monique Musick, Staff Alliance Co-Chair
RE: Proposed changes to the employee tuition benefit

This is in response to the May 8, 2012 memorandum regarding motions made by UA governance groups about proposed changes to the tuition waiver benefit.

We see the proposed changes to the policy heading in a beneficial direction. In the spirit of continuing to work together on the revision of R04.06.010, we would like to make some suggestions that address a few remaining concerns.

Staff Alliance recommends the following:

a.) Clarification that the grade point average (GPA) used to determine eligibility will be semester-based and not cumulative GPA.

b.) Clarification that withdrawals, audits, incompletes, deferred, pass/fail and other grades which do not carry a grade point will not affect eligibility.

c.) Provide an additional semester term of academic probation if employees or their dependents drop below the semester GPA requirement to allow opportunity to improve their GPA before the benefit is revoked.

d.) Consult with General Counsel in regards to the legality of sharing FERPA protected information beyond the financial aid office for the purpose of enforcing the policy.

Rationale:

Section M of R04.06.010 states “employees and dependents receiving undergraduate education benefits must maintain a “C” or better GPA in the waived courses. Employees and dependents receiving graduate level education benefits must maintain a “B” or better GPA in the waived courses.”
This is a logical and reasonable alternative to applying Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) rules to the tuition benefit. The wording in section “M” specifically mentions the GPA of “waived classes” being the determining factor for eligibility. That is an important detail. We believe using cumulative GPA to determine eligibility is unfair because it would tie current employee benefits to prior academic performance as a student, or as an employee utilizing the benefit prior to this change in policy. Is it to be inferred that any additional credits taken beyond the tuition benefit would not be included in the GPA evaluation? It would help to clarify that the calculation of the GPA would be semester based, from the time of the policy change forward, and limited to those courses covered under the waiver.

Our second suggestion is to clarify that non grade point carrying marks (W, I, AU, DF, P, CR) will not affect eligibility. This will ease concerns of any employee or their dependents that need to withdraw from classes because of workload, or choose to audit classes versus receiving credit, but still want to utilize the tuition benefit. Under SAP, a withdrawal would affect eligibility for financial aid, but not affect a student’s GPA. We would like to clarify that GPA alone will be the basis of eligibility for tuition benefits.

If a one semester academic probation period will be allowed to give employees or their dependents an opportunity to raise their GPA back up to eligibility criteria, it should be clearly stated in the new policy. This is an important point for employees’ dependents using the tuition benefit, as well as for employees themselves in cases where unforeseen work conditions or circumstance leads a failing grade.

Administrative staff has raised concerns regarding the potential handling of student records under FERPA regulations and the impact of this policy change. These concerns tie in with questions about the identification of the staff that will be enforcing this policy. Who will be creating the eligibility lists? How will HR know if you are eligible for the benefit? Sharing student records amongst departments violates FERPA, so how will this be tracked and enforced? Employees could end up in a position where private family matters, the academic performance of themselves or their dependents, gets shared beyond the financial aid office and into a murky area of FERPA compliance. We do not have the legal background to make recommendations, but would like to see General Counsel involved in this aspect of the regulation.

Thank you for this opportunity to work together on the tuition waiver policy.

Juella Sparks
Monique Musick

CC: Donald Smith, Interim Chief Human Resources Officer
    Joe Hayes, System Governance Council Chair