

Food for Thought

State Legislation Affects Certain Employee Benefits

In a series of actions designed to create revenue for the Teachers Retirement System (TRS), the 79th Legislature made changes in law that will impact current and future TRS participants, including those in COALS, TAES, and TCE. Many of the most significant changes will apply only to employees hired after September 1, 2007. Changes that affect current employees do NOT apply if the employee is at least age 50, has at least 25 years of service, or has at least 70 years in combined age and service. Employees who meet one of these exemptions by September 1, 2005 will not be affected by changes in TRS law.

Current employees who do not meet the criteria above will be affected most by a provision related to how retirement annuities are calculated. Currently, a TRS annuity is based on an average of an employee's three highest salary years. After September 1, 2005, annuities for those not exempted will be based on the average of the highest five salary years. This will lower pensions for almost all these future retirees.

Another potential impact is the elimination of what is known as the "early retirement subsidy." Current, members of TRS who are not exempted and who choose to retire with 20 or more years of service but have not reached the rule of 80 will see a substantial increase in the pension reduction factor. For example, a participant who is age 55 with 20 years of service currently faces a pension reduction of 10%. After September 1, the pension will be reduced by 53%. Obviously, employees planning to retire early will be significantly impacted.

Also, TRS members who had service at an educational institution in another state before joining TRS will be required to pay the actuarial cost of each year of prior service rather than a fixed 12% per year if they wish to purchase service credit. All individuals who are members of TRS by September 1, 2005, will have until January 1, 2006, to initiate the purchase of this service under the old cost structure.

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Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.
 — Albert Einstein

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Helpful Websites

Ag Program HR

<http://aghr.tamu.edu/>

Ag Program Directory

<http://agdirectory.tamu.edu/>

Benefits

<http://aghr.tamu.edu/benefits.htm>

County Programs

<http://taex-hr.tamu.edu>

GreatJobs—Applicants

<http://greatjobs.tamu.edu>

GreatJobs—Staff

<http://greatjobs.tamu.edu/hr>

Forms (Alpha List)

<http://agservices.tamu.edu/Forms/forms-alfa.htm>

HR Connect

<http://hrc.tamu.edu/hrc/>

LeaveTraQ

<http://aghr.tamu.edu/leavetraq/leavetraq.htm>

Online Employee Processing

<http://aghr.tamu.edu/processing.htm>

Payroll

<http://aghr.tamu.edu/pay.htm>

Single Sign On

<http://sso.tamu.edu/>

Series EE Savings Bonds to Earn Fixed Rates

The Treasury Department announced today that Series EE Savings Bonds issued on and after May 1, 2005, will earn fixed rates of interest. The new fixed rate will apply for the 30-year life of each bond, which includes a 10-year extended maturity period, unless a different rate or rate structure is announced and applied at the start of the extension period.

Rates for new issues will be adjusted each May 1 and November 1, with each new rate effective for all bonds issued through the following six months. Interest accrues monthly and is compounded semiannually. Savings bonds must be held a minimum of one year, and there is a three-month interest penalty applied to bonds held less than five years from issue date. At a minimum, Treasury guarantees that a bond's value will double after 20 years, its original maturity, and it will continue to earn the fixed rate set at the time of issue unless a new rate or rate structure is announced. If a bond does not double in value as the result of

applying the fixed rate for 20 years, the Treasury will make a one-time adjustment at original maturity to make up the difference.

Series EE bonds issued prior to May 1, 2005, will continue to be governed by the terms in effect when they were issued.

Savings bonds are available in electronic or paper form. Paper EE bonds are issued at a 50 percent discount from face value, and electronic EE bonds are issued at face value. Issue prices for EE bonds start at \$25. Electronic savings bonds can be purchased directly from the Treasury Department by opening a TreasuryDirect online account at www.treasurydirect.gov. Paper savings bonds can be purchased either through a financial institution or through payroll savings plans offered by thousands of employers.

— Patsy Schoppe



Learning Central - All Aboard the Learning Central Line!



Our monthly TTVN Training and Information sessions continue with the following schedule:

June 28 — Competency-based Performance

July 5 — Special TTVN—Position Description Module Training Part II

July 26 — Annual Enrollment

August 30 — Coaching & Mentoring Employees

September 26 — Dealing With Unsatisfactory Behavior

For updates to this schedule, handouts, How-To's, and other learning opportunities, go to:

<http://agtraining.tamu.edu>

— Bob Hensz

“Don't find a fault; find a remedy.”

— Henry Ford

New Online Position Description Module—Leave Your Paper Trail Behind!

The Human Resources Department is pleased to introduce an online position description module uniquely designed to automate the collection, updating and tracking of employee position descriptions.

This new online system will allow you and/or your unit to:

◆ Update Position Descriptions Online

Position descriptions can be reviewed and updated online. Employees can access their current position description by logging into the online system and reviewing and electronically certifying their position descriptions.

◆ Search Position Descriptions

Position descriptions can be reviewed and compared to both current and archived position descriptions using a variety of search options. This eliminates the need to store, retrieve and review paper job description files.

◆ Process Change Requests

Requests for position review, including the creation, updating and reclassification of positions, can be submitted through the appropriate approval channels online.

◆ View Request Statuses Online

Units/departments can review the status of their position change requests online.

◆ Create Job Announcements

Units/departments can easily convert position descriptions into job requisitions when a position becomes vacant. Positions requiring modification prior to posting can be automatically forwarded to the Human Resources Office, thus eliminating the forms and time associated with the traditional paper process.

◆ Reduce or Eliminate Paper Files

This streamlined online system will securely store position descriptions online and reduce and eventually eliminate paper files, providing easy solution for file access, maintenance and improving record compliance.

To ensure a seamless transition in the use of the new online position description system, comprehensive training will be offered to both on-campus and off-campus units. A staged-approach will be taken to introduce the system to employees. Initial introduction of the module to unit contacts begins on May 31. Subsequent training for supervisors and employees will follow.

— Linda Edge

Did you know....?



The kings in a deck of cards each represent a great king from history. The king of spades is King David, the king of clubs is Alexander the Great, the king of hearts is Charlemagne, and the king of diamonds is Julius Caesar.

Playing cards in India are round.



The king of hearts is the only king without a moustache on a standard playing card.

State Legislation..., (continued from page 1)

After January 1, 2006, employees will no longer be able to purchase discretionary TRS service. Previously, a member could purchase up to three years of additional TRS service after being employed for seven years.

For more information about these changes in law, you may contact the Human Resources Office or attend a TTVN session scheduled for June 28 at

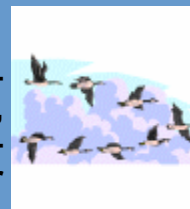
10 am. (Contact the training coordinator of your unit for details about this session.)

For a complete list of legislation regarding human resource issues, see our website at <http://aghr.tamu.edu>

— Steve Schulze

Team Work

Have you ever watched a flock of geese flying in their traditional “V” formation? Two engineers learned that each bird, by flapping its wings, creates an uplift for the bird that follows. Together the whole flock gains about 70 percent greater flying range than if they were journeying alone.



— Reprinted from *Good Stuff*, 370 Technology Dr., Malvern, PA 19355 (800) 220-8600

Volunteer Your Way to a New Career

by Dan Miller

When creating your resume, don't forget to include the skills you may have refined in doing volunteer work. A resume is to show competencies, whether they were gained in a paid position or through your community involvement.

If you headed up your church building program, then you have shown expertise in budgeting, delegation, organization, supervising, and inventory control. If you did volunteer computer work for a half-way house, show the computer programs you have mastered. If you have been a volunteer with your local food bank, list your experience in contacting companies, your marketing skills in getting donations and involvement.

If you received an award for your efforts, include that information on your resume. Your ability to get results is what you want to convey to a new prospective company. Volunteering is a great way to get the experience to position you for a new and better opportunity.

Here are a couple of sites for more information on volunteering opportunities: www.idealists.org and www.hotjobs.com/nonprofit

— Reprinted from *48 Days*, Dan Miller's
Weekly e-Newsletter
www.48days.com, 615-373-7771

Don't Chase the Snake!

by Dan Miller

Don't waste your energy fretting about what has already happened—what are you doing tomorrow?

When I was 10 years old, one of my best friends was Bob Queen. One afternoon while exploring the back acreage of our neighboring farms, a snake bit Bob. Seeing the snake slither off, my immediate response was to run after the snake, track him down and repay the scoundrel for what he had done to my friend. Bob, however, being a much wiser hunter and outdoorsman, quickly pulled out his knife, lanced the bite, sucked the blood out and spit out the poison. The focus for him was on his own well being, not on repaying the snake.

“Losers focus on what they are going through; champions focus on what they are going to.”
— Dr. Mike Murdock

How often I see people chasing the snake in their own lives. The company folds or you just simply get laid off. The immediate reaction may include anger, resentment, bitterness, and backstabbing. These lead to discouragement, frustration, guilt and depression. Be aware that all of these reactions and feelings focus on the past. Turning around and looking to the future opens up confidence, boldness, and enthusiasm. These often lead to an increased sense of accomplishment, personal control, fulfillment and even money.

“Live out of your imagination, not your history.”
— Stephen Covey

I am currently working with a client who has been with her company for over 22 years. She is paid in excess of \$300,000 annually and has a long list of accomplishments. However, with new management they have demoted her, moved her out—and quickly. She is experiencing stomach pains, high blood pressure and increased fatigue. Even though she has received several very attractive offers from sister companies, her first response has been to defend her position, request meetings with the new CEO and futilely attempt to regain what will never be the same again. My advice—quit chasing the snake.

“Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.” — Carl Bard

If Bob and I had chased that snake, the poison would have been given opportunity to plunge through his veins, draining his energy and perhaps leading to his death. What are you doing in your life? Are you chasing a snake in the past or pursuing a dream in the future? Choose carefully; your life may be at stake.

— Dan Miller is president of Business Source in Brentwood.
www.48days.com, 615-373-7771.
This excerpt is from Dan's new book, *The Rudder of the Day*.



"There is real magic in enthusiasm. It spells the difference between mediocrity and accomplishment." — Unknown

Work Life Balance Task Force Report

In October 2004, Texas Cooperative Extension appointed seven employees to the Work Life Balance Task Force. Task force members include: Dr. Jenna Anding, Susanna Coppernoll, Dr. Monty Dozier, Tanya Gunnels, Jennifer Humphries (chair), Jenny Russell and Ricky Thompson. Dr. Margaret Hale is the administrative advisor. The Work Life Balance Task Force was presented with the challenge of working on projects in support of Work Life Balance. The work of the task force included a review of relevant research and literature from a variety of sources, such as the *Society for Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Extension*, and various Cooperative Extension agencies. From this, the task force concluded that:

work/life balance is an important factor for employees and is positively correlated to job satisfaction and long-term job retention,

work/life balance is a concept that many employers have identified as an issue they must address,

many corporations, agencies, and consulting firms have developed programs to address work/life balance.

Work life balance is not a new subject, but some current trends are bringing this issue to the forefront:

Employee demand for flexible work schedules was 1 of the top 5 factors related to job satisfaction for both men and women in 2004.

Companies that offer a full range of work-life benefits and actively support their use have workers with the lowest stress levels and the fewest minor health problems.

Even when job satisfaction is high, a majority of workers rate balancing work and family as more important than any other employment factors.

70% of respondents to a 2002 survey say they do not have a healthy balance between personal and work lives.

Service sector employees rate work-life balance as the most important factor for a satisfying work environment.

One million workers are absent due to stress-related complaints and American firms lose more than five million workdays annually due to illness, more than half of which are stress-related.

A study of 46,000 employees at six large companies has found stress is the most costly of 11 controllable workplace health risks.

85% of U.S. wage and salaried workers have immediate, day-to-day family responsibilities off the job.

Increasing numbers of Americans are faced with the challenge of caring for older parents.

Workers born 1965 or later:

emphasize work-life balance more than previous generations;

consistently place emphasis on autonomy over their own time;

value family stability to a higher extent than baby boomers and are more willing to make economic or career sacrifices to ensure this stability;

rate work-life balance as one of the most important factors promoting job satisfaction and this trend is expected to continue due to the fact that this group will have care-giving responsibilities for either children or elderly parents most of their working lives;

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Work Life Balance Task Force Report, continued from page 6:

82% of men and 85% of women place family time at top of their work/life priorities.

On September 5, 2003, U.S. Senate Resolution 210 was passed designating October as National Work and Family Month. The U.S. Senate concurs with the National Work Life Initiative that "supporting a balance between work and personal life is in the best interest of national worker productivity" and that "reducing the conflict between work and family life should be a national priority." To that end, the Work-Life Balance Task Force is focusing on two key goals:

Design, develop and deliver curriculum related to work-life balance for supervisors and employees

Create a user-friendly curriculum of resources on flextime/comp time/leave policies, and professional scheduling for supervisors and employees.

The Work-Life Balance Task Force is developing seven curriculum modules designed to be used internally and with clientele groups. The curriculum will initially be presented during professional association meetings this summer, as part of the Friday Online series via CentraSymposium, and as requested. Following this pilot testing and

evaluation, the modules will be revised as needed and made available for use with clientele. The modules are as follows:

Overview of Work Life Balance
Health and Well-being
Work and Family and Friends
Managing Stress
Time Management
Personal finance
Issues of the "Sandwich" Generation

A website is also being designed to provide access to work-life balance news, professional development opportunities, and policies and forms related to work-life balance.

The task force is continuing work and will provide information as it becomes available. Please feel free to contact any of the task force members:

Jennifer Humphries, Chair	979-845-7810
Jenna Anding	979-845-6379
Susanna Coppernoll	979-845-2250
Monty Dozier	979-845-2761
Tanya Gunnels	979-845-7210
Jenny Russell	830-780-3906
Ricky Thompson	409-384-3721

— Jennifer Humphries

Laughter



- An adult laughs an average of 15 times a day. A child, however, laughs an average of 400 times a day.
- Clinical studies have shown that humor strengthens the immune system.
- Humor allows a person to forget about pains such as aches, arthritis, etc.
- According to a survey done by Match.com, '70% of 16,000 adults polled believe they're more likely to fall in love with someone who makes them laugh than someone who makes them think.' N.Y. Time Service, August 20, 2004

— Reprinted from *48 Days*, Dan Miller's
Weekly e-Newsletter
www.48days.com, 615-373-7771

2005-06 Benefits News

2005-06 Annual Enrollment is Just Around the Corner!

The 2005-06 annual benefit enrollment period is July 1-31. This is your opportunity to review your benefits and make changes for the new plan year effective September 1, 2005. The new insurance rates are available online at <http://aghr.tamu.edu>. Click on BENEFITS from the drop down menu to locate rate charts that are effective September 1, 2005. A schedule of Annual Enrollment meetings and the 2005 Benefit Enrollment Booklet are also available.

Most System health plans will offer a slight drop in monthly premiums as well as a lower prescription drug deductible from \$100 per person to \$50 per person. The A&M Dental annual and orthodontic maximum benefits will increase from \$1,000 to \$1,500.

Please call the benefits office at 979/845-2423 if you have questions.

Tax Saver Spending Accounts

If you are currently enrolled in a Health Care Spending Account and re-enroll effective September 1, you will NOT receive a new debit card. Make sure you keep your current card for use this coming plan year. Your card will reflect your new Health Care Spending Account election and be ready for use September 1.

Both Health and Dependent Day Care Spending Accounts now have a two-and-a-half month grace period that allows you to submit claims for eligible expenses incurred through November 25 of the next plan year. If you incur an expense during this grace period and wish to pay it using money remaining in your account from the previous year, you must submit a claim form and copy of the receipt. You may not use a debit card to pay an expense incurred during the grace period.

More information is available in the 2005 Annual Enrollment Booklet and you may also contact the benefits office at 979/845-2423.

— Jan Kyles



“You can tell a lot about a fellow’s character by his way of eating jellybeans.” — Ronald Reagan