EMPLOYEE RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

January 15, 2009
Sequoyah Room, University Center

Members attending: Pat Boyer, Joyce Blevins, Deanna Cameron, Debby Corey, Julia Cronin, Cheryl Faulkner, Kelly Griffin, Jeannie Hill, Valerah Hodges, Ken Hood, Anne Jay, Joyce Powell, Jean Rice, Doris Roensch, Nancy Tolar, Jan Uhles, Jean Walston.

Others in attendance: Dan Webb, Director, Office of Human Resources; Melanie Sadler, Administrative Specialist, Office of Human Resources.

Call to Order: Ms Hodges called the meeting to order.

Minutes: Motion was made and seconded to approve minutes of the December 11, 2008 meeting.

Blue Ribbon Awards
October 2008: Cindy Carroll, Assistant Director, University Relations
November 2008: Andrea James, Administrative Support Assistant, Engineering
December 2008: Julie Sanders, Project Lead the Way Coordinator, Engineering

Guest: Chuck Cantrell, Asst Vice Chancellor, University Relations

Mr. Cantrell said there are many rumors, fears and confusion surrounding the budget. Rarely does the university have budget cuts in November for the July budget. The target for cuts on an accelerated time frame keeps changing; at present, 13.9% reduced from 20% earlier. It is possible the state will request an additional 5% cut, which might result in layoffs. Mr. Webb said the system HROs would discuss with Linda Hendricks, UT Chief Human Resources Officer, what could be done to help those affected by a layoff.

A wide range of budget reduction measures have been discussed including layoffs, furloughs, salary reductions and retirement incentives. Retirement incentives will not be offered on a UT-wide basis. Each campus would have some latitude to develop their own plans for retirement incentives, which would have to be funded out of campus resources. The 401k match is a state program and discontinuation would not help the university. Longevity is also state funded and applies to all state employees, so cuts to longevity pay would not benefit the university or help with our budget reduction.

The senior administration is doing everything it can to avoid a reduction-in-force. System-wide the current estimate is for about 700 positions to be cut, many of these cuts requiring laying off the employees currently employed in them. UTC is still determining how many positions must be cut to meet budget requirements. Specific positions will be considered for elimination based on the position’s relationship to the core mission of the university; functions that are judged to be less central to the mission may be reduced or eliminated. Staff may be shifted to other positions to avoid lay-offs. Among the areas that have been discussed as providing opportunities for revenue enhancement are the Children’s Center, Challenger Center, Cadek, and WUTC. It was noted that the Children’s Center is partnered with the Hamilton County Board of Education, which is facing worse cuts than UTC.
Mr. Cantrell said he does not know how much tuition will increase or how much, if any, might be received from the government’s economic stimulus package.

Guest: Dr. Roger Brown, Chancellor

During his 30 years in higher education, Dr. Brown said he had never seen anything comparable to the budget crisis hitting all states. He noted that Colorado has talked of privatizing state universities.

Changes to previously announced freezes on hiring, purchases, and travel have been amended by the UT system. Staff may be hired if the salary is below $75,000 with exceptions requiring system approval. Travel has been reinstated. System approval is required for purchases costing more than $50,000.

Dr. Brown said his first job is to keep staff employed and his second job is to run the university with the best programs. There has been no thought of broad-based salary cuts and to date, no lay-offs are planned. He was asked if there was a reduction-in-force, would the university hire those affected and return them with seniority restored. Mr. Webb said UT Policy states laid-off employees are eligible for recall for one year after the layoff and would receive prior service credit. An employee questioned if a department was facing layoffs if those employees would be given the option to retire. Dr. Brown replied that he felt it was a fair request and would review it.

Cutbacks in fee waivers are being viewed. UT system offers a generous fee waiver for dependents, covering \( \frac{1}{2} \) of maintenance fees only for UT schools and \( \frac{1}{2} \) of mandatory fees for TBR schools.

Dr. Brown said it is difficult to make deep cuts to the budget and ask families to shoulder increases in tuition. The governor has said that tuition increases cannot be used to offset a lack of state funding.

A member wanted to know if the lottery had helped UTC. Dr. Brown responded that the first 2 years it was enacted that it hurt the university because students had more options of where to attend. Enrollment numbers are strong for the fall but increases will demand more rooms for instruction, programs, support services, parking, etc.

The Effectiveness & Efficiency Committee, comprised of UTC faculty and staff, has been formed to review ways to conserve material resources. The committee will recommend 6 - 10 things to implement. A website has been established for staff to submit ideas.

A member suggested imposing a service charge for students paying by credit card in the Bursar’s office. Dr. Brown and Mr. Cantrell said they didn’t believe it would be allowed by the state and is illegal at most places. A $50 one-time late fee is charged now if fees are not paid on time. A suggestion was made to charge another $50 charge for carrying fees. Dr. Brown responded that anything that looks like a fee increase is a risk in terms of public perception, especially in a recession; additionally, such a fee increase would probably require UT Board approval.

Another member thanked Dr. Brown for his comments and those of Dr. Petersen for keeping employees informed.
Employee Relations Advisory Board Meeting

Due to budget constraints, Ms Hodges and Mr. Webb attended the bi-annual Employee Relations Advisory Board via videoconference. Butch Peccolo, UT Treasurer, serves on the state benefit committee that is viewing a five-year strategic plan with more levels of participation for health insurance to include single coverage, employee + 1, employee + family. A Wellness program offered through health insurance for UT employees was discussed as part of this 5 year strategic plan.

Ms Hodges will forward ERAB minutes to the ERC when she receives them.

Training Update

The Training Advisory Group (TAG) has drafted a letter from the Chancellor to employees and supervisors to support HRO128, which sets a goal of 32 hours of training for all employees. Mr. Webb said emphasis on training will be reflected in the revised SPDR (Staff Performance & Development Review) form for this year.

A new website has been established, TOP (Training for Optimal Performance), whereby staff can find links to training provided by various departments.

Offerings by Human Resources include a Communication Certification; Supervisory Certification; Seven Habits; Computer-Based-Training of the month; Employee Assistance Program seminars; STAR Achievement with Kelly Griffin as facilitator. Specific training for a department or college may be obtained through EOD or EAP by contacting Human Resources. Mr. Webb asked members to help promote training not only for the content but interaction among employees.

Other Issues

Ms Hodges reminded representatives to release minutes to those they represent once they are approved.

Bursar has moved to Room 274 of the University Center.

Adjournment

Motion was made and seconded to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Sadler
Administrative Specialist
Human Resources