PerksConnect – Employee Discount Program

Coming this summer, PerksConnect! In our last issue we announced that Human Resources was working on a program to help you S-T-R-E-T-C-H your dollars through an employee discount program to help you spend less money for items you may already be purchasing. We are excited to announce that PerksConnect was selected as the vendor to manage the employee discount program!

In addition to the discounts for a variety of products and services, PerksConnect will also provide the opportunity to purchase voluntary benefits such as pet insurance, ID theft protection, auto/home insurance, mortgage assistance, supplemental insurance plans for non-qualified dependents, legal assistance and long term care insurance. Wow! There is something for everyone with PerksConnect!

Before we launch the program we need your help to make it even more valuable to you. Are there local businesses you frequent that PerksConnect should invite to participate in the Texas A&M University employee discount program? Are there certain types of products or services you would like targeted for discounts?

Please complete the online survey HERE by Friday, May 24th to provide information as we design the program. Watch for more exciting information about the PerksConnect program coming this summer!
Who you gonna call? Well, if there’s something strange in your neighborhood, call the Ghost-busters. However, if there’s something strange about your leave balances, call your HR Liaison! What is an HR Liaison you might ask?

- An HR Liaison is an employee designated by department heads or directors to perform or assist with your departmental human resources needs.
- An HR Liaison is the person who knows a lot about HR-related and payroll-related topics.
- This person typically has a real job unrelated to HR issues with the added responsibilities of the HR Liaison role.
- They are the people who know what to do and how to do it.
- HR Liaisons go through a comprehensive training curriculum, attend regular meetings and take refresher trainings to assure you have someone knowledgeable and close at hand to help you.
- Your HR Liaison is who you call when you have questions about taking leave for a doctor visit; when you’re wondering why you must take ethics training; when you get injured on the job; or when you need help with updating your job duties, and much more.

- They help managers post vacant positions for a hire search and submit a request for promotions.
- Your HR Liaison helps new employees get onboard and be part of the team, or handle the exit process for employees leaving.
- They help HR disseminate important information about your insurance benefits or assure compliance with numerous federal and state requirements and System and university rules/regs.

Actually, the task list is too long to give justice in this article! Basically your HR Liaison is the go-to person within your midst for HR questions.

Do you know your HR Liaison? If you’ve been helped with a paycheck issue, you likely talked with your HR Liaison. If you’re unsure, ask around the office, or use the “Your HR Contacts” webpage to find your HR Liaison... get to know them, and please thank them for all they do for you!
FEATUERED ARTICLES

Coming May 30th — PATH (Portal Access for Total HR)

As mentioned in the spring issue of HR EXPRESS, the online system known as TAMU Jobs is getting an upgrade and will be renamed PATH (Portal Access for Total HR). HR and the application vendor have devoted extra time to assure a successful implementation (fingers crossed!) for all of our constituents. The PATH system will officially launch Thursday, May 30, 2013.

Keep in mind, the TAMU Jobs system is where we post vacant jobs, review and update position descriptions, and complete performance evaluations. Whether you are an employee, supervisor or HR Liaison, the benefits from the more intuitive navigational system and user-interface, and the improved workflow management will ensure more convenient and efficient experiences for users.

There will be some changes in PATH, future job vacancy postings, the most recent version of position descriptions and future performance evaluations will still be accessed via Single Sign-On (SSO), so your login user identity and password will remain unchanged. The login button within SSO will be titled “PATH - Portal Access Total HR”.

The current job vacancy site (tamujobs.tamu.edu), will also undergo an upgrade and change to JobPath.tamu.edu. Details here.

To ensure you are kept informed about the upgrade process and new features, HR is working to create a PATH Help webpage with FAQs, training materials and resources for HR Liaisons, supervisors and employees. Check the site regularly for updates.

This article only skims the surface of the features and benefits of the PATH system. Experience it for yourself, live on the PATH May 30!

HR Website Makeover

Exciting changes are coming to the HR website (employees.tamu.edu) in the fall. We’ll have a new look and feel to the website and use a content management system (CMS) to organize information and update the site more quickly. Not surprisingly, this also means the web URL addresses you have bookmarked for forms and pages will break, but we’ll give you some lead time to be prepared for the changes. We are looking forward to our website being organized in a much more user-intuitive way to better serve you.

HR is using customer feedback to redesign the site so please share your ideas on how you would like to see us improve the HR site. Contact us at HR-feedback@tamu.edu anytime.
TO YOUR BENEFIT

Mark Your Calendar -- Annual Enrollment in July

It’s getting hot! As summer arrives it’s time to break out your sunscreen and shades; it’s also time to plan for your annual benefit enrollment options. Annual enrollment runs July 1-31, and is the time for you to review your insurance benefit selections and make appropriate changes to your benefits, if needed.

We know you are probably on pins and needles anxiously awaiting information on benefit coverage changes and the premium rates for the upcoming benefit plan year.

Here’s the latest information we have about benefit coverage changes:

- The state legislative session is still in progress through May, so the A&M Care health plan premium rates cannot be finalized until the state funding amounts have been set. Once finalized, we will communicate the new premium rates as soon as possible (probably mid-June). We are optimistic for increased state funding to help offset increased expenses related to healthcare trends and additional fees assessed for compliance with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The System Benefits Administration Office is diligently working to have as little of an increase in your out-of-pocket premium cost as possible while ensuring that the A&M Care health plan can pay for health claims.

- There are no plan design changes expected for the A&M Care health plan, the dental plans or other optional insurance plans. There are some plan design changes expected for the Graduate Student Employee plan which will result in lower premiums.

Watch for future communications from HR Benefits Services and System Benefits Administration in June. Also, save the date on your calendar to attend one of the sessions of the Annual Enrollment Benefits Fair, Tuesday, July 16 and Wednesday, July 17. The benefits fair will feature the insurance carriers in a come-and-go format with breakout sessions. Updates will be posted online as they become available.

Please review the annual enrollment communications that you receive and take appropriate actions by July 31 to ensure you have your desired benefits for the upcoming benefit plan year starting in September 2013.
Lower Your Taxable Earnings with Flexible Spending Accounts

Did you know that Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) give you the ability to set aside money from your paycheck to pay for qualified health-related and day care expenses on a pre-tax basis which lowers your taxable earnings?

This valuable benefit will again be offered next benefit plan year, but you need to be aware of some important changes:

1. Effective September 1, 2013, the maximum amount that may be contributed to the health care FSA is $2500 as required for compliance under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Currently, the amount is $4800, so you should plan ahead for the reduction.

2. Announced in April 2013 Benefits Briefs, your PayFlex card may now be used as a credit card or a debit card. Some merchants may require you to use it as a debit card. When using it as a debit card, you will be required to enter a Personal Identification Number (PIN). To get a PIN for your card, call PayFlex Card Services at 1-888-999-0121.

Remember that re-enrollment in the flexible spending accounts (both the Health FSA and the Dependent Day Care FSA) is required every benefit year and will not automatically continue. Re-enroll during annual enrollment (July 1-31) to continue to take advantage of these types of accounts. More information on the FSA benefit is available here.

Retiring this Summer? – Plan Ahead for a Smooth Transition

If you are planning to retire this summer, step #1 should be to contact HR Retirement Services (benefits@tamu.edu or 862-4028) now to schedule your retirement counseling session. You’ll receive an email in advance of your scheduled appointment with appropriate forms and a list of paperwork/items you should bring with you to make the session productive.

Step #2, if you participate in the Teacher Retirement System (TRS), it will take two months to receive your first annuity payment. HR provides a final report of earnings at the end of the month of your last paycheck. All earnings must be reported to TRS before retirement is certified, and annuity payments made, so plan ahead!

Planning ahead is the key to a smooth transition into retirement. Visit our Retirement Information webpage for more information.
SUPER SUPERVISORS

Good Supervisors Get in the Game!

As a good supervisor, when your employee succeeds, you can claim a role in that success. Likewise, when your employee struggles, you get to own part of that, too. Your responsibility as a supervisor requires your active involvement and encouragement. You can’t stand on the sidelines—you have to get in the game!

**Involvement:** Know what your employee does day-to-day to get the job done. If you’re not sure-ASK! You don’t need to have the same level of technical expertise as your employee, but knowing how the work gets accomplished and what successful completion looks like will go a long way toward building credibility when providing feedback. Listen for barriers that keep your employee from achieving success and do what you can to remove or reduce them. If you don’t have control over these matters, be honest with your employee about it and ask for their input.

**Engagement:** Your employees need and deserve your feedback on their job performance. Whether you’re addressing good or poor performance, be sure your communication is honest, respectful, clear and constructive. Stay away from personal opinions or speculation about your employee’s motivation for their performance. Stick with clarifying acceptable job standards and the roles you AND your employee play in their successes. Be deliberate about your efforts to ensure your employee has the training, development and resources to achieve their job duties.

**Educational opportunities** are available to help you enhance your supervisory skills, and HR Employee Relations (862-4027 or employee-relations@tamu.edu) can help you with your specific situations. Don’t supervise from the sidelines—get in the game!

**Best Practices in Hiring - A Winning Team**

Having a great team starts with having great players. To increase your chances of strengthening your team you need to use the best practices in your hiring process. Here’s the game plan you should follow:

- Make sure the Position Description (PD) accurately reflects the role you expect your new hire to play. If you don’t have a good one in place, it’s like starting a trip with an inaccurate map. If it’s time for a change, contact HR’s Classification and Compensation staff at HRcomp@tamu.edu or 845-4170 to get some advice and guidance.
Be assertive, not aggressive when expressing yourself.

Do you know the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness? Assertiveness means that you are able to express your needs and wants while still considering the needs and wants of others. Aggressiveness, on the other hand, involves doing what is in your best interest regardless of others’ needs or wants.

Developing and understanding assertive communication skills are essential for all employees. Learning how to be assertive can help you better manage conflict in the workplace as well as conversations that are uncomfortable or difficult. When you are skilled in assertiveness you’ll find that you are better able to manage interpersonal communication which often leads to a more effective and efficient workplace.

Are you ready to become more effective and efficient in the workplace? Of course you are! So, enroll now in the Assertiveness Training class by visiting the training schedule to read more about the workshop and find a date that meets your schedule.
**Meet John Williams, Senior Classification & Compensation Analyst**

John Williams is a Senior Classification & Compensation Analyst for HR. John is tasked with creating new positions and reclassifying existing positions, creating career ladders, and conducting salary and other surveys.

He has 9 ½ years of HR experience; working at Texas A&M HR from 1993-1998; 2 years in the United Kingdom working for Norwich Union; and returning to A&M HR in 2010. And, John is a retired military veteran, proudly serving in the United States Navy for 20+ years!

Today, he serves as the HR Rep for over 60 departments across campus, providing guidance on the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and delivering FLSA timekeeping workshops. The variety of people, departments and roles that John works with across campus is what he enjoys most about his job in HR. Thanks, John!
HR MISSION:
We provide human resource programs, services and expertise that foster employee and organizational success.

HR CORE VALUES:
• INTEGRITY
  We demonstrate uncompromising commitment to honesty and accountability.
• RESPECT
  We treat all people with dignity, recognizing diversity and unique experiences, perspectives and contributions.
• QUALITY
  We strive for excellence in meeting our customers’ expectations.
• EXPERTISE
  We develop and apply the highest level of knowledge and skills to address our customers’ needs.

Human Resources publishes HR EXPRESS three times per year for Texas A&M University employees to promote HR-related services and information.

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Newsletter Online: employees.tamu.edu/HRexpress
Newsletter Suggestions: employees.tamu.edu/feedback.aspx

COMING THIS SUMMER: PerksConnect, an employee discount program!

HR CALENDAR

Highlights for Summer 2013

JUNE

6/12 Benefits Orientation
6/12 New Employee Welcome
6/27 HR Liaison Network Meeting

JULY

7/1 Annual Benefit Enrollment starts
7/4 University Holiday – Independence Day
7/10 New Employee Welcome
7/16 Annual Enrollment Benefits Fair
7/17 Annual Enrollment Benefits Fair
7/31 Annual Benefit Enrollment ends

AUGUST

8/12 New Faculty Orientation - Tentative
8/14 Benefits Orientation
8/14 New Employee Welcome

SEPTEMBER

9/11 Benefits Orientation
9/11 New Employee Welcome
9/20 Coffee Conversations: Topic TBA

Employee Health & Wellness Fair was moved to the fall.