



# HR EXPRESS

KEEPING YOU ON TRACK WITH HR NEWS



**HUMAN RESOURCES**  
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

*INSIDE THIS ISSUE:*

<a href="#">Your Department's HR Liaison</a>	<b>2</b>
<a href="#">Coming May 30th – PATH</a>	<b>3</b>
<a href="#">HR Website Makeover</a>	<b>3</b>
<a href="#">Annual Enrollment in July</a>	<b>4</b>
<a href="#">Flexible Spending Accounts</a>	<b>5</b>
<a href="#">Retiring this Summer</a>	<b>5</b>
<a href="#">Good Supervisors Get in the Game</a>	<b>6</b>
<a href="#">Best Practices in Hiring</a>	<b>6</b>
<a href="#">Assertiveness: A Basic Communication Skill</a>	<b>7</b>
<a href="#">Understanding Communication Styles</a>	<b>8</b>
<a href="#">Meet John Williams</a>	<b>8</b>
<a href="#">HR Calendar Highlights</a>	<b>9</b>

## PerksConnect – Employee Discount Program



**Find savings in your neighborhood and across the country with the mobile app from PerksConnect! You'll have access to exclusive offers and great savings on:**

- **Entertainment & Travel**
- **Health & Wellness**
- **Home Services**
- **Insurance & Benefits**
- **And more!**

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 24<sup>th</sup> to provide information as we design the program. Watch for more exciting information about the PerksConnect program coming this summer!

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
HUMAN RESOURCES  
General Services Complex, Suite 1201  
750 Agronomy Road  
College Station, TX 77843-1255  
Mail Stop: 1255 | Phone: 979.845.4141  
Email: [HR-feedback@tamu.edu](mailto:HR-feedback@tamu.edu)  
Web: [employees.tamu.edu](http://employees.tamu.edu)

## FEATURED ARTICLES

### Get to Know Your Department's HR Liaison

Who you gonna call? Well, if there's something strange in your neighborhood, call the Ghostbusters. 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

*HR Liaisons  
complete  
training to  
stay current  
on HR issues*

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!



**get help**

Speak with your  
HR Liaison or your  
HR representative.

[CLICK HERE](#)

## FEATURED 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](http://tamujobs.tamu.edu)), will also undergo an upgrade and change to [JobPath.tamu.edu](http://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](http://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 some 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](mailto:HR-feedback@tamu.edu) anytime.



**We'll meet you on the PATH soon! Access it via the login button titled "PATH - Portal Access Total HR" within SSO.**



## 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:

*Annual Enrollment  
Benefits Fair  
Tuesday, July 16  
Wednesday, July 17*

- 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.



#### HR tidbits

During the 2013 Annual Benefit Enrollment, seven benefits staff responded to a staggering 322 customer contacts per day (average); a 49% increase from the last 3 year averages!

## TO YOUR BENEFIT

### 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](mailto: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.



**Lower your taxable earnings by setting aside money from your paycheck to pay for qualified health-related expenses and day care on a pre-tax basis.**



**great idea**

Send us your suggestions for articles or feedback!  
**[CLICK HERE](#)**

## 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 suc-

cesses. 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](mailto: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](mailto:HRcomp@tamu.edu) or 845-4170 to get some advice and guidance.

*Continued on page 7*



Let our HR Employee Relations staff help you become a Super Supervisor! Email [employee-relations@tamu.edu](mailto:employee-relations@tamu.edu) or call 862-4027.



#### HR services

View a list of our services and contact info for our offices.

[LOOK HERE](#)

## SUPER SUPERVISORS

### Best Practices in Hiring - A Winning Team

Continued from page 6

- As you prepare your job posting, find out as much as possible about your candidates. Our online system allows you to add job-based supplemental questions to gather more information. Use this to make the first screening more valuable.
- And don't forget about diversity in the applicant pool! Here's a [quick link](#) to lots of resources for spreading the word about your vacancy.
- Prepare well for your interview and prepare your interview team (if applicable). Know what you will look for in terms of the candi-

date's answers. Consult our [web resources](#) for help with creating questions, some do's and don'ts of interview questions and documenting your interviews.

- Always check references! See a [sample guide here](#).
- If the applicant is a Texas A&M employee, you can ask to review their personnel file.

Preparation is vital to making a good hire and building a good team. Please contact HR Recruitment and Workforce Planning staff at [employment@tamu.edu](mailto:employment@tamu.edu) or 845-5154 for assistance with hiring. We'd be glad to help you!



**Preparation is vital to making a good hire and building a good team.**

## TIPS FOR CAREER SUCCESS

### Assertiveness: A Basic Communication Skill

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.



**Be assertive, not aggressive when expressing yourself.**

## COMMON GROUND

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### Understanding Communication Styles

Communication impacts productivity and the quality of workplace relationships. Among the factors that influence how well we communicate at work is our inherent style preferences. For example, some people can be characterized as direct (even blunt) communicators, while others are more sensitive and subtle; some prefer communicating in writing, whereas others prefer meeting face-to-face; some focus on the big picture, while others get absorbed in the details.

Why does this matter? Because how we formulate and interpret messages is influenced by our communication styles – the patterns of

verbal and nonverbal behaviors that comprise our preferred ways of giving and receiving information in a specific situation. Our styles reflect personal and cultural upbringing and our underlying values and beliefs. Understanding our styles is the first step in learning how to better communicate with others. Furthermore, learning about the communication styles of others helps us adjust the way we communicate so that they understand us better.

Sign up for the [Interpersonal Communication Skills](#) workshop to discover your primary style(s) and learn strategies to enhance your workplace communication.

## FACES OF HR

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### 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!



**John is a graduate of Texas A&M with a degree in accounting. WHOOP!**



## HUMAN RESOURCES

TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY

### 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.

Editor: Pamela A. Praesel, Communications Manager  
Contributors: Human Resources Staff



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[employees.tamu.edu/  
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## 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.



**COMING THIS  
SUMMER:  
PerksConnect, an  
employee discount  
program!**