PROVOST’S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN’S ISSUES (PACWI)

April 2014 Report from the
Subcommittee for the Review of New and Existing Policy

**PACWI** serves as an advocate for women faculty, staff, and students at the University of South Carolina in order to: 1) assess current policies; 2) recommend new policies and procedures; 3) focus on areas that need improvement; and 4) provide opportunities to enhance the quality of the USC campus community.

The purpose of the **Subcommittee for the Review of New and Existing Policy** is to review and revise existing policies that affect women faculty and staff and to develop proposals for new policies to improve the university environment for women.

1. **Membership.** Jan Breuer, Sara Corwin, Lauren Dattilo, Robin DiPietro, Karen Edwards, Alison Hogue, Susan Kuo, Courtney Littlejohn, Kathryn Luchok, Deanne Messias, Donna Richter, Brooke Stillwell

2. **Review of Partner Benefits and Wording in Policies.** The Subcommittee has prepared its Final Recommendations to the Provost, attached, for approval by the full Committee and forwarding to the Provost’s Office.

Submitted by Robin DiPietro
PROVOST’S ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN’S ISSUES (PACWI)
Subcommittee for the Review of New and Existing Policy
2013-14 Final Recommendations to the Provost

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This year, the Subcommittee was asked to make recommendations for improvements in University policies and practices relating to domestic partners. Currently The University of South Carolina does not use the term domestic partner and instead provides a couple of cursory benefits to “plus ones” such as library privileges, Carolina Card privileges, and the opportunity to join the Strom workout facility. The University does provide insurance and benefits to common law marriage partners, but not to same sex or even opposite sex partners. Domestic partners are not eligible for medical benefits or any form of insurance coverage. However, information provided by the Provost’s Office indicates that the University does include domestic partners in its family-friendly policies, including extension of the tenure clock and third-year or post-tenure review, modified duties for faculty, and faculty dual career accommodation. Most recently, the University has included domestic partners (calling the policy “Plus One” benefits under the new EAP plan and provided access to University libraries and recreational facilities.

After an extensive study of partner benefits provided by universities regionally and across the nation (attached as Exhibit A to this report), the Subcommittee concludes that the University should consider providing domestic partners of faculty and staff with benefits equivalent or identical to those available to married partners as a recruitment and retention incentive. While our survey was limited to flagship state universities and does not capture historical information about when domestic partner benefits were adopted, the evidence seems to support the conclusion that there is a strong national trend toward full domestic partner benefits. For instance, of the 57 universities surveyed, 36 already offer medical benefits. This number includes 4 other SEC schools and 6 peer/peer-aspirant institutions (1 of these peer/peer-aspirant schools is also in the SEC). Life insurance is available for domestic partners at 25 of the universities surveyed, including 3 SEC schools and 4 peer/peer-aspirant institutions (1 of these peer/peer-aspirant schools is also in the SEC). Accordingly, expanding the existing benefits available for domestic partners would likely improve the University’s ability to attract and retain highly attractive candidates for faculty and staff positions.

Another extensive search was done of the top businesses in the state of South Carolina as well as a review of newspaper and magazine articles about the Fortune 500 businesses. This search is summarized in the appendix, but overall it was reported that some of the largest companies in South Carolina offer domestic partner benefits while some of them offer benefits to legally married same sex spouses. More than 62% of Fortune 500 companies offer domestic partner benefits.

We believe that it would be beneficial in terms of recruiting and retention of faculty and staff to the University of South Carolina to be more inclusive when providing benefits to include domestic partners. There are currently 17 states and Washington DC that offer same sex marriage and the country is in a unique position right now as there is a movement across the country to offer more inclusive benefits and to create an environment where everyone is treated equally. We are the flagship university of the state of South Carolina and are not keeping up with the trends across the country and with other flagship universities. The University competes with other colleges and universities for talent, but they also compete with private industry and not being proactive in adopting partner benefits is a threat to the ability to recruit and retain good people. By providing domestic partner benefits to employees would be an attractive benefit. The economic impact of ensuring that people are provided with fair and equal benefits that allow them to seek out South Carolina as a place that offers domestic partner benefits is large in keeping people here and ensuring their productivity.
In the University's Policy on Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, it is stated that “the University of South Carolina is committed to a policy of equal opportunity and non-discrimination on the basis of the following protected classes [i.e.]: race, sex, gender, age, color, religion, national origin, disability, genetics, sexual orientation and veteran status.” Since the University does not offer partner benefits, it can be misinterpreted that sexual orientation is not protected as benefits are not extended to people with different sexual orientation than other couples. The University extends benefits to common law marriages, but not same sex marriages or domestic partners.

We recommend that the University adopts a policy to define and cover domestic partners with benefits equal to married people that work at the University.