

# Universities offer equal benefits to gay, lesbian couples

By College Press Service

To demonstrate that they are desirable, equitable places to work and study, an increasing number of American colleges and universities are providing expanded benefits to the partners of their gay and lesbian faculty staff members.

This extension of benefits, mostly health insurance but sometimes tuition discounts and access to facilities, mirrors a growing trend among U.S. businesses to provide equal treatments and compensation to all employees and their partners despite their sexual orientation.

It also comes at a time when society's views about homosexuality are becoming more tolerant and gays and lesbians are demanding the same benefits that their married counterparts receive.

About two dozen universities and colleges have instituted domestic partner policies during the past two years, including Harvard, Columbia and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In doing so, these institutions are trying to attract students and faculty concerned with gay rights and to fulfill non-discrimination policies that many universities have instituted.

"This is an issue of fairness," said Marjorie Cowmeadow, a University of Minnesota associate dean and chair of UM's Select Committee on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns.

Because UM has a non-discrimination policy, providing domestic partner benefits to homosexual couples identical to those given to married couples means that the school is "bringing itself into compliance with its own stated policy," she said. "To say we don't discriminate means we don't discriminate."

Pat Cain, a lesbian law professor at the University of Iowa, said, "It's symbolically very important to us, even to the people who have not elected to use it. It's symbolically

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The benefits to the school are manifold, Cain said: The policy makes many employees happy, it provides good health insurance for people who might have to pay twice as much elsewhere, and it shows that the university is willing to "stand up for the principle of non-discrimination."

Since its start in January 1993, fewer than 20 people — as expected — have registered their partners to receive benefits, said Iowa Assistant Vice President Mary Jo Small. The program was debated and studied extensively for two years before receiving approval from the state's Board of Regents.

That cleared the path for Iowa State University, which adopted a policy that started in July 1993, and for the University of Northern Iowa, which is considering a similar program, Small said.

The major concern at Iowa, as well as other universities, came down to costs, specifically whether adding gay and lesbian partners to health benefits would be a financial burden, especially in an era when homosexuals are perceived to be at higher risk of contracting the HIV virus and incurable AIDS.

Those fears haven't come true, although it's too early in most programs to determine just how expensive the added benefits will be.

More than 17,000 employees and staff members are eligible for

UM's domestic partner benefits, approved in September. However, only about 50 have signed up during the past two months for the program, which offers a maximum benefit of \$2,250 per person, said Dianne Mulvihill, UM director of employee benefits. That is well under the 100 the university predicted, she said, adding that some partners are not enrolling for all potential benefits, decreasing their per-person cost projections.

Participating colleges and universities have varying guidelines for couples to qualify for these programs. At Stanford, same gender couples must fill out forms certifying that they are not blood relatives, that they have lived together for at least six months in an exclusive relationship and that they have mutual financial obligations.

UM requires that domestic partners be able to document at least three of the following qualifications that demonstrate joint responsibility: a joint mortgage or joint tenancy on a residential lease; a joint bank account; joint ownership of significant property; durable property or health care powers of attorney; naming each other as primary beneficiaries in wills, life insurance policies or retirement annuities; and written agreements or contracts regarding their relationships.

# Volunteer work helps graduates obtain jobs

By College Press Service

In 1990, according to The Monthly Labor Review, there were 974,000 new college graduates seeking jobs. That same year, there were 964,000 job openings for college graduates. Add to that the more than 200,000 old graduates seeking jobs, and you have a lot of men and women with college degrees watching "Days of Our Lives" in 1990.

Yet, the prospect of a tight job market has turned a growing number of recent college graduates to volunteer work as a way to get a foot in the door, delay career decisions until they've had more time to think and get some real satisfaction out of a well-done job.

Mark Gardner, a 25-year-old graduate of George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., had no idea what he wanted to do after college, so he moved to California to do some soul-searching.

"I just didn't want to go back to Fairfax," he said. Gardner delivered pizzas to make ends meet and did volunteer work at a sexual assault crisis center in his spare time.

"That's where I caught the bug for social work and social services," he said. His soul-searching brought him back to Fairfax, where after doing part-time work in social services, he ended up working for the Salvation Army as a full-time case manager.

Gardner works with residents of a community shelter, refers them to services in the area and helps to find them jobs and treatment for addictions. He said his "hibernation period" in California helped solidify his career goals. Various part-time jobs and volunteer opportunities in the social work field helped him get a job.

"It all sort of came together," he said.

Gardner's choice to put off making a final decision about his career plans resulted in his having a better idea about what he wanted to do. This decision isn't at all uncommon, and there are more places to hide after graduation than California.

Krista Francois, 23, said she felt lost when she graduated from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. She studied education because she wanted to help people, but the degree wasn't enough, and the job market wasn't promising either. She decided to volunteer for a year at a home for abused women in Bethel, Alaska.

"This is what I needed, to get away from all that was familiar so that I could figure out what I really wanted," she said. "There are so many people in this world that haven't been given what I have. This was my opportunity to help them."

By the time she got accustomed to the 20 hours of daylight in the summer, winter arrived.

"There were days when the sun didn't rise at all," she said. "It is a very sad way of life here."

Francois said volunteering is becoming increasingly popular among new graduates because they are, like many of their parents in the 1960s, very much aware of the problems facing the world today. This is their time to make a difference.

"I figured that it was the only time in my life I could do something like this," said Heather McIntyre, a College of William and Mary graduate who is volunteering for a year at a living facility for single mothers in Hartford, Conn. "It's kind of an easy step in some ways between school and going to work," McIntyre said.

# LEFEVRE continued from page 1

cility. "Students before 1990 were paying \$50 per semester," LeFevre said. "In 1990, they raised the price to \$100, but around that time they also added guards. Now, the students continue to pay \$100 dollars per semester, but they took the guards out, and I want them back in."

LeFevre wants to place an affirmative action officer in SGA to better represent women and minorities.

LeFevre is tired of what she considers SGA inaction.

"It seems nothing is really being done," she said. "Old ideas are being recycled. This university is going downhill at a rapid rate, and it needs to start going up again. We are losing professors because of budget cuts. We need to do something about

these issues, and I will."

If elected, LeFevre will give students the voice she said they don't have.

"Student government's responsibility is to reach out to students, not make them reach out to it," she said. "I think that student government has great potential, but they need to work harder and take action."

LeFevre, 20, is an international studies junior. She has been president of the Catholic Student Organization and a member of the debate team and Habitat for Humanity. She is also a Delta Gamma and has been involved with Carolina Alive and Carolina Classics. In the future, she wants to do research for the federal government on an international level.

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election," he said. "I saw so much bitterness in the last election. This campus is moving in two different directions, so with me being a third party, I think I have a better chance of advocating unity."

Niazi, 24, is a computer engineering major. He was president of the International Students Association for two years, president of the Pakistan Student Association and general secretary for the Muslim Student Association.

As a senator from the College of Engineering, Niazi served as co-chair on the Minority Affairs Committee, worked for CPU and is a member of the Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers.

In the future, Niazi would like to return to Saudi Arabia, his birthplace, and start his own business. Niazi would also like to work in some way for a relief organization.

# SGA Elections

The Elections Commission issued infractions to candidates Thursday.

| Executive Candidates | Office         | Infraction               |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| Stephen M. Brown     | President      | Illegal Poster Placement |
| Brian Comer          | President      | None                     |
| Joey Ditturi         | President      | None                     |
| September LeFevre    | President      | Illegal Poster Placement |
| Wesley Locklair      | President      | None                     |
| Yasir Niazi          | President      | None                     |
| Trav Robertson       | President      | Illegal Poster Placement |
| Amy Bigham           | Vice President | None                     |
| Tammy Butler         | Vice President | None                     |
| Mike Moore           | Vice President | None                     |
| Whui Chang           | Treasurer      | None                     |
| Zak Gilbert          | Treasurer      | None                     |
| Shawanna Wilson      | Treasurer      | None                     |
| Senate Candidate     | College        | Infraction               |
| Alex Vu              | Science & Math | Illegal Poster Placement |

Pat Holland/The Gamecock

Source: Elections Commission

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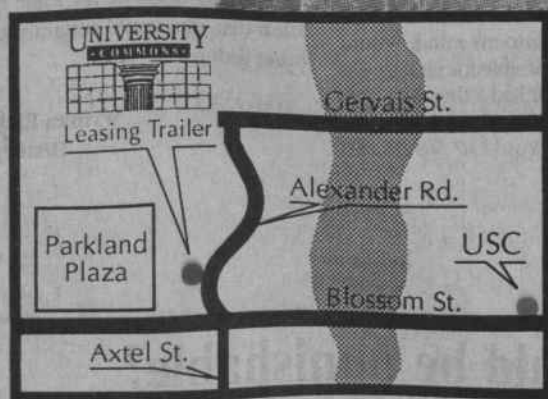
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