



## **The issue of Enhancements to Classified Grant-in-Aid Benefits to include usage by Spouses, Domestic Partners and Dependents**

### **History on Enhancement Requests**

In 2010, an NSHE Classified Task Force was put together to discuss the relative state of classified employees across NSHE and to specifically discuss whether NSHE classified employees should remain as State classified employees. This group was composed of various representatives from each NSHE campus and they ultimately recommended that NSHE classified remain as State classified as well. Additionally, within their report, they recommended the following in regards to grant-in-aid:

"However, it has also been noted by this committee that there is a benefit gap with relation to the grant-in-aid benefit, which only classified staff themselves can use at present. It is also the recommendation of this committee that, when economic times improve, classified staff within NSHE petition the board of regents to extend the grant-in-aid benefit to classified employee spouses and dependents."

More recently, these same sentiments have been increasingly echoed by the leadership of the UNLV Classified Staff Council.

### **To Date, Control of GIA Benefit for Classified at each Institution**

The Grant-in-Aid guidelines for classified staff are under the control of each institution; current policies were approved by the UNLV President and were not subject to review of the Board of Regents. Each institution has generally attempted to mirror classified grant-in-aid benefits between themselves. Differences exist with respect to the total number of credits permitted in a year (UNR allows only 12), but are universal with respect to those allowed in a given semester (fall / spring / summer). Like UNLV, each campus permits classified employees only six credits per semester. Additionally, institutions have attempted to maintain consistency between the benefit for classified employees and "A" contract faculty employees. As you know, for example, "A" contract faculty employees are governed under the BoR Handbook and limited to six credits each fall and spring. Each institution, UNLV included, has viewed the six credit per semester limit as a "safe harbor" that would ensure no negative reactions from the public or the legislature. Additionally, it treats all employees in roughly the same manner. Finally, the six credit limit was established as a threshold that would help ensure the maintenance of an appropriate balance between work and school.

### **Future Control of GIA Benefit for Classified to be via NSHE Board of Regents**

Recent discussions about Classified GIA has pointed toward the Chancellor's Office and the Board of Regents being desirous of commonality of Classified GIA Benefits and a structuring of this commonality through the addition of specific language to the NSHE Board of Regents Handbook.

### **Current Benefit to Classified Employees is Unique and Not Available to other "State" Employees**

No other State agencies provide educational benefits to their classified employees in the same manner and to the same extent that UNLV and NSHE institutes do. These agencies provide course reimbursement for classes that are job related only. At UNLV and within NSHE, an employee receives GIA for courses that are job related or degree related. With regards to the degree being pursued, the

selection of the course of study is left to the employee and may or may not be at all related to the job of the employee.

The GIA benefit afforded to Faculty and their dependents is less than that afforded to Classified employees. In essence, the GIA for Classified is paid at 100% of the per credit rate and the GIA for Faculty / Dependents is paid at a little less than 70%.

Employee Benefit	Undergraduate Rate is \$191.50 per Credit	Graduate Rate is \$264.00 per Credit
Classified Employee	\$191.50 covered by GIA (100%)	\$264.00 covered by GIA (100%)
Faculty Member and Dependents	\$129.21 covered by GIA (67.5%)	\$184.59 covered by GIA (69.9%)

The increased benefit rate for Classified employees was implemented to help “even the playing field” given that the GIA benefit was available only to the employee. Some have suggested that this “enhancement” remain even while other benefits for classified family are added. Our position is that such rate retention should not occur and suggest that the GIA benefits should be made the same for all.

**Initial Projections for Cost Estimates for UNLV Expansion to Cover “Family” Members**

Using Spouse / Domestic Partner and Dependent usage for Academic and Professional Faculty as a proxy, we earlier estimated that offering the same benefit to Classified at UNLV would add between \$300,000 to \$350,000 in expenses; that said, a corresponding reduction of the classified employee GIA from 100% to the same as Academic and Professional Faculty would lessen the expense by about \$53,000. In summary, both changes would increase expenses for UNLV by about \$250,000 to \$300,000.

**Achieving Classified Spouses/Domestic Partners and Dependents GIA Benefits by reducing current GIA Benefits for Faculty Spouses/Domestic Partners and Dependents**

Absent the addition of significant funding to the current \$1.07M budget for the employee/family GIA budget, the immediate path toward adding these enhancements for Classified family members would require a reduction of current benefits available to others.

Alternatively, and as a best option in our opinion, the changes for Classified employees and family members could be funded incrementally with the family benefits growing over time. If such incremental growth is not an option, we have suggested some financial mitigation factors below and believe that the changes in item A should be reviewed and discussed regardless.

**A. Modify GIA for Law, Medicine and pre-doctoral Dental Programs**

Title 4, Chapter 3, Section 10 of the NSHE Board of Regents Handbook provides GIA eligibility for these programs. Based upon current UNLV related enrollments in these programs, approximately \$188K in GIA expenses is currently paid for these programs. This expense of \$188K is paid for the studies of seven (7) dependents of Faculty members.

Given these higher expenses and the low number of beneficiaries served, we believe that the GIA for these programs must be changed so that it is the exact same as any other graduate level program. Implementing this change may need to be done with a transition period of 2 or more years so that any employees/dependents in the programs at that time would have some limited grandfather rights. The results of this change would produce the following changes to the benefit:

	Current GIA per credit per School	Proposed GIA per credit per School	Current Annual GIA Payment for F/T Student	Proposed GIA Payment for F/T Student
Dental	\$555.75	\$184.59	\$33,345.00	\$11,075.40
Law	\$423.81	\$184.59	\$11,866.40	\$5,168.52
Medical	\$437.62	\$184.59	\$18,380.04	\$7,752.78

With respect to Tier One Peers, the University of Oregon excludes their law program from from GIA eligibility. The University of Central Florida excludes their College of Medicine from GIA eligibility.

Again, given the cost, our position is that this suggested change should be reviewed and discussed either in conjunction with or separately from the Classified issues.

B. Limit number of credits eligible per “family” under GIA program.

Instead of allowing limited credits to employees and unlimited credits for spouses and dependents, the total number of credits available to a “family” could be capped.

With respect to Tier One Peers, the University of Colorado at Boulder allows for the transfer of the full allotment of nine (9) credits per year. This allotment cannot be shared, once it is transferred in a given year only that individual can use the allotment. The University of Oregon allows for the sharing of 12 credits per semester only.

C. Limit where credits can be used under GIA program.

Instead of allowing GIA benefit to be used at any NSHE institution, limit usage at home institution or regional institutions. Under such an arrangement, UNLV “family” members would be eligible to attend UNLV, NSC and CSN only, for example.

With respect to Tier One Peers, the University of Central Florida allows for the usage of credits at UCF only.

D. Establish waiting period for usage of GIA benefit.

Establishment of a waiting period could reduce expenses, especially with respect to dependents. That said, it would undoubtedly be a negative with respect to the recruitment of faculty and staff.

With respect to Tier One Peers, the University of Utah has established the following waiting periods: Employee period is six (6) months; Spouse period is one (1) year; for Dependents the waiting period is three (3) years after the Employee hire date.

E. Exempt certain courses from GIA usage.

Reexamining the courses that are available under the GIA program could also trim current expenses.

With respect to Tier One Peers, the following are exempted at one institution or another: Study Abroad, Continuing Education, Extended Studies, Executive MBA, Distance MBA nor the 11-month MBA program, College of Medicine, courses offered through other universities or community colleges in System, self-supported courses, law program, and differential tuition are excluded and no benefit offered.

### **Some Time and Planning Required to Implement Changes**

Changes such as those discussed in this document will undoubtedly take some time to implement. That said, should the Board of Regents approve to implement these types of policy changes at their March 2015 meeting, we would estimate that the benefit should be available for employees as early as Summer Term 2015.