November is open enrollment period for health, tax plans

With the end of the 2012 calendar year approaching, November is the open enrollment period for Auburn University faculty and staff to add or make changes to their health insurance, various optional insurance plans and tax-saving flex-spending plans for out-of-pocket health care costs.

University employees have until Nov. 30 to update, renew or submit changes to these plans, with the changes taking effect on Jan. 1 for the 2013 calendar year.

Chief among the benefits for most employees is Auburn’s group health insurance program, which is administered by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama but is financed entirely by the university and employee-participants. Fulltime non-student employees and dependents who are not currently enrolled may apply to join the plan during the November open-enrollment period for 2013.

During this period, employees may also sign up for or change dental, vision or cancer insurance, as well as life, disability or long-term care insurance.

Health insurance rates, which are based on actuarial projections of total payments in 2013, will increase by 3 percent, effective Jan. 1. Rates will vary on the basis of each employee’s pay level and pay schedule, as well as the categories of self, employee and spouse, employee and children, and family.

The categories for spouse and children are also being added in 2013 for dental insurance, providing rates between those for individual and family coverage.

Employees can save $25 per month on their health insurance premiums by participating in the annual Healthy Tigers health screenings for employees and their spouses. Some appointments are still available at the Auburn University Pharmaceutical Care Clinic through Nov. 30 and can be made online at www.auburn.edu/administration/business_office/payroll/healthytigers/.

For those who can’t get screened by the Pharmaceutical Care Clinic this month, a personal physician can complete the Health Care Provider form, which can be found on the Healthy Tigers website. The form must be submitted to the Healthy Tigers office in the Walker Building by noon Dec. 19 in order for both the employee and spouse, if applicable, to be eligible for the discount in 2013.

On the tax front, optional flexible spending accounts enable employees to set aside a portion of pre-tax income up to $2,500 per year to cover projected co-pays and other medical expenses not covered by insurance during the coming year. By reducing the gross amount of payroll subject to federal and state income taxes, these accounts enable participants to reduce their taxes and receive more net income in their paychecks.

City pledges up to $50,000 matching funds for forest ecology preserve

The City of Auburn has pledged a five-to-one match for individual and corporate contributions of up to $50,000 for the Louise Kreher Forest Ecology Preserve, a community outreach program for Auburn University’s School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.

According to the agreement, the city is providing the grant in the form of matching funds in order to encourage community engagement and support for this resource for outdoor recreation and education.

“We realize the enjoyment and educational value that our citizens receive from our parks such as Kiesel Park and Town Creek,” said Becky Richardson, director of Auburn Parks and Recreation. “The Forest Ecology Preserve provides these same qualities to our community. The partnership between the City of Auburn and the Forest Ecology Preserve will be a win for both parties and our citizens.”

Spanning more than 120 acres, the preserve features more than five miles of trails through various habitats, educational displays and signage, a nature playground, an amphitheater and pavilion space for programs. The preserve plans to use contributions and the city’s community grant to help keep up with the maintenance and improvements needed to support its 20,000 annual visitors.

“We are so happy to have this support from the City of Auburn leadership and the Parks and Recreation department,” said Jennifer Lolley, outreach administrator at the preserve. “It is wonderful that they recognize how unique and beneficial we are to local schools and our community.”
Tops in teaching
Andrew Freear, Wiatt Professor and director of Auburn University’s Rural Studio in the College of Architecture, Design and Construction, and Larry Wit, associate dean and professor in the College of Sciences and Mathematics, are this year’s recipients of the Gerald and Emily Leischuck Endowed Presidential Awards for Excellence in Teaching. The awards recognize Auburn’s top teachers for 2012. Freear, above at left, and Wit, above at right, are shown receiving congratulations from Provost Timothy Boosinger at the Faculty Awards Ceremony on Oct. 30.

Undergraduate Teaching Excellence
The Auburn Alumni Association presented the 2012 Alumni Undergraduate Teaching Excellence Awards to three faculty members at the recent Faculty Awards Ceremony. The recipients are, above from left, Shelly R. McKee of Poultry Science in the College of Agriculture, Bob Boyd of Biological Sciences in the College of Sciences and Mathematics and Karla Simmons of Consumer and Design Sciences in the College of Human Sciences.

Open enrollment period
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Because of a use-it-or-lose-it federal requirement, the University Business Office advises employees to plan conservatively to avoid placing more money into flex-spending accounts than they expect to spend during the coming year. An additional requirement of flex-spending accounts is that each participant must renew his or her account each November to participate in the next calendar year.

Other financial benefits that faculty, staff and other eligible employees may add, drop or change in November include dental, vision and cancer insurance options. These plans will continue automatically for currently enrolled members, unless the member chooses to make changes.

Details are in information packets recently mailed to all employees by Payroll and Benefits and online at www.auburn.edu/administration/business_office/payroll/. In addition, more information on all the plans and other aspects of the open-enrollment period are available online at www.auburn.edu/payroll.
Student athlete in Honors College named finalist for Rhodes Scholar posting at Oxford University

Auburn University Honors College student Ashton Richardson, who is also a senior on Auburn’s football team, has been named a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship.

The Rhodes Scholarships, founded in 1904, are the oldest international fellowships. Winners of the scholarship have the opportunity to do graduate work at the University of Oxford located in Oxford, England.

The next step for Richardson is a two-day interview process. He will appear before the District VII Selection Committee Nov. 16-17 in Birmingham, joining 12 other finalists from the district. Two finalists from District VII will be selected as 2013 Rhodes Scholars.

“Ashton is an ideal representation of whom my office seeks to endorse for the Rhodes Scholarship. He is someone who combines a sound intellect and puts it to good use by making good grades and engaging in the undergraduate research experience; someone who channels his energy for the betterment of our world, for others who are less advantaged and for those who struggle every day; and he is someone who lights up the room when he is around,” said Paul Harris, Auburn associate director for national prestigious scholarships.

Richardson’s major professor, Dale Coleman, said, “To Auburn, Ashton is a true ‘scholar-athlete.’ But to the world, Ashton is so much more – a true gentleman and a true humanitarian.”

Richardson is an Honors College student majoring in animal sciences with a concentration in pre-veterinary medicine in Auburn’s College of Agriculture, earning a cumulative grade point average of 3.94. He is a three-time SEC Academic Honor Roll honoree and earlier this year was a semifinalist for the National Football Foundation Campbell Trophy, which is presented annually to the top football scholar-athlete in the country. Richardson, who grew up helping his father raise quarter-horses, has aspirations to become an equine surgeon.

The four-year letter winner at linebacker has played in 32 career games, registering 13 tackles. He walked on to the football team as a freshman and earned a scholarship prior to his junior season.

A New Orleans native, Richardson is writing his honors thesis, tentatively titled “Comparison of Articular Cartilage Thickness in Cadaveric Equine Limbs,” under the direction of Reid Hanson, a professor of equine surgery in the College of Veterinary Medicine. He is scheduled to graduate from Auburn in December. Off the field, Richardson has volunteered each week for the past four years as a mentor at the Lee County Youth Development Center.

“When I was first notified that I was a finalist, I was so thankful to God and to all the people who have helped me,” Richardson said. “I was overwhelmed with a sense of humility. When you realize how prestigious and competitive the Rhodes Scholarship is, having the chance to try for it is a dream come true. I will give it my all to make Auburn proud and represent all the people on campus who have worked with me and believe in me.”

He added, “I am an aspiring veterinarian, but studying at Oxford would be a tremendous opportunity to pursue my dream of using my education to give back. These scholarships are set up to prepare individuals to ‘fight the world’s fight.’”

If awarded the Rhodes, Richardson plans to pursue degrees in biodiversity and environmental fields.

“The Auburn Family has been tremendous in helping me pursue my dreams,” Richardson added. “From the day I walked on to campus, there have been numerous people who have embraced me and have gone above and beyond to help me handle the challenges of being a student. My experience in athletics has taught me hard work and perseverance, and applying yourself every day. If I can go to the interviews and adequately represent what I have learned and experienced at Auburn, it will be an incredible experience.”

Richardson is the fifth Auburn student-athlete to be named a Rhodes finalist in the past four years. Other past finalists include former diver Dan Mazzaferro, swimming and diving student-athletes Erica Meissner and Jordan Anderson and former gymnast Krissy Voss. Anderson won the Rhodes Scholarship in 2009.

“Ashton is a remarkable young man, and we are incredibly proud of him for this outstanding accomplishment,” Director of Athletics Jay Jacobs said. “He is an exceptionally bright scholar with outstanding research credentials, but I think the Rhodes committee will be equally impressed by his humility and the community service he has done on his own since he came to Auburn.”

– Kirk Sampson

Provost Award

Martha Escobar, above, an assistant professor of psychology in the College of Liberal Arts, received the Provost Award for Excellence in Fostering Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship from Provost Timothy Boosinger at the Oct. 30 Faculty Awards Ceremony. The award recognizes faculty success in mentoring and nurturing undergraduate student development.

Outreach Award

Cheryl Morgan of the College of Architecture, Design and Construction received this year’s Award for Excellence in Faculty Outreach on Oct. 30 at the Faculty Awards Ceremony. Shown above, Royrickers Cook, assistant vice president for university outreach, presented the award, which recognized Morgan for her leadership of the Urban Studio’s Small Town Design Initiative Program.
History major named finalist for prestigious scholarship

Auburn University senior Marian Royston has been named a finalist for one of the nation’s most selective fellowships, the Mitchell Scholarship, to study in Ireland or Northern Ireland next year.

Royston, of Roanoke, is an Honors College student majoring in history and double-minoring in political science and community and civic engagement in the College of Liberal Arts. She is Auburn University’s first finalist in the Mitchell Scholars Program, which began in 2000.

The program, named to honor former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell’s contribution to the Northern Ireland peace process, is sponsored by the U.S.-Ireland Alliance to introduce future American leaders to the island of Ireland. Only 12 students in the U.S. are selected annually for the fellowship that is based on scholarship, leadership and a commitment to community and public service.

Royston will travel to Washington, D.C., Nov. 16-17 to interview with program officials for possible selection as a recipient.

“Marian is a conscientious, kind and caring individual,” said Paul Harris, Auburn University associate director for national prestigious scholarships. “I do not have the words to adequately express my supreme confidence in Marian as someone who will change the world for the better. She is going places and is going to leave a mark.”

In addition to her studies at Auburn, Royston has participated in the Appalachian Community Development Alternative Spring Break; she is an after-school tutor at Notasulga middle school and high school; she has been an on-campus resident assistant at Auburn for the past three years; and last summer she was a Living Democracy Fellow in Hobson City, Alabama’s first African-American municipality.