Auburn’s health insurance rates following national trend upward

Most Auburn faculty and staff will pay an additional $2.25 to $22.50 for health insurance per pay period after Jan. 1. The amount of the increase depends on such factors as salary level, how often they are paid and whether they have individual or family coverage.

A response to rising health care costs nationally, the increase affects Auburn employees covered by the university’s health insurance plans, which are administered by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama.

Meanwhile, the co-pay for non-preferred brand drugs, the most expensive of the three co-pay categories listed by Blue Cross Blue Shield, will increase to $50 from $40 on Jan. 1. The co-pay for generics remains $10, and the co-pay for prescription drugs on the BC/BS preferred list remains $25.

The university’s Insurance and Benefits Committee recommended the increases, which the administration approved, to ensure that funds are available to cover the projected cost of all claims in 2009.

The increase in premiums is approximately 7 percent. University officials say the increases in premiums and co-pay are due to continuing increases in the cost of health care, which has risen approximately 12 percent this year.

Although Blue Cross Blue Shield administers Auburn’s Traditional and Personal Choice insurance plans, the university is self-insured, so that premiums go into a fund to pay claims instead of profits to an insurance company.

The flip side is that the university and its employees have to make sure that the fund has sufficient resources to cover the cost of all claims.

‘Not gathering dust’

Gogue: New strategic plan to show results quickly in coming year

Anyone in the university community who expects Auburn’s new strategic plan to gather dust on a shelf could be in for a surprise, President Jay Gogue told the Board of Trustees on Nov. 7.

In the first year of implementing the 10-year strategic plan, Gogue said the university is concentrating on 35 of the 58 items in six broad areas of operations. He said the campus community has shown a great deal of initiative in developing and implementing a workable plan, adding that periodic review, with annual adjustments to meet changing conditions, will help ensure continued participation and support among all constituencies.

Some of the initiatives for enhancing Auburn’s academic quality and reputation are under way and will begin producing results in 2009, with further improvement expected over several years, he said.

These include fully implementing the writing requirement on ACT/SAT college entrance exams for entering freshmen. Gogue said an alternative writing review will be available for the few prospective students who did not get word about the ACT/SAT requirement this year.

A writing center will be operational by next fall to help colleges and schools implement new standards for improving the quality of student writing across the curriculum. A major part of that program, he said, will be aimed at helping students improve their writing ability within their disciplines.

Meanwhile, faculty and academic administrators are developing a new model for the Honor’s College this year. The goal, Gogue said, is to significantly expand the Honor’s College, which now has approximately 1,400 of Auburn’s 24,500 students.

In the review of general education requirements, including the core curriculum, he said the university is attempting to define sets of basic academic skills that today’s generation will need for success in a highly complex global environment. Since Auburn is part of the larger environment for higher education in the state, Gogue said the university will work with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education to ensure that changes are compatible with ACHE guidelines.

The goal of giving students more exposure to international education also presents more of a challenge than would at first seem apparent, he said. While the university and its colleges and schools are expanding programs and incentives to get more students involved in Study Abroad programs or foreign language courses, or both, many students will not be able to participate due to financial or other reasons. Faculty and academic administrators are trying to find a way to help these students, he said.

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Spirit of Excellence
Each month Auburn presents Spirit of Excellence awards to four staff members in recognition of outstanding performance. Pictured above are the recipients for September and October. Spirit of Excellence winners for September, top left, from left, were Jerome Perry of Housing and Residence Life, Sherry Boothe of the College of Education, Joan Aston of the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering and William McDonald of the College of Sciences and Mathematics. Recipients for October, above at right, from left, were Andrew Gunn of Alumni Affairs, Willie Mae Buford of Housing and Residence Life, Susan Hinds of University Libraries and, not pictured, Renee Mackey of Housing and Residence Life.

Strategic plan
(continued from page 1)

Each school and college at Auburn now has at least one Study Abroad program, and the number of students traveling abroad through these programs increased from 469 two years ago to 565 last year. Yet that number represented just over 2 percent of the students at Auburn. The goal, he said, is to move closer to the 20 percent participation rate of Michigan State University.

In another area, Gogue said the university should make rapid progress in 2009 with the goal of establishing learning communities that group students with similar academic interests to build support groups for long-term academic development of those individuals. He noted that the Village residential community is being built to facilitate that model, and more opportunities are being developed to encourage student involvement in service learning, another widely cited element of individual academic growth.

Among steps to ensure a high level of teaching quality, Gogue cited efforts by the provost to encourage faculty, especially new faculty, to participate in programs and activities of the Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

On a broader level, Gogue said the university has to improve its six-year graduation rate, which is now approximately 62 percent. Although many others eventually complete their degrees, Gogue said they lose some of the benefits of their education through the delay and Auburn’s academic standing is related directly to the six-year graduation rate.

Schools and colleges are expanding their course offerings to make it easier for students to get the courses they need to graduate on time. Gogue said the university and its schools and colleges must also help students recognize the importance of taking a full load each semester, without having to repeat classes, so they can graduate on time, he said.

Gogue also described activities and plans for other strategic areas in teaching, research and outreach, as well as development, revenue and support areas.

— Roy Summerford

Museum displays abstract work ‘Dark Harmony’ by prominent 20th century sculptor

“Dark Harmony,” a large-scale fabricated steel sculpture by award-winning artist Dorothy Dehner, is on exhibition in the Grand Gallery of Auburn’s Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art.

“Although the sculpture is abstract in composition, its jagged shapes and totemic structure reflect natural forms, such as a dancer’s gestures or the silhouette of a tree,” said Museum Director Marilyn Laufer. “‘Dark Harmony’ displays a lyrical quality not found in the work of many of Dehner’s first-generation abstract expressionist colleagues.”

Born in Ohio in 1901, Dehner started her career in visual arts after a trip to Europe in 1925. She was inspired by the experience of viewing important Cubist and Constructivist works of art while there and enrolled at the Art Students League after returning to New York. Dehner’s early art consisted mainly of Cubist- and Surrealist-inspired paintings and drawings but in the mid-1950s, at the age of 54, she turned her attention to sculpture. After working in cast bronze for several decades, Dehner began producing sculpture in fabricated steel in the 1980s that was often executed in very large scale.

The subject of more than 50 solo exhibitions in the United States, Dehner is represented in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Phillips Collection and others. She continued to make sculpture until her death in 1994. The exhibition of “Dark Harmony” was made possible by an extended loan from the Dorothy Dehner Foundation for the Visual Arts and through the Kraushaar Galleries in New York.
Soule named to lead Women’s Resource Center at Auburn

Jennifer Soule recently joined Auburn’s Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs as director of the Women’s Resource Center. The center serves as a centralized hub of information and resources for women’s initiatives, programs and issues.

“We are fortunate to have Dr. Soule join us,” said Donna Sollie, assistant provost for women’s initiatives. “We look forward to her contributions to our established programs, including the annual Women’s Leadership Conference, and to the new programs that she will develop for all women in the Auburn community.”

Sollie said Soule brings extensive experience in higher education, clinical social work and community service to her new position. From 1980-99, she was a professor and department chair in the Department of Social Work at Shepherd College in West Virginia, now Shepherd University, where she helped develop an interdisciplinary women’s studies program and led the student community service learning program.

Earlier in her career, Soule was an instructor and fieldwork supervisor in the School of Social Work and Community Planning at the University of Maryland in Baltimore and was an instructor and fieldwork supervisor in the department of social work at Murray State University in Kentucky. In addition, she has been active for more than 20 years in the field of social work, community service and leadership.

Soule received a bachelor’s degree with majors in English and sociology from the University of South Dakota in 1969. She holds a master of social work degree from West Virginia University, a doctorate from the University of Maryland School of Social Work and a master’s degree in creative writing from the University of Nebraska.

In December, the Women’s Resource Center will hold a grand opening at its new location in Mary Martin Hall.

Health insurance

(continued from page 1)

enough cash in reserve through premiums and investments to pay all claims.

The university pays from 60 percent to 80 percent of each participating employee’s total cost for health insurance, depending on the employee’s salary level. For their share of the cost, faculty and staff members will pay from $65 to $270 more next year for BC/BS Traditional, which is held by a majority of employees, or from $58.50 to $252 more for BC/BS Personal Choice. The university, meanwhile, will provide approximately $1.7 million for its portion of the cost increase.

Employees making less than $25,900 will see the smallest increase in premiums and will pay the least overall. Under BC/BS Traditional, workers who are at that level and are paid every two weeks (26 times per year) will pay $39.25 per pay period for single coverage ($2.50 more) or $78.75 ($5.25 more) for family coverage.

At the high end of the scale, faculty and staff making $38,900 or more will pay $164 ($10.75 more) for individual coverage or $344.75 ($22.50 more) per pay period if they are paid monthly, and those paid twice monthly on nine-month appointments (18 pay periods per year) will pay $110.25 ($7.25 more) for single coverage or $230.25 ($15 more) per pay period.

In between are employees making $25,900 to $38,799. Depending on choice of coverage and how often they are paid, these employees will see their rates increase from $3.75 to $16.50 per pay period.

Faculty and staff with BC/BS Traditional can offset the increase, actually paying below their current rate in many cases, by switching to the BC/BS Personal Choice plan during November, the annual open enrollment period. Under that plan, an employee agrees to get a referral from his or her family physician before going to a specialist for treatment. Those who switch from Traditional to Personal Choice will save from $91 to $283.50 during the coming year.

The new rate schedule is included in a recent mailing to all Auburn employees by the Office of Payroll and Employee Benefits. Rates for calendar year 2008 are posted online at www.auburn.edu/administration/business_office/payroll/health.html.

Health insurance is one of several benefits to which employees can make adjustments — adding, subtracting or changing them — during November. Other insurance options include dental, vision, cancer and supplemental disability. November is also the month when employees may add, drop or change flexible spending accounts to gain tax advantages. Check the Payroll and Benefits Web site or contact the office in Ingram Hall for information.

— Roy Summerford
College of Education appoints administrators, 12 new faculty

The College of Education has announced the creation of two new offices, the appointment of an interim department head and the introduction of 12 new faculty members. The new faculty appointments include those filling formerly vacant positions as well as new positions.

Administrative appointees include Rodney Greer as director of the new Office of Research and Innovation, which the college created with the help of a $1 million gift by 1968 graduates Wayne T. and Cheryl Smith. The office supports faculty efforts to boost research opportunities by helping to identify, cultivate and pursue state, regional, national and international funding opportunities, as well as assisting in grant preparation and completion of funded projects.

Greer previously served for four years as assistant to the dean in Western Illinois University’s College of Education and Human Services, where he was responsible for teacher education partnerships, professional development and technology.

Melanie Brooks is coordinator of the new Office of International Programs, where she directs the Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching. Her work includes expanding opportunities for study abroad programs and promoting research and service learning opportunities for undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff. She serves in a joint appointment as a reference and instruction librarian at Draughon Library.

Wayne T. Smith Distinguished Professor E. Davis Martin is serving as interim head of the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, Counseling and School Psychology. The department is the result of the merger of the Department of Rehabilitation and Special Education and the Department of Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology and School Psychology in August. Martin, who joined the College of Education faculty in 2003, is graduate program director of the college’s rehabilitation counseling program.

— Lawrence Johnson
Dedicating Auburn’s new Student Center

With an assist from Dean Emeritus James E. Foy and university officials, Auburn students dedicated the new Student Center on Nov. 5. Festivities included a parade from the old student union to the new building, a dedication ceremony for the new building, ribbon cutting by Foy, the former longtime dean of students, and dedication of the Foy Information desk. Street-level photos are by Jeff Etheridge and the overhead photo is by Melissa Humble, both of Photographic Services.
Campus Scenes
In the shade

Study cites homeowner savings

An Auburn study sheds new light on just how valuable shade trees are in reducing homeowners’ electricity bills during hot summer months.

Professor David Laband in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences says electricity usage and costs will be 11.4 percent less if a house has just 17.5 percent heavy shade coverage. This is compared to a house with no shade.

“The keys are heavy foliage and late afternoon shade,” Laband said. “The savings can be very significant for homeowners. Over the years I had read statements that shade trees reduce electricity consumption, so we wanted to put a dollar amount to it.”

His office conducted a yearlong study of 160 houses in the Auburn area to determine the annual energy savings provided by shade trees, primarily looking at the months of May to September. He analyzed power bills, calculated shade coverage and surveyed the homeowners about household makeup, electricity-usage habits, square footage, type of air conditioning, appliances, roofing, exterior material and other factors.

“We looked at the amount of shade in the early morning, early afternoon and late afternoon,” Laband said. “If you have trees on the west side of your house, you will have a much lower power bill.”

Using local power company rates for kilowatt hours per day, Laband said the 11.4 percent savings would equal $31 to $33 per month. The study, which categorized types of shade into light, moderate and heavy, also found that a house covered with 50 percent of light shade will save 10.3 percent.

Thermostat settings were important as well. “For each degree you raise your thermostat, you will save 3.3 percent on your power bill,” he said. “We also found that children under age 12 are the major power consumers in the home. They watch television, play games and leave lights on.”

Laband said he hopes the study will discourage real estate developers from cutting down all the trees on new lots.

“Many older houses have large trees around them because the owners did not rely as much on air conditioning then,” he said. “Houses today often do not have shade trees because it’s easier to run an air conditioner. This study shows how much can be saved when trees are used in yards.”

The study was funded by a $116,000 grant from the Forest Service’s Urban and Community Forestry Program in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and a matching $116,000 grant from Auburn’s School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.

Laband has briefed USDA officials on the results and has presented seminars in Australia at the Tropical Forest Research Institute, the University of Melbourne and the University of Adelaide.

“It gets very hot there, too,” he said. “They are interested in doing a similar project.”

Laband, who earned his Ph.D. in economics from Virginia Tech in 1981, conducts research and teaches on topics related to economics and policy, with a focus on natural resources. A faculty member of the Center for Forest Sustainability and the Forest Policy Center, he joined the Auburn faculty in 1994 and the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences in 2000.

Auburn's School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences

Cubist walk

Students recently walked a print of one of the most famous paintings of the 20th century past Auburn’s Late Victorian Era Samford Hall as part of the School of Fine Arts’ annual Art Walk. The 12-foot-square print is a copy of Pablo Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (The Young Ladies of Avignon), which is one of the artist’s best known works and is frequently cited by art critics as a seminal work in the early development of the style known as Cubism. This reproduction was used in The University Theatre’s production of “Picasso at The Lapin Agile” in September.

Achievements

Jack Feminella, a professor in the College of Sciences and Mathematics’ Department of Biological Sciences, has been named department chair for a four-year term. He succeeds Jim Barbaree, who served in that position for more than five years.

Journalism Professor Ed Williams recently received the 2008 Distinguished Adviser Award of the College Media Advisers, a national association for collegiate media advisers.

Williams, who continues to teach in the Department of Communication and Journalism, stepped down last spring as faculty adviser to the Auburn Plainsman. During his 23 years advising the student newspaper’s editors and staff, Williams won several teaching awards and the Plainsman won 13 Pacemaker Awards, which recognizes quality in student journalism.

Six graduate students who have distinguished themselves as principals, classroom teachers, journal editors, researchers, organizational leaders and volunteers have been named Holmes Scholars in Auburn’s College of Education. Tonja Jacobs Exford, Sydney Freeman, Cheron Hunter, Sheila Moore, Thomandra Sam and Jennifer Wells were recognized at a Holmes Scholar induction ceremony on Nov. 6.

The Holmes Scholars Program provides graduate students from underrepresented ethnic groups and students with disabilities who aspire to higher education careers with enriched academic experiences, career training and concentrated professional mentoring. Scholars are selected for a three-year term that provides resources for networking with peers through the Holmes Partnership network and others within academia. Recipients are chosen through a competitive process and must have a minimum grade-point average of 3.3 on a 4.0 scale.
Going green

Auburn institute teams with business to develop biofuels, biomass

The Natural Resources Management & Development Institute at Auburn has entered into a collaborative agreement with the Colorado-based biomass conversion technology company PureVision Technology Inc. for research and development of biofuels and biomass products.

As part of the agreement, PureVision is providing a continuous biomass fractionation process development unit to Auburn for use in research and technology commercialization initiatives.

The unit rapidly converts cellulosic biomass into sugars and lignin for making many biobased products, including biofuels and industrial chemicals. For use by Auburn’s Center for Bioenergy and Bioproducts, the unit will be located in newly renovated space in the Forest Products Laboratory and will be available for interdisciplinary collaborative programs to advance biomass research programs.

“Our biorefining research and development programs are focused on deploying these advanced biomass fractionation technologies in conjunction with biochemical and thermochemical conversion processes to take advantage of Alabama’s abundance of natural resources, particularly woody biomass, and convert them into energy or liquid fuels,” said Steve Taylor, Center for Bioenergy and Bioproducts director.

Taylor said the PureVision unit provides Auburn researchers with unique capabilities for fundamental and applied research on biomass feedstocks that are readily available in Alabama and throughout the Southeast for conversion to bioenergy and a variety of bioproducts. Funding for these efforts is being provided by the university, the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Energy.

The PureVision unit also will be used by the Alabama Center for Paper and Bioresource Engineering.

“We are pleased to have the PureVision technology available for pursuing biomass fractionation and utilization programs,” said Harry Cullinan, center director.

Along with Auburn’s Center for Bioenergy and Bioproducts, the Alabama Center for Paper and Bioresource Engineering has expanded beyond traditional pulping and papermaking processes to include advanced biorefining technologies for producing fuels and chemicals from woody biomass and other cellulosic feedstocks.

PureVision has been developing and scaling up its biomass conversion technology, known as biomass fractionation, since 1999.

“This new collaboration with Auburn University will advance research and development initiatives and expedite the commercialization of those technologies needed to convert abundant cellulosics into biobased fuels and chemicals,” said Ed Lehrburger, president and CEO of PureVision.

— By Leslie Parsons and Charles Martin

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