

Recommendation to the Board of Regents Regarding Domestic Partnership Benefits

Dear Members of the Board of Regents:

We, the members of the Faculty Senate of Georgia Southern University, request that the Board of Regents amend policy statement 802.01 in its *Policy Manual* to include prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Our request is based upon this institution's longstanding prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation as codified in section 104.01 of our own *Faculty Handbook*, "Reaffirmation of the University's Equal Opportunity Policy." Its first paragraph reads, in part, as follows:

It continues to be the policy of Georgia Southern University to implement affirmative equal opportunity for all employees, students, applicants for employment or admission, and participants in any of the University's programs without regard to race, color, sex, *sexual orientation*, national origin, religion, age, veteran status, political affiliation, or disability. [emphasis added]

We further request that the Board extend to domestic partnership couples full University System of Georgia benefits, including health care benefits. Domestic partnership should be available to both same sex and opposite sex couples who either cannot or choose not to marry. The following language, adapted from American Civil Liberties Union guidelines, provides a useful definition of domestic partners and the means by which their relationship is established:

1. the two must live together;
2. the two must agree to be jointly responsible for each other's basic living expenses during the domestic partnership;
3. neither person may be married or a member of another domestic partnership;
4. the two must not be related in a way which would prevent them from being married to each other;
5. both must be over 18;
6. the two must sign a notarized and witnessed Declaration of Domestic Partnership.

We believe that the University System of Georgia enjoys a unique position of leadership in our state and should, under the guidance of the Board of Regents, implement policies that promote fairness and that enhance the University System's ability both to recruit and to retain the most highly qualified individuals. Studies show that the availability of domestic partnership benefits does help universities attract the best candidates—without increasing the cost of benefits to those already enrolled in their benefits programs.

The Faculty Senate of Georgia Southern University applauds the initiative taken last fall by the University Council of the University of Georgia, when it authorized President Michael Adams to petition the Board of Regents to prohibit discrimination against individuals in domestic partnerships and to provide them with full University System Benefits. We note with approval that both Georgia State University and Georgia Tech are already offering limited benefits (those not requiring BOR approval) to domestic partners of faculty and staff.

At our meeting of February 12, 2003, the Faculty Senate of Georgia Southern University approved a resolution providing that “the appropriate individuals and organizations on the Georgia Southern University campus . . . make available to domestic partners of faculty and staff the same privileges currently accorded to the families of faculty and staff.”

We hope that the Board of Regents will recognize in these actions a groundswell of support for full domestic partner benefits, issuing from among the leading schools in our System. We ask that the Board, recognizing its opportunity to take a stand for fairness and progress, will quickly act to provide these benefits.

Sincerely,

The Faculty Senate of Georgia Southern University