

KSU classified workers to vote on change from state employment

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Kansas State's classified employees are considering moving from state employment to university employment due to a lack of recent pay increases and hiring flexibility.

Classified employees' pay raises are reliant upon state legislators' approval under current civil service designation.

If employees vote this fall to shift to university support staff, that would put K-State rather than the state in charge of determining pay increases. Either way, by statute classified employees retain their health and retirement benefits.

The move would affect the nearly 1,800 employees who receive hourly wages and don't have contracts. Among them are custodial staff, maintenance workers, and some administrative and supervisory jobs.

An entity called the Alternative Service Committee is leading the potential move. This is the second time K-State has a committee considering a change. The first met during the 2007-08 academic year on the same topic.

"The reason why we put a hold on it is because the legislature put together an oversight committee for the pay plan," said committee chair Carol Marden, a public service administrator.

The pay plan changes for state classified employees included a five-year funding plan to increase wages, beginning with their paychecks on July 11, 2008.

But Marden said more pay hasn't occurred as expected, which is why the issue is being taken up again. She said some employees, she among them, haven't received a raise since 2008.

Marden said the change would also allow for more flexibility in hiring practices. She gave an example of looking for an accountant with federal grant experience.

Despite the specific nature of that requirement, K-State was only able to advertise the position using the state's specifications. "I think it's very bizarre because I can't actually get what I need," Marden said.

Marden said being under university control would give classified staff bosses more of a connection with employees.

“Not that I’m badmouthing the state, but they have a different agenda than we do,” she said. “It makes sense that our bosses should be on a local level.”

Classified employees at the University of Kansas haven’t been under state control since 2005; KU is the first and currently only institution to have this structure. “KU – from all the people we talked to – are happy they did,” Marden said.

Marden said the 22member committee has communicated with KU officials several times to get an understanding of the impact the change would have.

“Nearly all of those members went to KU and spent a day there with employees from various departments including the head of human resources,” he said.

The committee has also been in contact with classified staff at Fort Hays, Emporia State and Wichita State, all of which are also understood to be considering changing from state employment to university employment.

Marden said there will be 12 meetings through the middle of May to gather feedback from employees.

The November vote will follow a series of town hall meetings with K-State President Kirk Schulz.

Marden said the administration has provided financial support, space and access to attorneys as the committee researches the options.

“They remain neutral on whether to move from civil service or not because they know it’s our decision,” she said. “But we know we have their support.”