

APA November/December 2013 Newsletter

MSU's Employee Assistance Program

In life's harder moments, help is available. All of us have moments in our lives when things can seem too big and overwhelming. We may be confronted with a problem we have never had to face before and not know what to do about it. We may experience a trauma or loss that overwhelms our current coping skills and leaves us with intense feelings of stress.

If we have moments like this and try to ignore them, stress tends to build up. Emotionally turbulent times take a toll on our physical bodies as well. Sometimes we deal with emotional and physical upset by behaving in ways we believe will reduce our stress (isolating ourselves, drinking more alcohol, eating, smoking, gambling, etc.), but these behaviors can further complicate the situation.

For employees of MSU and their family members, another option exists. There is no need to go through moments like this alone and without support. The MSU Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to you as part of your employment benefits. The EAP offers free, confidential, short-term counseling for MSU employees and their immediate family members. Sometimes people use their sessions to work through a specific issue in their work or personal life. Others use their sessions to get a sense of what is happening in their emotional world.

Occasionally, people are concerned about depression, anxiety attacks, or may wonder if they have a drinking problem. The EAP staff will work with you on these issues during your sessions, and may also refer you to a counselor or other resources in the community so you can continue to obtain any needed help or support.

Don't wait for a crisis. People sometimes experience low moods or high levels of stress, and in those moments, it is hard to find your own way, make healthy decisions or determine the next best step.

If you find yourself in this position, please feel free to utilize your contracted EAP benefit. If you notice a coworker having a tough time in their life, encourage them to take advantage of the MSU EAP. Effort is made to hold sessions at times that are convenient for employees and/or family members.

To locate and contact EAP, please visit their website at <http://eap.msu.edu>

All About Evaluations

The performance evaluation process should be valuable time used to get constructive feedback from your supervisor that reflects a review of the last year but also lays out a plan for the following year. It may also be an opportunity for you to set goals. This may include the criteria for the merit portion of the bargained raise for October 1, 2014.

Contractually, the performance evaluation review should be done annually, according to Article 12 Clause 101 of the MSU APA Master Agreement.

http://www.msuapa.org/?page_id=24

If an employee is having performance issues, more frequent evaluations are allowed. The Performance Evaluation Form is standard a form and can be found on the Human Resources website:

http://www.hr.msu.edu/performance/supportstaff/staffperformance_docs/PDP.pdf.

The formal evaluation form is one of the few documents that may be placed in an employee's official personnel folder. In addition, an employee may add additional comments regarding the evaluation to be placed in the personnel file. You have a right to know what is placed in your personnel file which is governed by the Bullard Plawecki

Employee Right to Know Act

<http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/uwidepolproc/righttoknow.htm>

If you are not evaluated, there is a presumption of satisfactory work.

If you receive an unsatisfactory evaluation and/or placed on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

http://www.hr.msu.edu/performance/supportstaff/staffperformance_docs/PIP.pdf, you should notify APA President, Maury Koffman at koffman@msu.edu or MEA staff, Melissa Sortman, mSORTMAN@MEA.ORG for advice and support. If you contact your union representative, it will be kept confidential.

You will be reevaluated in ninety days and your union representative can assist you in many ways through the process. The APA representative can, at the member request, call a conference with the evaluator prior to the ninety day evaluation. This meeting can be useful to facilitate a problem solving path versus a punitive one.

Don't hesitate to ask for assistance, the MSU APA office is (517) 353-4898.

Resources:

Probationary Evaluation Form:

http://www.hr.msu.edu/performance/supportstaff/staffperformance_docs/ProbationaryEval.pdf

Performance Development II Form:

http://www.hr.msu.edu/performance/supportstaff/staffperformance_docs/PDP2.pdf

Performance Improvement Plan:

http://www.hr.msu.edu/performance/supportstaff/staffperformance_docs/PIP.pdf

Employee Self Review Worksheet:

http://www.hr.msu.edu/performance/supportstaff/staffperformance_docs/selfReview.pdf

Your Fellow APs

This editions member spotlight is Jonah Magur, Library Assistant IV.

How long have you been at MSU?

I've been working at MSU for a relatively short time, just since this past August, but I've been thoroughly enjoying it. I have indeed been an APA member that whole time.

Can you tell me a little bit about what you do?

What I do is a nice mix (in my opinion) of various activities. First and foremost, I run the Espresso Book Machine, which is something that can produce a library-quality, perfect-bound paperback book from a couple of digital files in roughly 5-10 minutes. It's rather amazing to see, and I always welcome curious parties to come by the Copy Center in the Main Library to watch it in action. On the daily, I meet with potential clients who would like to have a book printed—this might be something they wrote, but it also might be an out-of-print title, publisher-authorized reprint, a Google book or copy of something that exists in the public domain. I work with them to make sure copyright is not being infringed upon, and then print as many or as few copies of their book as they want.

Unlike traditional publishing, I can print forty or fifty, or even just one or two copies of a book upon request. This works particularly well for when graduate students want copies of their dissertations to give to loved ones, but don't want to pay the crazy monopoly prices the authorized, hardbound-only printers demand. Anyway, sometimes it's relatively simple: I upload and print from correctly formatted files that are brought to me. Other times it's necessary to work with a patron to format their material to acceptable specs, teach them tricks in Microsoft Word, design covers for them, or address any other issues that may arise, such as obtaining permission to reprint an image. For example, one of my most recent clients wanted to reprint sheet music in his book, but we determined that the cost to do so legally was prohibitive. Since the music was not central to the story, the client decided to remove it from his book, and happily took 50 copies home. I've helped the library reproduce rare old cookbooks, professors create custom textbooks, old ladies produce extensive genealogical histories, and students print art anthologies, just to name a few things.

(You can find more information about MSU's Espresso Book Machine here:

<https://www.lib.msu.edu/about/ebm/>)

What brought you to your job at MSU?

What brought me to this job was a combination of factors coming together. I got my bachelor's in journalism from MSU, so I was particularly excited to continue bleeding green! The job posting jumped right out at me because of its desired qualifications matching perfectly with my skills and the direction I wanted to move in professionally: After speaking with some old classmates and colleagues, I had decided that I didn't want to join the newspaper industry as I'd planned to do at the outset of undergrad studies. At the time I applied for my current job, I was serving as the general manager of a local restaurant, and really wanted to something closer to "my industry." Sure, I had been able to design a few things to market the business, and really enjoyed leading a team but

overall my design and writing talents were not being utilized. My degree was not doing me any good, and I certainly wasn't being paid what I thought I was worth, working on salary for 50, 60, even as many as 80 or 90 hours per week, making less than 40k per year. So I took the position at MSU, and I couldn't be happier: I get to keep my work week to 40 hours, which is great, but the benefits are almost impossible to name off all at once. I'll be excited to affordably pursue a master's degree once I'm eligible for tuition assistance. The retirement package is unbeatable. But what really makes the job great is the very agreeable mix of client interaction, physical production and creative marketing and design that it offers. It's nice to take something that may have turned out mediocre, and really tweak it to perfection so the finished product is something that won't irk obsessively detail-oriented folks such as myself once it's out there in the world.

What do you love about working at MSU?

The thing I love most about working for MSU—especially after being in a corporate environment for many years—is that my job is to provide a service that doesn't necessarily generate profit. Sure, the machine I run has the potential to bring in money, and as it grows in renown we increase our revenue, but it was purchased in order to enrich the lives of Spartans and the community at large. My personal approach is to keep busy, and recognize that there's always room for growth. In my own mind, I wouldn't be doing my job if I were not expanding this great service, letting as many folks as possible know it exists for their use. It's really rewarding to finish a job, and watch a patron walk away not just with a physical product but also with greater knowledge than they had when they came in.

Can you tell me a little about the benefits and challenges of working at the library?

There really are not many challenges I've encountered in working at the library. Sure, there are those little things: I have to pay MSU for a parking pass, I had to finally medicate myself for allergies that I'd left untreated for years after I moved into the building, and I have to be up bright and early for work every day, but the benefits far outweigh anything that I might consider unpleasant. It's nice getting out of work when the sun is still shining!

What do you like to do when you are not at work?

When I'm not at work, I listen a wide variety of music, and play my own in a 14-piece band—I've been a percussionist for about 13 years. I enjoy reading sci-fi and other fictional novels, and playing video and group-oriented games. I live in a house in Lansing with my girlfriend, a dog and a cat.

Questions From the Trenches

For this installment of APA Questions From The Trenches, we asked APA President Maury Koffman to answer a potpourri of questions that members have brought to his attention recently.

How much is the January 2014 lump sum payment per the APA ratified health care and wages agreement? What makes someone eligible?

The exact final number is yet to be announced. However, it appears most members will net between \$750 to \$1,000 depending on their tax bracket. To be eligible for the payment, the individual must be actively employed in a union represented position and be MSU health care benefits eligible on January 1, 2014. Even if you take the health care waiver you will still be eligible for the lump sum payment if you meet the aforesaid criteria. And, if both you and your spouse/OEI are eligible, both of you will receive the payment.

How will the January 2014 payment be issued?

The payment will be considered special pay and included in your January 2014 regular paycheck.

I have been asked to wear specific clothing during the workday. Can my supervisor and the University require specific attire to be worn in the workplace?

There is precedent that the University can have a reasonable expectation that employees wear appropriate, professional attire in the workplace. However, the approach must be uniformly applied.

I have been informed that my workspace will be relocated through a department reorganization. How is the decision made where my new workspace will be located?

The University, as the employer, retains the right to determine your office workspace under prevailing law and the APA contract. However, in most reorganization situations, APs are asked for their input before a final decision is made. The APA is able to assist in reaching a mutual resolution to your office space as it has an overall impact on your daily work environment and can impact your ability to perform your work responsibilities.

I have been offered another job on campus. How much notice must I give before resigning my current position?

There is no length of notice requirement to resign from your current position. The APA encourages providing as much notice as possible with the standard minimum of two weeks notice if your calendar for transition allows.

I have questions about our APA bargained retirement plan administered through MSU. Who can I contact for more information?

There is an FAQ on the MSU HR website at <http://www.hr.msu.edu/benefits/retirement> that provides more information around our retirement plan. Additionally, you can contact the retirement office via phone at 517.353.4434 or via email at benefitsinfo@hr.msu.edu.

On the Political Front

by Leo Sell, Legislative Committee Chairperson

Two recent legislative moves, one passed and signed, and the other still pending are worth noting by our members. First, in a display of majority muscle similar to what was displayed with the Right to Work (for less) legislation, a radical change to the Michigan Court of Claims was made. While numerous explanations and justifications were offered, the handling of the change doesn't really strike me as honest governance. The change was rammed through in a matter of two weeks or so. Such a fundamental change to jurisprudence in Michigan should have involved many weeks of testimony and consideration. To do otherwise makes the purpose suspect.

The Court of Claims is important to people like you and me because that's where lawsuits against the State begin. Issues such as the changes to state retirement, FOIA, Open Meetings compliance and much more have commenced with the Ingham County Circuit Court as the state Court of Claims for nearly 40 years. Some might speculate that the change reflects a desire to be more "certain" of the outcome of current and future pending lawsuits. The Michigan Supreme Court tried to blunt partisan concerns by appointing 2 Republican and 2 Democrat appeals judges. That's cold comfort. My own point of view is that if this was such a necessary and advantageous and necessary change, hearings and testimony would have made that clear.

One more aspect of this change of political rules makes it terribly suspect. It was passed with "immediate effect". The fact is, in the Michigan House, there is not a 2/3 majority that would have supported this change had the votes been counted by roll call. However, that is not how the House operates. They "take" an immediate effect vote by voice and the presiding officer rules on whether in his/her judgement 2/3 of the assembly has voted in the affirmative. By such a voice vote and declaration, with the outcome occurring, frankly, according to the will of the presiding officer, there is always going to be a question about how honest these "votes" really are.

Another change currently pending involves campaign finance here in Michigan, with the Senate passing a bill to double up campaign contribution limits – which means those with large financial means can have even more financial/political influence. I'll bet few reading this article are in a position to give thousands of dollars to a political candidate. We already have way too much private money in elections (personally, I'd like to see it virtually all gone and have political races publicly financed. I'd also like a return to the old style "fairness doctrine" as well. But both are highly unlikely.)

The bill in question also vacates a recent ruling from the Secretary of State that would have eliminated the ability to spend what is termed "dark money" on so-called issues advertisements. You know those – they start up shortly before an election and purport to speak to an issue, typically critical toward a specific candidate, but never actually

advocate a particular vote for or against that candidate. The actual donors, people or organization that are sponsoring the ad is almost impossible to ascertain. The ruling would have required that the person/organization behind such ads be clearly identified. Wouldn't you rather have that information than not? I certainly would like to know who is trying to influence a given election. See <http://www.mcfn.org> for more information.

Winter Coat Drive Update

Michigan's cold, icy weather can be a challenge, even for many individuals already accustomed to it at MSU. New students from warmer climates often quickly realize the need for several crucial additions to their wardrobes as the snow starts flying. However, the associated expenses are often beyond the means of some students, including many from migrant labor families coming to MSU for the dream of education, but with few funds and no experience with freezing temperatures.

Thanks to many APA members and supporters, winter has become a little easier for a number of at-need students. Over 1,100 coats and articles of winter apparel were donated during the 2013 APA Winter Coat Drive. Clothing contributions were collected by APA volunteers at several locations across campus during the September/October initiative.

Donations have been sorted and are being distributed to worthy student programs, including MSU Migrant Student Services, MSU Family Resource center, and Lansing Public Schools. The APA Community Based Events Committee would like to thank all those individuals, groups, and departments joining in the drive.

The CBE Committee is always seeking for opportunities to support those in need at MSU and in the Greater Lansing Community. Ideas and inquiries should be made to Elias Lopez, lopezell@vps.msu.edu, or Nick Bourland, bourlan2@msu.edu.