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Report on Domestic Partner Benefits at Peer Institutions, March 2008

The Commission for Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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The UT Commission for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People

Report on Domestic Partner Benefits at Peer Institutions, March 2008

1. Introduction

The Commission for LGBT People's Equity and Research Committee has recently conducted a review of those peer institutions designated by the Association of American Universities and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. The review examined the availability of benefits to the partners of LGBT faculty and staff as compared to those provided to heterosexual spouses. In recent years, numerous national universities have responded to these inequities by making domestic partner benefits available to all employees, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. These efforts have dramatically altered the standards to which institutions of higher education are held. Consequently, there now exists a considerable divide between institutions that meet the expectations of prospective employees and a shrinking group of universities that have yet to extend equitable treatment to LGBT people. This review was motivated by the University of Tennessee's continued presence in this latter group. With peer institutions taking bold action on this matter, the University of Tennessee now faces increasingly problematic barriers obstructing the successful recruitment and retention of talented faculty, staff, and administrators. It is our belief that, in order to remain competitive in this regard, it is imperative for UT to move forward to meet these standards of equity and fairness.

2. Summary of Research

The Equity and Research Committee inquired into the availability of the following domestic partner benefits: bereavement leave, COBRA coverage, dental insurance, employee assistance programs, flexible spending accounts, recreational facilities availability, health insurance, library services, parental leave, spousal/partner job placement, tuition waivers, voluntary life insurance policies, and imputed tax relief. The table on the next page ranks those peer institutions designated by AAU and THEC according to the availability of these benefits. In ranking the institutions, each benefit was given equal weight. Currently, the University of Tennessee provides only one of the aforementioned benefits to the partners of LGBT employees.

