

September 2010

Professor Supports Benefits Decision: On Domestic Partner Benefits at EKU

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Recommended Citation

Day, Richard E., "Professor Supports Benefits Decision: On Domestic Partner Benefits at EKU" (2010). *Curriculum and Instruction Faculty and Staff Scholarship*. Paper 51.
http://encompass.eku.edu/ci_fsresearch/51

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On EKU's Domestic Partner Benefits

President Doug Whitlock has signed off on a regulatory change that ended a decade-long push for domestic partner benefits for EKU employees, and history professor Todd Hartch is concerned. (Eastern Progress, 9 Sept)

Apparently, Hartch fears that EKU students have been awaiting guidance from Whitlock and the Board of Regents on whether they should all move in together and make a big pile. Has the university undermined marriage by encouraging students to forego that particular honor in favor of all manner of social intercourse?

Now I consider myself to be something of an expert on marriage, having experienced it with two different women - which the university seemed to think was OK, or perhaps, simply none of their business. Of course it might also be argued that, given the state of heterosexual marriage these days, we straight folks are in no position to offer marital advice to anyone. But both my wives happily enjoyed all of the benefits available to any other state employee's family without any extraordinary governmental scrutiny.

It seems to me that the primary focus of the Regents has always been, and should always be providing the continual assurance to each and every EKU student and employee that we are a community of equals where all are respected, and none are second-class. The university's interest lies in assuring that our students are excellent learners, our faculty are excellent teachers, and both have what they need to be successful.

But I've been racking my brain, and I just can't figure out how my marriage is harmed by domestic partner benefits. Fortunately, that question is getting a thorough examination in the California case, *Perry v Schwarzenegger*, where the judge asked anti-gay marriage advocates to provide evidence that traditional marriage is harmed by gay marriage. When the judge pressed the lead attorney to identify how straight people would be affected, he responded, "Your honor, my answer is: I don't know." He was certain, however, that children are better off in a stable home, whether that is a traditional union or a civil union.

As all history professors surely know, traditional marriage was really about property and the joining together of men's fortunes (women considered essentially chattel well into the twentieth century) for political reasons - not sex - so any anxiety over who is sleeping with whom seems a bit misplaced.

Now I suppose one should always be concerned with the legislature's potential response, but in this case four other public institutions (UK, NKU, UofL and WKU) have already approved domestic partner benefits without any loss of funding. Perhaps Hartch will encourage "our generous friends in the legislature" - who have steadily reduced state support for higher education thus placing increased burdens on our students - to stop dragging their feet and modernize the state tax code so that we might finally end the biennial sleight of hand that produces an untrustworthy budget built on structural imbalances and bad estimates.

As Hartch suggested, students should contact President Whitlock - and thank him. My hope is that you will agree with the Faculty Senate which supported domestic partner benefits with a unanimous vote last spring. Thank Whitlock and the Regents for assuring that the *Essential Eastern* is a place where every student, every employee, every individual is equally and highly valued.

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