

Seminars to inform workers on benefits

Professor says university policies need to be reassessed due to bias

By Wendy Root
Staff Writer

As housing and dining services workers continue to press university officials for higher wages, an adjunct professor of the Law Center will analyze employee benefits in relation to changing family needs in seminars Tuesday and Wednesday.

The program, "Employee Benefits Redefined: Meeting the Challenge of the Family," will be given by Thomas Coleman, a member of the California Legislature's Joint Task Force on Family Diversity.

"We're offering the university community information that will help faculty and staff balance workplace, personal, and family concerns," said Debra Graynom-Daly, program director for the Staff/Faculty Counseling and Consultation Center, which is co-sponsoring the seminar with the Family Diversity Project of Spectrum Institute.

Coleman will address the need for employee benefit programs that are reflective of new family structures and make recommendations about how the university's employee benefits program can be improved to accommodate non-nuclear families, such as single-parent homes.

"The system definitely needs improvement — major

improvement," Coleman said.

Employee benefits discriminate against single people with no spouses or children by giving more subsidies to married couples, he said. The majority of the university's employees are single.

Among his suggestions for improving the university's benefits system is to increase employee involvement and push for a needs-assessment survey on benefits.

"There has been no needs-assessment done to look into workers' needs and desires, which is inexcusable," Coleman said.

The seminar was arranged in response to a change in family structures during the past few decades and to examine employees' rights and benefits in relation to the needs of today's families.

A fundamental problem, Coleman said, is that employers in general have been slow to recognize the need for change in benefit programs to more adequately fulfill the different requirements of single-parent and extended families.

Tuesday's seminar will be on the Health Sciences Campus in Hastings Auditorium, and Wednesday's will be in Room 106 of the Mudd Hall of Philosophy. Both seminars will be from noon to 1 p.m.

City attorney names professor to head study of singles bias

By Anita Vogel
Staff Writer

A university law professor has been chosen to direct a task force formed last week by City Attorney James Hahn to study discrimination against single persons.

Thomas Coleman, an adjunct professor at the Law Center and a bachelor, will lead an investigation into the growing problem of "life-style" discrimination by the business community.

The task force will study the extent of discrimination by Los Angeles businesses against consumers on the basis of marital status and will recommend ways to reduce any unjust business practices.

"It is a big problem when only 22 percent of Los Angeles households are composed of a husband, wife and children," Coleman said. "Married couples make up 44 percent, but even that leaves 56 percent of the people categorized as single."

The Consumer Task Force on Marital Status Discrimination was formed by Hahn after the L.A. City Task Force on Family

Diversity, for which Coleman was a principal consultant, found many instances of discrimination against single persons in business matters, Coleman said.

The task force will hold public hearings for members of the business community, such as insurance company representatives and landlords, to express their views.

The committee will review the adequacy of laws prohibiting such discrimination and will analyze the effectiveness of government agencies with jurisdiction in this area to investigate and remedy any violations.

After four meetings focusing on the origins of discrimination, a final report elaborating on the committee's findings will be released in March.

Topics of investigation include membership discounts from insurance companies, automobile clubs and frequent flyer programs, as well as rental housing, health care and adoption rights.

Businesses that may have

been charged with discrimination previously are invited to attend the meetings so that they can share their experiences and ideas on the subject, Coleman said.

"We also strongly urge the public to attend these meetings," he said. "That's what these meetings are for — the benefit of the public."

Coleman, who has studied the subject of discrimination for years, teaches a class titled "The Rights of Domestic Partners" at the Law Center.

As head of the task force, his job will be to provide leadership and information, and to give direction to the committee.

The 21 members of the task force were selected by Hahn from a group of nominees proposed by government agencies, businesses and community organizations.

"These 21 individuals come from all walks of life," Coleman said.

The membership includes people from the American Civil Liberties Union, the Chamber of Commerce and the Aids Project of Los Angeles, as well as three university law students who will be assisting Coleman in legal and factual research.

Victims of discrimination can write to Coleman at P.O. Box 65756, Los Angeles, Calif., 90065.

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