

Background Information
IG report on BPA education programs
Dec. 10, 2004

Background

The DOE Inspector General investigated an allegation of nepotism in a BPA student training program at BPA. The IG found no evidence of nepotism or other problems. It did recommend BPA keep all records of student training in its computerized Human Resources Management Information System as well as in employees' personnel files. BPA agrees and is doing so.

(A separate concern about a student training program at DOE's Savannah River Operations Office addressed in the same IG report is not addressed in these talking points.)

Questions and Answers

What questions were raised about BPA's conduct of its student training program?

The DOE Inspector General received an allegation that two BPA employees were having their college education paid for because they were relatives of other BPA employees.

What did the DOE IG find?

The IG found that two of more than 90 participants in BPA's Student Career Experience Program are related to other BPA employees. Both complied with BPA policies and procedures by reporting that they are relatives of BPA officials.

What did the IG recommend?

The IG did not recommend any changes to BPA's training program. It did recommend that BPA record training paid for under a continuing service agreement in the agency's computerized Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS) in addition to its previous practice of maintaining the records in employees' official personnel files. BPA is doing so.

What is the Student Career Experience Program?

The Student Career Experience Program pays college tuition for qualifying students who, in return, work at BPA. It is BPA's primary source of new, entry-level professional hires. BPA typically has 90 to 100 students involved in the program at any time.

Student trainees must be enrolled at least half-time in a post-high school degree program and maintain at least a 2.5 GPA. While they study, they gain related work experience. Participating students are eligible for federal employee benefits pro-rated based on the hours worked. Tuition assistance is provided at management's discretion for work-related educational expenses. Students may also receive student loan reimbursement at management's discretion up to \$10,000 per year and not to exceed a maximum of \$60,000. BPA normally offers permanent full time

employment to student trainees upon successful completion of their education program and successful performance during their student trainee employment.

What does the student owe BPA in return?

If BPA agrees to repay qualifying student loans, the employee must in return agree to serve for a specified period of employment of at least three years.

For all students in the Student Career Experience Program, BPA payment of tuition assistance obligates the student to a written continued service agreement equal to the length of time in which the student received tuition assistance. Students must sign a new agreement to continue service each year while they are in the program.

Can an employee really have their entire college education paid by BPA?

No. BPA does not pay for students' entire education; it covers eligible costs. The amount of tuition assistance may vary from student to student, based on staffing requirements of each BPA organization. BPA is not required to provide tuition assistance to every student. Decisions to award tuition assistance are based on recruitment, retention and other organizational concerns such as diversity goals, geographic location, special assignments, etc.

Is the SCEP program specific to BPA or government wide? Is it tax supported or ratepayer supported?

SCEP is a government-wide training program available to all federal agencies. Because BPA is self-financed, SCEP and other training provided by BPA is paid through power and transmission revenues – ratepayer dollars, not taxpayer dollars.

Who are the employees involved?

Since no wrong was done, the employees' identities are confidential to protect their privacy.