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Work-Life at URI

A newsletter from the URI Work-Life Committee

SPRING/SUMMER 2012 Volume 1, Issue 2

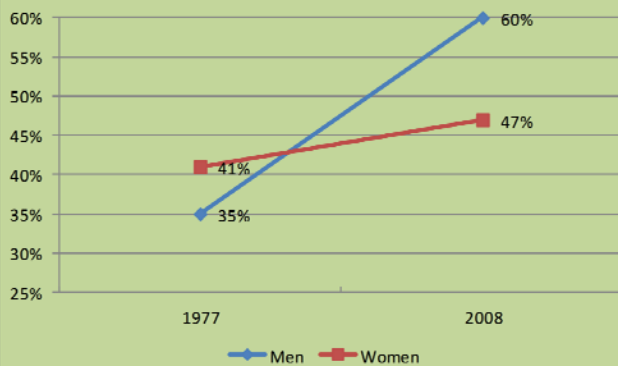
The Work-Life Movement and its Place at URI

Part 2: Work-Life Initiatives Across the Country and Here at URI *By Barb Silver*



Did you know that URI male staff employees experience more work-life conflict than do women, according to early data findings from the 2012 URI Work-Life Survey? This fits with national findings:

Percentage of Fathers and Mothers in Dual-Earner Couples Reporting Work-Family Conflict (1977-2008)



Data from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce conducted by the Families and Work Institute found that, with more involvement in family life and with increasing numbers of dual earner couples, fathers' work-life conflict has nearly doubled over the past 30 years, from 35% to 60%, now surpassing women's by 13%.

National work-life efforts are vigorous and increasing. Alternative work schedules, compressed work weeks, paid leave, child/elder care assistance, telecommuting, creative phased retirement plans, cross training, part-time options, tenure clock extensions, and many other solutions are becoming mainstream options rather than exceptions. University and corporate human resource divisions nationwide are creating work-life specialist positions, offices and programs to develop flexibility options and other benefits to meet the work-life needs of their employees. Increasingly, prospective employees rank work-life balance as a high priority and are seeking workplaces that offer work-life supports.

In March 2010, the President's Council of Economic Advisors published a report on the economic benefits of workplace flexibility, and the President hosted a White House Forum on Workplace Flexibility.¹ The Department of Labor led subsequent efforts around the country to generate best practices in the private sector. Telework mandates for federal employees, for example, have significantly increased in the last two years. In September 2011, the National Science Foundation launched a 10-year Career-Life Balance Initiative to promote greater workplace flexibility for its own employees, for men and women grantees in research careers, and within the institutions they fund.² In response to the NSF initiative, the Association of American Universities and the Association of Public Land-grant Universities have partnered with NSF to support and promote flexible work and learning environments at the nation's universities.

Organizations promoting the work-life agenda abound nationwide. The National Clearinghouse on Academic Worklife specifically provides information for faculty and higher education administrators. The College and University Work & Family Association (CUWFA) provides leadership in facilitating the integration of work and study with family/personal life at institutions of higher learning. URI is a member institution.

Regional university efforts include the [University of New Hampshire](#), which has recently been awarded a 2011 Sloan Foundation Award for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility. Said Dick Cannon, Vice President for Administration and Finance at UNH, "Employers that provide flexibility to their

employees, with regard to where

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to where and how their work gets done, gain a tremendous financial benefit and competitive advantage in today's economy. With workplace flexibility, UNH is better prepared for challenging state budget cycles by taking advantage of cost savings and better positioned to deliver the highest quality and value education to our stu-

dents."³ Of note among its many strategies is the launching of a comprehensive work-life survey to its employees, and an effort to "support a strong performance-based culture focused on results whereby flexible work arrangements and a results orientation need not be at odds, but can be a win-win for the university and its staff." Many other regional universities, such as the [University of Vermont](#) and the [University of Connecticut](#), are also actively engaged in developing work-life programs.

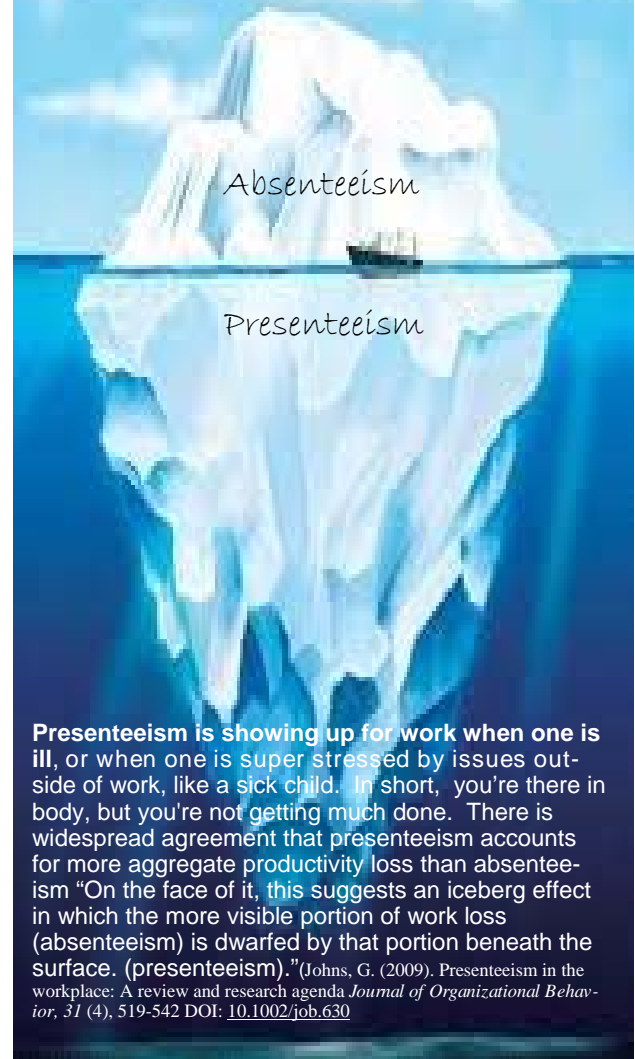
The goal of the URI Work-Life Committee (WLC) is to prioritize a work-life agenda at our University. The most recent initiative of the WLC, in collaboration with the [Schmidt Labor Research Center](#) (SLRC), was the launching of a campus-wide staff survey in the spring 2012 to assess the work-life needs, attitudes, and experiences of URI employees. Data analyses are underway. This will be followed by a faculty survey. This instrument, developed by URI social scientists, represents robust constructs in the work-life literature. It will provide valuable insights to URI administrators and supervisors, as well as exploring inter-relationships between several variables related to work-life, such as stress, care giving responsibilities, level of supervisory support, job satisfaction, intent to leave, dual earner status, etc. From these findings, they plan to develop a set of recommendations that they believe will be useful in moving URI forward.

Also in the near term, the Committee's work will focus on exploring the improvement or creation of several URI policies, such as a policy for pregnant/parenting students and improved parental leave. Recognizing that work-life initiatives are economic drivers, the WLC and the SLRC are aiming to foster relationships with union leaders and Rhode Island economic development offices.

Work-life options at URI do exist in several forms. In 2004, a group of faculty campaigned to then President Carothers to improve an archaic maternity leave policy. Following many months of work, a 6-week paid parental leave policy was adopted by the faculty union, AAUP. This policy was subsequently adapted by all Board of Governor unions, covering approximately 63% of URI employees. While a significant step forward, this policy is now in need of improvement. Steps should also be taken to determine a means to offer paid leave to the remaining URI employees, who constitute over a third of the URI employee pool, and include employees in 2 of URI's largest unions, Council 94 and ACT/NEA.

The WLC has also produced a set of nationally-recognized dual-career hiring guidelines for faculty, an increasing challenge in recruitment as the numbers of dual earner couples increase. In 2008, a Lactation Program was launched, resulting in the adoption of a lactation policy for new mothers returning to work, the establishment of several lactation sites on 3 campuses, and the [Rhode Is-](#)

PRESENTEEISM & PRODUCTIVITY *The Iceberg Effect*



Presenteeism is showing up for work when one is ill, or when one is super stressed by issues outside of work, like a sick child. In short, you're there in body, but you're not getting much done. There is widespread agreement that presenteeism accounts for more aggregate productivity loss than absenteeism "On the face of it, this suggests an iceberg effect in which the more visible portion of work loss (absenteeism) is dwarfed by that portion beneath the surface. (presenteeism)." (Johns, G. (2009). Presenteeism in the workplace: A review and research agenda *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31 (4), 519-542 DOI: [10.1002/job.630](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.630)

[land Department of Health Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Gold Award](#). The WLC also sponsors work-life workshops, brown bag lunches, and produces and disseminates work-life literature. As well, the URI Human Resources Office sponsors talks and workshops on wellness and financial planning.

However, while these initiatives are important, and while URI has a generous benefits package, there is much more that can be done here to make URI a truly family friendly, flexible workplace.

Workplace flexibility: the building blocks are there. As long ago as 1987, the Rhode Island General Assembly, recognizing changing workforce trends and actions taken by other states, and to "reduce commuter congestion, conserve energy, increase employee morale, increase productivity, and reduce tardiness and absenteeism," (Ch. 36-3.1-4) passed legislation requiring that optional alternative work schedules be offered to state employees (Ch. 36-3.1-2-8).⁴ Many of these options can be arranged

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through existing union contracts, and many national union websites have position statements and/or information about this topic and how to bargain for work and family benefits.

We are proud of the steps URI has taken to support its employees and provide work-life and flexibility options. But it is important for URI to more fully embrace the 1987 legislation and put a variety of formal, effective, well-publicized, and accessible measures in place that can assist all categories of employees. As we often do, relying on an informal, case-by-case approach to solving workers' needs is inefficient, invites discrimination, and can disadvantage workers who are unable or unwilling to ask and who may need scheduling adjustments the most. The bottom line is that the University can be proactive rather than reactive in being supportive and responsive to employees' work-life needs. We need to embrace a "culture of coverage," in which employees and supervisors support each other when work-life challenges arise, as they will for every employee at some point, rather than a "culture of compliance" to traditional and rigid rules.

The URI Controllers' Office provides an excellent model of how to develop a unit-wide set of policies to enable approximately 62 employees scheduling flexibility. Working with Human Resources, they put a formal "Voluntary Flexible Schedule" program in place, and managers in that office are very enthusiastic about its positive outcomes, citing increased productivity and morale. *(Refs available with full article found at: www.uri.edu/worklife/homepage)*

COMING NEXT. Part 3: Workplace Flexibility Close-Up: How One URI Office is Making it Work

Elder Care - One of Our Biggest Challenges

According to early findings from the URI Work-Life Staff Survey:

- **35%** of URI staff employees are currently providing care for an aging parent/relative or expect to in the next year.
- **48%** say it is likely or very likely they will have significant elder care responsibilities in the next 5 years.
- Another 15% weren't sure, suggesting that up to **63%** of our staff employees may be providing significant care for an aging relative soon.

The Rhode Island workforce is aging faster than the national average. A 53% rise in its elderly population over the next 25 years is projected. RI ranks 7th among states with populations over age 65, and ties for 4th place with fellow New England states Connecticut and Massachusetts in the percent of the population over age 85. Services and supports for those caring for aging relatives will most definitely be on the increase in the years to come. Below are a few URI and state resources.

[The Rhode Island Geriatric Education Center \(RIGEC\)](#) at the University of Rhode Island helps prepare health care and human service professionals, faculty, and students to better meet the physical, functional, and psychosocial needs of older adults. **[The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute \(OLLI\)](#)** at URI is a community of older learners who participate in a variety of activities, projects, classes and discussions. **[Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs](#)** has much information for seniors. **[The Point](#)** provides comprehensive information, referrals, and help getting started with programs and services for seniors, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers. This includes help choosing where to live, help with living at home, finding doctors and health services, health insurance counseling, legal issues, recreation, and many other topics. The National **[Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center](#)** has contact information for ombudsmen and services for aging adults by state.



The Value of *Appreciation*

Practical Steps to Build Performance

We are all more vulnerable than we like to imagine. Authentically appreciating others will make you feel better and will increase the likelihood they'll invest more in their work, and in you. The human instinct for reciprocity runs deep!

1. **As the Hippocratic oath prescribes to physicians, "Above all else, do no harm"** Spend more time thinking about how to hold people's value, and improve their performance, even when they have fallen short, than devaluing them.
2. **Practice appreciation by starting with yourself.** If you have difficulty appreciating others, you likely have a hard time appreciating yourself. Practice acknowledging to yourself at the end of each day what you have done well or what you are proud of.
3. **Make it a priority to notice what others are doing right.** The more you do it, the more natural it will become. Assess what positive aspects of your employees/coworkers you take for granted—what does each one uniquely bring to the table?
4. **Be appreciative.** The more specific you can be about what you value, and what will be most meaningful to that person, the more impact you will have on that person. A handwritten note is better than an email, or passing comment, but any is better than none at all.

From Tony Schwartz, Harvard Business Review Blog Network, 1/23/12

"I think that the lactation policy and the parental leave policy that went into effect a few years ago are exactly what this community needs to get us heading in the right direction—that being our development into a family-friendly community, one which is aware of and supports the challenges we all face outside the workplace."
- URI employee



This publication is sponsored by the Schmidt Labor Research Center and the Vice President of Administration & Finance

Contact us
(401) 874-5289
worklife@etal.uri.edu
www.uri.edu/worklife

Thank you for taking the URI Work-Life Survey

We would like to thank the 836 (44%) staff employees who completed a survey, 64% of whom were women, and 25% of whom were men (the rest didn't say). We are busy analyzing results and will have a report in the fall.

Here are a few of our 40 survey raffle winners. *Congratulations to everyone:*

Michelle Carnevale: iPad
Elizabeth Smith, theater tickets
Kathie McKinstry, basketball tickets
Joan Harrington, \$10 RAM account
Erin LaMountain, \$10 RAM account
Pam Sherman, Hair Salon Gift Certificate
Kendall Beckman, iPad
Jeanne Browning, Ronzio pizza
Christina Berardi, URI Bookstore GC
Nancy Neff, Ronzio pizza