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Work-Life at URI: A newsletter from the URI Work-Life Committee for Winter 2013

URI Work-Life Committee

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MYTH: Work-life and Diversity are Two Separate Topics

FACT: Work-life is a **CLASS** issue. Lower income workers are much more likely to work in structured, inflexible jobs with fewer leave benefits - they are the ones most likely to lose their jobs for taking time off to care for sick family members, or to not have as much access to break time for things such as doctor appointments. They are also more likely to work more than one job, and fair and equitable policies for part-time workers are needed. Women are also more likely than men to work part-time, helping to define work-life as a **GENDER** issue. Though nearly as many women as men are in the workplace now, women still are the primary caregivers, though men's participation is increasing. Both are seeking jobs that have some flexibility in how, when, and where their work gets done. Women's career trajectories can be significantly challenged by competing work and caregiving responsibilities, and need work schedules and leave policies to enable them to do both well. Research shows that women caregivers drop out of demanding jobs, such as tenure-track science and engineering faculty jobs, for example, at a much higher rate than do men. Both men and women faculty are increasingly looking for positions for partners, and more effective dual career hiring solutions are also needed. Work-life is also an issue of **RACE/ETHNICITY**. White people are less likely (19% in one AARP survey) to care for an elderly relative than are Asians (42%), Latinos (34%), and African Americans (28%). Cultural and socioeconomic differences play a role in how much family and friends participate in caregiving. Work-life is an **AGE** issue. As our workforce ages, valuable older workers need and/or want to remain in the workforce and will benefit from part-time and creative phased retirement options, job sharing, and other flexible work arrangements. Flexible work arrangements also benefit those who are differently abled, making work-life a **DISABILITY** issue. Finally, work-life is a **SEXUAL ORIENTATION** issue as we seek to include same sex couples in our leave and benefits policies.

In order to recruit and retain a diverse workforce, and promote an equitable workplace, work-life policies and practices must be a top priority. These practices include mechanisms for diverse employees, many of whom may experience isolation or lack of support, to find that support through networking and mentoring opportunities. As Joan Williams, Distinguished Professor of Law, and UC Hastings Director of the Center for Work-Life Law, says, "A diversity program without a work-life component just won't work."

SAVE THE DATE

Faculty & Staff GLBT Spring Social

April 19, 2013 5-7 pm, Narragansett
At the home of Lynn McKinney

To RSVP and for directions:
401.864.5246 or lynnm@uri.edu

WORK-LIFE BROWN BAG LUNCH SERIES

Remaining Spring 2013 Dates

Wednesdays, 12- 1 pm, Memorial Union

- 3/27** Caregiver Burnout, MU 308
Gina McClure, URI Couple & Family Therapy Clinic
- 4/10** Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine, MU 308
Nancy Graham, Spring Lotus Holistic Health Center
- 4/24** Gardening for the Birds, MU 360
Rosanne Sherry, URI Master Gardener



Work-Life at URI

A newsletter from the URI Work-Life Committee

WINTER 2013 Volume 2, Issue 1

TELECOMMUTING AND SUPER STORM NEMO

- or: "I'm still contagious but I can work."

On Friday, February 8, in anticipation of super storm Nemo, the Rhode Island Department of Administration declared that state government offices would continue to operate, or they could enact the Policy on Adverse Weather Conditions, which states that absences due to weather "shall be recorded as either annual leave, personal leave, or leave without pay." By 5 pm that day, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island had declared states of emergency and banned non-essential vehicle travel. But unlike Rhode Island, both Massachusetts (since 2000) and Connecticut (since 1996) have telecommuting policies in place for state workers, and no doubt a large number of those employees remained productive throughout the storm.



Telework (or telecommuting) is basically a work arrangement that allows an employee to perform work at an approved alternative worksite. Initial federal telework legislation was passed in 2000. In December 2010 a significant expansion of these practices were detailed in the 2010 Telework Enhancement Act (Public Law 111-292). The reasons for enacting this legislation were to: 1) improve continuity of operations of federal functions during an emergency, 2) promote management effectiveness by reducing management costs, environmental impact and transit costs, and 3) to enhance the ability of workers to better manage their work and family obligations.

During a March 2010 White House Forum on Workplace Flexibility, which occurred a few weeks after a massive snowstorm, President Obama referred to the federal telework program, saying "I do not want to see the government close because of snow again." Indeed, the Office of Personnel Management estimates that one third, or about 100,000, of federal employees in the Washington DC area telework when weather forces the closure of government buildings. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly 20% of the U.S. workforce work remotely at least one day a month. Several states have their own telework policies and programs. Connecticut, for example, estimates that their program has taken 60,000 cars off the roadways on an average day. Numerous studies show that carefully planned telework results in significantly increased productivity, reduced costs and energy savings, and more satisfied, committed employees. In this 24/7 information age, work is increasingly seen as something you do, rather than the place you go, and performance-based management is taking precedence over "face time" in many work sites.

"I do not want to see the government close because of snow again."
President Barack Obama, March 2010

Many jobs are not suited for telecommuting and few employees at URI can telecommute as their regular schedule. For these employees, some other form of flexible scheduling would be more appropriate, when needed. Not for everyone or every job type, regular telecommuting is also not necessarily healthy for many businesses, as face-to-face co-worker interaction can be crucial to effective functioning. Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer's recent retraction of Yahoo's telework policy, which has created a national firestorm of debate and criticism, was done ostensibly to encourage more co-creativity in the office. However, occasional teleworking can be of extreme value to many employees who need to stay home now and then. There are many people at URI who can and do telecommute on a partial basis, perhaps once a week or once a month, or sporadically when needed, such as during Nemo, or to prevent their illness from spreading at work, or to be home when the repairman shows up. Our 2012 URI Work-Life Staff Survey indicates that while only 4% telecommute as their normal schedule, these people are highly satisfied with that work schedule, only surpassed by those who are able to have daily, as needed, flex time. Telecommuting programs, like other types of flexible scheduling, are only successful when developed thoughtfully, formally, are well-managed, and used responsibly by the appropriate employees. There are many resources available to help supervisors develop these programs and procedures.

It is time Rhode Island considered a statewide policy, and for our various bargaining units at URI to consider the same. What types of flexibility might have been useful for you or your unit to enable the choice to remain productive (and paid) during Nemo? How would productivity overall have been impacted at URI if employees who could continue to work at home on that Friday and Monday been able to do so? What are the pros and cons of telecommuting for URI employees? We welcome your thoughts: email us at worklife@etal.uri.edu.

The Work-Life Movement and its Place at URI, Part 3: Workplace Flexibility Close-Up: How One URI Office is Making it Work

By Barb Silver and Lexi Lyman

(Parts 1 and 2 of this series are in prior newsletters, and can be found on the homepage at www.uri.edu/worklife)

Implementing new policies and practices to help employees better balance competing life, family, and work responsibilities can be complicated in an institution comprised of nine labor unions with nine separate collective bargaining agreements. But the flexibility model developed in the URI Controller's Office is testament to the impact that creative determination can have, and offers an excellent example of how one URI office took the initiative to formally offer creative flexibility solutions to its approximately 62 employees across 5 departments and 3 labor unions.



Sharon Bell

Because of the nature of the work, the Controller's Office is one place where flex hours and compressed work weeks are feasible options. At least as long as nine years ago, the office made flexible starting times informally available. In 2007, Sharon Bell, Controller, and Trish Casey, Associate Controller, with input from Human Resources, implemented a comprehensive Voluntary Flexible Schedule program. This thoughtfully-developed program offers basic flex options, while emphasizing the need to ensure business continues to be conducted efficiently. As stated in the program description, it "offer[s] the staff the option to work a flexible schedule based on [the] department's needs as well as ensuring supervision, hours of operation, customer service, overall department responsibilities and deadlines, etc., are covered."

The program offers two flex options to staff and managers alike. Both are available for 6-month terms, and approval for either is granted depending on seniority, the department's work load and other factors. The "flexible 'day-off' schedule" offers essentially a compressed work week, in which an employee may take one day off during a 2-week pay period, while still working a 35-hour work week. The second option is a "non-standard hours schedule," in which an employee may design a 7-hour schedule between the hours of 7:30 to 5:00, rather than the standard 8:30 to 4:30. Those who choose a flex option must sign an agreement that includes parameters and restrictions for use, as well as consequences if abuse of the new schedule occurs. "This is a binding agreement between the supervisor and the employee. It is black and white," says Bell. Departments within the Controller's Office must develop plans that address issues relating to overall department schedules and optimal functioning. After 6 months and a positive assessment, employees may renew or modify their contract, or return to their regular work schedule.

Both Bell and Casey understand that today's employees, both women and men, are increasingly facing multiple, competing, and sometimes simultaneous challenges in meeting family and personal demands while adhering to a strict work schedule. "We try to listen to everybody's needs," says Casey. "We emphasize that this is not about women or for special needs – it is for everybody across the board." And, in addition to tuning in to the work-life needs of their employees, they believe they have improved their office's functioning. "This is not meant to be an interference with how we service our community," emphasized Casey. "We feel we are serving our community better with a broader number of hours we work. We are here as early as 7:30 to sometimes as late as 5:00 pm. And we do this without the additional expense of Overtime."



Trish Casey

Why provide these options? "People wanted them. They heard about it being done other places, and asked for it. They use it to meet child care demands, go to doctor's appointments, or to go to school themselves. For those who work the 'day-off' schedule, it also helps with gas prices," says Casey. And the benefits the two managers talk about mirror national findings that flexibility reaps increases in job satisfaction, productivity, morale, and more. "People are able to be productive both at work and at home, and some employees say they are more productive during their flex weeks than their non-flex weeks," she added. Bell agreed, "Things are going very well. There is no diminishment in productivity or workload. Employees opting for the flexible 'day-off' schedule get on a roll, they put in the extra time during a day, and don't have to stop what they are doing. They know they have to get what they need to get done and have things in order for the day they are going to be out."

At first, Bell and Casey shared concerns echoed by others hesitant to implement flexibility options. "We were worried about abuse. In the past, when flexibility was more informal, some people did take advantage of it. But this newer plan is more structured – we looked at everything that could go wrong – holidays, sick days, coming in late, etc.," said Bell. The administrators are firm about the rules. For example, the office has a 7-minute rule – if an employee is less than 7 minutes late, they make up those few minutes at the end of the day. If it happens periodically, they work with the employee to perhaps shift their hours by 15 minutes. But for the flex people, there is no 7-minute rule, and those who come in late must dis-

charge time. "If they want it, they have to be responsible," says Bell. "People have been very appreciative. From a manager's perspective, it is not as disruptive as one might think."

People have been very appreciative. From a manager's perspective, it is not as disruptive as one might think.

Sharon Bell

Another oft-cited barrier to implementing flex options is the fear by supervisors that they will be inundated with requests and that managing schedules will become too time-consuming and burdensome. Not so, say both Bell and Casey. "It takes a little thought in the beginning, but it is not hard to manage, once you get it down." And not as many people opted for a flexible schedule as they expected. In the beginning, as many as half the staff requested formal flex schedules, but that has dwindled to about a third. "People want it until they try it, then they find out it may not be so great. They find out that it is not really a 'day off' – they still have to put in their 35 hours!" In one case, an employee opted out of a plan because it actually added stress at home. For another, a mother determined that a day off meant an older child spent some time unsupervised, and so she switched to a non-standard hours schedule that better matched her child's school schedule.

Yet another perceived barrier, placing undue burdens on other employees and causing employee resentment, was touched on by Casey. She noted that this plan sometimes can place burdens back on managers who are covering for those off on flex days. "One of my managers takes every other Friday off as her flex day, and the burden of her not being here falls on me." However she noted that the antidote to these

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URI LACTATION PROGRAM UPDATE



Many new mothers need or want to return to work soon after the arrival of their baby, and are intent on continuing to breastfeed, knowing the positive health benefits to child and mother. An excellent example of a flexible workplace initiative at URI is the Lactation Program. URI policy states: *The University of Rhode Island recognizes the importance and benefits of breastfeeding for both the mothers and their infants, and in promoting a family-friendly work and study environment. Therefore, in accordance with Rhode Island state law, the University of Rhode Island acknowledges that a woman may breastfeed her child in any place open to the public on campus, and shall provide sanitary and private space, other than a toilet stall, in close proximity to the work or study area for employees or students who are nursing to be used as a lactation room. Supervisors will work with these employees to schedule reasonable and flexible break time each day for this activity.* Procedures for employees and supervisors in the effective use of this policy, and details about each lactation room, can be found on the URI Work-Life website on the [Lactation Resources page](#) under the Family Care section.

Lactation Sites - Kingston campus

Memorial Union, 1st floor
Pharmacy Building, Rm. 284
University Library, 1st floor
Mackel Field House, 1st floor **(new!)**
Women's Center, 22 Upper College Rd. **(new!)**

Lactation Sites - Narragansett Bay campus

Ocean Science & Exploration Center, Room 017

Lactation Sites - Providence campus

Faculty Restroom Lounge, Room 218

shifts in duties is careful planning, and promoting a "culture of coverage," or a work environment where employees support one another, recognizing that everyone will have a time when they need co-worker support. Another tactic is to cross-train employees, so that each employee can assume other duties if need be. Cross-training can be a powerful flexibility tool in creating a nimble and efficient workplace, as it can not only service the organization's needs, but can provide professional development and skill broadening for employees. The Controller's Office has a "buddy system" in which a designated back-up is available to fill in when needed if their buddy is out. (continued on our website)

To read the end of the article about how 3 employees in the Controller's Office (Helene Bucka, Judy Moore, and Kathy La-Croix) have benefitted from a flex schedule, go to our website homepage and click on "[3 Controller's Office Flex Employees Share their Experiences](#)"

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