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Work-Life at URI

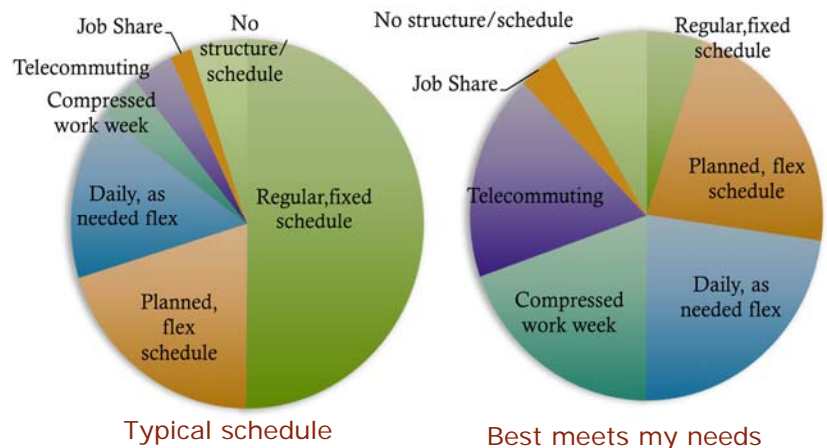
A newsletter from the URI Work-Life Committee

WINTER/SPRING 2014 Volume 2, Issue 2

URI STAFF EMPLOYEES and WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY:

Findings from the Work-Life Staff Survey

What are the key ingredients to employee satisfaction? In several studies (e.g., Families & work Institute, 2008), after salary and benefits, workplace flexibility is often ranked as the top priority that enhances employee satisfaction. Findings from the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce (Families & Work Institute, 2010), the most comprehensive, longitudinal national study of employees' lives on and off the job, indicate that 87% of employees report that having flexibility to manage work and personal or family life would be "extremely" or "very important" in looking for a new job.



URI offers many forms of flexibility to about half its employees. Findings from the URI Work-Life Staff Survey indicate that 53.2% work a regular fixed schedule, but nearly an equal number (46.8%) work some type of flex schedule. The graphs at right depict the schedules URI staff employees typically work versus the ones that would best meet their needs. Clearly, there is a desire for more flexible schedule options. Indeed, when asked which of 15 work-life supports would be most useful to URI employees, including benefits like paid leave, a sick bank, phased retirement options, etc., "daily, as-needed flex time" topped the list (4.6 on a 5-point scale), and "regular, scheduled flex-time" ranked second (4.46).

Control over work schedule is one key predictor of employee satisfaction, being correlated with many positive job indicators, including increased productivity, morale, retention, etc. URI employees having some flexibility report significantly greater control over their schedules and are significantly more satisfied with that schedule than those on a fixed schedule. In fact, URI employees who have some flexibility report significantly greater job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceptions of supervisory and organizational support, and less sense of overwork than for those on a fixed schedule.

Lowered absenteeism and attrition rates are experienced in organizations offering some form of flexibility. At URI, intent to leave the University is low and does not differ between the two groups. However, those with a fixed work schedule were significantly more likely to choose "inadequate flexible work options/practices," "being treated unfairly," "transfer to a different job at URI" as reasons they would leave their job, if they were to do so. *Continued on page 2.*

ANNOUNCING

URI Family Care Assistance Program



Professional Family Travel Fund

See Inside!

AGEISM IS NO JOKE, RIGHT?

Uhmm, was that cartoon funny? The last issue of the *Work-Life at URI* newsletter contained a cartoon of an elderly woman interacting with a mail carrier at a sidewalk mailbox.

We printed that cartoon with the intent of drawing a smile of recognition that aging, which affects us all, can bring various challenges. Unlike other marginalized groups (race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, income status, and others), we ALL share the impacts of aging in one way or another, ultimately (hopefully) within ourselves, but also with loved ones and friends, or both. Just as we might rely on humor to soften the singular stresses of parenthood, most of us also use humor to soften the unique, and often painful, stresses of becoming old, or caring for those who once cared for us. It is a poignant condition that in some way at some point affects us all, and humor is often used as an effective coping mechanism by both young and old.

However, cartoons like the one we published can be very hurtful to those who are old, and can contribute to labeling and stereotyping. They can reinforce a culture that devalues older adults; and for this, we apologize. Ageism and negative stereotyping of the elderly diminishes the remarkable wisdom and irreplaceable gifts many older persons offer. They also fail to recognize the wide variability of aging and older adults, and how the experience of growing older can be shaped by our own attitudes and behaviors. Growing older with dignity and social respect is everyone's birthright, and facilitating that goal is part of the URI Work-Life Committee's mission.

This type of humor is very prevalent in our society, but when, if ever, is it appropriate? Whom does it serve and whom does it hurt? Would "old age" jokes be funny if *you* were very old? Can we move to



a place where embracing aging can be done without deprecating humor? In our next issue, the results of the URI staff survey on elder care will be reviewed in a larger context of aging in America. We invite your thoughts, and your suggestions about translating survey results into action items

for elder caregiving support at URI: work-life@etal.uri.edu.

Staff survey findings, continued from page 1.

Flex for elder caregivers. Obviously, having some degree of flexibility is highly valuable to working parents. Less obvious are the needs of elder caregivers, an increasing priority as our population ages. When comparing the means across four categories of caregiving responsibilities for URI employees (none, child-only, elder-only, both child and elder) those with elder care responsibilities express the least supportive work climate for flexible work arrangements, the most work-life conflict,

the least work-life supervisory and organizational support, the highest intent to leave the organization, the least control over their work schedule, and the most sense of being over-worked. While some of these differences are not statistically significant, the pattern is clear. Elder care can be accompanied by levels of stress and unpredictability that

Those at URI with some type of flexibility report significantly greater:

- ✓ Job satisfaction
 - ✓ Organizational commitment
 - ✓ Supervisory support for work-life issues
 - ✓ Satisfaction with child care arrangements
 - ✓ Satisfaction with their work schedule
 - ✓ Control over their work schedule
- ... And less sense of being over-worked

are unique, and workplaces must become responsive in designing workable solutions.

What do elder caregivers want? Findings from the Families and Work Institute's 2010 Elder Care Study point directly to the need for flexibility. In that study of nearly 1600 working caregivers, these four top wishes were identified for ways their workplaces could support them as caregivers:

1. *Greater flexibility*
2. *More options for managing time*
3. *Time off for elder care, especially paid time off without having to use up vacation time*
4. *More understanding of their situation from management*

Not surprisingly, higher incomes, education, and supervisory responsibilities are correlated with more job flexibility at URI. Because rigid schedules can provide some of the most grievous challenges for working families today, we need to design creative approaches to enable employees with more structured schedules similar opportunities. As we have seen, many supervisors at URI already provide flexibility options. Others may need to think "outside the box" about how to accomplish this.

Introducing the URI Family Care Assistance Program

Helping the URI community be both great employees and great caregivers.



Today, employees, and many students, face challenges balancing their work responsibilities with caregiving responsibilities. These needs are for child care, elder care, or even pet care, or a combination of all three. They may be planned, or may arise suddenly and unexpectedly. Supporting the needs of working caregivers results in many positive outcomes for employees, organizations, and society: lowered stress, illness, and absenteeism; healthier, safer, and better cared for family members; more satisfied, productive, engaged employees; and stronger career growth.

“FCAP” is a new program that will offer some assistance to faculty and staff working caregivers at URI. While we plan to add components over time, including assistance for student caregivers, we are excited to launch the program featuring the following two components.



Family Care When and Where You Need it Most. *Bright Horizon’s Care Advantage* is a web-based portal that provides all URI employees access to a wide variety of local and remote child and elder caregiver services. For children, these include regular childcare, emergency back-up care, care for mildly ill children, tutoring services, and

others. For adults, these services include in-home health and companion care, certified adult/elder care advisors, specialized facilities including memory care, hospice care, and independent/assisted living communities. Other services include pet care and housekeeping assistance. *Care Advantage* is an industry leader, serving over 500 institutions, including the entire US military. Your membership is fully paid for and allows you to simply register online and begin hand-selecting pre-screened caregivers who meet your exact needs, locally or anywhere in the country. Payment of caregivers is between the employee and the caregiver. **YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS FREE - REGISTER TODAY at: www.careadvantage.com/uri**



Professional Family Travel Fund

Professional travel is an essential career component for most faculty and some professional staff, many of whom may opt out of important opportunities due to conflicts with caregiving responsibilities. This is particularly true for early-career primary caregivers, although challenges with elder care responsibilities are increasing. This program awards modest financial assistance to faculty and professional staff primary caregivers who need incremental financial assistance in order to pursue professional travel or other professional obligations above and beyond normal caregiving arrangements. Examples include but are not limited to caregiving costs during travel to professional conferences or other events, and partial support for accompanying caregiver travel, when it is important that babies or young children accompany a parent on a trip. Awards will typically be between \$300—\$500, and will be based on demonstration of need and availability of funds. A full description, eligibility requirements, and application information can be found at web.uri.edu/worklife/fcap.

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Retaining a 21st Century Workforce through Faculty Career Flexibility

A Presidential Initiative at URI

The American Council on Education launched a new initiative in summer 2013, the *National Challenge for Higher Education: Retaining a 21st Century Workforce*. This initiative provides an opportunity for college and university presidents to be involved in a national campaign to promote faculty career flexibility. President Dooley signed on as a coalition partner, endorsing a Statement of Support for Expanding Workplace Flexibility, which states that *"well-implemented supports for workplace flexibility lead to improved recruiting, increased faculty commitment and engagement, greater productivity, reduced turnover, and reduced stress. . . We believe that supporting flexibility must become a core leadership competency to enable our faculty to meet the increasing demands of twenty-first-century workplaces and to meet their personal and familial responsibilities."*



The University community is key to achieving the transformational goals that are making URI a sought after place for learning and discovery. Part of any transformation is to ensure that we remain competitive and flexible in a global marketplace and the ACE initiative is an excellent example of how institutions can adapt. I hope faculty will take advantage of this opportunity to partner with us in identifying ways to continue to attract and retain the best and the brightest scholars and teachers."

- President David Dooley

A URI ACE Task Force has been formed to identify the most important flexibility priorities for faculty that can be achieved here at URI. It will be advised by a council of URI administrators. The Task Force will be developing a set of recommendations, strategic plans for accomplishing them, and will engage in activities targeting attainable policies and best practices. Three initial priorities, focusing on three different career stages, have already been identified:

Early career: **Dual career hiring program**
 Mid career: **Mid-career revitalization initiatives**
 Late career: **Post-retirement engagement initiatives**

We are seeking members to serve on Task Force subcommittees that will focus on specific topics, as well as members for the Advisory Council. If interested, please email silver@uri.edu.

While a faculty initiative, we aim to expand all appropriate initiatives to staff employees. We are looking forward to this unique opportunity to evolve our policies and practices at URI, and honing our competitive edge in recruiting and retaining an excellent workforce.

WORK-LIFE BROWN BAG LUNCH SERIES ~ Spring 2014

Thursdays, 12– 1 pm, Memorial Union 308

- Jan. 30:** Family Care Assistance at URI: New Solutions & Future Directions (Barb Silver, Helen Mederer, URI)
- Feb. 13:** Learning to Manage Alzheimer's: Advice for Caregivers (Alzheimer's Association)
- Mar. 13:** Finding the Right Elder Care Options in RI (Jenny Miller, Senior Care Concepts)
- April 17:** TBD
- May 15:** Who Will You Be in Retirement? What Will You Do? (TBD)