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 ARAP 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 Wilcox notes, recruitment 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. Work-life is also an issue of race/ethnicity. White people are less likely (19%) in one ARAP 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.”
Implementing new policies and practices to help employees balance work and 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 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.

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 supervisory approval, 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 workload and other factors. The first option is a “day-off” schedule, in which an employee may take one day off during a designated period, which will 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 work period during which they work from 7:30 to 5:00, rather than the standard 8:00 to 4:00.

Both Bell and Casey understand that today’s employees, both men and women, are increasingly facing a work-life imbalance. “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 productivity. “This is not meant to be an interference with how we service our community,” emphasizes 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.

Why provide these options? “People wanted them,” says Bell. “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 at both 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.,” says Bell. The administrative assistant of a firm about that fund, however, 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 is more than 15 minutes, 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 discharge time. “If they want it, they have to re-responsible,” says Bell. “People have been very appreciative. From a manager’s perspective, it is not as disruptive as one might think. ”

Another oft-cited barrier to implementing flexible options is the fear by supervisors that they will be inundated with requests and that managing schedules will become too time-consuming and burdensome. “We tried 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 as her flex day and the burden of her not being here falls on me.” However she noted that the antidote to these challenges is empowerment. 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.”

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