Q &A with URI-PSA President Charlene “Candy” Dunn

BY: CHRISTIANA MOLINSKI & JENNIFER MACNAB

Q1: What was your path to union leadership and what role do you hold at URI?
A1: Candy works at URI in the Research Office. Her civic involvement began on the Charlestown Conservation Commission and Charlestown Town Council. She later became actively involved in the union after recognizing the important role unions held during the Rhode Island banking crisis of the early 1990's. She has held various roles on the PSA Executive Committee including, negotiating team member, treasurer, and President. She has been President for 17 years.

Q2: Why is it important for people, especially Women at URI to be active in their unions?
A2: Unions provide an important voice to all members equally, and in order to negotiate for contracts that represent the wants and needs of the membership, people must be actively involved. To read more from Charlene Dunn click here.

University of Rhode Island Lactation Policy

BY: HELEN MEDERER AND BARB SILVER

Policy and Program: Rhode Island legislation protects a woman’s choice to breastfeed by requiring an employer to make “a reasonable effort to provide a private, secure, and sanitary room or other location in close proximity to the work area, other than a toilet stall, where an employee can express her milk or breastfeed her child” (R.I. General Laws §23-13.2-1).

Thanks to the support of the Elsevier Foundation, the National Science Foundation, and the URI Administration, the Work-Life Committee launched a lactation program during the winter of 2008. To read more, click here.
Child Care Assistance for Undergrads is Coming!

BY: HELEN MEDEER AND BARB SILVER

In the fall of 2017 a new Child Care Financial Assistance Program will become available to undergraduate URI students. Created and managed by the URI Work-Life Committee, this pilot program will be sponsored by Enrollment Services for two years, during which plans to permanently institutionalize it will be underway, including determining the scope of need and identifying sustainable funding sources. Beginning Fall 2017, financial assistance of up to $500 per semester will be offered to approved applicants. More details and application instructions will be available over the summer. Faculty and staff are asked to share this information with student parents they know.

Why is this important? Almost 25% of college students overall in the United States are parents of dependent children, as are over one-third of low-income, first-generation students, and students of color [i] Unlike in many other countries, securing quality, affordable child care is a significant, and sometimes impossible, challenge not just for American workers, but for student parents, particularly those with lower incomes. The United States has the lowest college completion rates in the developed world, hovering around 55%. [ii] Parenting contributes significantly to this high rate: the drop-out rate of student parents is 53% compared to 31% of non-parents, and it is estimated that becoming a parent is a key factor in almost one-half of the female students who drop out of school.[iii] [iv] Many of these student parents will leave school burdened not only with significant college debt but also without a college degree.

The increasing cost of child care in our country is “staggering”[v] for lower wage workers and is, in fact, virtually untenable for many workers and students. One study, conducted by Child Care Aware of America, of 31 states including Rhode Island, found that the cost of day care was more than the cost of in-state tuition and fees at those states’ public colleges. [vi] According to their data, in Rhode Island the average annual cost of full-time center-based infant care is $12,867 compared to a public college tuition rate of $10,934 (however, in 2017, URI’s in-state tuition is 13,800), and that single parents in Rhode Island can expect to pay 49% of their income for full-time infant center care. Low-income parents are disproportionately burdened, with the lower the income, the higher the proportion of income dedicated to child care.[vii] This is especially burdensome for single student parents, of whom 78% are considered low income.[viii] As the Pew Research Center reports, an increasing number of parents are simply avoiding unaffordable child care costs by staying home,[ix] and likely the same can be said for student parents who drop out of school. A Wisconsin Financial Aid Study indicated that 23% of undergraduates enrolled in college in 2008 had at least one child – yet less than 10% of student parents completed their bachelor’s degree within six years of entering college.[x] To read more, please click here.

Interested in joining the committee e-mail cmolinski@uri.edu

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PLEASE SEARCH FOR WOMEN@URI ON FACEBOOK TO JOIN! THIS GROUP WAS CREATED AS A SPACE FOR WOMEN-IDENTIFIED FOLKS AT URI TO SHARE RESOURCES AND UPDATES ON UPCOMING EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS! FEEL FREE TO INVITE OTHER URI FOLKS!