

# National Work & Family Month

*October 2007*



“Reducing the conflict between work and family life should be a national priority.”

*U.S. Senate Resolution 210*

---

---

---

---

---

Celebrate with us!

**Alliance for  
Work-Life Progress®**

*An Affiliate of WorldatWork®*

[www.awlp.org/workfamilymonth](http://www.awlp.org/workfamilymonth)

## **Work-Life Breakfast Summit Summary October 18, 2007**

### **Summary**

On Thursday, October 18, 2007, University administrators and other community members attended a Breakfast Summit meeting at the Women's Center to discuss work-life issues at URI. The event was jointly sponsored by ADVANCE, the Women's Center, the President's Commission on the Status of Women, and the Schmidt Labor Research Center. Over 40 people were in attendance, including the President, Provost, Vice Provost, and many other senior administrators. Following remarks by President Carothers, and Professor of Sociology and URI Work-Life Committee Chair Helen Mederer, participants were engaged in a facilitated discussion to identify the key work-life issues the University needs to address.

### **Goals of Work-Life Breakfast Summit**

1. To raise awareness across the university about the centrality of work-life issues in today's workplace, in order to move the university forward in becoming an excellent place to work and learn, and to bring the President's strategic plan to fruition.
2. To position URI in the forefront of academic institutions that recognize the importance of work-life issues in recruiting and retaining an increasingly diverse workforce, and in a related way, position URI to be competitive in acquiring grant funding for research and outreach on work-life issues.
3. To announce the creation of a Work-Life Center through the ADVANCE office, and solicit input about what work-life issues and initiatives should be priorities for the Center.

### **Professor Helen Mederer's Comments**

Helen Mederer, Professor of Sociology and Chair of the URI Work-Life Committee remarked that October is National Work-Life Month, which was created by a U.S. Senate resolution in collaboration with Fortune Magazine and the National Alliance for Work-Life Progress. This national designation recognizes that work-life effectiveness is one of the most important business growth trends of the decade, and that supporting a balance between work and personal life is in the best interest of national worker productivity. 85% of U.S. workers have caregiving responsibilities off the job, including those who face the challenges of aging parents, child care, or community involvement. We must take this opportunity to reach students, as their well-being as future workers will depend on developing creative strategies to better balance work and life. Moreover, we must create a more rounded community, with generational and community linkages, and recognition of the importance of community involvement. As well as students, we must put more energy into how to better assist staff at URI, as there are differences in workplace flexibility between staff and faculty. A focus on wellness also needs to be re-energized.

### **President Robert Carothers' Comments**

President Carothers stated that sustaining the workforce can only be accomplished by addressing work-life balance challenges, and emphasized how important it is for the university to be engaged in these efforts, noting that everyone at URI, from students to retiring employees, has time demands. There is a tremendous load for young people at URI (i.e. balancing family and work), and this was taken into consideration when the 2006-2009 University Strategic Plan was created. He noted that we must have more

respect for workers' various responsibilities, and create a work environment conducive of health, productivity, and one which will reduce stress.

Also, when making changes, President Carothers emphasized that we must take steps to ensure their institutionalization, since often good initiatives dissipate when initial funding ends. Thus, we must find ways to sustain positive initiatives like the ADVANCE program. There are many ways to make the institution stronger, and there are many ongoing initiatives already well underway at URI, such as the Wellness Initiative and the Sustainability Commission. The efforts being made during this breakfast meeting is another good example. The President thanked Helen Mederer and the Work-Life Committee for their leadership on these issues, and hopes to continue this work.

## **Key Themes from Dialogue with the Audience**

### **Housing**

- Affordable housing in the vicinity of the university at all points of the ladder - for faculty, staff, graduate students and international students - is needed

### **Day Care**

- Childcare options needed - faculty and staff should have priority at CDC
- Nearby services need to be more available;

### **Elder Care**

- is a critical issue, as need is increasing and is often unplanned and sudden
- guidance and mentoring should be provided to caretakers of aging parents – geriatric care management, support groups, flexible work options, facilities, etc.

### **Flexible Work Options**

- Address issues for *all* employees, not just permanent employees, e.g., part-time, per-course faculty (55% nationally)
- variety of programs need to be explored:
  - part-time PhD programs
  - phased retirement
  - stopping tenure clock
  - job sharing

### **Sick Leave and Wellness**

- Change Sick leave plan from opt-in to opt-out
- Introduce discharge for those recovering from major illness, etc.
- Continue the Wellness program

### **Dual Career Hiring**

- need flexibility of department strategic plans
- need to talk more deliberately about this – need a more formal structure and a network
- look at corporate models
- Lynn will ask Deans to contribute to joining a regional dual career network

### **General Comments**

- Policies should be created across a spectrum for all employees
- We need to change the culture. Reinforce positive systemic changes within the culture in order to help transition from awareness and information to policies.

Stories should be shared about success with flexible work schedules, supervisors who promote work-life balance should be recognized and rewarded