**UFC Report on Childcare Benefit Options at the University of Richmond**

Over the past two academic years (2007-2008, 2008-2009), the administration has launched a major initiative aimed at addressing work-life family balance issues at the University of Richmond. We are appreciative of this effort and the work undertaken by the Work-Life Balance and Dependant Care Committee. The survey on work-life and dependent care needs conducted in 2007-08 shows that UR is a good place to work: UR staff feel that the overall level of support for their family and personal lives is roughly comparable to that at the average university, and UR faculty feel that the overall level of support for family and personal lives is **above** that at the average academic institution (p. 16).

In spring 2009, the university acted decisively to address a major concern of faculty and staff with its announcement of a generous parental leave policy. This should have a significant positive impact on the UR community and should boost both faculty recruitment and faculty retention over time. We congratulate the university on acting boldly to fill a major gap in UR’s policies and practices.

The purpose of this report is to call renewed attention to the still unresolved questions about dependent care policy, in particular child care. On April 13, 2007, University Faculty Council passed a resolution calling on the university to look specifically at the possibility of providing on-campus child care. The data compiled by the Work-Life Survey provides a wealth of insight into the university community’s perception of need for organized child care arrangements. Indeed, one of the survey’s most striking findings is that **89% of all respondents expressed support for an on-campus child care center, and that 93% of parents with children under the age of five years reported a center would be of value** (p. 30).

That level of support stems from widespread experiences of stress and burnout among faculty and staff with children, a situation exacerbated by the difficulties associated with child care arrangements for young children especially. Pages 17-19 of the survey show that on several key measures, stress levels associated with balancing family and work responsibilities at UR exceed the benchmark levels in the WFD dataset. (This observation leaves aside the highly pertinent question of whether we should take the “average” level of stress at academic institutions as a benchmark for comparing ourselves, given that there is good reason to think that the average stress levels at all academic institutions are unhealthy.) For instance, 58% of UR faculty members believe that balancing work and family issues negatively affects their health, and 46% believe that such stress inhibits faculty from doing their best work. These are stresses that carry not just personal but, through their impact on teaching and research quality, institutional costs. Page 19 shows that overall faculty stress (4.95) is at the “high” score level in the WFD database; the numbers are higher still among tenured (5.19) and tenure-track (6.22) faculty.

The survey provides specific evidence of how child care issues contribute to this stress. 74% of UR parents have missed at least one day of work due to child care breakdowns (including 23% who missed 5 or more days of work), and 81% have had to arrive late or leave early because of a breakdown (p. 44). Parents with children who must use an off-campus day care provider have to add extra length to their daily commute. More specifically, faculty and staff members with children under five report, on average, an additional 16.8 minutes added to their one-way commuting time in order to transport
children to child care (Unweighted WFD Data, p. 17). Multiplied by ten trips per week, the average faculty/staff member with children under five is estimated to spend an additional two hours and forty-eight minutes per week commuting. This average of course understates the reality for those parents who do not have an at-home child care option (i.e. care by a spouse, partner, or other family member). From a faculty perspective, this represents a significant cost at a time when work-related stresses are at their highest (i.e. during tenure-track years).

Additional stress is generated by the scramble to find an adequate child care provider. 81% of parents report difficulty finding infant care (including 52% who report “great difficulty), 78% report difficulty finding toddler care, and large majorities report difficulties finding care that is affordable, good quality, reliable, and at a convenient location (p. 42). Market data assembled by WFD confirm that there is a paucity of licensed care center for infants, toddlers, and pre-school children, including a total of only 35 centers providing infant care in the ten zip codes with the greatest number of UR faculty and staff members (p. 62-63). The difficulties of finding good quality child care arrangements are likely to increase further in future years, with 25% of faculty and staff planning to have children in the next few years, including 58% of tenure-track faculty (p. 33).

How can these stresses and costs be alleviated? According to the survey (p. 30), the top four childcare benefits that would be of use to parents with children under 5 are:

1. A Campus Childcare Center. 93% of parents with children under 5 would find this of some or great value, and 99% of faculty and staff with children under 5 support establishment of a center (Unweighted WFD data, p.13)
2. Emergency Back-up Care. 90% of parents with children under 5 would find this of some or great value
3. Childcare Discounts. 89% of parents with children under 5 would find this of some or great value
4. A Child Care Resource and Referral Center. 82% of parents with children under 5 would find this of some or great value (Note: Paid Parental Leave at 83% has been addressed by the recent instatement of a comprehensive paid parental leave policy at the University, thus placing CCRRC at position 4 in this list.)

Each of these four benefits have widespread support from the entire faculty and staff, with 85%-93% of faculty and staff reporting that the proposed benefit would either be of direct value or should be offered (p. 30). In addition, due to their overlap to #2 and #4 above, it should be noted that an elder care resource and referral service and elder backup care were both seen as of some or great value to elder caregivers (85% and 75%, respectively) and had great support from all faculty staff (91% and 89% respectively; p. 30).

Recommendations

The current lack of support for UR faculty and staff with young children continues to generate significant costs. These include the inefficiencies and stress caused by longer commute times, having to come in late/leave early or having to miss work completely due to child care breakdowns, and the difficulty many parents have in finding affordable, quality care in the Richmond area. While these
stresses may be borne only by a minority of faculty/staff at any time, over time a large proportion of employees will experience these stresses. Moreover, these costs often fall hardest on tenure-track faculty members at a time when they are experiencing maximum pressures to be professionally productive in addition to being effective teachers.

If we conservatively estimate that the roughly 105 faculty members with children under five spend on average 90 minutes (1.5 hours) per week commuting to and from child care locations, that represents a total of 7,875 hours spent in additional commuting (calculation based on a 50 week work year). This is equivalent to nearly four full time positions. This additional time represents a deadweight loss; it takes away from both productive work time and from family and leisure time, and may contribute to the stress levels reported herein.

Additional costs associated with present conditions not covered in the survey data include the impact of current child care arrangements on recruitment and retention of faculty and staff. The current fend-for-yourself policy can be off-putting to prospective faculty and staff who are parents or plan to be parents when considering employment at the University of Richmond. Moreover, it can be a source of frustration and even resentment for current faculty and staff. Proactive policies to tackle this situation could provide a significant boost to morale and well-being among current faculty and staff, and be another substantial step in making the university an “employer of choice” in the national and regional markets. Further, an on-campus child care center could strengthen the sense of community at the University, increase interactions between parents, and even become a focal point of pride for the institution.

We therefore recommend that the University continue to explore the possibility of an onsite childcare center, to open within the next few years. In the survey, 85% of parents with a child under 15 or planning their first child would likely use a childcare center near campus (p. 47). Current estimates indicate a viable child care center at UR might require an operating subsidy of under $300,000 per year, which includes $2.7 million (amortized over 30 years) for building costs. (This subsidy assumes parents will pay market-rate fees, possibly on a sliding scale basis, to enroll children in the center.) This is a significant amount of money, but we ask that it be evaluated in light of the strategic priorities of the university as a whole, and comparable levels of investment made in other areas of the university. In particular, this cost needs to be weighed against the potential tangible and intangible benefits of a center, and in light of the fact that an overwhelming majority (89% of survey respondents) support such a center. Of course, the university should also continue to explore ways the costs associated with such a center might be minimized, such as by partnering with a community agency or opening the center to non-university members. We do not think, however, that the stated cost attached to a center is in itself a compelling or decisive objection, given the benefits over the long-term such a center might provide.

In the near term, the University should also consider devising a system of childcare vouchers. While the estimated cost of a voucher program is still significant ($270,000 per year), it would postpone the large upfront costs of an onsite childcare center. We believe vouchers are sub-optimal to a childcare center because this approach does not address the core issue of the relative lack of quality child care in the Richmond area, the day-to-day costs imposed on employees, and the various positive benefits for
the campus community of having an onsite center. Nonetheless, as discussion regarding a child care center continues, provision of vouchers could help off-set the financial costs and stresses for parents associated with finding their own day care arrangements.

We recommend that the University take two immediate, relatively low-cost steps to improve the child care situation at the university:

First, the University should set up a resource and referral service for childcare. This would involve only a small cost if any, but would be of great benefit, especially to new parents and employees who are new to Richmond and have children. Such a service can be located within Human Resource Services and can be started and maintained without adding additional personnel.

Second, the University should provide back-up emergency childcare. In the survey, 88% and 80% of parents with a child under 15 or planning their first child would likely use backup care for well or mildly ill children, respectively (p. 47). The University can provide a certain number of days free of charge and possibly allow employees to pay for additional days if needed. This can be done by an outside contractor and involves few start-up costs. According to the Work-Life Balance and Dependant Care Committee, such a service would cost between $20,000 and $80,000, depending on the number of days provided to each employee and the use of the program. Considering the loss of productivity incurred when parents must stay home, miss meetings, cancel class etc, the cost of providing back-up emergency childcare may be small in comparison.

We also feel obligated to point out that it would be beneficial to extend both recommendations above to include an eldercare referral and resource center and back-up eldercare as part of the benefits. The press of elder care is and will continue to be felt by increasing numbers of middle-aged children and other relatives. Although it is difficult to project demand for elder care in the UR community based on data (un)available in the survey, national data indicate significant costs currently associated with elder care, and project rising costs as the present cohort of middle-aged adults (so-called “Baby Boom” generation) enter old age. Expanding these two programs should be straightforward and would provide significant benefit to even more UR faculty and staff. 41% of faculty and 35% of staff currently provide eldercare or expect to do so in the next four years (p. 52). Additionally at least 80% of current or future elder caregivers find value in various eldercare resource services (p. 59). Finally, 71% and 74% of current elder caregivers have missed one or more days of work and arrived late/early early, respectively, due to elder care giving responsibilities (p. 57), indicating a great need for emergency elder care as well.

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i Calculated based on converting categorical data presented in the WFD Unweighted Data, p. 17, into whole numbers as follows: Zero minutes coded as zero; 1-15 minutes coded as 10; 16-30 minutes coded as 23; 31-45 minutes coded as 38; 45 minutes or greater coded as 50. The resulting figure should be understood as an estimate.

ii The WFD report indicates that the actual number of parents with children under 5 is roughly 108; p. 34 indicates that 30.2% of faculty members have a child under age 5 (derived from figures that 57% of faculty have children under 15 and 53% of these have children under 5). Total faculty in the year of the survey was 358 (p.5).

iii 119 employees; subsidy range $1,000 - $3,000 depending on income and number of children)