Family-Friendly Programs at Pacific University's College of Health Professions: Feedback, Analysis, and Recommendations

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Family-Friendly Programs at Pacific University’s College of Health Professions: Feedback, Analysis, and Recommendations

Abstract
An increasing number of organizations have developed family-friendly policies and programs over the past 20 years in response to the demographic changes of the workforce to include more working mothers. In addition, organizations learned to use family friendly programs as a means of recruiting top talent and retaining experienced employees (Arthur & Cook, 2003). However, as Frone (2003) explained, while organizations frequently put strategies in place to promote work-family balance, very few organizations study the outcomes to determine if the goals for those initiatives (e.g. reduce conflict, enhance loyalty, increase efficiency) are met. The current study examined the work-family programs and policies available to eligible employees of Pacific University’s College of Health Professions (CHP) to determine if those programs are meeting the goals of the University and the diverse needs of the employees. Twenty seven CHP staff and faculty members participated in focus groups or individual interviews to provide feedback about their experience and opinions regarding the benefits available. Data collection occurred prior to an update to the benefits package; therefore feedback is reflective of the benefits in place prior to April 1, 2008. Results showed participants were most concerned with the cost structure of the healthcare plan, followed by costs of parking and athletic facilities, and access to continuing education. Other concerns are also documented. Using justice theory and work-life balance literature, trends in the results are analyzed and interpreted. Recommendations to address perceived inequity are provided.

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FAMILY-FRIENDLY PROGRAMS AT PACIFIC UNIVERSITY'S
COLLEGE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS:
FEEDBACK, ANALYSIS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
HILLSBORO, OREGON

BY
ALISON GRECO

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY
JULY 25, 2008

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of organizations have developed family-friendly policies and programs over the past 20 years in response to the demographic changes of the workforce to include more working mothers. In addition, organizations learned to use family-friendly programs as a means of recruiting top talent and retaining experienced employees (Arthur & Cook, 2003). However, as Frone (2003) explained, while organizations frequently put strategies in place to promote work-family balance, very few organizations study the outcomes to determine if the goals for those initiatives (e.g. reduce conflict, enhance loyalty, increase efficiency) are met. The current study examined the work-family programs and policies available to eligible employees of Pacific University's College of Health Professions (CHP) to determine if those programs are meeting the goals of the University and the diverse needs of the employees. Twenty-seven CHP staff and faculty members participated in focus groups or individual interviews to provide feedback about their experience and opinions regarding the benefits available. Data collection occurred prior to an update to the benefits package; therefore feedback is reflective of the benefits in place prior to April 1, 2008. Results showed participants were most concerned with the cost structure of the healthcare plan, followed by costs of parking and athletic facilities, and access to continuing education. Other concerns are also documented. Using justice theory and work-life balance literature, trends in the results are analyzed and interpreted. Recommendations to address perceived inequity are provided.
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REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON FAMILY-FRIENDLY BENEFITS

An increasing number of organizations have developed “family-friendly” policies and programs over the past 20 years in response to the demographic changes of the workforce and the needs of a new set of employees, many of whom are female. Burke (2006) describes “family-friendly” programs as those policies that have, “the goal of facilitating the ability of employees to fulfill their family responsibilities (p. 236).” Glass and Fujimoto (1995) define the term as, “any benefit, working condition, or personnel policy that has been shown empirically to decrease job-family conflicts among employed parents (p. 382).”

The development of these programs and policies reflects a dramatic shift in who is working and in family arrangements in America. According to 2006 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 58.3% of employees are women. In addition, 67.4% of all women with children 18 and younger are employed and 56.4% of mothers with children under age 3 are working. These statistics represent a 50% increase in the number of women in the workforce since 1977 (BLS, 2006). The reasons women have moved from primarily working in the home to more frequently also working outside of it are numerous and complicated. Economic factors play a role, as inflation and rising costs of living have encouraged more family members to work (Philipson, 2007). Changes in culture, including the rise of feminism that popularized liberation and autonomy for women, also made it socially acceptable, even desirable, for women to pursue a career (Philipson, 2007).
In addition, the definition of a "family" has grown to include a variety of structures. In 2006, married couples with children comprised nearly 74% of families; single parents were the head of nearly 25% of families in America, an increase from 17% in 1977 (Bureau of the Census, 2006). Same sex partner households (or domestic partnerships per the Oregon Family Fairness Act as of February 2008) are estimated to be .7% to .9% of households. Family structures also include blended and stepfamilies, foster children, and grandparents caring for grandchildren (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

Another factor influencing the benefits that organizations provide employees is the fact that the population of the United States is aging rapidly. According to the Administration on Aging (2006) persons 65 years or older represented 12.4% of the U.S. population, or about 1 in every 8 Americans. By 2030, the number of people 65 and over is expected to increase to 20% of the population. The National Council on Aging (2002) estimates that between 30 - 40% of all employees currently provide some form of elder care for a family member. Over 60% of caregivers are working full or part-time. More than 40% also care for children under 18. Therefore, while employees have traditionally balanced parenting and work, increasingly "the sandwich generation" is also managing the needs of aging parents and other relatives. The struggle to reconcile the demands of work and family life has been heightened as traditional roles and values conflict with the realities of non-traditional dual-earner lifestyles.

Research investigating these changes in demographics and the impact on employees and organizations has grown exponentially over the last 20 years (Matz, 2003). Early conceptualizations tended to treat work and family life as distinct and
independent domains with little or no influence on the other (Brough, O'Driscoll, & Kalliath, 2005). However, this view was short-lived as researchers began to see the variety of linkages between the two central areas of life. The theory of spillover holds that, “a person’s attitudes and experiences in one domain (e.g. work) will be positively correlated with their attitudes and experiences in the other (e.g. family) (Brough, O'Driscoll, & Kalliath, 2005, p. 224).” Most research has focused on negative spillover, or work-family conflict. The impact of this conflict has been well documented and includes lower job satisfaction, increased turnover, lower quality of family life (including marital conflict and higher rates of alcohol abuse), and increased rates of clinical depression and other health complaints (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Wilcock et al. 1997; Frone, 2003; Hammer et al., 2005). A high level of conflict between work and personal life can be detrimental to individuals, their families, and the organizations where they are employed. As Backman (2004) notes, occupational balance leads to improved health and perceived well-being, while imbalance reduces morale and, potentially, physical health.

One explanation for work-life conflict is described by the scarcity hypothesis (Barnett & Baruch, 1985). This theory holds that because an individual has limited resources which to draw from, taking on an increased number of roles will increase the potential for experiencing role strain. Role strain then leads to conflict as the person works to fulfill competing role demands. Role strain has been used to explain occupational burnout and postpartum depression in working mothers. (Goode, 1960; Philipson, 2002).
Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) described three types of work-family conflict: *time-based, strain-based,* and *behavior-based.* Time-based conflict describes role overload and schedule conflicts. The time pressures of one role make it physically impossible to fulfill the demands of the other role, which may cause some individuals to be preoccupied mentally with one role even while physically participating in another (e.g. thinking of work while coaching a child’s soccer game or worrying about a sick child while attending a work meeting). Contributing to time-based conflict are working long hours, inflexible work schedule, employee’s personal attitude toward working (e.g. one who chooses to work the longest possible hours or travel extensively, potentially in excess to the requirements of the position), marriage, having younger children, large family, and spouse’s working. This is often the type of conflict most readily identified when discussing the difficulty of balancing the needs of work and family.

Strain-based conflict takes the form of tension, anxiety, fatigue, depression, apathy, and irritability. An ambiguous or conflicted work role and low levels of leader support are sources of strain at work. Family sources of strain include family conflict, lack of spousal support, and dissimilarity between spousal attitudes toward work. Strain based conflict is generally more interpersonally driven than time-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Behavior-based conflict is seen when the in-role behavior is incompatible with behavioral expectations of the other role. Aggression may be acceptable, even required at work, but nurturance and emotional availability may be necessary at home. The need to switch, sometimes rapidly (e.g. while taking a personal call from work), between role-appropriate behavior can be challenging and draining.
Adams et al. (1996) and Frone (2003) note that work-family conflict is bidirectional, meaning that events at work have impact on the home and vice versa. This spillover can describe both conflict and positive effects in each domain. This finding has important implications for family-friendly programs as efforts at work to minimize conflict can have generalizable effects on an employee's home life and therefore can, in effect, compound the impact of these programs.

An increasing number of organizations have developed family-friendly policies and programs over the past 20 years in response to the demographic changes of the workforce and the needs of a new set of employees, many of whom are female. In addition, as the labor market became increasingly tight in the 1990s (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006), organizations learned to use family-friendly programs as a means of recruiting top talent and retaining experienced employees (Arthur & Cook, 2003).

Beyond adding and keeping employees, organizations look to family-responsive programs as a means of decreasing employee absenteeism and increasing work efficiency and effectiveness (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006). According to Burke (2006), popular family-responsive programs and policies fall under four major categories: dependent care, parental leave programs, spouse relocations and job locator programs, and alternative work schedules (including part-time work, flexible hours, and job sharing).

More recently elder care is also being included in these programs (Boise & Neal, 1996). The National Council on Aging (2002) estimates that between 30 – 40% of all employees provide some form of elder care for a family member, and that 70% of employers report increases in caregiving-related staffing problems in the past 10 years. Caring for elders can have an impact on an employee’s ability to work and to advance
their career (AARP, 2007). Caregivers many need to reduce work hours, turn down a promotion, or take a leave or absence in order to meet the requirements for caring for an older family member. Recognizing the needs of employees and attempting to address staffing problems related to elder care, organizations have begun offering benefits to employees that often include elder care resource and referral assistance, on-site assessment, long-term care insurance, and/or adult day care.

The earliest work-family programs, from the 1940s (as women entered the workforce during World War II) and again in the 1970s, focused on childcare concerns, including on-site child care centers, and eventually broadened to include off-site resources, emergency child care ("backup"), referral services and voucher programs (Friedman, 1990). The priority switched to family leave strategies in the 1980s as maternity leave and short- and long-term disability leave policies were instituted. In the 1990s, organizations began addressing the conflict between work and family demands by adding flexibility and employee autonomy with options such as flex-time, part-time, job sharing, and telecommuting (Friedman, 1990).

As the provision of family-friendly benefits is neither uniform nor ubiquitous among organizations in the U. S., a variety of explanations have been offered to explain the pattern of combinations of programs offered to employees. One theory describes the human resource perspective on work-family programs as "efficiency based" and are therefore designed to increase employee productivity. As Arthur and Cook (2003) note, "the basic assumption is that, if an organization helps employees balance work and family, organizations will be better able to attract, retain, and extract increases in productivity from current employees (p. 227)."
Davis and Kalleberg (2006) explain that organizations respond to three types of pressures by creating family-friendly plans: internal economic pressures (protecting investments), external economic pressures (competing for workers), and external, institutional pressures (accepted and legitimate industry practices). Internal economic pressures tend to impact organizations with substantial investments in training employees so that turnover is very costly. These organizations use family-friendly employment practices to enhance commitment, employee satisfaction, and reduce turnover. Other organizations depend on workers who have many alternate job opportunities and find it necessary to meet the needs of those employees in order to attract and retain valuable employees. External economic pressures are seen in a strong labor market or with highly and uniquely skilled employees. Finally, some organizations institute family-friendly policies because they are viewed as “best practices” in the industry or are legally mandated, lending legitimacy to the organization without regard to the actual outcomes of the policies themselves.

While the U.S. government has traditionally played a limited role in mandating family responsive policies to organizations, especially when compared to some western-European countries (Gault & Lovell, 2006), some federal and state laws have had an impact on the provisions organizations make for their employees. In 1993, the US government passed the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that allows:

...“eligible” employees of a covered employer to take job-protected, unpaid leave... for up to a total of 12 workweeks in any 12 months because of the birth of a child and to care for the newborn child, because of the placement of a child with the employee for adoption or foster care, because the employee is needed to care for a family member (child, spouse, or parent) with a serious health condition, or because the employee's own serious health condition makes the employee unable to perform the functions of his or her job (section 825.100).
The state of Oregon also has a similar law, the Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA, 1995), which is supplemental to the federal law and allows for more reasons for taking a leave. The law provides up to 12 weeks protected, unpaid leave to care for an extended family member (such as in-laws) or to care for an infant who is ill (though not suffering a serious health condition) who needs home care.

Oregon recently passed a law designed to encourage working mothers to continue to breastfeed after returning to work. The law requires employers of 25 or more employees to provide unpaid rest periods to employees to express milk. “Employers should provide a location other than a public restroom or toilet stall, in close proximity to the employee’s work area for the employee to express milk in private. This may include the employee’s work area; a room connected to a public restroom, such as a lounge; or a child care facility in close proximity to the employee’s work location (Oregon State Law 653.077, 2007.).”

As of this writing, California is the only state to currently offer paid family leave. Launched in 2004 and funded through the state’s disability insurance program, the leave covers up to 6 weeks to care for an infant or ill family member (Wisenale, 2003). Washington State passed a law (Washington Family Leave Act (RCW 49.78) in April of 2007 (which will go into effect in 2009) that provides paid leave for 5 weeks to care for a newborn or newly adopted baby. Funding for the plan is still under consideration, as is a broader bill to cover leaves for family illness (“Paid Family Leave Becomes Law,” 2007).

As a country, the United States is still debating the costs and benefits of work-life policies and who should be responsible for paying for the plans. The costs of unpaid
leave fall to the individual employees and families, which limit who is able to take advantage of the program. The benefits of work-life programs, such as improved morale or strengthened loyalty, can be difficult to quantify and as such are often overlooked (Gault & Lovell, 2006). In addition, when work-life programs are implemented in a manner that is considered inequitable by some employees, resentment and reduced loyalty can result, negating the potential gains of the plans.

Justice theories (Casper et al., 2007; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Rothausen et al., 1998) are used to explain the resentment expressed by some employees. These theories state that individuals have certain values or norms regarding how employee rewards should be allocated. Rewards can be distributed according to effort and performance (equity-based allocation), to everyone at the same level (equality-based allocation), or due to individual need (need-based allocation). When employees feel equity and equality-based allocation values are violated (e.g. unqualified person is promoted, only some departments receive bonuses), feelings of unfairness and resentment may follow which can lead to dissatisfaction, lower commitment, and withdrawal by those employees.

"Benefits offered only to workers with children, or to only some workers with children, violate both equity- and equality-based reward allocation values; therefore, workers who do not receive these benefits (or benefits of equal value) may experience resentment which is manifested in less positive attitudes about the benefits and the organization (Rothausen et al., 1998, 687).”

Employees are sensitive to the fairness of programs and research has shown that many employees have been reluctant to participate in many family-friendly plans. Some studies have shown participation rates as low as 2% (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman,
Employees are less likely to participate when they believe that coworkers will be significantly burdened as a result of their utilization of benefits (Waters & Bardoel, 2006; Viega et al., 2004).

Viega et al. (2004) noted three other factors that influence employees' decisions to participate in available programs: the perceived usefulness of the programs (concrete benefits to the employee), personal psychological costs (e.g. feeling helpless), and likelihood of requests being acted upon (e.g. employer saying yes to request for leave).

The perceived usefulness of the benefit has been directly correlated to the likelihood of participation. If the benefit is worth it to the employee, they are more likely to attempt to take advantage of it (Viega et al., 2004). However, it is important to understand that each benefit has a cost. Specifically, employees are less inclined to participate when they anticipate greater image cost due to negative assessments by others, being labeled or stigmatized, by appearing less committed to their organizations, or any combination of these.

The factor with the most impact appears to be the organizational culture and the amount of support (both formal and in practice) supervisors and managers give family-friendly programs. The more supportive the corporate culture, and especially the employee's direct supervisor, the higher the likelihood of increased participation (Burke, 2006; Frye & Breaugh, 2004; Viega, 2004). In addition, employees who receive social support from supervisors report less work-family conflict. As Burke (2006) said, "Supportive supervisors play a key role in the implementation of family-supportive policies: supervisors embody and reflect the organizational culture...when managers
provide an example of the success of flexible work arrangements and encourage their use, employees are more likely to take advantage of this option. (p. 254-255)."

Thompson and Beauvais (2000) described six cultural barriers to implementing work-life programs in organizations: ingrained cultural assumptions and values regarding work and non-work domains, structural difficulties in implementing programs, lack of support from managers and supervisors, the perception that family issues are women's issues, maintaining equity among all employees, and lack of evaluation data on work-life programs. Burke (2006) made the point that organizations need to look at their corporate culture and the norms that define success, commitment, and appropriate behaviors. These norms will determine if work-family integration is likely or if culture and policies will clash.

For successful company efforts, Thompson and Beauvais (2000) suggested three themes: work-life integration is considered a strategic initiative of the business (a bottom line issue), research is conducted on behavioral and organizational effects of work-life policies and programs, and cultural assumptions about the link between work and other life domains are examined and changed.

Burke (2006) also identified workplace elements that have helped employees reach integration and increase satisfaction. These include providing employees a sense of autonomy and the ability to plan, structure, and control work schedules as well as influencing how employees perform their jobs. Organizations should have an outcomes focus rather than emphasizing face-time, so that employees are judged and rewarded for the work they accomplish and not the time they devote. In addition, social support (both instrumental and emotional) from co-workers reduces strain and perceived stressors. The
most vital element is supportive supervision that allows the other elements to grow and flourish in organizations.

Frone (2003) explained that while organizations frequently put strategies in place to promote work-family balance (such as those discussed above), very few organizations study the outcomes to determine if the goals for those initiatives (e.g. reduced conflict, enhanced loyalty, increased efficiency) are met. In addition, it can be time and resource intensive to determine if the programs in place meet the needs of employees. This lack of investigation, especially when organizations grow rapidly and the demographic mix of employees change, can lead to an imbalance between the goals of the organization and the needs of employees. Therefore, this study is intended to examine the work-family programs and policies available to eligible employees of Pacific University’s College of Health Professions (CHP) to determine if they are meeting the goals of the University and the diverse needs of the employees. As Davis & Kalleberg (2006) stated, “...organizations may need to respond to work-life concerns more inclusively to recognize the diversity of their workforce and the different needs at varied stages of the life course (p. 216).”

Pacific University offers a benefits package to its employees as a portion of the total compensation package, which also includes hourly rate or salary. The University has specific goals for creating and providing its benefit programs and policies, including aiding in the recruitment and retention of quality employees and remaining in sync and competitive with the offerings of similar-sized, private universities (those with whom they compete for staff, faculty, and students). Further, according to Mona Ward, Director of Human Resources at Pacific University, Dr. Phillip Creighton, President of Pacific
University, has sought for the benefits package to be responsive to people's needs at all stages of their lives. This mandate aspires to provide benefits that are inclusive of the needs of singles, couples, and those with dependents (children and elders) at various points in their careers. This goal extends beyond "family-friendly" and strives to identify and value every employee.

Pacific's CHP has experienced a great deal of growth within the past five years. New programs have been added, including the School of Dental Health Science and the School of Pharmacy, and existing schools have reorganized and grown in size. In addition, all the Health Science graduate schools consolidated and relocated to a new building in Hillsboro in 2006, creating the new College of Health Professions campus. Given the increased hiring, the tremendous growth of the programs, and recent logistical changes, it is an appropriate time to conduct a program evaluation of the benefits available to CHP employees. This evaluation will determine if the programs and policies are meeting the needs of employees, as well as helping the institution attain its objectives.

The specific goals of this project are the following:

1. Document the feedback of CHP employees regarding the benefits available to them, specifically those which facilitate the needs of work and home
2. Using relevant research and literature, identify themes in the feedback that highlight where needs and objectives are being met and where they are not
3. Based on the literature, provide recommendations for more closely aligning the programs and policies with the needs of employees and objectives of the University
METHOD
Participants

Eligibility and Recruitment

To be eligible to take part in this study, participants needed to be employees of Pacific University’s College of Health Professions (CHP) and eligible to receive benefits. The prospective participants, including faculty, administrators, and staff, were invited via email to attend one of several scheduled focus group meetings. Meeting place and times were arranged with interested participants via email. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with six professors who were unable to attend a scheduled focus group.

Participant Characteristics

Twenty-one participants attended 10 focus group sessions and 6 faculty members participated in individual interviews. The final sample consisted of 27 eligible employees, which represents approximately 20% of the total available employees of CHP. Characteristics of the participant sample are depicted in Table 1. Each school within CHP was represented by at least one participant, and the sample also includes representatives from supportive or administration positions within the CHP campus.

The mean age of the sample was 45 years and the median age was 43 years. The range of ages was from 26 to 65, a range of 39 years, with 50% of the sample falling between the ages of 35 and 58. Most of the participants (19/27) are married, though only 41% (11/27) have children. Of those with children, the majority are under age 5
(7/11) and most are under age 2 (5/11). The sample contained a wide variety of employment duration at Pacific, with 25.9% having worked for the University for 2 to 4 years and 22.2% having been at Pacific for more than 10 years. The sample reported working generally between 20 and 50 hours a week, and most of that work occurred on the CHP campus.

Measure

The demographic questionnaire asked participants to provide descriptive data, including marital status, number and age of children, job title and school, and length of employment at Pacific. This questionnaire was used to ensure the sample was a reasonable representation of CHP employees.

Procedure

Participants were recruited and asked to give their feedback during a focus group about benefits available to them at Pacific. Focus groups were held from January 14 through February 1, 2008. Focus groups were run according to a standardized protocol, including scripted instructions and questions for participants. Participants were informed that their participation was anonymous and voluntary, and they could end their participation at any time. The focus groups were video taped for record keeping purposes and participants were asked for their consent prior to the recorder being turned on. In addition, to fully ensure anonymity, the video camera was turned away from participants' faces so that only their voices were recorded.

To provide for an appropriately large sample, individual interviews were added to the data collection process. Interviews were held from February 14 to February 28, 2008. The individual interviews were conducted in faculty member's private offices.
and were video taped with consent. Interview participants were asked the same questions as the focus group participants.
Table 1

Sample Characteristics ($N = 27$)

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Other Dependents

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Education Level

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<td>College Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctorate Degree</td>
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Length of Time at Pacific

<table>
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<td>Less than 6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 months to 1 year</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 year to 2 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 4 years</td>
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<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 7 years</td>
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<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 to 10 years</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
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Weekly Hours Worked

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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 40 Hours</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>41 to 50 Hours</td>
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Table 1, continued

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<th>Hours Worked only at CHP</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<td>51 to 60 Hours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
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<td>More than 60 Hours</td>
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<td>More than 60 Hours</td>
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RESULTS

Pacific University offers a benefits package to its employees to aid in the recruitment and retention of quality employees and to remain competitive with the offerings of other small universities. The University also hopes the features available in the package fit the needs of all employees, including staff, administration, and faculty.

In order to determine if Pacific’s current benefits package is indeed meeting the needs of CHP employees and, by extension, the goals of the University, this study solicited direct employee feedback. Employees responded to open-ended questions in focus groups and interviews. They provided their thoughts and opinions about what they found valuable and what was not working well. They also discussed what brought them to Pacific and how they would describe the benefits package to others. These questions provided information directly pertinent to retention and recruitment of staff and faculty. The results of the focus groups and interviews are presented here, organized by the specific questions employees answered. The full list of questions is available in Appendix A. Feedback that is mentioned by 6 individuals (20% of the sample) or more is considered a trend, and is included in the results.

Employees were asked which programs or policies they felt were valuable. All employees (27/27) named the retirement plan and health care benefits as highly valued, and mentioned these programs as those they felt the most passionate about. A large number of employees (18/27) also discussed feeling the culture of the CHP was a benefit. Their description of CHP culture included excellent colleagues and interdisciplinary
contact, a stimulating work environment, flexibility (within the confines of the job), and a sense of trust and autonomy. Another highly valued benefit was the available time off, either through accrued vacation and sick time (for staff) or holiday and summer breaks (for faculty). Seventeen of the 27 employees expressed that the time off was very important to them. Finally, 8/27 participants named the tuition remission and exchange program as a benefit they appreciated. While a smaller number had actually used the program (3/8), those others who named the program hoped to be able to use it in the future.

Employees were then asked the correlative question to the first: what programs or policies did they not value or have concerns or problems with (See Figure 1). All employees (27/27) mentioned the cost of the health care plan as a concern. Even by those employees who are not enrolled in the health care plan (covered by spouse or partner) or who cover only themselves (and therefore do not pay a monthly premium) expressed this concern. The cost of the plans and who was required to pay the premiums were discussed as the source of their dissatisfaction.

The next three issues employees raised appear to be related to each other. Half of the participants (14/27) expressed frustration at what they expressed as a lack of appreciation and understanding by the larger Pacific community. They noted that the Forest Grove (FG) campus is considered the “main” campus where events and meetings are held. As a satellite campus, the Hillsboro campus does not provide the same amenities as the larger, older FG campus. Thirteen participants conveyed that they perceived the

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1 It is very important to note that parts of the benefits package, including the cost of health insurance, were significantly updated after a majority of data collection was completed. Therefore, feedback is largely reflective of the prior pricing.
move to the CHP campus from Forest Grove as a loss of benefits. They noted that having to pay for parking and to use the local athletic facility (Shute Park Aquatic and Recreation Center) decreased their actual benefits. Also related to campus concerns, six (6/27) participants explained that the shuttle service to the FG campus was too unreliable and inconvenient to be used regularly to attend meetings and events. They said they hesitated to commute to work using the Max line (light rail train) or carpool because they frequently needed to use their cars to reach the Forest Grove campus and return to CHP in a timely manner. Access to the FG campus also concerned nine (9/27) participants who felt disappointed that they were unable to take advantage of attending undergraduate classes. Since the classes are only offered during the workday, and only in Forest Grove, they explained that the free tuition was moot. Finally, a few employees (4/27) said that no longer having easy access to discounted movie tickets, though, “it seems little,” was a disappointment and lowered their morale.

Participants requested several additions to the benefits they are offered (See Figure 2). The most popular request (17/27) was to have chiropractic services covered under the health plan. Many employees (16/27) also sought to have covered access to alternative healthcare providers and procedures, specifically requesting naturopathic services, acupuncture, and therapeutic massage.

Saying they valued education, nearly half of the participants (13/27) felt that having tuition help to continue their education would be a highly valued addition. They requested vouchers that would allow them to attend classes at other institutions to earn a certificate or degree (undergraduate or graduate) not available at Pacific while continuing
in their jobs. They noted that their new skills would be a benefit to Pacific and the tuition payments may help with retention and recruitment of employees.

Access to quality childcare was a concern of 12 participants and they felt there are too few options in Hillsboro. While 2 participants hoped Pacific would provide high quality childcare on-site, the other 10 did not specifically seek an at-work-based solution. Increasing available options, providing options for sick childcare, and providing subsidies to help with the cost of childcare were employee suggestions.

The last two suggestions reflect employee concerns with working at the CHP campus. Ten (10/27) participants requested free access to workout facilities close to the CHP campus and eight (8/27) sought free and convenient parking.

In thinking about the benefits package as a potential recruiting tool, participants explained what drew them to work at Pacific and the role the benefits package played in their choice. For a majority of participants (20/27) they explained that they chose to work at Pacific for reasons beyond the benefits. They really enjoyed the work culture and their colleagues. They concluded that the benefits offered were “required but not sufficient.” Some employees did have specific reasons for choosing Pacific. For 13 employees, the flexibility and hours were paramount for balancing work and home life. For 11 employees, the benefits did play a strong role in their decision to work at Pacific. These employees had previously not had access to healthcare or needed the benefits for their family. Seven individuals (7/27) mentioned the tuition remission/exchange program as a primary draw to Pacific. Six (6/27) recalled that having access to the retirement package was a strong consideration when choosing where to work.
To end each session, participants were asked for their overall assessment of the benefits available to them at Pacific. Comments ranged from “Very good,” “Good, Satisfactory,” to “Adequate.” In examining trends, it is clear that single individuals or those not taking advantage of the healthcare benefit were more positive in their evaluation of the benefits. Some comments were, “All the basic minimums are there”, “Adequate in all areas and in some areas quite good”, “Benefits are comparable and adequate, if expensive”, and “On the whole, good; not Cadillac, but good.”
Figure 1. Employee Feedback Regarding Perceived Problems with Benefits Package

Figure 1: This chart illustrates the five concerns heard most frequently from participants in this study. The percentages represent the portion of the 27 participants who mentioned the concern, the larger the circle, the more people who mentioned the problem.
Figure 2: This chart shows the requests participants made when asked what they would like to see added to their benefits package. The arrows lead down to illustrate the decreasing popularity of each request. Percentages indicate how many of 27 participants sought each addition.
DISCUSSION

The feedback participants gave during the focus group and interview sessions was remarkably uniform though it came from employees who vary widely in age, job type, length of employment, and family arrangement. Themes of fairness and equality largely united participants' concerns and requests.

Drawing from Justice theories, Casper et al. (2007) explain that benefits packages, specifically family-friendly programs, are most able to reach their goals of retention, recruitment, employee loyalty, etc. when employees perceive the plans to be appropriately distributed, either based on merit (equity allocation) or to everyone at the same level (equality allocation.) However, results from the focus groups and interviews highlight several places where CHP employees believe an imbalance in benefit distribution exists at Pacific.

The area mentioned by all 27 participants concerns the cost of health care. While health care is available to all employees (equal benefit allocation), there is the perception that not all employees contribute to the cost of coverage and consequently the burden of costs rests most heavily on couples and those with children (unequal cost allocation). The perception expressed by a large majority of employees (24/27) is that the current structure of health care cost distribution is “punitive” to families. ²

The health care cost structure can be seen as working against the goals the University has for the benefits offered. A couple of employees (2/27) explained that they

² Note that an update to the benefits package, including healthcare costs, occurred after a majority of data collection had been completed.
chose to come to Pacific in spite of the health care coverage. Rather than being a recruitment tool, the cost of health care gave pause to these employees when considering an employment offer.

Employees highlighted another area of perceived inequality when they expressed frustration with working at the new CHP campus. These employees felt that moving to the new campus had been “almost a punishment” that resulted in the loss of some perquisites available at the Forest Grove (FG) campus. Bearing the new costs of parking and gym membership were viewed as unfair, as only CHP employees are required to pay these costs. Also frequently raised was the fact that receptions, meetings, and parties are generally only held at the FG campus, necessitating that the CHP employees travel to Forest Grove.

By contrast, the University’s retirement plan is considered to be entirely fair and appropriately distributed. All participants cited the University-funded retirement plan as a highly valued benefit and 6 employees explained this benefit was a specific reason for their choosing to work at Pacific. Because the contribution percentage is equal across employees and contribution is not required, this benefit is considered “generous” and fair among employees. Two employees described the retirement plan as the “counter-weight” to the health care costs, allowing them to accept a position or remain at Pacific.

Burke (2006) explained that a supportive environment and a sense of autonomy are keys to the success of benefit packages meeting employee needs. While there may be some differences among schools, the overall opinion of the CHP culture is very high. Employees explained that the main reason they chose to work at Pacific (20/27) and one of the most valued benefits (18/20) overall is the work culture. Employees said they
appreciated the quality and dedication of their colleagues and felt the environment was “stimulating” and “demanding but supportive.” Participants also explained that they felt they worked in an environment of autonomy and trust and were able to work flexible hours as the work allowed. While “culture” can be a challenging benefit to quantify, Burke (2006) and Viega (2004) point to a positive culture as a primary factor in the reduction of work-life conflict.

In addition to the positive and collegial atmosphere, for a majority of participants the available time off (through sick time, vacation, or holiday and summer breaks) was specifically noted as being a highly valued benefit. For those who came to Pacific from a non-academic environment, the time off was novel and “refreshing.” Several employees explained, “what I may lose in pay, I gain in time.” Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) discuss time-based conflict as a basic source of work-life conflict that results in not having enough time to meet the demands of work and home. By having sufficient and flexible time off, Pacific employees are more able to avoid this source of conflict and feel more able to reach integration in their lives. They clearly recognize time as an advantage in working for Pacific.

In sum, employees report that Pacific is successful meeting the majority of their needs, and is generally meeting its own goals for recruitment, employee satisfaction, and retention. Where problems were identified, employees reported feeling unequal treatment coupled with high or increased costs as their chief complaint. Supportive and flexible culture, and high caliber colleagues were reported strengths that contribute to Pacific’s success.
RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought feedback from CHP employees in order to determine if the current benefits structure is meeting their needs. Employees reported feeling important inequalities exist in the way benefits are allocated. This perceived disparity was illustrated in three specific areas: health care premium contribution structure, the cost and access to parking at the CHP campus, and the cost of the work out facilities available to CHP employees. I put forth these specific recommendations to address the areas highlighted by employees as being in need of attention.

The updated benefits package presented in April 2008 addressed the high cost of healthcare, particularly to cover employee partners and children, which employees had raised as a problem. The impact of the cost reduction is unknown as the changes occurred after data collection was largely completed for this project. However, while the updated benefit package did reduce premium costs, contribution allocation remains unchanged. In the current structure, individuals do not contribute to the cost of their premiums while those who cover themselves and their families do pay a monthly premium cost. It was noted during data collection that this design could be perceived as preferential to single employees. Unless employees who pay premiums are paying only for the additional family members they are covering, it appears that some employees receive “free” healthcare and others do not.

I recommend the Benefits and Compensation Committee examine the current structure in the light of ensuring fairness for all employees. Communicating to employees
the goals of the healthcare contribution structure and how fairness is ensured will ease
concerns regarding potential inequalities and preferential treatment.

Gathering additional information is also the first step in addressing other concerns
raised during the focus groups and interviews. The Staff Senate could add a goal of
campus alignment to its activities. The Senate members could investigate and address
employee concerns about parking and paying for workout facilities. Some options to
consider when addressing access to workout facilities are: remain with the status quo,
charge all employees an “activities fee,” or charge no one to access workout facilities.
The Staff Senate could either make a decision for the University as a whole, or conduct a
survey to understand employees’ preferences and concerns. This same process can be
used to handle the parking concerns and generate ideas to better integrate the graduate
programs into the larger Pacific community and culture.

For several concerns, supplemental communication about benefits already
available may provide reassurance. With regard to calls for chiropractic care, it may be
helpful for employees to know that the Kaiser health plan does cover this procedure, with
a $15 copay and a referral. If these services were available through Western States
Chiropractic College, as a fellow member of the Oregon Independent Colleges
Association, this information would also be helpful for employees. Similarly, while
employees felt there were few childcare options in Hillsboro, none mentioned using the
Childcare Referral Service available through the EASE employee assistance program.
This service may help employees discover options they did not know were available near
Hillsboro or their own homes.
In the future, Pacific may wish to consider increasing the education benefit beyond undergraduate classes at the Forest Grove campus. Providing an incentive for employees to increase knowledge that can be used to improve their work skills is an attractive benefit for recruiting potential staff and retaining ambitious employees. Tuition discounts and other programs also reinforce the value the University places on education. As well, the culture of the College of Health Professions emphasizes integrated healthcare and offering discounts or other incentives for using alternative therapies such as acupuncture and massage or naturopathy communicates the University’s commitment to employee health and wellness.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the benefits available to you as an employee of Pacific University?

2. Which benefits do you now use or have you used?

3. What programs or policies do you like or value the most? Why?

4. Which programs or policies do you dislike or value the least? Why?

5. What programs or policies would you like to have that you don’t?

6. Did you choose to work for Pacific University in part because of the benefits available to you?

7. What is your overall impression of the benefits available at Pacific University?
1. Date of Birth ____________________ , 19 __

2. Identified Gender
   a) Female
   b) Male

3. What is your Current Marital Status? (Circle One)
   a) Single
   b) Married
   c) Member of an unmarried couple
   d) Separated
   e) Divorced
   f) Other
   g) Prefer not to answer

4. What is the highest level of education you completed? (Circle One)
   a) Some high school
   b) High school graduate or equivalent
   c) Some college
   d) Undergraduate degree
   e) Master’s Degree
   f) Doctorate Degree
   g) Other

5. Do you have a child or children who live in your household or for whom you are responsible?
   a) Yes (Go to Question 6)
   b) No (Skip to Question 7)

6. How many children in your household or for whom you are responsible are:
   a) Under age 2 ________ (whole number)
   b) Ages 2 to 4 ________
c) Ages 5 to 12  
d) Ages 13 to 17  

7. Do you have other dependent individuals who live with you or for whom you are responsible?
   a) Yes  
      What is their relationship to you?  
      a) adult child (age 18 or over)  
      b) parent  
      c) other  
   b) No  

8. What is your job title?  

9. How long have you worked for Pacific University? (Total time, even if doing different jobs)  
   a) Less than 6 months  
   b) 6 months to 1 year  
   c) 1 to 2 years  
   d) 3 to 4 years  
   e) 5 to 7 years  
   f) 8 to 10 years  
   g) more than 10 years  

10. How many hours a week (on average) do you spend working for your job? (Include time spent doing work while in another location, such as home)  
    a) Less than 20 hours  
    b) 20 to 40 hours  
    c) 41 to 50 hours  
    d) 51 to 60 hours  
    e) more than 60 hours  

12. How many hours a week (on average) do you spend working at the CHP campus (do not include time spent doing work while in another location, such as home)  
   a) Less than 20 hours  
   b) 20 to 40 hours  
   c) 41 to 50 hours  
   d) 51 to 60 hours  
   e) more than 60 hours