



# Family-Friendly University

By Andrea C. Poe

*Helping people blend work and personal lives makes UC Davis a top employer.*

When Jill Frankel found out she had to have bed rest for the last couple months of her pregnancy, she was afraid that her boss, who didn't have children, would not be understanding, "but he was awesome," says the HR analyst at the University of California, Davis. "I telecommuted from home."

After 12 weeks of leave, her boss allowed her to work part-time and ease back into her schedule. "The school was incredibly accommodating," she says.

Frankel's experience isn't uncommon. UC Davis is known as the diamond among the gems in the University of California system. Californians have long considered it a progressive workplace, one with a myriad of work/life benefits available to employees throughout the system at all levels.

The administration has made work/life programs a priority, says Barbara Ashby, manager of child care and family services for the

Davis campus, which took the mandate to heart. Starting in the 1980s, the campus started formally implementing work/life programs, such as onsite child care.

UC Davis, a campus with 16,000 employees and 27,000 students, is a pioneer, known within the UC system for trying new programs and introducing initiatives that are staff- and faculty-driven. The school is proud of this hard-earned reputation.

Work/life balance benefits at the university include onsite child care and kindergarten, breastfeeding support, flextime, alternative work schedules, catastrophic leave assistance, broad family leave policies, onsite athletic facilities, onsite housing for faculty and staff, and job placement assistance for domestic partners.

The campus's location off the beaten track—100 miles from San Francisco and 100 miles from Lake Tahoe—is partly responsible for the

plethora of work/life benefits, school representatives say. "Davis is a small community, and the university is the major employer, so there isn't this big divide between people's work lives and personal lives," Ashby explains.

The university's attention to work/life programs has made

it an employer of choice, says Dennis Shimeck, associate vice chancellor of human resources. "Our work/life programs really resonate with people."

Frankel agrees. Four years after the birth of her child, she continues to sing the praises of her workplace. Her supervisor lets her take an hour and a half for lunch so she can fit in

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a workout. "I live in a subdivision with its own fitness club, so it takes me awhile to drive there, go to my class and come back," she says. "My boss totally gets how exercise affects mental health." She makes up the time by arriving a half hour earlier in the morning.

### From Co-Workers to Community

The work/life initiatives can make a difference in people's lives. Just ask Carlene Blaylock, assistant dean for administration and finances in the College of Engineering. An administrative assistant in her department with two small children had recurring breast cancer. When she ran through her own leave, she was able to tap into catastrophic leave assistance, a program that permits employees to donate their unused vacation time to colleagues in need.

Blaylock sent out a call for help. "I e-mailed everyone, telling them what was happening to Linda," Blaylock says. "The response exceeded all of our expectations." Employees offered up nearly a year of vacation time.

"People who didn't even know her donated their very precious earned vacation time. It was the most amazing thing I have ever seen. Unfortunately, Linda wasn't able to use all the time since she lost her fight. But I will tell you this: It made people feel really good that they could help someone in need," Blaylock says. The employees' compassion cost the university nothing.

### In Committee

UC Davis officials credit communication among managers, faculty

members, HR and other staff members and unions with the development of work/life initiatives. Where many institutions would find gathering consensus among this disparate group akin to herding cats, Davis has embraced the process.

"As an academic institution we have a long history of committees," says Ricardo Freeman, human resource manager. "There's a built-in mechanism that enables all kinds of employees to come together and share ideas. By bringing a cross section of people together, we can find out what's really needed."

Virginia Hinshaw, provost and executive chancellor, says: "People are the biggest investment you're going to make. Our committees are geared towards soliciting information from our employees so that we can meet their needs."

Most of the initiatives have come from these employee-driven committees. "We're famous for positing a program and then piloting it to see if it works," Freeman says.

For example, the lactation program began as an idea generated by a small group of new mothers who requested a private place to pump breast milk. There are now 10 rooms across campus designated for breastfeeding mothers; each is stocked with literature about child care and breastfeeding. In addition, a nurse is on call 24 hours a day to answer questions. In the five years since the inception of the program, some 200 women have made more than 8,900 visits to the lactation rooms.

Monica Steinhart, an administrative assistant, breastfed for 10

months. "Since I didn't have an office and worked in a cube, the breastfeeding support program made it possible for me to come back to work earlier than I had planned," she notes. Because she already had a breast pump, the lactation program was free. (Discounts on pumps are available to all UC Davis employees.)

### Selling Buy-In

Educating employees is one of the school's most important steps when rolling out a new program. Knowing there can't be buy-in unless people understand the initiatives, HR makes it a point to introduce new programs to all employees.

"In addition to formal training and information sessions, all the information is put on the web site. Then periodically we do follow-up because information changes," Freeman explains.

Another reason for heavy usage of the programs is minimized bureaucracy, he says. "We don't want paperwork standing in the way, so we really simplify it. For instance, if you want catastrophic leave, we know you have a lot of stress in your life; you don't need more of it. A simple e-mail telling us you want it is enough."

### Evolution

Since initiatives are developed by rank-and-file employees, they address work/life balance issues that matter to staff and faculty. Because of this, no initiative has been yanked from the benefits list.

However, that doesn't mean that all programs work for all employees

as well as the school would like. For instance, HR has been unable to make flextime and alternative schedules available to all employees. Because of the nature of their jobs—such as customer service and medical research—some employees haven't been able to tap into that option.

"We'd like to figure out a way to offer that kind of flexibility to everyone," Freeman says. "But we haven't given up and are still thinking out ways to do it."

Programs evolve, Ashby says, pointing out that the first on-site child-care center at Davis opened in 1985, the second in 1988, and the school is looking into opening a third. "There's clearly a demand for it," she says, noting there is a waiting list of six to nine months for infant care.

Infant care costs \$900 a month; preschool care is \$550. "The reason is that it's good care and accessible," Ashby says, noting that even at those rates the child-care costs are below market rate in the area.

Davis not only tries to tweak existing programs but also seeks out

ideas for new initiatives through its work/life committees. Currently, the university is considering offering child-care subsidies to help offset recent increases in the cost of child care. "We did a needs assessment last year about work/life issues, and one that kept coming up was the need for child-care subsidies," Ashby notes.

### **Paying Off**

The work/life initiatives are costly, but the payoff is immeasurable, school representatives say.

While the campus does not keep stats, the school's work/life programs have made a difference. "We have stories, not statistics," Shimeck says. "We have lower turnover and higher morale [than other workplaces]."

Hinshaw agrees. "We are seeing an increased awareness in our work/life programs and an increased interest in people being attracted to the school."

Work/life programs at UC Davis will become more important in coming years. Not only is the

school the fastest-growing in the UC system, but it is also poised to have one of the youngest employee populations.

"Forty percent of staff and faculty will retire in the next few years," says Steinhart, who serves on a work/life advisory committee. "That means younger families will be coming in and looking for additional work/life benefits."

The Davis campus is well aware of its image as a family-friendly workplace and works hard to enhance it.

"Our work/life programs really help us with recruitment and with retention, especially among faculty who are looking for things other than salary," Ashby explains. "When you put in place things that make employees' lives easier, you have much happier employees. In turn, we earn their loyalty." **HR**

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