Fort Lewis College
Presidential Task Force on Family-Responsive Employment Policies
REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2007, President Bartel formed the Task Force on Family-Responsive Employment Policies to review current family-responsive employment policies at Fort Lewis College, and to research and recommend additional family-responsive employment policies that are financially sustainable. To this end, the task force conducted a survey, speak-your-mind sessions and focus groups. In addition, the group independently researched alternative family-responsive policies. This document summarizes the findings of the task force.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The task force used three guiding principles in forming its recommendations: (1) work and family compatibility, (2) fairness and (3) financial sustainability.

(1) The task force is committed to the idea that work and family can be compatible. One shouldn’t have to choose between being a good family member and being a good employee. The task force is committed to finding employment policies that are in the best interest of both families and the college.

(2) The task force is committed to ensuring that family-responsive policies are fair to all employees. All policies and benefits should embody fairness between employees with families and those without, between families headed by opposite-sex partners and families headed by same-sex partners, and between different employee groups (where possible, given the constraints of state regulations regarding classified staff).

(3) The task force is committed to finding solutions that are financial sustainable. There are very real budget limitations at Fort Lewis College. The only real solutions for families are financially-sustainable solutions.
EVALUATION OF THE CURRENT POLICIES AND BENEFITS

The survey, speak-your-mind sessions and focus groups revealed that there are many existing policies that are very helpful to employees. For example, employees are appreciative of the excellent childcare facilities on campus. Many employees have benefited from parental leave policies. Many employees are assisted by flex-time work arrangements. Also, many employees express special appreciation for understanding and supportive supervisors. In fact, on the survey 91 of 130 staff respondents and 71 of 99 faculty respondents marked “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “Most people in my department/program are supportive of colleagues who want to balance their family and their career lives.”

At the same time, there was wide agreement that obstacles and problems remain. On the survey, 41 out of 130 staff respondents and 60 out of 100 faculty respondents marked “agree or “strongly agree” to the statement “I sometimes feel that I have not adequately fulfilled my responsibilities to my family because of my work at the college.”

In addition, the survey provided important information on how family-responsive policies impact the retention of employees. While most of the respondents marked that they “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the statement, “I have considered leaving Fort Lewis College in order to better achieve balance between work and family,” it is worth noting that one in four respondents (58 employees total) agreed or strongly agreed that they have considered leaving FLC in order to achieve a better balance between work and family.

The task force divided the obstacles and problem into four categories: (1) general concerns, (2) concerns about work and parenting, (3) concerns about work and elder care, and (4) concerns about work and partner relationships.

(1) General Concerns

One major problem is that employees are not adequately informed about existing family-responsive policies and benefits. The first section of the survey summarized existing family-responsive policies at Fort Lewis College, asking respondents about whether or not they were aware of the policies or had used them. There were surprisingly high numbers of faculty who were unaware of some of the policies. For example, 55 of 100 faculty respondents were not aware of the 20 days of paid family leave available to faculty. Also 75 of 99 faculty respondents were not aware of the stop-the-clock policy. There were also some staff members who were not aware of staff family-responsive policies, though the trend was not as remarkable as among the faculty. The speak-your-mind sessions and focus groups reaffirmed the fact that people are not clear about existing policies.

Financial concerns are significant for all employees. The generally low salaries combined with the high cost of living create financial stress for families. For example, employees struggle to cover the cost of childcare or the cost of care for elderly family members.
One recurring theme of the speak-your-mind sessions and focus groups was that the college is understaffed and employees are overworked. Many employees are working much more than forty hours per week (exempt staff and faculty without overtime pay). This is especially problematic for employees with families when it involves working early mornings, late evenings, weekends, and traveling. The reports of faculty working “overtime” are consistent with data from the National Survey of Post-Secondary Faculty. At liberal arts institutions across the nation, faculty work an average of more than 53 hours per week during the academic year. More than 35% of faculty work more than 60 hours per week.1 It’s difficult to balance work and family when one is rarely at home. In addition, the problem of understaffing and overworking has prevented some people from using existing family-responsive policies. One focus group participant said, “There’s the guilt of, how’s my job going to get done? Everybody else is going to have to pitch in and they’re going to work harder.” Another participant stated, “Now of course I have the leave, I have sick leave and vacation, but again, the main thing is the workload.... The attitude is always we’re there for you, but the fact remains that everybody is so overwhelmed with work that even if they did know how to do your job, they wouldn’t have time.”

Another common concern of employees was a lack of equity between departments and employee groups. In the focus groups, participants noted that variation exists between departments in how family-related policies are applied. There was also concern expressed about variation in policy depending on one’s title/status. For example, adjuncts, part-time employees, and visiting faculty generally are offered fewer family-related benefits than other faculty. In addition, their lack of job security provides a disincentive to use the benefit they have.

Finally, employees expressed concern that our current family-responsive benefits help some employees while having a negative impact on others. One participant in the focus groups said, “I do think society has a responsibility to support people to be good parents, but when I work an overload to allow someone else to take maternity leave, it does impact my family.” People expressed clearly and repeatedly that it is not acceptable to benefit employees with families at the expense of other employees.

(2) Concerns about work and parenting

By far the most commonly cited work-family problem was the lack of alignment between the Fort Lewis College academic calendar and the academic calendar of local school districts. This was mentioned repeatedly in the speak-your-mind sessions and the focus groups. On the survey, 132 respondents (of 222 total who answered that question) marked that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “It would be/would have been useful to me if there were an alignment of the FLC calendar with the area primary and secondary school calendars.”

Another significant concern of parents had to do with childcare availability and affordability. On the survey, 50 of 231 respondents indicated that they currently use or need childcare services. There were many respondents who indicated that they had difficulty finding available childcare slots. 33 of 49

respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had difficulty finding available childcare slots. Also, 39 of 49 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had difficulty covering childcare costs. The speak-your-mind sessions and focus groups confirmed that childcare costs and availability are significant problems for employees. Participants noted that they had an especially difficult problem finding childcare for babies under the age of one. In addition, parents cited a need for drop-in and extended-hour childcare. This information is consistent with information from the La Plata County Early Childhood Council, who states that La Plata County is currently experiencing a serious shortage in childcare providers, especially for infants. They estimate that there is a shortage of 719 childcare slots for children age 0-3 in the county.

In the focus groups, there was an interest in asking the Campbell Child and Family Center to revisit their policy of only accepting children who need full-time care. People noted that it may not be in the best interest of young children to encourage parents to place them in daycare full time. In addition, they suggested that this policy is at odds with family-responsive policies that allow parents to work part time.

There was a mixed response to current parental leave policies. There are some really good options for faculty members who are also birth mothers (because they can use four weeks of paid family leave in addition to medical leave). The focus group indicated that the only problem is that the policy is very complicated and requires individual negotiation. One needs to be an expert on the policy and plan way ahead in order to get a good paid leave policy. Also, female faculty members at the speak-your-mind sessions expressed that they felt some pressure to teach an overload before or after the leave. One participant in the focus groups said, “I think one of the things is to make it standardized so that you don’t have to be trying to wheel and deal to make things work. It would be nice if it was just, this is the policy and that’s what it is.” It is worth exploring whether one may be able to retain some flexibility, without requiring so much tactical expertise of employees. For faculty members who are fathers and adoptive parents, there was a general agreement that four weeks of paid leave does not really meet their needs as a new parent. As one focus group participant stated, “the main problem is that you can’t even put a child in daycare until they are six weeks old... [so the four weeks of leave time] doesn’t even get you to the minimum time needed... adoptive parents or single parents or whatever need at least enough time to get their kid childcare.” With only four weeks of paid leave, it appears that fathers will be expected to have partners in the traditional stay-at-home role, and adoptive parents will be forced to take unpaid leave. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that staff often have much less paid leave available than faculty, though it varies according to how much sick leave and vacation leave they have accrued. Employees sent the message that the college needs family leave policies that are equitable, clear, and do not require tactical expertise.

Many employees indicated that they were troubled by the Fort Lewis College policy which does not allow children to be brought to work (except on an emergency basis). At one speak-your-mind session, it was noted that this is especially problematic for coaches who regularly travel for games or faculty members who regularly lead field trips.

(3) Concerns about work and caring for elderly or sick family members
The survey indicated that a minimum of 24 employees have been the primary caregiver for an elderly family member while working at Fort Lewis College. 11 of the 24 employees marked “yes” to the question of whether care-giving responsibilities for elderly family members presented them with conflicts in fulfilling work responsibilities. While there was not a high number of respondents who were taking care of elderly family members, the college certainly should consider how to best meet the needs of these employees. National data indicates that the number of employees caring for elderly family members is higher than our survey suggests and likely to increase. According to the U.S. Administration on Aging, of 106 million USA households in 2003, more than 22 million were providing care to one or more elderly persons. Another study suggested that 35% of Americans had “significant elder care responsibilities” and more than one third of those had reduced their work hours or take time off to provide care.² It is also worth noting that 25 respondents to the survey indicated that they made the decision NOT to take on primary care-giving responsibilities for an elderly family member because they believed they could not both provide the care and meet their work obligations.

21 of our survey respondents indicated that they were the primary caregivers for seriously sick or disabled family members while working at Fort Lewis College. 16 respondents felt conflict in fulfilling work responsibilities.

The speak-your-mind sessions and focus groups highlighted some of the difficulties involved in elder care and care for sick family members. Participants stated that it is difficult to predict when and how much leave will be needed for this purpose. Also, there is the difficulty of finding people who can do one’s job in one’s absence. As mentioned above, there is often no one with the extra time or expertise to do one’s job. In addition, many of the attendees noted the financial, physical and emotional costs of caring for family members. In particular, participants in the focus groups cited the cost of long-term care for parents as a problem, since it is not covered by Medicare.

(4) Concerns about work and partner relationships

Perhaps the most significant inequity on campus involves the treatment of employees with same-sex partners. In the speak-your-mind sessions and the focus groups there was a clear agreement that same-sex partners should receive the same benefits as opposite-sex partners. Members of the focus groups articulated it as an issue of discrimination. Providing benefits to opposite-sex partners that are not provided to same-sex partners is discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. One member of the focus group added, “If the college were to show that this is important... I think it would show... not only the people who are here on campus now but also those who approach this campus that diversity and equity are important... are what we value.” There was also agreement in the focus group that it is not acceptable to use financial issues as a reason to delay change. “The financial reasoning has only been an excuse to not address values... that we might be discriminating against people here. And it seems our hiring policy says we don’t discriminate.”

² Families and Work Institute, Highlights of the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce
The participants recognized the college’s efforts to get the CHEIBA group to provide benefits for same-sex partners. They also support the college’s efforts to get CHIEBA to allow individual variation among schools on same-sex partner benefits. They warned against using CHEIBA as a reason not to make changes at the college. Are there other benefits the college provides to opposite-sex partners that are not associated with CHEIBA, such that the college could start offering them to same-sex partners immediately? While the group recognized that such changes could create controversy, they argued that administrators ought to have the courage to do the right thing. On participant added, “On my behalf, not a lot of courage has been demonstrated.”

There was some concern expressed that the lack of same-sex partner benefits affects our ability to attract new employees. Regarding same-sex partner benefits, one participant in the focus groups stated, “In the search and hiring process, when we’ve had candidates come in who asked us specifically about this and we can’t address it… we don’t have an answer to give them other than we just don’t have it. I’m afraid there’s the potential that we have lost a couple really good people in part because they have benefits elsewhere.”

Finally, there were other partner issues that negatively affected both same-sex and opposite-sex partners. Employees expressed concerns about the difficulty of finding employment for partners in this area. On the survey, 62 employees marked “agree or “strongly agree” that they were considering leaving Fort Lewis College to enhance their partner’s career. Forces beyond the control of the college create a difficult employment situation in Durango. However, participants were optimistic the college could take steps to support employees in this situation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES/ADDITIONS TO THE CURRENT POLICIES AND BENEFITS**

We believe ALL of the above-listed problems can be solved in fair and financially responsible ways.

We recommend Fort Lewis College consider implementing the following 20 changes (not listed in order of importance).

1. In order to better communicate policies and connect employees to resources, the task force recommends that the college establish a central work-family referral center (perhaps online, with handouts available at HR) with
   a. Information on all the existing family-responsive policies at Fort Lewis College
   b. A referral list for childcare (using the regularly-updated La Plata County list)
   c. Adoption information (using existing information sources)
   d. A referral system for helping employees find elder care services (connecting to the existing County referral list, and providing information on geriatric specialists in the area)
   e. Information/resources for employment for partners (using existing resources of the Office of Career Services)

2. One very equitable way to deal with financial problems faced by families (such as the cost of childcare, the cost of elder care, and difficulties of partners finding jobs) is to continue efforts to
improve salaries for all employees. This is also fair to people without families, who would clearly benefit from a raise as well.

3. **Renew efforts to align the Fort Lewis College calendar with local school calendars.** This is perhaps the single biggest thing the college could do for families that would be cost-neutral and fair. The task force recognizes efforts have been made to align the calendars repeatedly in the past. We are suggesting the college should revisit the issue with a new willingness to compromise. Fort Lewis College should take the initiative to move their spring break to the same week as the Durango/Bayfield/Ignacio school districts. All other Colorado State colleges, including Mesa State, Adams State and Western State have aligned their spring break with the local school districts. From conversations with the local districts, it seems extremely unlikely that the local districts will move up their spring break because of the constraints of CSAP testing. The survey, speak-your-mind sessions and focus groups indicate that the staff and faculty would support this change, despite the fact it may sometimes divide the winter term into eleven-week and four-week units. A balance between course time before and after the break is not a strong enough reason to keep a very inconvenient schedule. If the college adopted the later spring break schedule, the weather would generally be nicer, families could spend time together, employees would not have to struggle to find day care and/or leave children alone, and students with children would not be missing class due to childcare issues. We recommend either a college-wide survey be conducted on this, a motion taken to the Faculty Senate, or decision be made by the Provost or President.

4. **Create a formal policy for requesting flex-time.** Many employees already benefit from flex-time arrangements. It is widely agreed that it is helpful to employees balancing work and family, whether they are parenting young children or caring for aging parents. There is also evidence that flex-time arrangements benefit employers by increasing worker productivity and reducing absenteeism. One concern about the current policy is that it is not written, and so it is not equitably applied. The task force suggests a written policy that states that employees may request flex time. Supervisors can then consider whether or not flex-time works with the particular job in question. In addition, it is important that there be specific method for supervisors to use in making that decision so it is fair across departments.

5. **Create a formal policy for employee requests to go part-time temporarily.** Currently, there are no written policies governing faculty and staff requests for temporary part-time status with part-time pay (though requests have been considered and granted). One trend in “family-friendly” policies across the nation is to create explicit policies that allow employees to request part-time status with part-time pay for an extended amount of time (usually up to five years), as life needs arise. There are colleges and universities who have successfully implemented this policy; Fort Lewis College could use their policies as a model.

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6. **Create opportunities for more job-share positions by creating a formal mechanism for consideration of this in our job-advertising process.** The Office of Equal Opportunity already monitors job advertisements. It would be simple to add to the advertising “checklist” that advertising departments consider whether or not job-sharing would be appropriate in that particular case. If job-sharing is appropriate in that case (and approved by the President or Provost), then a statement such as this could be added to the advertisement, “Will consider job-share applicants.”

7. In an effort to create a family-leave policy that is generous, equitable between different kinds of families and different categories of employees, and financially sustainable, we recommend that the college **explore the possibility of a family-leave insurance program.** This strategy involves having employees save for their own paid leave through family-leave insurance. The idea is to model it after disability insurance. Employees could elect to pay a small amount of money for family-leave insurance each month, creating a fund from which employees receive 2/3 of their salary for a limited amount of leave for family situations such as the birth of a child or the care of a sick or elderly family member. It could be combined with a medical leave or a short-term disability policy. What Fort Lewis College needs are the funds to hire actuarial and legal experts to explore how to design family-leave insurance so that it works for both employers and employees. In order to determine long-term financial sustainability, the college would need an estimate of the costs of the benefits, as well as the administrative costs for the program in both staff resources and liability. The task force has applied for external funds to hire experts to do this.

8. Employees agree that one important benefit provided to employees with families is the 25% reduction in tuition. In the survey, speak-your-mind sessions and focus groups, employees expressed interest in finding ways to further improve those benefits. We recommend the following steps be taken: (a) For the sake of equity and fairness, provide **reduced tuition for same-sex partners.** In the focus groups, it was suggested that college could use the Colorado state standards of evidence for “common law” marriage to determine which partners are eligible for tuition reduction. (b) Better advertise that Fort Lewis College currently participates in the **Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) program** through which employees and their families can get 150% of in-state tuition at 135 public two and four year schools in 14 western states. (c) **Raise funds for scholarships for employees and their family members who attend Fort Lewis College.** While state regulations govern the tuition-reduction rate, there is nothing to prevent the college from creating an additional scholarship fund through the FLC Foundation to help support the education of employees and their families.

9. One of the major problems cited by employees is that it is very difficult to take time off of work for family-related reasons (even when it is offered) because of the demands of work. It is a significant imposition to ask one’s colleagues to cover one’s job in one’s absence (and often there is no one sufficiently trained to do so). Through the speak-your-mind sessions and focus
groups, we collected a number of ideas to create a plan for dealing with unexpected absences from work.

a. Systematically and regularly evaluate staffing needs to avoid understaffing offices or overworking employees.
b. Create a “buddy system” or “cross-training” policy. Everyone should have one person who knows one’s job well enough to substitute on emergency basis.
c. Advertise that substitutes can be paid for their additional work through the family-leave fund.
d. Hire a permanent “float” or “substitute” employee who is familiar with college policies and systems, and could step in to do some (mostly classified staff) jobs when employees must be absent.
e. Use the student labor pool as substitute employees.
f. Teachers should have a class plan on file or on Moodle for substitutes.
g. Use technology (Moodle, videocasting) to facilitate doing a job from a distance.

10. Consider giving paid leave for grief. The speak-your-mind sessions raised the issue that some employees who experience the death of someone close to them have difficulty working for a time. These employees would benefit from leave for grief. Currently, the only options are for staff to use vacation time, or for employees (faculty or staff) to have their grief certified as a medical condition. We suggest that it would be more appropriate (and clear) to have grief leave explicitly incorporated into the family leave policies.

11. Create a loan program to help cover the cost of unpaid leave for family emergencies. When families experience a crisis in caring for sick or elderly family members, they can sometimes face serious financial difficulty. A short-notice flight across the country, medical bills, and funeral bills can all create significant financial strain for employees. One way the college could assist employees is through providing low-interest loans to families in crisis. We estimate that $45,000 will be enough for sustaining a small loan program that will help innumerable families in the long term while providing a base of sustainability for program continuation. The task force has applied for external funding for this purpose.

12. Hire a professional to explore the feasibility of a building remodel or space re-allocation to open an infant-care room at the Campbell Child and Family Center. Currently, the Campbell Child and Family Center on the Fort Lewis campus provides care for forty-three children ages one to five. Given the county childcare crisis mentioned above, we should explore the possibility of expanding the Campbell Child and Family Center so that it can open an infant care room. One major obstacle is finding a suitable space. As such, the task force has applied for external funding to hire a consultant to evaluate the use of space in the Campbell Center, propose possible locations for the infant care room, and estimate the costs of renovating space to meet the licensing requirements for an infant care room.
13. **Reduce the operational costs of Campbell Center (thereby making it more sustainable and reducing costs to parents) by raising funds for an “endowed chair” preschool teacher position.**

More than 98% of the operational costs of the Campbell Center are staffing. One way to reduce the operational costs of the facility and thereby the costs passed on to parents is to seek external funds to cover part of the staffing costs. We suggest that the FLC foundation start a campaign to raise an endowment large enough to pay for an endowed chair position for an exceptionally well-trained and talented preschool teacher. This endowed chair will serve four vital needs at once: (a) it will help to attract and retain an outstanding preschool teacher who will provide excellent quality care for children, (b) the teacher will provide a model of excellent teaching for our early childhood education students, (c) the endowment will help the Campbell Center become more financially sustainable, and (d) the endowment will reduce the operational costs of the center, thereby reducing the costs passed on to parents.

14. **Establish a student babysitter registry and referral system to help address the need for drop-in and extended-hour childcare.** The survey, the speak-your-mind sessions, and the focus groups indicated a clear need for drop-in and extended-hour childcare. The problem is that opening an actual drop-in and extended-hour center is not financially sustainable (Drop-in care centers that exist at the Durango Community Recreation Center and Durango Mountain Resort are largely subsidized by other parts of the organizations). An alternative, financially-sustainable solution is to establish a babysitter registry and referral. The idea is to allow students to sign up as possible babysitters, providing references and finger-prints (for background checks). Students and employees with unexpected or extended-hour childcare needs could go to the list, call the references, and choose a babysitter. While the initial identification of a babysitter may take time, it may only take ONE such effort to find an excellent babysitter that one could use for the next four years. This method has the added benefit of providing an employment opportunity for students.

15. **Re-examine the policy prohibiting employees from bringing children to work except on an emergency basis.** This policy was established to address the problem of employees bringing children to work in situations where the children interfere with the employee’s own work or that of their colleagues. But sometimes children simply don’t interfere in that way (e.g. very young infants, older high school kids, or coaches taking their whole families to away-games). This policy may be throwing the net too far, creating unnecessary obstacles for families. Can the policy be reworded to frame it entirely in terms of interference with work? Or do we even need the policy, since one can assert that an employee has an obligation to do his/her job (and disapprove of anything that interferes with that) without such a policy? Are there any liability issues involved in not having a policy about children at work? It would be worth exploring alternative options for addressing the problem.

16. **Update bathroom facilities for employees and students who sometimes need to bring their children on campus by installing diaper-changing tables in the bathrooms.** Currently, if someone needs to change a baby’s diaper on campus, they have to do it on a desk or the floor.
Adding diaper changing tables to the bathrooms would send a message that the college welcomes families. The task force is seeking external funds to pay for the installation of the changing tables.

17. Seek to **provide benefits for same-sex partners equivalent to benefits for heterosexual partners.** The college should continue to advocate that the CHEIBA group allow benefits for same-sex partners. We should also consider our alternatives if the CHEIBA group is unwilling to adopt the changes. What other benefits (not associated with CHEIBA) currently provided to spouses could be extended to same-sex partners? The task force suggests restating all policies currently mentioning the word “spouse,” replacing that with the word “partner,” and accepting the policy implications that would have.

18. **Explore alternatives for healthcare premium categories besides individual or family.** Currently faculty’s and exempt staff’s monthly health insurance premiums for an individual are $111, whereas monthly premiums for an individual plus one or more family members is $406. Therefore, an individual employee who adds just one family member will pay almost four times the monthly premium. If the college were to have three categories of insurance (individual, individual +1 and individual + 2 or more), this would increase the cost of insurance to families of three or more, but it would also be more equitable to two-person families. Participants in the speak-your-mind sessions suggested surveying employees about whether or not they would support making this change.

19. **Explore the possibility of offering optional insurance to cover the cost of long-term care for employees, their partners, and their elderly family members.** State Farm Insurance indicated it could put together an estimate for long-term care insurance for employees and their families. No doubt other companies would be interested in putting in a bid, allowing Fort Lewis to select the best offer. This could help to alleviate the financial burden of providing long-term care for elderly family members.

20. **Provide regular family-responsive training for all managers.** As college policies and families change, managers need to stay informed about how to respond appropriately and equitably to employees balancing work and family.