**Report of the Alternative Work Arrangement Subcommittee**
**Work-Life Committee**
**Emory University**

## Work-Life Committee Charge

In February 2006, President James Wagner commissioned the Work-Life Initiative task force to participate in the University's cross-cutting strategic theme "Creating Community-Engaging Society." In his opening remarks to the task force, President Wagner asked members to consider ways to enhance the work, health, and life of faculty, staff and students in the Emory community. He encouraged the task force to seek out innovative experiments or programs—signature Emory activities—that would address well-being and maximize joy and vitality on campus.

Members of this task force met over the summer, fall, and spring of 2006-2007 to address three main areas: 1.) faculty recruitment, retention, tenure, and promotion; 2.) child and dependent care; and 3.) alternative work arrangements. This report focuses on alternative work arrangements.

## Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) Subcommittee

The Work-Life Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) subcommittee chair Allison Dykes led a group of faculty and staff to research existing practices and policies at Emory University and across the country and to make recommendations for ways to enhance these arrangements at Emory. The subcommittee met several times over the course of the 2006-2007 fall and spring semesters to discuss current successful AWA practices and ways that Emory could further develop successful practices. The AWA subcommittee also consulted the Employee and Administrative Councils and the Emory Division of Human Resources. In spring 2007, the AWA subcommittee members worked closely with Office of Institutional Research and the Faculty Staff Assistance Program to develop and distribute a web survey and conduct focus groups that engaged staff about their experiences with alternative work arrangements at Emory. This report and its recommendations are based on the findings from these surveys and the work and discussions of the AWA subcommittee and the larger Work-Life Initiative.

## Defining AWA at Emory

The first task of the AWA subcommittee was to research and understand the Alternative Work Arrangements offered at Emory University. The subcommittee found that Emory has specific guidelines and policies listed on the Human Resources website, where Emory University's position on AWA is clearly stated:

> As an "Employer of Choice" concerned about the well being of our employees and concerned about the effects of traffic congestion and pollution on our quality of community life, Emory University strives to strengthen the workplace options that support employee work and

personal life balance. From flextime to telecommuting, work schedule alternatives allow employees to customize their work arrangements to fit their personal needs and goals. To be effective, these arrangements must be implemented with careful planning and continuous support.

The subcommittee found that the website is clear, concise, well organized, and clearly communicates Emory's support for alternative work arrangements. Although certain policies are open to interpretation, the subcommittee felt that it was a good resource for most supervisors and staff to reference as they develop policies and guidelines for specific alternative work arrangements in their respective schools, units, or departments. Throughout conversations with the Work-Life Initiative members and the Emory community, it was clear that the university community is unaware of Emory's AWA options and this website. Members questioned why these policies were not more widely known and implemented. In order to understand the staff's perceptions of Emory AWA policies, the subcommittee enlisted the assistance of professional researchers to develop surveys and focus groups. The following sections describe the methodology and findings of these processes.

## AWA Web Survey Methodology

The director of Emory's Office of Institutional Research, worked with the AWA subcommittee to develop a web-based survey that asked staff about their experiences with alternative work arrangements and dependent care needs. The survey included multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Emory University staff members, except for Emory Healthcare staff, were invited to participate.

Specifically, the questionnaire aimed to gauge employees' awareness of participation and levels of interest in various types of alternative work arrangements as well as levels of comfort in discussing these options with their supervisors. In addition, participants were asked to identify challenges to implementing alternative work arrangements and indicate if such arrangements would work for their current positions. The web survey was designed to find the following:

- The number of staff participating in alternative work arrangements
- Staff's interest in alternative work arrangements
- Perceptions about the availability of alternative work arrangements
- Challenges and benefits of alternative work arrangements

Closely related to alternative work arrangements is child and dependent care option. Therefore, the second section of the survey addressed issues such as satisfaction with current dependent care arrangements, interest in Emory-sponsored emergency, back-up, or "drop-off" dependent care, and interest in an Emory student as a sitter or after-school service. The child and dependent care findings are located in "The Report on Child and Dependent Care at Emory University" section of this report.

Institutional Research professionals collected, analyzed, and presented the AWA web survey results to the full Work-Life Initiative group and the AWA subcommittee who discussed the findings and made recommendations for this report.


*Web Survey Response Summary*
Approximately 29 percent (1641) of Emory staff responded to the survey. Of the 1641 who took the survey, 92 percent (1511) are full time employees and 14 percent (124) are part-time employees. Seventy-eight percent (1274) of the survey respondents are women and 22 percent (350) of survey respondents are men. Forty-six percent (737) of survey respondents have some type of supervisory responsibilities while 54 percent (870) have no supervisory responsibility.

Of the 1641 staff members who responded to the survey, 884 (54 percent) responded to the open ended question "What can Emory do to make alternative work arrangements a success?" The answers were copied into a Word document and imported into qualitative visual data management and analysis software (Atlas.ti). The most prevalent themes were
- the need for communication and awareness (473 quotes);
- the important role of managers/supervisors/leaders, manager awareness/training and buy in/support (399 quotes);
- availability to the wide range of Emory employees, ideas for flex schedules and what would make AWA easier (transportation, tech support, etc) (212 quotes); and
- a focus on the need for additional research and guidelines (161 quotes).

## AWA Focus Groups Methodology

In addition to the web survey on alternative work arrangements, focus groups were developed to conduct more in depth research into staff (both supervisors and non-supervisors) experiences with alternative work arrangements at Emory. The AWA Subcommittee worked closely with the Director and Senior Program Consultant for the Faculty Staff Assistance Program, both of whom have extensive experience in the area of group facilitation, to develop focus groups. Both facilitators have conducted numerous Organizational Dynamics and focus group processes in the past twenty-five years of their careers. In addition to the two facilitators, the FSAP utilized an administrative resource person to assist in scribing the responses that were generated in this assessment process.

The focus groups were designed to accomplish the following goals:
- Probe awareness, perceptions and utilization of alternative work arrangements;
- Discuss communications about alternative work arrangements;
- Discuss measures for the success of alternative work arrangements.

*Focus Group Participation*

A total of 116 faculty and staff members were invited to participate in one of six two-hour focus groups that were scheduled at varying times, dates and locations. After receiving personal e-mails and hard-copy invitations to participate in one of six focus groups, 45 individuals agreed to be involved in the AWA process. There were 35 female and 10 male participants who represented diverse job titles and work sites. The participants also represented a range of years of working for Emory.

Due to the number of individuals who signed up for two of the focus groups, participants were combined to represent a final configuration of four focus groups. The specific number of focus group participants in varying sessions ranged from 6 to 15 individuals. The small group size served to promote in-depth discussions in each of the focus groups.

The focus groups were conducted at three different locations on the Emory campus. Contingent upon the time of the group, either a meal or refreshments were served at each. The managers and supervisors of the participants were asked to provide the opportunity for non-exempt employees to participate in this AWA process without penalty of their work time (i.e., without a modification in pay or the need for them to work any overtime). The specific structure for the AWA focus groups was as follows:

- Introductions
- Overview of Purpose, Goals and Format for the AWA Focus Groups
- Dissemination of Definitions of Alternative Work Arrangements
- Facilitation of the Focus Group Process via Nominal and Modified Affinity Diagram Approaches
- Dissemination of fact sheet and website information
- Discussion of Next Steps
- Closure

The focus group questions were designed to assess three primary areas for the AWA needs assessment: 1.) awareness, perceptions and utilization of alternative work arrangements; 2.) communications about AWA; and 3.) measures of success of AWA.

## AWA Survey, Focus Group, and Subcommittee Findings and Themes

AWAs hold the potential for increased employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention, and will promote Emory University's vision to be a true destination for its skilled and valued employees. Dr. Jill Perry-Smith, Assistant Professor of Organization and Management in the Goizueta Business School, presented her research on the value of work-family policies within organizations to the Work-Life Initiative members in fall 2006. According to Dr. Perry-Smith's findings, "the presence of a bundle of work-family policies is positively associated with perceived firm-level performance. Specifically, organizations with a greater range of work-family policies have higher levels of organizational performance, market performance, and profit-sales growth" (*Academy of Management Journal,* 2000).

Strong interest in compressed work weeks, flexible workday scheduling, and telecommuting exists across the university. Moreover, there is already some use of these options. Given these conditions, an effective and comprehensive education program about existing AWA options, analysis of infrastructure, support for AWAs in the varied environments of Emory's many units and offices, and periodic review and assessment of AWAs presents an opportunity as Emory strives to implement an AWA program that is both equitable and sensitive to the demands different jobs must meet.

*Current Participation in AWA at Emory*
Of the 1641 respondents to the web survey, 22 percent state that they participate in some form of alternative work arrangement.  Of that 22 percent, 13 percent participate in flexible scheduling, 7 percent telecommute, 5 percent have part-time scheduling, 2 percent have a compressed work week, 2 percent engage in other alternative work arrangements, and 0.2 percent job share.  (The sum of these percentages exceeds 22 percent because respondents were allowed to indicate more than one option).

*Awareness, opportunity, and willingness to Participate in AWA*
Seventy-eight percent of respondents stated that they did not currently participate in an alternative work arrangement; however, 60 percent stated they would like to see AWA expanded and 37 percent said that they might be interested in exploring the expansion of AWA.  Of those respondents who are not participating in AWA, 81 percent stated that they are interested in flexible scheduling; 73 percent in telecommuting; 72 percent in compressed work week, 20 percent in part-time scheduling, 15 percent in job sharing, and 13 percent in other arrangements.  (The sum of these percentages exceeds 78 percent because respondents were allowed to indicate more than one option).

More than half of the respondents believe that alternative work arrangement is possible in their current position—Seventy-four percent in flexible schedule, 67 percent in compressed work week,  60 percent in telecommuting, 22 percent in part-time schedule, and 24 percent in job sharing.

**Themes**

*Awareness, Communication, and Education*
Despite strong interest, many staff are unaware of existing AWA options.  Fifty-six percent of web survey respondents stated that they are not aware of Emory's AWA options.  In the focus group sessions, many participants stated that they were not aware of and only 3 participants knew with certainty that the policies were posted on the website. Many web survey respondents stated that they have never heard of AWA as revealed in statements such as "I never knew there was such a thing" or "This is my first time hearing about Alternative Work Arrangements."

Although many administrators and supervisors' jobs require that they participate in some form of alternative work arrangement, many Emory employees perceive resistance to AWAs among supervisors and administration. When asked about discussing specific AWAs with supervisors, many indicated discomfort in discussing AWAs. Although only

22 percent felt uncomfortable discussing flexible scheduling, 38 percent felt uncomfortable with the topic of telecommuting; 37 percent with compressed work week; 48 percent with part-time scheduling; and 48 percent and 49 percent for job sharing.

Topping the list of challenges to AWAs are position requirements (rated as "extremely challenging" by 44 percent of respondents), which will need to be assessed by supervisors, in collaboration with an Office of Work-Life facilitator, at the office level. The education of supervisors is crucial as thirty-five percent of respondents thought "Lack of managerial/administrative support" would pose extreme challenges. It is important that schools, units, and departments not only have flexibility in implementing arrangements that work for their unit and staff members but also be consistent in the communication and implementation of AWAs.

Recommendations
**Within the newly established Work Life Resource Center, develop support and communication mechanisms that will increase awareness and support implementation**
- Communication campaign and broad policy regarding AWA options
- Publicity to showcase Emory University as an industry leader in AWAs and work-life satisfaction
- Encourage supervisors through training to encourage equity in discussion and assessment of AWA options and competence in planning, implementing and evaluating AWA options within their departments

*Availability, Equity, and Support*

Echoing concerns and advice of survey respondents, the Subcommittee emphasizes the importance of access to information and assessment of the possibility of AWAs. Not all positions will be amenable to AWAs, due to job requirements. But the conversation about possible AWAs should be open to every employee; the Office of Work-Life should periodically assess the success of initiatives.

Given the wide spectrum of the Emory community and the range of job types, subcommittee members recognize that not all jobs easily fit into an AWA model. However, it is important that AWA be as inclusive as possible. The Office of Work-Life is encouraged to work with employees to consider a full array of AWA options in the context of employees' life goals and the necessities of the work place. Respondents to the web survey noted concerns over the availability, fairness, and practicality of AWAs in their work environment.

> Not every position is conducive to alternative work arrangement so those not able to participate will feel they are treated differently.

Too often there is resentment by other co-workers when someone has an alternative arrangement. In a previous department they allowed Flex scheduling, but new management disallowed it and forced everyone into an 8-5 schedule.

My department has implemented an Alternate Work Arrangement Program but non-supervisory staff.  This is a great benefit to those employees.  However, I don't know how practical it would be for someone in a Supervisory position, like me, who is very hands on, and with the needs and workflow of the office.

The Subcommittee feels that numerous technological issues, especially related to telecommuting, IT infrastructure, privacy, security, and intellectual property concerns, will need to be addressed in coordination with IT experts from Emory.   At the most fundamental level, telecommuting requires a home computer, phone and internet connectivity. To ensure equity, the Office of Work-Life should consider how costs for such technology will be distributed: Will it be a condition of an AWA, for example, that an employee purchase a home computer? What about DSL charges, which may disappear someday if Atlanta becomes a wireless city? To what extent will home computers have access to servers and data in the Emory system, and how to ensure security? What if someone has a computer with Emory data stolen? These and many other questions may not be answerable at the outset, but a special discussion with relevant experts is recommended. Various web survey respondents identified such issues:

Make it possible to forward my phone to home and make teleconferencing an option for me for meeting.

Lack of video-conferencing – it is already extremely difficult to arrange meetings with administrators & managers, alternative work would make it impossible.

Lack of technical/equipment support from remote locations.

Communications with co-workers would become more dependent on email (and phone) rather than face to face, and some co-workers don't use these lines of communication as well as others.

Recommendations
**Make AWAs available in a more consistent manner across campus and develop programs that support the education and implementation of AWAs.**
- Actively promote the AWA policy and encourage supervisors to identify ways in which AWA can become an integral part of department management
- Flexible, yet realistic and consistent discussion and assessment of AWA options across varied office environments
- Assessment and coordination with IT of technological issues (remote access, IT hardware, confidentiality, equity in all such matters)
- Confidential clearinghouse and advocacy center for employees seeking to engage supervisors in discussion of AWA options

*Policy and Implementation Review, Assessment, and Ongoing Support*
Survey and focus group participants echoed concerns about AWA policies and their implementation. Several respondents suggested that Emory as a community and supervisors within departments seek new and innovative alternative work arrangements and ways to implement them. Respondents also encouraged administrators and supervisors to continue to "elicit input from all levels."

Recommendations
**Review, assess, and provide on-going support for the awareness and implementation of AWAs at Emory.**
- Archive of AWA success stories to serve as models for offices and employees
- Ongoing research into AWAs adopted—especially conscious of the pitfall that those in AWAs may perceive increased demands on their time
- Fine-tuning of AWA policies and procedures in light of experience over time
- Provide ongoing training and support for supervisors as they seek to implement AWA and/or other work-life enhancing activities
- The Work-Life Center partner with the Sustainability and Campus Master Plan to continue to support work-life opportunities

NOTE: Beyond the defined AWAs, the Subcommittee recognizes and strongly endorses life-and-work-enhancing activities at Emory, which can be coordinated within offices with support from the Work-Life Office:
- Physical exercise and other well-being activities
- Community service (work days dedicated to volunteer service, or volunteer weeks planned by entire offices)
- Participation in the intellectual life of the campus (e.g. attendance at lectures during work hours or support for use of employee courtesy scholarship benefit)

Employees should be encouraged to define further options. The Work-Life Resource Center should remain abreast of AWA trends at other academic institutions, keeping an archive of models for employees to consider.

## **Conclusion**

Emory University's vibrant intellectual life can provide the basis for rich and rewarding work experiences that help employees grow and flourish across multiple dimensions of their lives. The Work-Life Resource Center with the strong and public support of the administration, and through on-going review and gathering of experiences and data, can serve as a central resource that will not only enhance satisfaction and bring joy to work at Emory, but will define Emory University as an innovator and leader in higher education.