

Work/Life Programs: In Support of Employees

A Study of
Human Resource Practices
in
Cooperative Extension

by Nancy L. Hicks

Finance & Personnel
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Cornell University

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Credits

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administrators and staff who provided the data and the many ideas
for recruiting, retaining, and supporting quality employees.

PREFACE

This study was an attempt to assess the extent of the work/life programs, benefits, and work arrangements available in the land-grant system.

As a part of this study, Cooperative Extension directors/administrators were asked to have their human resource specialists complete a survey based on their experiences. There was a return rate of 80% (49 surveys were returned representing 59 of 74 land-grant institutions). Exhibit 1 indicates the percentage of institutions providing the opportunities for some or all of the Cooperative Extension employees to participate in the benefit, program, or work arrangement. Exhibits 2 and 3 indicate the most frequently identified programs which best attract, retain, and support quality educators. The responses to the various questions do not pretend to measure the quality or success of the benefits, programs, or work arrangements.

It was hoped that as the human resource specialists completed the survey, questions would be raised in their minds about the quality success, and the extent to which the benefits, programs, or work arrangements are offered in their institutions.

The intent of sharing the responses is not to infer that all programs should be available, but to provide an opportunity for organizations to reassess what is possible or appropriate in their institution. In some situations, the benefits, programs, and work arrangements are available but assistance is needed regarding how to utilize them more fully.

The results of this study are offered to encourage further thinking and discussion.

Work/Life Programs: In Support of Employees

Addressing work and family obligations can be very challenging. Juggling family demands (be they children, parents, or extended family) can be more difficult when job pressures are present. Likewise, doing an effective job can be difficult when family pressures are present. All of us experience these pressures at one time or another and some of us at several stages of our lives. Sometimes we question if we can get through the day or week being successful at both.

Research shows that it isn't just single working women with children who are experiencing the pressures of juggling work/life. A recent study by Baruch College on the conflict of work/life (which surveyed a broad range of employers) indicated:

- nearly half of the survey respondents were experiencing some degree conflict;
- there were no gender differences;
- individuals holding a college degree and individuals with children regardless of marital status were experiencing greater levels of conflict;
- exempt employees reported significantly higher levels of conflict than non-exempt employees;
- most employees found work interfering with family more stressful than family interfering with work;
- and contrary to literature, the working women did not spend more time than men taking care of family.

Although it is the responsibility of employees to determine and adjust their priorities to help relieve or resolve the stress, employers can do much to help provide relief. In a study by Godwins Booke and Dickenson (1996) it was found that workers are most satisfied when the following needs are met in this order: 1) health care, 2) financial needs, 3) balancing work/life needs, and 4) career development needs.

The Baruch study findings indicated that levels of stress and job satisfaction were inversely related and work hours and promptness were many concerns of employees. Survey respondents reported spending an average of 51.8 hours a week working (managers averaged 58.4 hours) and 37.2 hours a week taking care of family. Seventy-four percent (74%) believed their managers were supportive but only 37% believed their organization was supportive. Both levels of support lowered work/family life conflict, increased job satisfaction, and decreased turnover (with organizational support having a stronger impact than managerial support). So as you can see, employers can be very helpful in reducing work/ life conflict. Flextime was by far most often identified as being helpful. Also mentioned were personal leave, telecommuting options, and sick leave.

Studies conducted by Towers Perrin (1995) found that work/life programs contribute significantly to: employee loyalty; employee perception that the organization is a good place to work; awareness and appreciation for the organization's programs; competitive recruiting; job satisfaction; employee productivity; and reducing absenteeism.

How Are We Doing?

With these perspectives in mind, CDC set out to survey Cooperative Extension systems throughout the nation to see what work/life programs are currently being offered. Forty-nine surveys (80%) representing 59 of the 74 land-grant colleges/universities were returned. A summary of the responses can be found in Exhibit 1. On the whole, the land-grant colleges and universities have much to offer.

As you review the responses, you could reflect on:

- where your college/university has made strides over the past few years;
- how your college/university compares with other land-grant colleges and universities; and
- where gains need to be made in your college/university.

This information will provide a basis for you to enlighten others in your college/university about significant trends. Note, for example, the responses on flextime. Eighty percent (80%) of the survey responses indicated that flextime options are available. Has flextime grown or does it need to be expanded in your college/university? If flextime is so key to job satisfaction, what needs to be done to make it more widely accessible or used?

A recent issue of USA Today (1996) contained a graph displaying the findings of senior executives of automated workplaces. The survey revealed that more than 40% of the companies now have telecommuting (up from 27% in 1993). Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the companies expect to use it more this year. Are we utilizing telecommuting where and when it is appropriate? Can it be on an as-needed basis rather than on a regular basis or on a regular basis when appropriate? What technology, policies, and guidelines need to be in place to make telecommuting feasible?

As you review Exhibit 1, you may see other programs that will raise more questions than answers. For example, it appears that we have room to grow in the areas of flexible work schedules and employee assistance programs. How can we do more in these areas? As employers of choice, we should be raising these questions with ourselves and with others throughout the college/university. Are we participating in the right councils/committees to make a difference?

Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Quality Employees

In the second part of the survey of Cooperative Extension systems, human resource professionals were asked to identify two programs/benefits/work arrangements that they thought best attracted, retained, and supported quality employees in their college or university (see Exhibit 2). This information is separately displayed for colleges/universities where 20% or more of the staff are culturally diverse (see Exhibit 3).

A review of the information summarized in the three exhibits clearly indicates the need for us to market the programs/benefits/work arrangements we so generously have available. When recruiting, we need to sell the status of being affiliated with a renowned college/ university and make known the opportunities that are available through internships. We need to talk more about our flexible work/life policies. To retain quality employees, we need to discuss the educational opportunities available, our flexible work schedules, and our benefits that are extended to retirees. To best support quality employees, it is suggested that we continually keep them aware of and involved in developmental opportunities, mentoring programs, travel opportunities, team efforts, and leadership opportunities. Looking at phased retirement plans or tapping retiree expertise can help both the individual and the organization make the transition into the employee's retirement. When we are recruiting individuals who are culturally diverse, it may serve us well to market our leadership as visionary, inclusive, and welcoming and to show how our programs and policies help support individual's needs and recognize team achievements. More importantly, our actions need to demonstrate commitment.

Making it easier for employees to be more satisfied and productive is a key part of our responsibilities. What can we, as administrators do to facilitate this? It is important for organizations and supervisors to be supportive. Many of the programs/benefits/work arrangements mentioned are ones we are already doing. It may be a matter of how we package and market these benefits. The challenge is before us.

References

Godwins Booke and Dickenson. (1996, February). Needs assessment. *Human Resource Executive*. Horsham, PA. Used with permission of the Human Resource Executive Magazine, copyright 1996. All rights reserved. For subscription information call 215-784-0910.

Gooler, Laura E. (1995). Balancing work and personal life survey summary. Baruch College. New York, NY

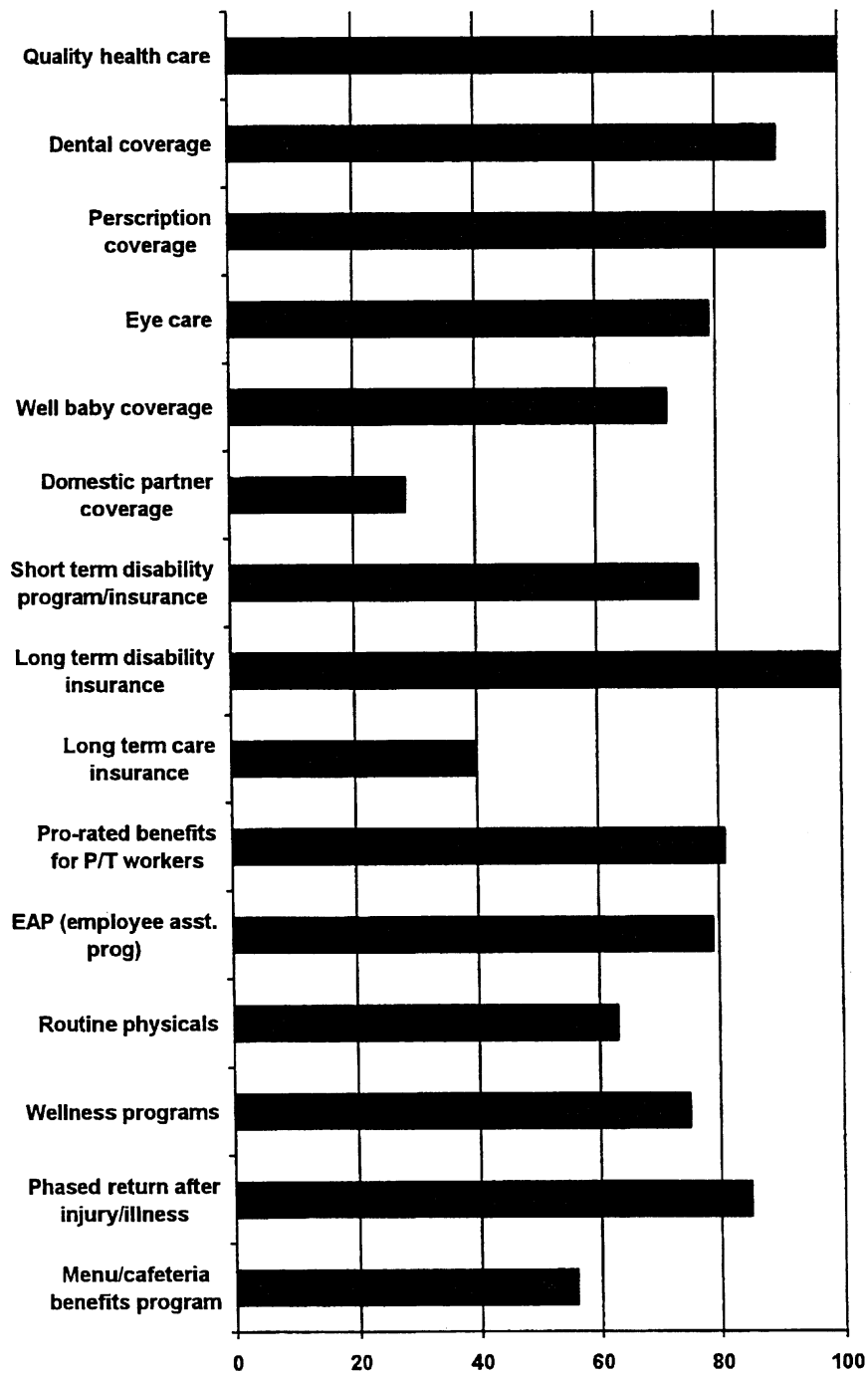
Olsten. (1996, May). Virtual workplace growing. *USA Today*

Towers Perrin. (1994). *Work/life programs: Supporting a new employer/employee "deal"* survey report. Philadelphia, PA.

SURVEY OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Percentage of Colleges/Universities Offering Programs/Benefits/Work Arrangements to Extension Employees.

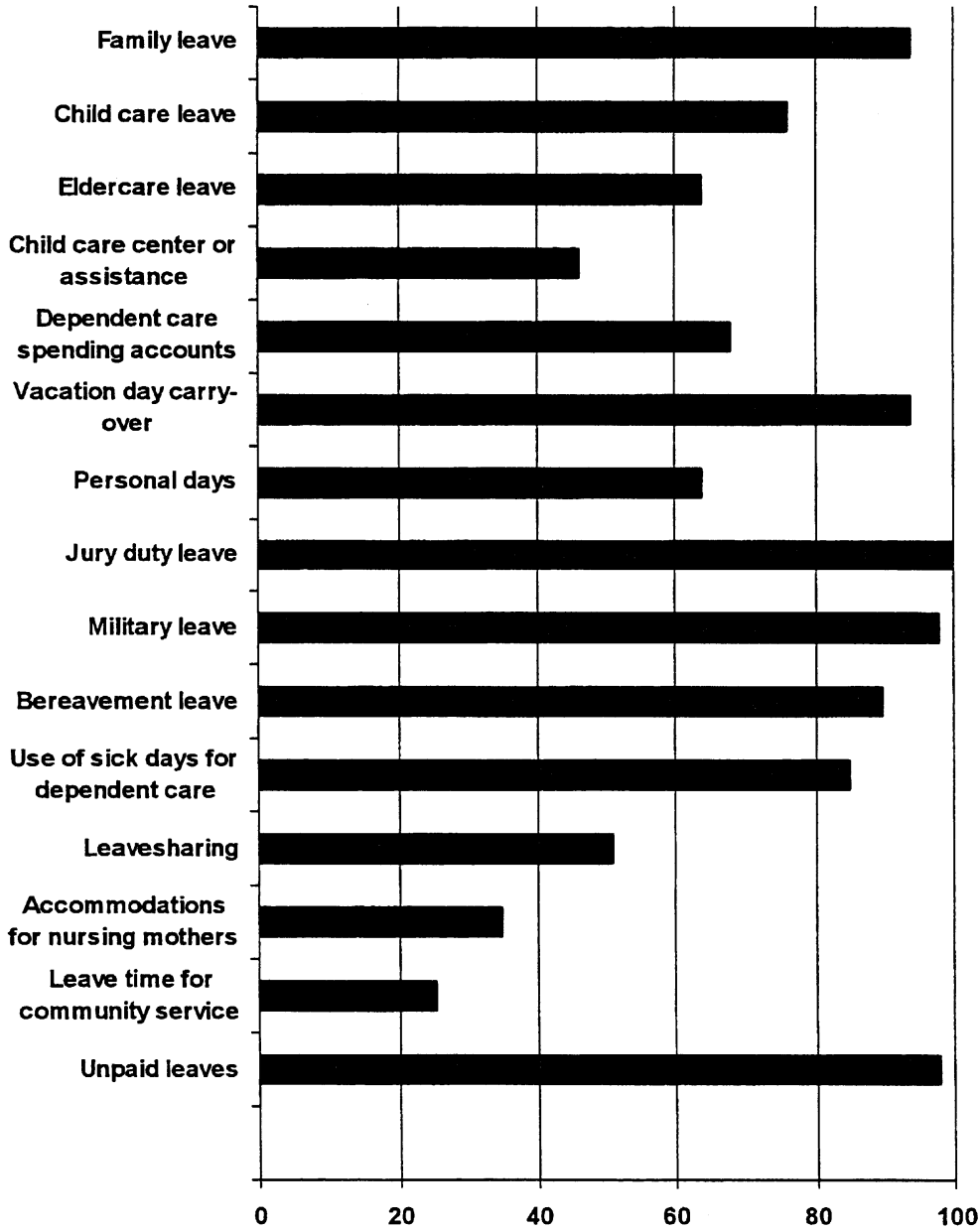
HEALTH CARE



SURVEY OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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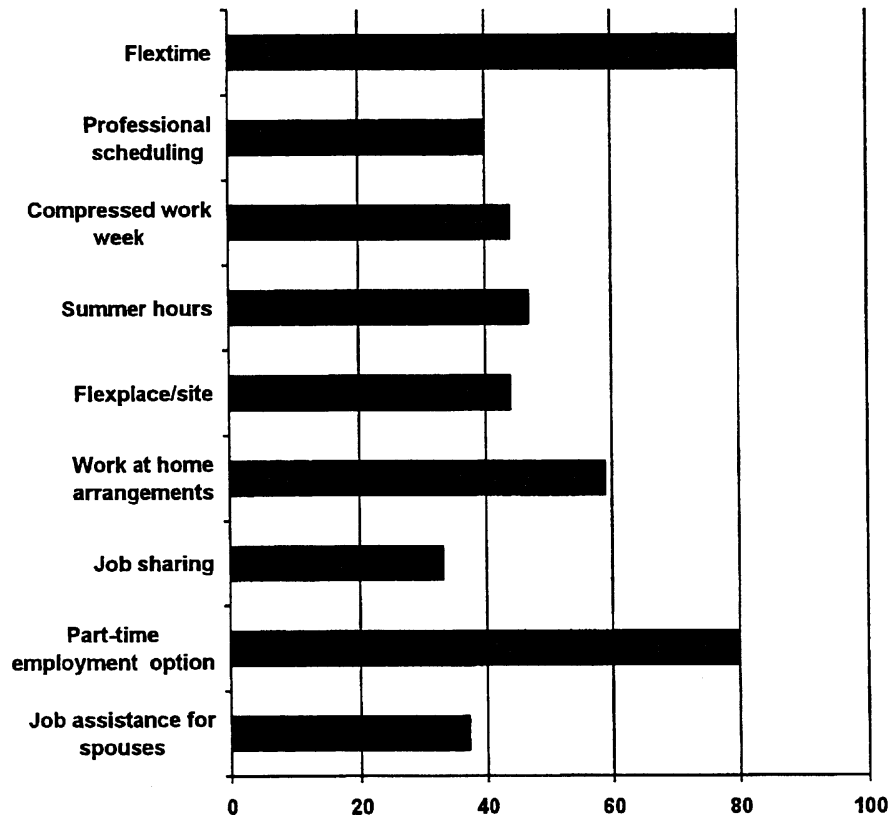
LEAVE TIME



SURVEY OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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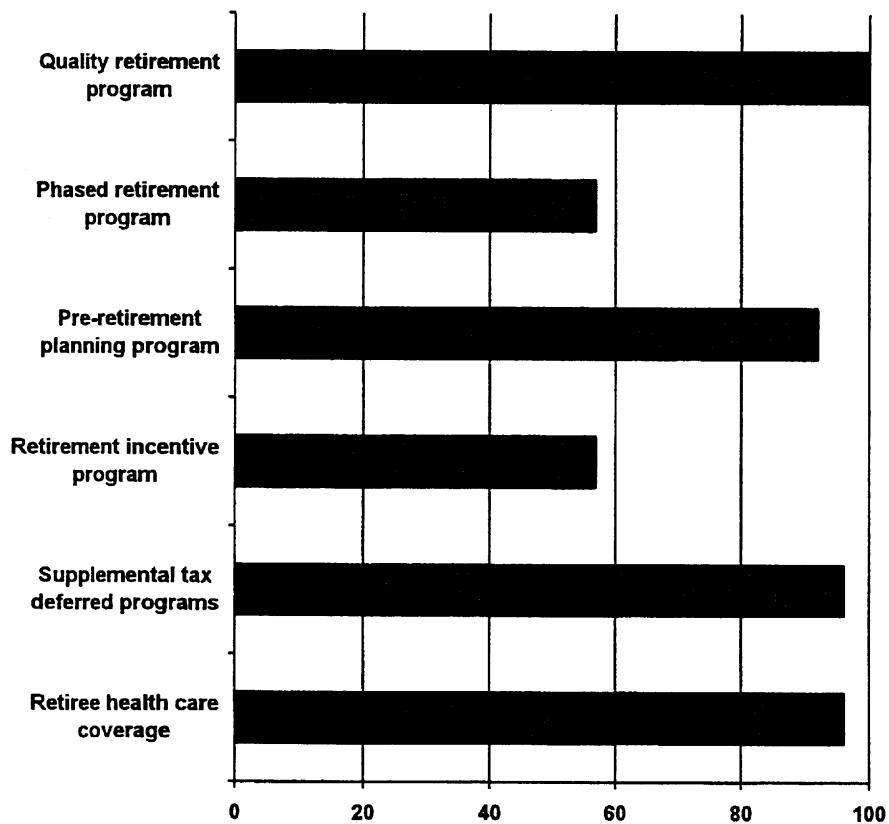
WORK SCHEDULE



SURVEY OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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to Extension Employees.

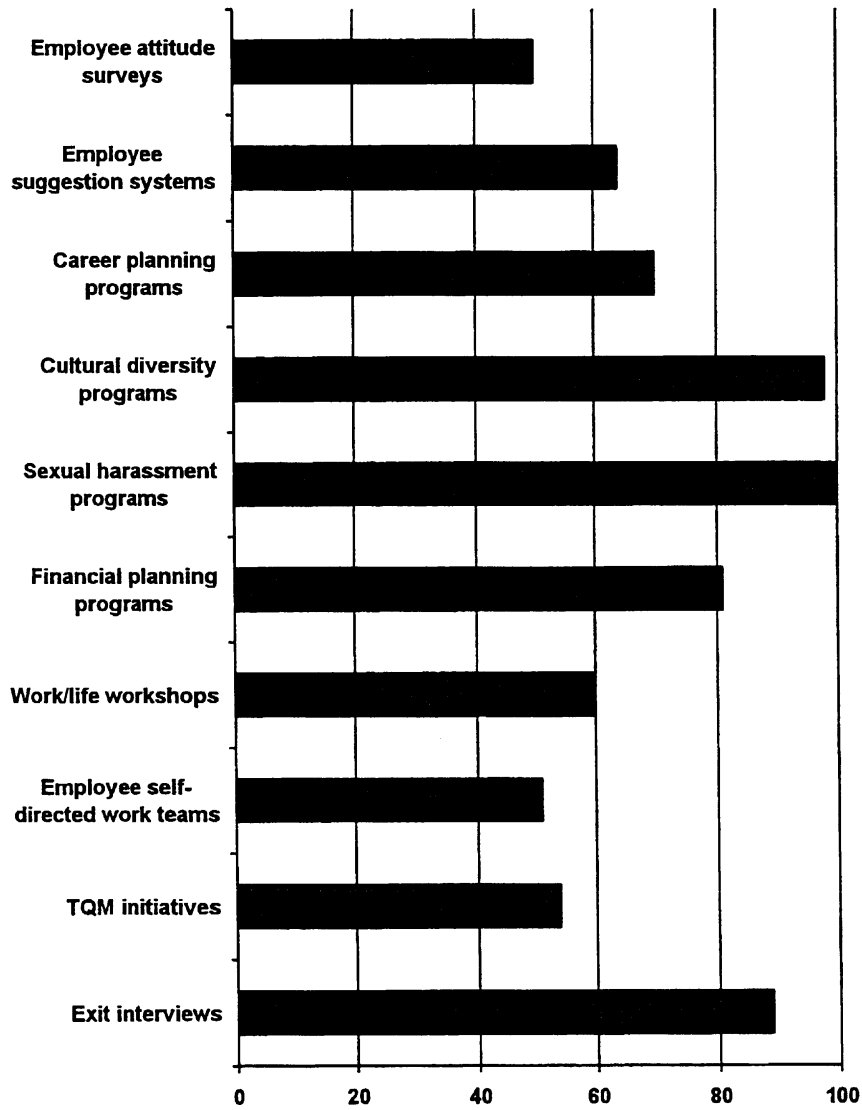
RETIREMENT



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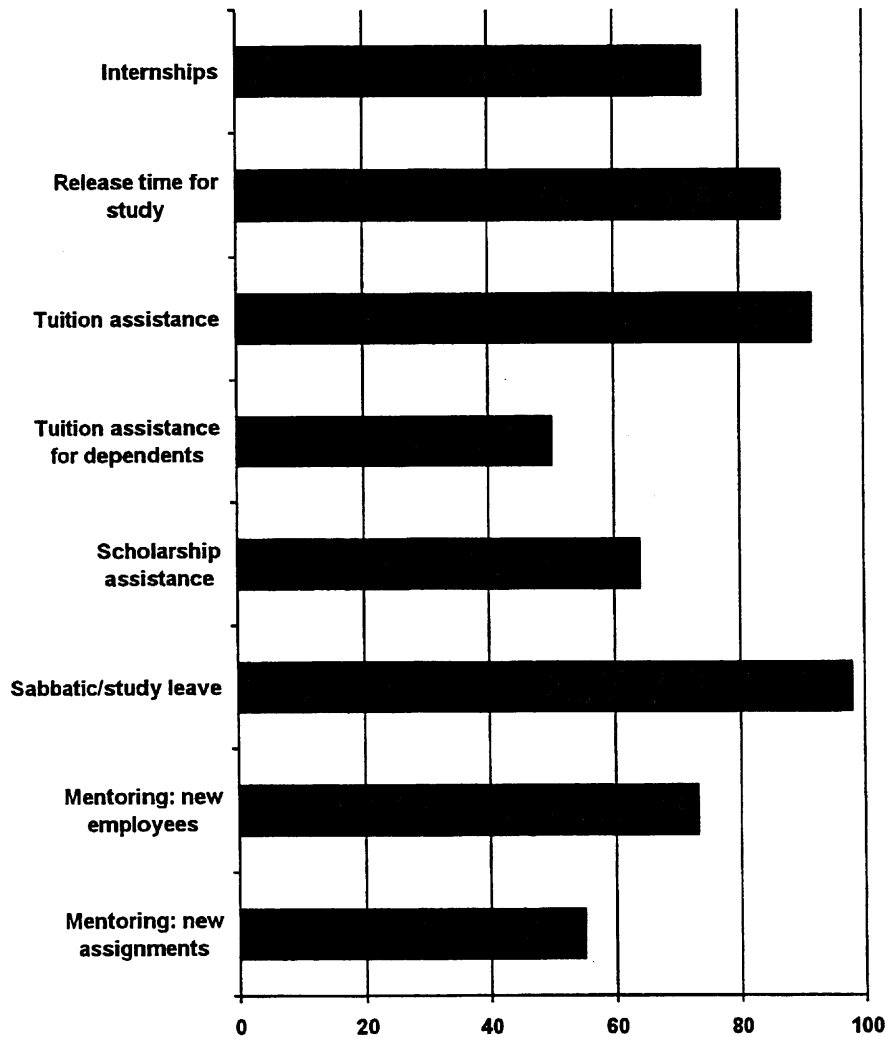
EMPLOYEE RELATIONS



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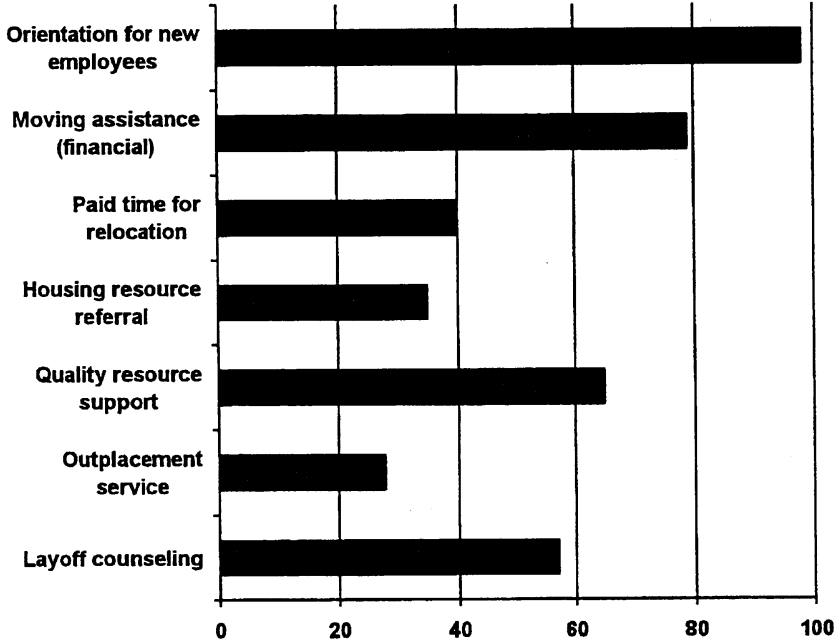
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS



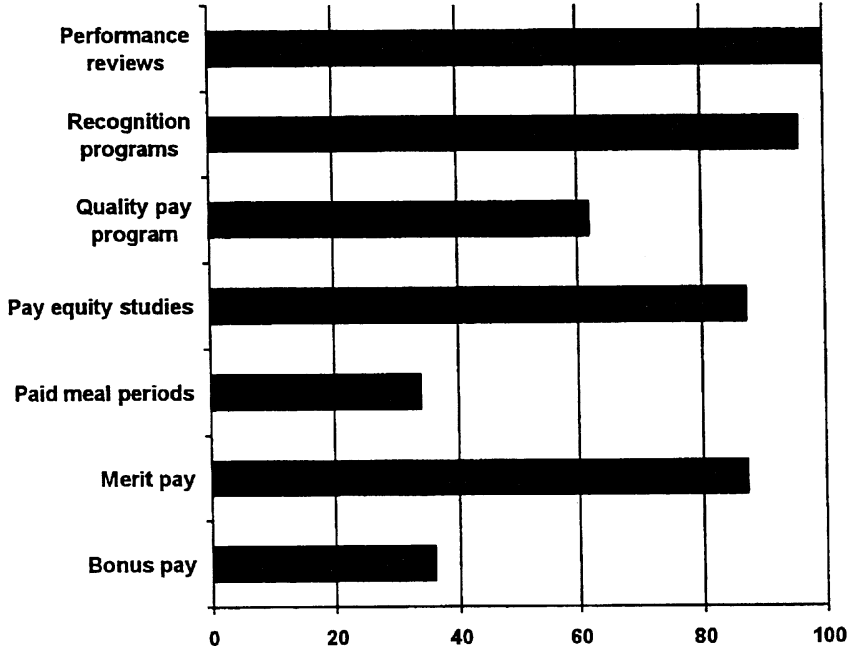
SURVEY OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Percentage of Colleges/Universities Offering Programs/Benefits/Work Arrangements
to Extension Employees.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE



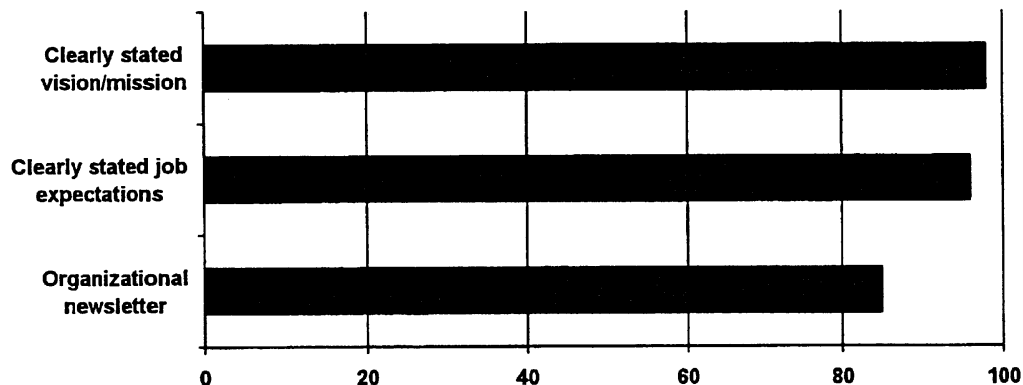
PAY PROGRAMS



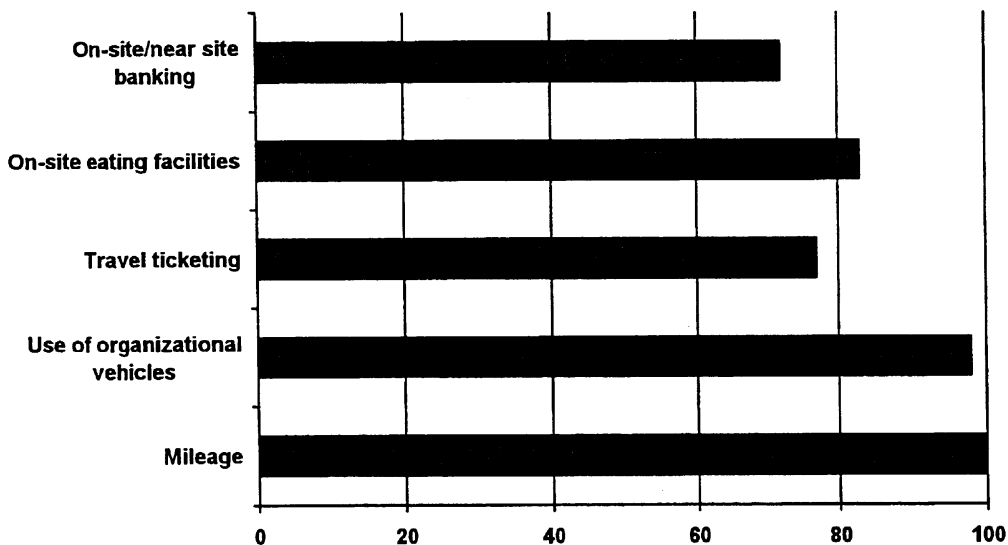
SURVEY OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTICES IN COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Percentage of Colleges/Universities Offering Programs/Benefits/Work Arrangements to Extension Employees.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



MISCELLANEOUS



**Most Successful Programs for
Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting
Quality Employees**

A list of the most successful programs/benefits/work arrangements in the Cooperative Extension system that best attract, retain, and support quality employees in their: early-career; mid-career; late-career. (Each College/University Human Resource Specialist was asked, based on their experience, to identify two for each matrix. The following are the most frequently identified programs.)

	Early-Career	Mid-Career	Late-Career
ATTRACT quality extension employees	attractive fringe benefits (16) competitive salaries (11) affiliation with university (6) liberal leave benefits (5) educational assistance (3) intern program (3) paid moving expenses (3) location (3)	fringe benefits (13) salary (6) salary and benefits (5) university reputation (3) faculty appointment/tenure (3) tuition assistance (3) liberal leave (3) study leave (3)	benefits (14) status as University employee (3) location (3) salary program (3)
RETAIN quality extension (3) employees	education opportunities (8) benefits (7) flexible work schedule (4) orientation/core training (4) merit program (3) opportunity for advancement (3) mentoring system (3) tuition assistance (3)	benefits (10) staff development opportunities (8) promotion system (7) study/special projects leaves (6) tuition benefits (6) flexible work schedules (5) merit program (5) competitive salaries (5) excellence programs (3)	retirement and other benefits (20) salary levels (4) recognition for accomplishments/expertise professional development opportunities (3) promotion/tenure system (3)
SUPPORT positive morale	training & development opportunities (10) mentoring program (5) team effort (4) new staff orientation (4) tuition assistance (4) inservice opportunities (3) genuine concern for staff growth & dev (3)	continued educational opportunities (8) study leave (6) inservice opportunities (6) team concept (5) merit program (3) recognition (3)	retirement and other benefits (6) continued educational opportunities (4) relationships with other colleagues (3) travel opportunities (3) recognition programs (3) salary equity (3) retirement planning (3)

N=49 (representing 59 institutions 80%)

**Most Successful Programs for
Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting
Quality Employees
in Colleges/Universities Where 20% or More of the
Staff are Culturally Diverse**

A list of the most successful programs/benefits/work arrangements in the Cooperative Extension system that best attract, retain, and support quality employees in their: early-career; mid-career; late-career. (Each College/University Human Resource Specialist was asked, based on their experience, to identify two for each matrix. The following are the most frequently identified programs.)

	Early-Career	Mid-Career	Late-Career
ATTRACT quality extension employees	attractive fringe benefits (4) liberal leave benefits (3) competitive salaries (2) intern program (2)	salary and benefits (2) job security (2) fringe benefits (2) salary (2) liberal leave (2)	benefits (6) location (2) liberal leave (2)
RETAIN quality extension employees	educational opportunities (3) merit programs (2) benefits (2) tuition assistance (2)	benefits (6) tuition benefits (3) excellent programs (2) staff development opportunities (2) promotion system (2) competitive salaries (2) merit program (2)	retirement and other benefits (6) promotion/tenure system (2)
SUPPORT positive morale	training & development opportunities (3) admin open door policy (2) team effort (2)	inservice opportunities (3) admin open door policy (2) continued educational opportunities (2) study leave (2) merit program (2) recognition programs (2)	retirement and other benefits (3) admin open door policy (2) recognition programs (2) salary equity (2)

*a visionary leader was also mentioned as an important asset across several of these areas.
N=18 (75%) of the Colleges/Universities where 20% or more of their staff are culturally diverse.

bold = where priority is consistent with the total systems identification.

italics = a program/benefit/work arrangement that was identified to a greater degree by the Colleges/Universities where 20% or more of the staff are culturally diverse.