



**BARRY UNIVERSITY**

Southern Association of College and University Business Officers  
“BEST PRACTICES”  
Submission

Designing a Work/Life Balance Initiative  
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### *Abstract:*

*In January of 2001, Barry University's Quality Improvement Program (QIP) helped launch a work/life balance initiative for its employees. After reviewing feedback from university staff and different departments throughout the campus, the university made a commitment to examine ways it could create a more supportive work environment. By examining its policies related to this issue, expanding training opportunities and promoting better utilization of existing and new employee benefits, the university made the "caring environment" part of its mission a reality for our faculty and staff. This ultimately was a win/win for the entire school community because our students have benefited from the positive impact this initiative has had as well. The employee response has been very encouraging. Employee attendance has increased campus wide at many of the programs and events that have been offered. New employees seem excited to begin working for an organization that espouses a work/life balance initiative. The policy changes that have taken place clearly communicate the institution's commitment to its employees.*



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### **Introduction of the Organization:**

Founded in 1940, Barry University is a co-educational Catholic institution of higher learning with approximately 8,200 full-time students. Located in Miami Shores, Florida, just seven miles from Miami and 14 miles from Fort Lauderdale, Barry University stands minutes from two of the nation's most vibrant international communities.

Barry's 10 schools provide bachelors, masters, law and seven doctoral degree programs to more than 8,600 students. The Dominican Sisters of Adrian, Michigan founded the university in 1940 and it became co-educational in 1975. Barry and its subsidiaries employ more than 1,700 full and part-time faculty and staff. The university operates on a budget of \$119 million and has an economic impact of \$300 million in the greater Miami area.

The university has four major components to its mission. These are to offer students a quality education. Furthermore, Barry commits itself to assuring a religious dimension and to providing community service and presence within a more caring environment.

Barry's mission transcends the statistics by which many universities measure themselves. As a Catholic institution, it goes beyond the traditional emphasis on academic excellence to incorporate a human quality, with personal attention to a student's social, moral, physical, emotional and religious growth. Above all, the purposely intimate scale of the campus and the student body, the careful selection of faculty and staff, and the Judeo-Christian religious dimension combine to create a caring environment.



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### **Statement of the Problem/Initiative:**

Balancing our personal and professional lives has become a major task for many people in today's competitive and busy world. Survey after survey indicate that employees are looking for ways to better balance this tension and are looking for employers who support them in this area. Research on the impact of these worksite programs report a positive impact to the bottom line of an institution by supporting recruitment and retention efforts and reducing stress related health care costs. They also have the potential to positively affect staff productivity and efficiency, while enhancing staff motivation and morale. For all of these reasons, Barry sought to support its employees through everyday life stressors such as parenting and caregiver issues, dealing with depression and creating healthy lifestyle behaviors to name a few. The university believed this support would be beneficial personally for our employees and would enhance and help achieve its organizational goals as well. We developed our goals related to these two key areas: the impact to the employee personally and professionally and the impact to the culture of the school.

### **Goals of Initiative:**



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<p>Benefits of a “work life balance” initiative for Barry Employees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Promotes personal productivity</li><li>➤ Creates a supportive work environment</li><li>➤ Reduces stress and promotes health</li><li>➤ Fosters a better relationship between Barry and its Employees</li></ul>	<p>Impact to the Organizational Culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Promotes Teamwork</li><li>➤ Improves staff motivation, commitment and retention</li><li>➤ Supports conflict resolution</li><li>➤ Promotes mutual respect</li><li>➤ Promotes institutional excellence</li><li>➤ Supports quality service towards each other and our students!!</li></ul>
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### **Design:**

Barry’s Quality Improvement Department (QIP) operates within the Business and Finance division and supports staff involvement and feedback through a standing committee made up of staff from 20 different university departments. This committee represents both contract and non contract level staff who meet monthly to review campus issues, plan programs, communicate important administrative decisions and share essential departmental initiatives in an effort to gain university wide support. This committee heartily endorsed the work/life balance concept and began offering feedback on the types of programming and policies that could be supportive to our employees.

As a result, a three pronged approach was created to promote this initiative on our campus. They were to increase organizational support through examining HR policies, expand training and programming opportunities related to work/life balance and to promote existing programs by educating the university community about their importance to work/life balance. For example, Yoga and Aerobics classes were already offered



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through the department of Campus Recreation and Wellness to our employees. Lunch N' Learns were already being offered and immediately adopted a focus on work/life balance issues such as parenting, nutrition, etc. New courses were created from the office of Training and Development like Stress Management and Substance Abuse Awareness. With the new initiative in place, we began to promote employee attendance at these and other events through Human Resources at New Employee Orientations and other campus events.

### **Implementation:**

#### *Steps in Introducing a Work/Life Balance Initiative to our Employees*

#### **1. QIP reviewed the Work/Life Balance concept and presented to university wide staff committee for endorsement and support**

- This committee supported the concept and offered feedback about classes and programming that would be supportive to our employees such as stress management, nutrition, caregiver support group, etc.
- Suggested the initiative should combine programming with policies that support our employees.

#### **2. QIP presented idea to Human Resources for additional ideas and support.**

- Human Resources examined policies that were already in existence that supported our employees in their work/life balance such as our flextime and FMLA policies.



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These were compiled into handouts, made available on web-sites and handed out at all HR policy workshops.

### **3. Marketing Plan:**

- Designed Work/Life Balance Logo and put it on appropriate web pages and flyers where existing programs helped support work/life balance. This logo is used to promote all newly developed programs as well.



- Joint effort from a training perspective brought together QIP and Human Resources to host a major presentation with a nationally recognized speaker—presented the new initiative at a campus wide event where the Initiative was explained and endorsed by upper administration.
- Upper administrative support was made visible at this stage by letters to staff and supervisors endorsing the concept and inviting them to attend the workshop.
- Used existing communication methods for promoting events internally such as Employee Newsletter, e-mails, etc.
- Used community newspapers to report on events and Barry's new initiative and its goal of better supporting its employees.



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- Designed a work/life Balance Opportunities and Resources brochure to highlight the many departments on campus that support our staff and where to go for what type of service. These are distributed at all New Employee Orientations and at other training programs and events.

### **4. Initial Steps:**

- Staff who attended the initial kickoff presentation made suggestions on how the university could better support its employees. These were put on the QIP web page and made available to the entire university. Two specific suggestions were followed up on immediately—the issues of flextime and childcare support for our staff.
- Organizational and Personal barriers to work/life balance were identified for future follow-up.

### **5. Current Action Items**

The work/life balance initiative has been built in to strategic planning efforts at the university in the Business and Finance Division for the coming year. Many of these efforts fall in the Human Resource area: These include:



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- The development of a Recruitment and Retention department to help assess if this initiative is helping with university wide efforts in the area of recruitment and retention. (See CUPA Newsletter, June 2002 for research on the assessing the impact of Work/Life Balance Programming).
- Expansion of communication efforts regarding employee benefits with a big emphasis put on education via e-mail, Benefits Fairs, open enrollment meetings, supporting our University's Annual Wellness Day, etc.
- Training on specific tips and strategies regarding work/life balance will be a part of the Training and Staff Development calendar and recognized as important workshops for all levels of staff to attend. These include classes on Substance Abuse Prevention, Depression Awareness, Stress and Time Management, etc. This legitimizes attendance at this type of programming and makes it an important part of our university culture.
- An office of Employee Relations has been created to promote a positive and respectful work environment for University's employees by working closely with supervisors and staff to establish open communication and informal resolution of workplace problems and disputes. This office focuses on issues that affect work performance such as team conflict, poor communication, ineffective or poor work performance as well as Employee Assistance Program referral information.



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Universities are prime organizations to implement these types of initiatives because many of the facilities and programming are already in existence throughout the campus and can easily accommodate a work/life balance approach.

1. Does your institution have a university wide planning committee that addresses quality improvement issues across all departments and divisions? If not, create one. This type of committee helps support campus wide initiatives in many areas and helps bridge turf wars that are all too common on university campuses.
2. Examine the interest and/or need for a work/life balance initiative and where it might fit within your organization. Many of these types of programs might already be offered through different units within your institution such as HR and/or Campus Recreation. Use surveys from existing programs to get ideas about other topics/ programs that would be seen as supportive to your employees.
3. Try to understand who your stakeholders might be and where you already have support for such a program—HR, Institutional Advancement, Quality Improvement, Recreation and Wellness, Upper Management, Business and Finance division, etc.
4. Design your approach from the beginning to get buy in—not after you have already tried to implement a program. This helps prevent territoriality and build consensus and buy-in since the programming for this type of initiative will likely come from many university departments.
5. Present related research to appropriate decision makers to help them understand the bottom line impact of such a program.



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6. Use the top level of your organization to visibly support the initiative wherever possible to help foster the “perception is reality” philosophy.
7. Build work/life balance initiatives into your strategic planning efforts to help the entire institution understand the Return on Investment (ROI) surrounding this concept and institutional benefits gain by implementing such a program.

### **Benefits:**

In addition to the expansion of training and staff development opportunities in the areas of Work/Life balance, we have also seen an increase in the number of employees attending all of our programs which include Lunch N Learns, Support Groups, wellness/fitness classes, etc. We have also seen an increase in the Employee Assistance Program referrals to our health care provider due to better education about the importance of preventative and proactive intervention strategies. Our supervisors are utilizing this option more than discipline or termination which can help us retain these valuable employees who are currently dealing with stressful issues.

Barry’s sick and personal time-off policies were reviewed and made more user friendly by combining both areas into one and calling it “Flextime”. Employees can use their earned time for any reason. This encouraged taking wellness days where employees “call in well” or take time off for parenting and caregiver issues, etc.



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A Child Care survey was distributed to staff and students to better assess the need for providing support to our employees in this area. As a result of the survey, a child care task force was formed and has begun to offer on-site childcare on school holidays to begin its programming efforts. They are currently looking at outside funding sources to continue this effort.

Dependent care flexible spending accounts (FSA's) have been added to our employee benefit package to allow employees to afford this care for their children or parents without paying tax on the benefit.

The University expanded its holiday calendar by closing all facilities for one full week during the Christmas Holiday due to feedback that our employees would like to spend more quality time with their families. Employees do not have to use their flex days or vacation days to enjoy this time off.

### **Future Directions:**

- Barry's work/life balance Initiative relies heavily on departments such as Campus Recreation and Wellness to offer wellness and fitness programming for our employees. Their efforts will continue to be supported and promoted in an effort to encourage employee attendance at this type of programming.
- We are currently working with our health care provider to understand where our high claims areas are with the goal of targeting these areas through proactive and preventative programming. Common employee health issues such as stress and



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depression can be modified through lifestyle behavior changes and our hope is to create more worksite support specifically related to our high claim areas.

- With the increasing focus on the high cost of health care, the university is making extensive efforts at cost shifting within the insurance plan designs while maintaining quality healthcare and subsidizing employee and dependent care premiums at all levels.
- Every Year QIP undertakes certain projects that have been suggested by our employees or the committee. Some of these projects are completed very quickly, others require years to implement. QIP Committee members along with other university staff from Vice Presidents on down volunteer their time and expertise to examine our campus issues, work in teams to create solutions and implement these ideas wherever possible. When and if programs become part of our university's protocol, they are turned over to the appropriate department for continued administration.

The projects below show current issues that this committee is working on related to achieving many of our goals under the Work/Life Balance Initiative.

<b>Employee Wellness</b>	<b>University Wide Process Improvement</b>	<b>Task Force Membership</b>	<b>Staff Recognition</b>	<b>Other Projects</b>
Childcare Task Force	Departmental Communication Project	Benefit Committee for Insurance Renewal	Service Award Project	Grant Acquisition Project
Work/Life Balance Policy Implementation Project	Customer Service Project	Internal Communication Task Force	Sr. Jeanne Recognition	Mentoring Program



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Educational Programming Lunch N' Learn Caregiver Support Group	Employee Suggestion Box	Wellness Initiative Network (WIN)	Yearly Events Administrative Professionals' Day Barry Pride Day Caroling Party	Professional Development Day
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