

Work and Family Integration for Faculty: Recommendations for Chairs

Institutions of higher education are increasingly recognizing that being family-friendly is an asset for faculty recruitment and retention. Over the last decade, a growing number of colleges and universities instituted policies for new parents including tenure clock extensions, reductions in teaching duties, and parental leaves, to name just a few. In terms of policies and accommodations, much of the focus is on junior faculty and accommodating birth; there is less attention to the work/family needs of midcareer or more senior faculty. Institutions tend to assume that once faculty earn tenure and once children grow older that managing work and family integration comes naturally and does not require institutional support. Our research shows that this is not necessarily a safe conclusion, especially for women faculty with children. The academic career and parenthood are both lifelong commitments and higher education institutions are best served by recognizing this and responding affirmatively to work and family needs at all stages of the career. Failure to do so could result in continued gender stratification in the profession and possibly the loss of talented professionals in the field.

This article offers recommendations for department chairs to help early and midcareer faculty members manage work and family. These suggestions grow out of findings from our longitudinal research project on how more than one hundred tenure-track women faculty from different institutional types and across disciplinary fields managed work and family at the early-career stage (when they face the dual pressures of tenure and infants) and then again as these same women face midcareer challenges and older children. (For a complete analysis of the study results, see Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2012.) Our research indicates that it is possible to manage a work/family balance, but that as women's academic careers and families evolve they face different kinds of challenges and pressures. The findings also suggest that department chairs play a key role in helping faculty at both career stages navigate the work and family terrain.

The Findings

The early-career results show that the academic career is consuming and greedy (as is parenthood), but that the autonomy and flexibility of the position make managing multiple roles possible. During the early career, even when policies are available, faculty members are reticent to use them. Midcareer faculty were less stressed about managing work and family but were, in general, not making progress toward professional advancement as hoped. Many were fearful of institutional politics related to promotion and were content to stay put on the professional ladder. For some, it appeared that career advancement was incompatible with being a good parent. At both career stages, women were making it work through their own efforts and choices and relied little on assistance from their institutions or their departments. While it is important for faculty to manage their own lives, chairs play an essential role in assisting both junior faculty as they navigate the hurdles of tenure and midcareer faculty as they develop into successful senior scholars.

Our research findings point directly to departmental contexts and the role chairs play in helping faculty manage work and family integration. Chairs must be familiar with policies, apply them fairly, and educate faculty about their use. This education must be extended to those who may use the policies as

well as to those who evaluate the faculty members who use them (annually as well as for promotion and tenure). Above all, department chairs must be proactive in maintaining an open climate, where policy issues regarding work and family are discussed forth-rightly. The following are specific suggestions for chairs to consider for assisting faculty as they manage work and family.

All Faculty

Effective policies and practices and an accommodating culture encourage all faculty to be productive and successful department members.

Be aware of and advocate for institution-wide policy. Chairs need to know which policies exist on campus. If there are no (or limited) policies, chairs must be leaders in creating them. Campuses are becoming increasingly competitive when it comes to offering leaves as part of recruitment and retention plans, and those with more progressive policies stand to recruit and retain more qualified faculty than those without.

Call for department chair training. The widespread lack of awareness regarding work and family policy suggests that the topic is not discussed at department chair meetings or at new chair orientations. Chairs would do well to be leaders among their peers in starting the conversation.

Break the silence. A major finding of our study is that few people talk about work and family issues, especially with the person having a baby. Department chairs must take the lead in discussing work/family issues with their departmental colleagues. Silence may often indicate a respect for personal boundaries, but creating a hospitable climate for work and family issues calls first and foremost for talking about it.

Share the wealth. Creative solutions to help faculty manage work and family must be shared. Talk about work and family within the department and with chair colleagues.

Understand power differentials. Chairs sometimes do not know their own power. One of the reasons faculty are fearful to ask department chairs for ?help? is their awareness of the power chairs have to make decisions that can affect the faculty career. By recognizing their own power, chairs may be better able to understand why a new assistant professor is reluctant to talk about modifying duties to have a baby.

Recognize that one size does not fit all. We are strong advocates for centralized policy offerings, but no one policy can meet all faculty needs. Chairs may need to be creative with how they translate policy options for individual faculty members. A faculty member with a baby born with complications may need different accommodation from a faculty member with a trouble-free pregnancy. The same is true at all career phases.

Adopt a life-course perspective. There are different phases to the academic career, and adopting a long view a life-course perspective can shift the emphasis of work and family as being the concern of only a few to being the concern of many. We have heard from chairs that they are nervous about accommodating junior women faculty with children and not others. Adopting a life-course perspective can show that people may need accommodation at any time and for a variety reasons. Senior faculty members may have family concerns as well, ranging from providing for adolescents to caring for aging

parents. If departments take a life-course perspective, then accommodations and support can be provided for faculty at all stages of the academic career.

Early-Career Faculty.

Institutional context shapes the overall experience of early-career faculty. Departmental climate and the institutional mission influence faculty's daily work and family lives.

Provide options for covering classes. A significant concern for the early-career faculty members in our study was how to cover classes during the semester a baby is born. Opting for an unpaid leave (as provided by the Family Medical Leave Act) is often not an affordable option for many faculty, and the twelve-week leave provided does not account for the length of a typical academic term. Further, many new professors do not have sick time to compensate for a semester leave. In helping faculty respond to work/family demands, department chairs must think carefully about what needs to be taught, when, and by whom. There are several ways chairs can help (depending on the specific policies of the institution):

- Modified duties: Faculty continue to engage in service or research obligations but are relieved from teaching responsibilities for a term.
- Courses would be canceled or taught by someone else.
- Bank courses: Faculty teach an overload in a different semester so as to not teach during the semester in question.
- Team teaching: Faculty team-teach a course with another professor, adjunct, or graduate teaching assistant.
- Alternative formats: Courses are offered in formats with more flexibility (online, condensed).

Offer support for breast feeding. Breast-feeding mothers have unique needs that must be recognized and accommodated. New mothers who are breast feeding should be provided with private, clean spaces to pump and store breast milk. Faculty members often have private offices, but if that is not the case then it is up to departments and units to provide lactation spaces.

Midcareer Faculty

Midcareer faculty must manage family responsibilities while thinking about the myriad of opportunities available to established faculty members, including administration, promotion to full professor, and changes in responsibilities.

Regenerate academic careers through modified duties. Helping midcareer faculty shift their priorities could mean allowing limited teaching for a semester or a year to reestablish a research program or reducing service for a year as a way to encourage research or teaching productivity. Sabbaticals serve this renewal process, but we found that many faculty members took their sabbaticals shortly after receiving tenure and were not eligible for another leave even though they were eligible to be considered for promotion. A modified duty policy for mid-career faculty can help prepare them for promotion to full professor.

Offer mentoring and support for faculty throughout the career. Mentorship tends to focus on helping junior faculty achieve tenure. Mentoring should continue beyond tenure to help faculty members be mindful of career advancement and the need to maintain productivity. Formalized mentoring should be

available to help prepare department members as they move through the faculty and administrative pipeline.

Clarify expectations for promotion to full professor. The tenure process is known for its ambiguity. In response, many campuses have developed mentoring programs, faculty handbooks, and professional development materials geared toward junior faculty. Going up for full professor is also fraught with uncertainty and there is little information available to help faculty decode this process. Campuses wanting to help faculty members at all stages of their careers would do well to provide more detailed information about when faculty are eligible for full professor and what is required. This information should appear in faculty handbooks, be part of the annual review process, and be the subject of professional development workshops so that tenured faculty members can be prompted to think about career advancement.

Provide professional development opportunities for administration. Many campuses have specified goals to diversify their administrative ranks in terms of race and gender. However, our midcareer faculty interviews revealed little interest on the part of respondents in regard to moving into formal administrative positions. This is due in part to family responsibilities, but it is also tied to concerns about dealing with campus politics, conflict, and difficult personalities. Professional development programs could help provide greater understanding of administrative roles and help faculty learn more about administrative processes. These programs could also provide part-time opportunities for faculty to engage in administrative roles under the guidance of an administrative mentor.

Conclusion

Too often work and family dialogue is about early-career faculty members who have infants. This type of conversation is important, but it should not preclude discussion of the needs of faculty at all career stages and with family members of all ages. It is just as important for department chairs to be mindful of how work/family concerns affect their more senior colleagues as they do their more junior ones. In order to create equitable work environments for faculty, there must be more proactive measures in place than just adding women at the junior levels and hoping that they progress through the pipeline. Colleges and universities must recognize that faculty at all career stages need support and care in order to be productive and successful. We hope the suggestions presented here inspire department chairs to take the initiative to help their faculty who have immediate work and family concerns. Departments that are open to meeting faculty needs and offering reasonable accommodation are likely to be healthy and hospitable places to work that can better recruit and retain high-quality faculty.

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