

2006-1089: DEMYSTIFYING FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES FOR FACULTY: RESOURCES FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

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DEMYSTIFYING FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES FOR FACULTY: RESOURCES FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

Introduction

Family-friendly policies for faculty are no longer the exception, but rather are becoming the norm on many campuses. Yet, the existence of such policies is not enough to bring about a cultural change. In addition to changes in policies, institutional transformation requires a significant amount of change in attitudes and practices throughout the university community. A top-down policy change can rarely transform an institution. Rather, the success of institutional change hinges largely on the extent to which (attitudinal and practical) change occurs at the academic department level.^{1, 2} Department chairs are the critical point of influence at the department level.

Yet academic department chairs are not often prepared to be change agents or administrative managers.²⁻⁴ Faculty who have risen to the department chair position are usually recognized leaders in their scholarly fields and have been trained to be scholars, not managers. Moreover, academic department chairs are generally not equipped to navigate policy changes nor the attitudes and prejudices that impair effective policy implementation. Nevertheless, they are precisely the ones who can affect such changes since, as noted by Etzkowitz, Kemelgor and Uzzi, “Policy change cannot affect inherent attitudes and prejudices. Change of that nature appears to emanate from those in power within the department. They become the role model for the role models.”⁵

To help department chairs gain the skills and information needed to address department culture, which would then support the effective implementation of policies such as family-friendly policies, the University of Washington’s National Science Foundation-funded ADVANCE Center for Institutional Change (CIC) received a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to pilot an annual two-day national leadership workshop for department chairs, deans, and emerging leaders. A particular emphasis of the workshop was work-life issues for faculty. The workshop was designed to address the disconnect that exists in American institutions of higher education between the adoption of flexible career options as a means for recruiting and retaining the “best and brightest” faculty, and the existing climate and culture of the academy that discourages utilization of these policies. But before department chairs can begin to address the aspects of department culture that influence family-friendly policy implementation, they need the background information to understand their own attitudes and they need information on policies and examples of effective implementation.

The purpose of this paper is to share information about the policy search process and to discuss the benefits of having family-friendly policy information easily accessible for department chairs and faculty. In collecting information about the family-friendly policies at the various institutions, it became increasingly clear that the information is often difficult to find and even more difficult to implement. Based on our experience, it is no wonder that faculty and department chairs need help demystifying such policies.

This paper begins with an examination of the current environment for care-giving faculty and the role that department chairs play in embracing flexible faculty careers. Next an overview of the

process of obtaining policy information and how that information was shared and used by participants of the national workshop will be given. The paper concludes with recommendations for helping demystify family-family friendly policies for faculty, which is a critical step to institutional transformation in this arena.

The Current Environment for Care-Giving Faculty

One of the key areas addressed in the workshop was the role of departmental leadership in embracing flexible faculty careers. While the common assumption holds that the flexibility of a faculty career provides the perfect opportunity for work and family balance, it has been demonstrated that this flexibility blurs the boundaries between academic work and life and typically results in less time for the personal lives of faculty.⁶⁻¹¹ Departmental leadership is vital in this arena, particularly given the current environment for care-giving faculty.

Institutions of higher education are making the attempt to be supportive of faculty with care-giving responsibilities through the adoption of policies such as part-time tenure track, family leave, modified duties, and tenure clock extension, but it will be necessary to transform departmental climate and culture for these efforts to be successful.^{8, 9, 12, 13} Institutional policies and departmental climate and culture define the environment in which faculty work.¹³ Even with the existence of family-friendly policies, the environment can cause faculty to feel that they are jeopardizing the attainment of tenure by being the first person, or even one of a select few, to use a family-friendly policy that may make them appear less committed, less professional, etc.^{6, 7, 12-16} For faculty members who are primary care-givers, negative climate and culture can create a catch-22 where they can be denied tenure for utilizing family-friendly policies, as well as denied tenure for not utilizing family-friendly policies. If a family-friendly policy is utilized, faculty risk the consequences attached to the stigma of care-giving, including the possibility of being denied tenure. If faculty care-givers do not utilize family-friendly policies that are designed to help them balance the responsibilities of primary care-giving and career, they may experience reduced scholarly production and be denied tenure.^{6, 7, 12, 14}

While some faculty manage to achieve balance between their commitment to work and family responsibilities, many do not.¹⁰ Some faculty women end up leaving the academy, not having families, or having smaller families than desired, and faculty men may deny themselves active roles in their families.^{9, 17, 18} The inability to create a supportive environment for faculty with care-giving responsibilities will artificially limit the pool of potential faculty.¹³

The Role of Departmental Leadership in Embracing Flexible Faculty Careers

Research demonstrates that institutional policies are not transforming departmental climate and culture, evidence of which was seen in the lack of policy utilization by faculty.¹² Drago et al. found that of over 500 faculty at Pennsylvania State University between 1992 and 1997 who became new parents, only 7 faculty members utilized the parental leave available.¹² Similarly, Sloan-funded research at the University of Washington found that very few tenure track faculty are utilizing the part-time tenure track policy.¹⁹ Interviews with faculty members who took advantage of family-friendly policies at UW found that policy availability is not communicated and that faculty in departments fear stigmatization.¹⁹ While considerable research has been done to determine the variables that result in reduced numbers of mothers attaining tenure,^{9, 18, 20-22} the

influence of departmental climate and culture on all faculty with care-giving responsibilities is relatively unexplored. This area is critical because the ability of institutions to recruit and retain a diverse faculty will diminish unless climate and culture are transformed to foster a family-friendly environment.¹³

Leadership at the departmental level can either work to transform climate and culture to be supportive of all faculty, or it can undermine institutional efforts at cultural transformation by perpetuating the bias against faculty with care-giving responsibilities. Chairs need support if they are to hire and retain the best faculty.²³ According to the research-based and practical evidence, an environment that enables faculty to maintain a balance between their work and family responsibilities will benefit both male and female faculty members.^{9, 10, 21} As the number of academic women choosing to have families and the number of academic men choosing to be active care-givers continues to increase, the issue of work and family balance will become more crucial.⁹ Additionally, faculty at the later stages of a career may desire to “phase” into retirement through part-time appointment. Leslie and Walke analyzed the 1992-93 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF-93) and found that 45.9% of the part-time tenured or tenure track faculty were men over 60 years of age.²⁴ Post-tenure, late career part-time status has similar, and different, challenges for both the faculty member and the academic department.^{19, 24} Department chairs must be able to effectively work with faculty at varying stages of the academic career.

Even where family-friendly policies and flexible career options exist for faculty, implementation at the department level can negate the benefit for faculty. Armenti states, “policies like maternity leave provide the illusion that universities are working toward gender equality but these policies are flawed because department chairs (mostly privileged white males) have the discretion to interpret, implement, and enforce them.”²⁵ We believe that the time pressures placed on department chairs, coupled with the burdensome language typical of university policies and the difficulty in locating relevant policies in the various handbooks and codes, markedly reduces the ability of a chair to utilize the available policies.

Family-Friendly Policies for Faculty: A Department Head/Chair’s Guide

Part of the goal of the national workshop hosted by the CIC was to help inform department chairs of the current environment for care-giving faculty and the critical role of a department chair in creating a supportive environment. In addition to hearing about the experiences of their department chair colleagues and fellow faculty and learning about the research from national experts, workshop participants received a family-friendly policy guidebook, “Family-Friendly Policies for Faculty: A Department Head/Chair’s Guide,” and a brochure entitled “Work/Life Balance for Faculty: Research and Recommendations on Family-Friendly Policies and Practices,” which contained general recommendations and background research on family-friendly policies for faculty. The difficulties experienced during the process of creating the policy guidebook highlight the challenges department chairs face in locating necessary policy information. Family-friendly policy information, when it exists, is scattered around university web pages, including the university or faculty handbook; the human resources web site; the faculty senate web site; the web site of the committee for women; ADVANCE programs, etc.

The family-friendly policies for faculty at the home campus of each workshop participant were researched and synthesized into a guidebook of single-page policy synopses for each campus, with contact information for the person in charge of the policies if additional questions arose. This guidebook was intended to help remove the initial barriers of policy identification and distillation by bringing policy availability to the attention of department heads or chairs; provide basic details about policies; and assist department heads or chairs in locating additional information about the policies. It was not meant to replace the source materials of the campuses. UW ADVANCE Research Assistant Kate Quinn, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program, searched the web pages of twenty-four institutions to obtain the information provided in the guidebook. The policy-types included were: Leaves, including paid and unpaid for illness, pregnancy, care-giving; Workload Adjustment, such as part-time tenure track, phased or partial retirement, modified duties.; Tenure Clock Adjustment, whether 'waived' years, 'stopped' clocks; Dual Career Hiring; and, Domestic Partner Benefits. Each policy synopsis page was sent to the Provost, or another top academic officer, at the campus for verification of accuracy. The majority of campuses (18 of 24) responded quickly, including two senior academic leaders who requested the copies of the finished guidebook for reference. The remaining six campuses did not respond prior to the workshop and participants from these campuses were encouraged to contact their dean to verify accuracy of policy information.

In searching for policy details online, it is useful to have an idea of target locations and keywords. For faculty-specific policies, such as those relating to tenure, searching within the faculty handbook or faculty code, is the most effective. Occasionally, faculty policies are located in the university handbook or university policy manual or a system-wide policy collection. Within these sources, the keywords "part-time," "extension," "adjustment," "probationary period," "phased," and "partial" are effective at locating part-time tenure policies, tenure clock extensions or adjustments and phased or partial retirement. Additionally, "spousal," "partner," and "dual career" are effective in locating policies related to dual career hiring. Policies that adjust faculty workloads such as Active Duties Modified Service and teaching release are mostly commonly found through the web sites of ADVANCE programs and Women's Committees, which highlight family-friendly policies for faculty. Policies such as sick leave, family leave, and domestic partner benefits tend to be located in Human Resources web pages. Related keywords include: "leave," "maternity," "paternity," "family," "same sex," and "domestic partner." Searching the keywords "family-friendly" and "work-family" from the main campus web site tends to bring up minutes from Faculty Senate or Women's Committees meetings where such policies were discussed, indicating interest on campus but not necessarily policy availability.

The cover letter of the policy guidebook encouraged department heads or chairs to transform their departments into supportive, inclusive places for faculty working through life transitions – whether or not their institution has many of these policies. Each participant received the entire guidebook, not just the page for his or her campus, so that each could see examples of different types of policies and policy details. Preliminary analysis of phone interviews with workshop participants indicates that the guidebook has been used for different purposes within three months since the workshop. For some chairs, the guidebook has raised their awareness of policies, enabling them to recommend policy use to faculty. For others, the policy information is seen as a recruiting tool, making the guidebook useful only during searches. A couple chairs

noted that the policy synopsis for their campus did not reflect practice, making them aware of the need to have the policy information updated online. The guidebook is seen by a few chairs as a resource only for policy makers, and they have given it to their dean, provost, or chancellor or to their ADVANCE department or Women's Committee. The guidebook has been useful to campuses interested in benchmarking themselves by what family-friendly policies their peer institutions offer. Similarly, for campuses in the process of modifying existing or adopting new family-friendly policies, the guidebook has provided useful details on other campuses' policies. The information has been used as a leverage tool with campus presidents, as well as a template for new policies.

Summary and Recommendations

Many institutions have adopted family-friendly policies, but these policies can be so hidden in various manuals, handbooks, or codebooks, that faculty and department chairs are unaware of policy availability, unsure of policy details and eligibility, and skeptical of institutional endorsement of policy use. Department level leadership is crucial in effectively implementing policies for faculty, yet chairs are not supported by many institutions in finding the necessary information, or convinced that policy use should be encouraged. Changes must be made in the way that family-friendly policies are communicated both to department chairs and to faculty members. Department chairs need to be both aware of policy availability and details, and confident in institutional commitment to flexibility in faculty careers before they can advocate policy use to their faculty or work to transform department culture. For these reasons, we recommend that institutions create simple, easy to find references that provide a 'snapshot' of the family-friendly policies available with links to additional information. We recommend the following guidelines:

- Keep it short: The policies are already out there in a long, cumbersome format; include only the basics of what the policy does, how it works, who is eligible, and where to find additional details. Creating a simple, "snapshot" reference document with links to additional information will help make the information more readily accessible.
- Endorsement of senior leadership: Have the policy guide linked from the Provost's website, indicating the Provost's commitment to flexibility in faculty careers. This support will facilitate cultural change at the department level.
- Encourage dissemination of policy information at meetings of deans, chairs, and faculty: Indicating that policy use is a routine path in an academic career and broadcasting policy availability will facilitate cultural change at the department level.
- Encourage department chairs and search committees to use family-friendly policy availability as recruitment and retention tools. Some campuses are already doing this to gain a competitive advantage over their less family-friendly peers.
- Share policy implementation case studies with faculty, department chairs, and other administrative leadership: While policies may be widely explored across the entire campus, most departments will just have a few instances of policy use.

Therefore, department chairs may have a situation for the first (and perhaps only) time. Learning from others experiences helps chairs and faculty be flexible and creative with their solution strategies. Learning from others also helps department chairs interpret the policies.

- Identify barriers to use: Policy existence is not enough to support a family-friendly environment for faculty. Taking stock of what policies are actually used and exploring why policies are not being used will help an institution better respond to the needs of their faculty.
- Provide supporting information to create context and illustrate implications of academic culture: Offering a document such as the “Work/Life Balance for Faculty: Research and Recommendations on Family-Friendly Policies and Practices” brochure, which contained general recommendations and background research on family-friendly policies for faculty, sets the content and can help create credibility for the existence and successful implementation of family-friendly policies.

The conversations with workshop participants demonstrate that faculty and department chairs generally wish to be supportive of these additional dimensions to faculty life. However, knowing what policies exist and how to use them is not always easy. Information must be provided in a way which is accessible and useful to department chairs or policies will remain unused. By demystifying the family-friendly policies for faculty, we can support our administrators to bring forth the type of institutional transformation which will benefit all faculty.

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