

## Discussing Parental Policies with Your Dean or Department Chair

—Fiona Scott Morton, Yale University



Bearing or adopting a child can be immensely rewarding personally and intensely stressful professionally. Uncomplicated pregnancies may leave you exhausted (especially in the first trimester) and reduce your productivity; complications can extend that impact for months. Caring for a newborn is the ultimate 24/7 job for someone, and the effects of sleep deprivation may limit your effectiveness even when “off-duty.” Some parents want time at home with their newborn and no outside responsibilities; others may look forward to early childcare assistance and rapid re-engagement with the more intellectual, predictable, and controllable challenges of their job. Moreover, these impacts vary greatly across parents and children, and may be impossible to predict and therefore to plan for. Finding ways to balance across these demands, and to compensate professionally through reduced commitments around the birth or adoption date, can be very important, especially for women junior faculty.

There is considerable variation across departments and schools in the existence and/or terms of policies to facilitate these transitions. Some schools offer tenure clock extensions and paid parental leave; others may have unpaid leave policies. Some leaves are maternity (available only to women giving birth), some are parental (available to a newborn’s primary caregiver of either gender), and some are available to both biological and adoptive parents. Casual empiricism suggests that employers are expanding the scope of coverage – we are seeing more parenting leave available to either gender, automatic tenure clock extensions, part-time or unpaid leave options post-tenure for childcare (and often medical or elder care), and so on. Despite this, you may find yourself at an employer without clear leave policies, or in a situation that requires some deviation from established policies. A conversation about parental policies of a Department has the potential to be awkward because you have to reveal something about a normally private decision: views you and your spouse may have on the desire for, and timing of, children. And this continues to often be a more awkward conver-

sation for women than for men.

I found that a comfortable time to bring up the subject was when I received my first job offers on the rookie market. I was not married at the time, and had no immediate plans for children, but expected that I might in the future. This enabled me to ask about maternity policies as another characteristic of the job, at the same time I would ask about housing programs, retirement benefits, or tuition assistance. As a young woman, I don’t think whoever is hiring you is unaware that you are in the risk set for childbearing, so you are probably not giving away any information to your senior colleagues that they didn’t already know.

I engaged in my second round of maternity conversations when I was actively planning to have a baby, and indeed I was pregnant when I eventually changed jobs. I encountered two types of institutions in that job change. One Dean insisted that his institution treated its faculty well, but had a policy of having no maternity policy. Each parent was handled on a case by case basis. This made me very nervous, as my situation would clearly depend on how favorably I was viewed by those in power at the relevant time. If I had chosen to work there, I would have attempted to extract something written with more specifics in it; see Susan Athey’s discussion of negotiating outside job offers in this issue.

The second institution offered no benefits at all: no teaching load reduction, no clock extension, etc. At the time of the negotiation, no tenure-track faculty member of this institution had given birth in living memory! If you find yourself in this situation, there are some legal protections available. See Saranna Thornton’s article on Maternity Leave in the Winter 1998 CSWEP newsletter (<http://www.cswep.org/maternit.htm>). If an employer has a temporary disability leave policy for any conditions, federal nondiscrimination law requires that this be made available on the same terms for pregnancy or childbirth. Note that disability leaves cannot be used by fathers or adoptive parents as they are not suffering from a temporary disability (pregnancy). However, the Family and Medical Leave Act (<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/FMLA.html>) requires employers to grant up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during a 12 month period for a variety of family situations including birth or adoption of a child.

If the institution offers no maternity benefit, one has to be creative and explore all options. Is unpaid personal leave



a viable option? Is there a way to organize teaching at particular times of year that would be convenient for you? Is there a merit or sabbatical leave that could be used at the time the baby is born? Are there other tasks that could substitute for teaching, such as giving talks at alumni events or new course development? Could an extra course be taught in another year to enable a lighter load at the time of the birth? Could funding be found for more TAs and RAs to leverage your time? Could the institution's policies be moved? Gather data to show the Department Chair or Dean what standards are in peer institutions or the "outside world." I developed a spreadsheet of the competitors of my institution with a terse description of the maternity policies of each ("1 of 3 courses reduced; 1 year clock extension"). It's probably worth listing not only direct peers, but institutions a little higher in the pecking order. I collected the information by contacting friends at other schools, and in some cases, administrators.

The ensuing conversation may be tricky, especially if your department Chair or Dean is not interested in helping you find a solution. Be calm, professional and persistent. If you are not yet pregnant, you can have this conversation in the relaxed manner of someone who still has an outside option. "What if I were to have a baby – some day my husband and I would like to, you know - how could I get a semester cleared of courses with impacting my research time?" If you're expecting a child, the need for resolution will be more immediate. Decide on your goals ahead of time: a particular semester freed up, flexibility across semesters to deal with uncertainty about the arrival of a child, a research assistant to push your agenda forward while you are not in the office, etc. Point to the data that you have collected. This allows you to focus the negotiation on the specifics and not get sidetracked into conversations about babies. I gave the data to the Dean with a note saying our institution would have a hard time attracting qualified women if we remained so much below the standard of our peers. By this time I was at another business school, again with no policy. However, happily, a maternity teaching load reduction and a clock extension were adopted in time for the arrival of my second baby. (You can suggest or design your own policy as illustrated by this story <http://chronicle.com/jobs/2005/02/2005020701c.htm>.)

Even if your institution has a leave policy, its implementation may be unclear. And unfortunately, pregnancy occurs

with a long enough lead time that, provided you admit to being pregnant, administrators may want to schedule your teaching in a time of year when the baby is not actually being born, leaving the research part of your schedule to absorb the birth and potentially requiring new teaching preparations. This can be very costly to you. In theory, one could invoke the disability policy or FMLA when the baby arrives and stop teaching part way through a semester; one may be unpaid for a couple of months (under FMLA), but not teaching either. While drastic, I do think this scenario is useful as the classic 'outside option' in a nice conversation (negotiation) with your Department Chair. While one does not want to "win the battle and lose the war" by threatening to abandon classes mid-semester, this foil may help your Chair appreciate how relatively costly piling up the teaching would be. Again, with a calm and professional approach, and a clear sense of your goal, it may be possible to negotiate a Pareto improvement, leaving you better off and your Chair reasonably satisfied.

What might a solution look like? I personally found it was optimal to teach fairly shortly (a few weeks) after my children were born. A lot of teaching preparation could be done at home, and my classes were sufficiently short to nurse or use a breast pump conveniently between them. I was so tired that there was no way I could sit at a desk and read quietly or think without falling asleep. However, I could draw on the blackboard and talk just fine. So I allocated time for research during my pregnancies and then when my baby was born I told my co-author he was in charge for a while, and did nothing but teaching for a few months. If your usual teaching load doesn't mesh with this schedule, you may consider exploring unpaid personal leave. This may be your only option if your employer doesn't have any disability or maternity leave, but some have found it attractive in combination with paid leave when the alternative is to undertake new (especially one-time) teaching preparations immediately before or after your maternity leave. This can facilitate a transition period from infant care back to research without administration or new teaching preparations. This clearly works better if you have a spouse with plenty of income or have saved in advance to finance the temporary income reduction—but you might consider this, like a good nanny, as an investment in your career. Not everyone agrees, but I do not feel that part-time status is a good solution. If you want to stay active in

research and return to fulltime status shortly, you go to seminars, read journals, attend conferences, and engage in other professional activities. So working halftime results in no reduction in research time, traveling, writing referee reports, etc, only a reduction in teaching, in exchange for getting paid half as much!

Having said all this, each person's preferred solution depends greatly on what support from family and spouse is available, what financial resources can be brought to bear, and what the work habits of each parent are (can you work at night, do you need extended uninterrupted periods for research, can you work at home, can you research and teach in the same semester, etc). So ultimately the best solution is personalized. A negotiated package that yields more on the dimensions you care about most is very likely to be superior to a standard policy. However, the need for personalization indicates how important is the negotiation with the Chair or Deans and how worthwhile it is to be informed about your outside options and articulate about what would be most helpful to you.

Naturally, a friendly negotiation is likely to get you further, so it may be useful to treat the pregnancy as an exogenous event that you and your Chair need to find a way around together, rather than as something you chose to do in order to disrupt the smooth functioning of the Department. Blame your spouse for the arrival of the child, or simply don't refer to it as a choice (after all, having children is quite common in the general population)! Instead, focus on finding a solution that preserves your research time and satisfies the Department's constraints. That will generally be in everyone's interest.

## Conversations with your Chair

—Nancy Marion, Dartmouth College



In putting together an article on the theme "Conversations with Your Chair," it seemed sensible to solicit the perspective of someone who has served as chair. Since I have held that position, I was asked to provide some advice for junior faculty on how to interact with their chair in productive ways.

Most often, junior faculty have conversations with their chair to discuss next year's teaching schedule, preparation for upcoming departmental evaluations, such as a third-year review, and service on departmental and university-wide committees. A good chair will explain the rationale for proposed departmental course and committee assignments, listen to alternative suggestions from the junior faculty member, and hopefully guide the discussion to a mutually agreeable resolution. A chair can provide helpful advice on preparing documents for review, such as the vitae or the research statement. A chair also can be an ally in confronting excessive university-wide committee demands.

On occasion, junior faculty may believe the department is making excessive demands on them in terms of class preps, teaching terms, or committee assignments. In such a case, I believe the best strategy for junior faculty is to get full information about established policies and norms. This information can be gathered by having conversations with more experienced junior faculty and trusted tenured faculty and by reading university policy handbooks. If you still have concerns about extra work being asked of you relative to these norms, you should express these concerns to your chair, honestly and candidly. If the chair persists in making an extraordinary request because of special circumstances, I believe you should probably acquiesce. By assisting, you are being a good department citizen. In addition, your cooperative spirit normally will give you credit for favorable consideration if you have special needs in the future.

What about approaching your chair with a special request? You should recognize that it is difficult on equity grounds for most departments to grant special favors to individual faculty



members. Good chairs want to preserve a sense of equity and fairness across faculty. Nevertheless, it is possible that your institution lags behind its peers in terms of addressing some issue important to you, such as maternity/parental leave, unpaid leave for personal reasons, a professional leave for government service, or a leave to spend time at an institution where a partner is employed. In that case, you might be effective in getting your department/institution to look favorably on your request by putting it in a broader context. For example, you might suggest to your chair that you are willing to work with some other faculty to gather information about institutional policies elsewhere that could inform new practices for your own department/institution. Fiona Scott Morton's article in this newsletter describes one such approach to an institution's lack of maternity leave.

Although I was seen as friendly and easily approachable, no junior faculty ever came to me with a special request while I was chair. Maybe that was because my own institution had a clear set of policies related to paid and unpaid leaves and other matters. Maybe that was because my department successfully protected junior faculty from career-impeding demands on their time. Or maybe it was because no junior faculty had a health crisis, family emergency, child care nightmare, or relationship breakdown on my watch.

In the absence of a personal crisis, it is difficult for me to conceive of a case where junior faculty would ask their chair for special treatment. At my institution, junior faculty have the same course load as everyone else (barring buy outs from grants) and are usually hired with a reduced teaching load for the first year or so. Our junior faculty have one or two preps in the first three years, not the three or four preps per year that I had as a junior faculty years ago. Our junior faculty are protected from university-wide committee assignments in the first three or four years (i.e. encouraged to say no), so we rarely have to invoke the advice I was given when I arrived—to serve on no more than one time-consuming and one minimalist university-wide committee per term. Junior faculty are encouraged to focus their efforts on research and teaching, attend all recruiting seminars and all workshops in their field, attend (infrequently scheduled) department meetings, and participate actively in department committees to which they are assigned. This focus pays off at

tenure time, since institutions evaluate excellence in scholarship and teaching, with some consideration to departmental and university service.

As a chair, I don't think I would have been amenable to granting requests for special favors from a junior faculty bold enough to ask for them (apart from deals negotiated in the process of keeping a faculty member from taking an outside job offer, but that is another matter; see Susan Athey's article on negotiating job offers in this issue.) On the other hand, I never had a junior faculty member suddenly confronting a serious health condition, a family emergency, child care nightmares, or a relationship meltdown. If I had, I would have welcomed their approach to me on the issue, rather than trying to struggle with it alone. I hope I would have listened sympathetically and then taken some time to understand and communicate university policy. Usually, a reduced teaching load, leave or delay in the tenure decision is granted fairly automatically in cases of serious, long-term illness, arrival of a child, or prolonged family emergency. If the university does not have clear and fair policies in place, chairs can assist junior faculty by initiating requests for policy changes or clarification, pointing out appropriate policies that are in place at other universities.

For personal concerns that don't come under the category of "crises," such as trying to balance a commuting marriage/relationship, your chair may be a helpful resource in finding a creative solution, especially when it can be framed as a win-win outcome. That is when the department can keep a valuable member and the faculty member can function more productively.

I suspect the most common reason for junior faculty to feel they need special support is a sense of being overwhelmed by the stress of publishing, class preparation, concerns about poor teaching evaluations, or short-term crises related to child care or other conflicting time demands. For these problems, I question whether the chair is their best source to share confidences and seek support. Better resources to deal with these concerns would be close colleagues, friends, or professional counselors.