WORK-FAMILY BALANCE AT PENN STATE

Findings from the 2008–09 Focus Groups of Faculty and Staff

A Report by Penn State’s Commission for Women

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The Commission for Women was established in 1981 to serve as an advisory group to the President on issues affecting women and to guide the University in its efforts to enhance the status of women at Penn State. The commission advocates for programs and policies that enhance the working and learning environments for women students, faculty and staff members, technical service employees, and administrators.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2008–09, Penn State’s Commission for Women (CFW) sponsored a study of faculty and staff parents at Penn State to better understand how they balance the dual responsibilities of work and family in the year following the birth or adoption of a child. The goal of the work was to provide CFW with information on new parents’ issues and challenges, allow insight into how Penn State policies affect new parents, and enable the commission to make appropriate recommendations to improve work-life balance for University employees.

The data for this study were gathered via focus groups of Penn State employees. Participants included: (1) Penn State faculty – fixed-term multi-year, standing, tenure-track, or tenured – whose appointments were based at University Park, and (2) Penn State staff based at University Park or a Commonwealth campus (excluding Hershey). Eligibility criteria for participation included having had or adopted a child in the past four years while holding one of the positions described above. Both women and men were eligible. The groups were conducted by the Center for Survey Research at Penn State Harrisburg and the resulting data were analyzed by members of the commission’s Family Leave Committee under Penn State IRB #29673.

Findings in Brief

The level of support from supervisors and colleagues for work-family balance varies considerably depending on where an employee works within the University. Discrepancies in levels of support appear to be widespread and well-noted by both faculty and staff. Penn State is perceived as a place where supportive work environments do exist, but not as an institution that promotes a family-friendly culture overall.

Scheduling insensitivities within some departments were noted by faculty, who reported facing conflicts with early morning or evening departmental commitments. For staff, the situation is more severe, with many respondents noting the challenges of juggling daycare drop-off with an inflexible job-start time. Many expressed the desire for such accommodations as compressed work weeks, alternate start or end work times, the ability to leave work in the middle of the day and make up that time in the evening, or to work part-time at home.

Most of the faculty interviewed reported being satisfied with the amount of leave time granted them to care for the new child, though they noted that leaves were determined locally by department/college rather than universally across the University. Faculty questioned why there was no paternity leave available at Penn State, perceiving that time off for male faculty members depended on the will of the department head. They voiced concerns that the leave policy does not stop the clock for a second child. Faculty reported that finding the policies on maternity leave was extremely difficult and frustrating.

Faculty who reported positive experiences in obtaining leaves were grateful for having the time to care for a new child. They appreciated the importance of having a supportive department chair/head in achieving work-family balance. They felt loyal to Penn State if their leave experience was positive. Nonetheless, most noted the lack of centralized information about leave
options and preferred the onus not be on individual faculty to negotiate leaves given the varying levels of knowledge and support for leaves from department heads.

Staff emphatically and uniformly articulated disappointment in being offered nothing beyond the FMLA-mandated leave provisions. Staff indicated that taking leave at Penn State means using accumulated sick and vacation time, and almost all reported thinking this to be unfair given the demands of having and caring for a newborn. Women who had not worked at the University long enough to accrue much time often were particularly anguished by the situation, as were those who had medical issues during the pregnancy, which depleted their reserves of sick time available following the baby’s birth.

Staff also reported that one of the biggest issues and concerns with taking leave is the level of flexibility and support offered by a supervisor, which varies depending on where the employee works. Some staff were offered the chance to work at home or flexible hours while others were not. Such information is shared between employees and appears to be widely known, so staff tend to compare their situations to those of other staff members and even to those of faculty. Staff also reported confusion as to what FMLA really is and what it means to them.

Breastfeeding was not an issue of concern for the faculty interviewed for this study. Staff, on the other hand, found breast pumping (necessary for successful breastfeeding) to be difficult while working, particularly so for those without their own offices. Some women chose not to breastfeed or stopped sooner after the baby’s birth than they wished because their supervisor was not accommodating. Most did not have the time during their work day to use campus lactation stations because of the time required to walk to a station in another building. They reported being directed by supervisors to pump in open cubicles or bathrooms. In addition, staff are unclear about how to account for time spent pumping.

For faculty, the most problematic issue regarding childcare was the long waitlist for on-campus daycare. Staff members consistently reported that the cost of childcare on campus is too expensive, and consequently none of the staff members participating in focus groups use the facilities on campus or have their child on a waitlist for campus childcare. Using off-campus childcare, while more affordable, created scheduling issues for staff because drop-off and pick-up times make commuting, parking, and being at work on time challenging.

**Recommendations in Brief**

1. **More effective communication of existing family leave policies**

   a) The University should develop an easy-to-find, user-friendly link on the Office of Human Resources (OHR) Web site that contains a comprehensive menu of topics related to family leave policies.

   b) Auto-generate a packet of relevant information or an email to an employee as soon as OHR is notified of a pregnancy or adoption.
c) Provide all deans, department heads/chairs, supervisors, OHR managers, and University ombudspersons with information and training about the University’s family leave policies.

2. Improved support of breastfeeding/pumping

   a) Penn State should develop a written policy covering faculty and staff that clarifies the role of both employer and employee in supporting breastfeeding.

   b) Provide centralized annual funding to offset costs of the existing Breastfeeding Support Program at Penn State.

3. Provide flexible work conditions

   a) Create and promote possibilities for flexibility in accomplishing work for those balancing work-family responsibilities.

   b) Provide training for supervisors on how to create flexibilities within a job and to use cross-training as a way to allow more flexible assignments among staff members.

4. Foster a family-friendly climate

   a) The University should strive to create a climate supportive of those employees who become new parents.

   b) Top-level academic administrators must be charged with establishing a positive climate for balancing work and family responsibilities.

   c) Department chairs need to know policies, apply them fairly, and educate their faculty about their use.

   d) OHR should proactively establish a network of people who have recently had or adopted a child so those expecting could get advice.

   e) Valuing the ability of both men and women to balance work-family commitments, especially for dual-career couples, the University might consider stipends to assist with childcare, offer grants to support faculty travel, and permit flexible class and work scheduling.

   f) Increase the number of childcare slots available on campus in University-run facilities.
5. Assess progress

a) Track and evaluate the use of policies to monitor their effectiveness.

b) Conduct regular, periodic assessment of campus climate related to work-family balance issues.

c) Monitor the external environment. Compare Penn State’s policies and climate to those of peer institutions.
INTRODUCTION

During 2008–09, Penn State’s Commission for Women (CFW) sponsored a study of faculty and staff parents at Penn State to better understand how they balance the dual responsibilities of work and family in the year following the birth or adoption of a child. The goal of the work was to provide CFW with information on new parents’ issues and challenges, allow insight into how Penn State policies affect new parents, and enable the commission to make appropriate recommendations to improve work-life balance for university employees. This report is part of a larger body of work conducted by CFW in 2008–09 that includes a comparison of Big Ten parental leave policies.1

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were gathered via focus groups of Penn State employees. The commission funded the Center for Survey Research (CSR) at Penn State Harrisburg to conduct the focus groups and transcribe the resulting audio files. Members of the commission’s Family Leave Committee conducted analyses of the resulting data. The study was conducted under Penn State IRB #29673.

Focus groups were conducted with participants from two groups of employees: (1) Penn State faculty – fixed-term multi-year, standing, tenure-track, or tenured – whose appointments were based at University Park, and (2) Penn State staff based at University Park or a Commonwealth campus (excluding Hershey). A total of six focus groups were conducted, three groups with faculty participants and three groups with staff participants.

Eligibility criteria for participation included having had or adopted a child in the past four years while holding one of the positions described above. Both women and men were eligible. The definition of child used to determine study eligibility is as follows: a child is any biological, adopted, or foster child, a stepchild, a legal ward, or a child for which an employee is standing in loco parentis, who is under 18, or over 18 and incapable of self-care because of a mental or physical disability.2

The focus groups were conducted in November 2008 and February 2009 at University Park and the Harrisburg campus. Participants in this study included twenty-seven individuals from University Park and five from other campuses (Harrisburg, Dickinson, and Brandywine). Faculty and staff participated in equal numbers, with sixteen faculty and sixteen staff included in the focus groups. Twenty-nine women and three men participated. Most participants had either one or two children, while a few had three children. Most participants were birth parents, with

1 See Parental Leave and Modified Duties Policies across the Big Ten by Robert Drago and Kelly Davis, April 14, 2009. Available at http://lser.la.psu.edu/workfam/Big10parentalleavefinal.doc.

2 The definition of “child” used for this study is taken from the Penn State Human Resources Guideline 11. Available at http://guru.psu.edu/policies/OHR/hrg11.html#C.
several being adoptive parents and one who became a guardian to several elementary school age children after a second marriage.

ANALYSES

To make sense of the data generated during the focus groups, the authors of this report reviewed session transcripts to identify emergent themes. Faculty and staff data were analyzed separately because of the differences between faculty and staff jobs, and the varying policies that apply to each group of employees. Participants’ own voices are quoted throughout the report to illustrate key themes.

This report is organized around the themes the data themselves suggest. These themes are level of support for work-family balance, workplace flexibility, leave, breastfeeding, and childcare.

USES AND LIMITATIONS OF FOCUS GROUP DATA

Focus groups are a qualitative research method. They use guided group discussions to generate a rich understanding of participants’ experiences and beliefs. The data generated are not intended to be representative of the perspectives of a population, but rather to raise issues for further consideration.

FINDINGS

Level of Support for Work-Family Balance: Faculty

Faculty reported that the level of support for work-family issues varies considerably by department and college. For example, in some cases, department heads discouraged expectant faculty from stopping the tenure clock. In other departments, the department head was knowledgeable about policies for stopping the clock and submitted the required paper work promptly. Some faculty reported that experiences also vary depending on the college dean.

The variability is highlighted in the experiences of one faculty member who is affiliated with two departments. She encountered two very different reactions upon announcing her pregnancy. In one department, where she was one of the only young faculty, “my head . . . choked; coughed out a lung when I told him I was pregnant.” Her comments illustrate the theme of support being dependent on departmental affiliation:

“I’m sure there are some University-wide policies, but boy, the implementation of those has really looked different depending on who your head was and how kind of assertive they were on your behalf.”
Overall, faculty report that department heads have differing levels of knowledge about and support for clock-stops and leave requests. They report being aware that discrepancies exist between departments in granting leaves. Rather than a universal culture that permeates the University, they perceive support for such requests to be locally determined and influenced by those who lead the department or college.

Support for managing work and family responsibilities also varies depending on the ages, gender ratio, and parenting responsibilities of colleagues in the department. According to faculty, there tends to be more colleague support in departments with young faculty who are parents. The same faculty member quoted above also reported different experiences from colleagues in the two departments in which she had appointments when she had her child. In one department, where several other faculty also had children, she felt really supported. In the other department, comprised of mostly older faculty without children, she felt very alienated. Another faculty member expressed similar concerns:

“One of the main problems is still . . . either older colleagues that . . . have older children, so they don’t remember what it was like when they were little, or men that have never been involved with raising their small children or people that don’t have children, there’s just a lack of sensitivity.”

Faculty peers who are older and/or childless may be less accommodating or sensitive because they do not understand the challenges involved in having a child while holding a faculty position. Faculty members with similar experiences may be more supportive because they understand the situation better. This point is illustrated by a faculty member describing her department head:

“I think since having a child, it’s opened his eyes how difficult it is. . . . I think he is beginning to realize, you know, that it’s not that easy juggling a child and your career responsibilities.”

One reason for the lack of sensitivity on behalf of some colleagues is that ideas of the traditional gendered division of labor still guide many people’s expectations today. As some faculty conveyed, the culture of academia caters more to men than women.

“Women with children aren’t seen as the norm. . . . It’s more they cater to either the childless women who is sort of the pseudo-male or actually still the male who’s, you know, got the stay-at-home wife. . . . I think it’s still the norm even in academia where things are sort of beginning to change a little bit.”

Faculty noted that a woman who is the first in her department to request a leave may face pressures not to do so. If she does take a leave, she may face repercussions such as less favorable reviews and the perception by colleagues that she is not committed to her career, is slacking while on leave, or worse still, that she is “cheating” by getting ahead on publications during the leave period.
Despite the challenges, many faculty members felt a lot of support from Penn State and are grateful for the leave policies provided by the University. When faculty received support, they felt very loyal to their department and Penn State:

“I think Penn State’s been incredibly supportive. I think two semester long paid maternity leaves has made me feel pretty loyal; a sense of obligation to paying back.”

Still, they feel, there is room for improvement. Some offices have taken things into their own hands, as in the case of one professor who created a “family first policy” in her office.

“We’ve actually set up a policy in my office where family comes first and we have arranged retreats and staff meetings and all kinds of things because I can’t pay the staff a lot and we don’t have a cushy office or anything like that but I can at least acknowledge that their family’s important.”

**Level of Support for Work-Family Balance: Staff**

Staff from University Park and other campuses described varied experiences with regard to receiving support for work-family responsibilities. Several stated they received support for parental leave and breastfeeding from their bosses and co-workers. Others, on the other hand, were disappointed in the lack of support they received. Several female staff also explained that they felt pressure to stop breastfeeding. One staff member described her boss and co-workers as openly shocked when she announced she was taking a year of maternity leave. In some cases, there is resentment by co-workers when working parents need to take time off for their children’s school snow or in-service days.

Similar to the reports from faculty, support for managing work-family responsibilities is not perceived to be universal across the University, but rather to depend on where an employee works. As one staff member said:

“I think everyone’s experience is completely dictated by where in the University you are.”

Information about which colleges, departments, and offices are more supportive is spread via word of mouth. Some staff reported using this grapevine information to seek positions in a more family-friendly environment.

“Personally, my supervisor has been amazing, but I took personal steps two years before I got pregnant to seek out that, like when a position came open that . . . I sought because I knew he would be supportive because I had other friends who had worked for him.”
Receiving the support for work-family responsibilities can really make a difference in job satisfaction and continued association with the University. Several staff stated that the support they received made the difference between them staying versus leaving their job.

“I think I’ve just been so fortunate with who I work for and he’s been very accommodating and very family-oriented and just supportive of this situation that I think it would be hard for me to leave based on that. And even if I was interested in, you know, pursuing a different position.”

Thus, work-family support can foster loyalty among staff to their jobs and supervisors. The challenge, then, is to find a supervisor who understands the need for balance. What about the less fortunate employees who do not have a supportive supervisor and cannot move to a more family-friendly setting? Staff suggested supervisors be educated to be more supportive of those managing multiple responsibilities on and off the job.

Overall, many staff said that they were pleased with Penn State’s support, but that there is still room for improvement – that Penn State needs to “round out this rough spot in … the way they treat work-family issues” and become more in step with other employers in acknowledging and supporting work-life balance.

**Workplace Flexibility: Faculty**

Although faculty work typically affords fairly flexible hours, faculty focus group participants explained that the timing of work responsibilities can nonetheless render managing family responsibilities a difficult proposition. For example, new parent faculty feel challenged to participate fully in the life of their department if early morning and evening meetings or job candidate talks are scheduled. When scheduled to teach either very early in the day or in the evening, the timing of teaching conflicts with childcare responsibilities. For example, one faculty member’s course schedule conflicted with the hours of her childcare provider:

“[I] trek[ked] from the south end of campus all the way up to Innovation Boulevard to get my daughter and that meant I had to cut class early.”

This scheduling conflict between class times and daycare hours can potentially affect job performance. One faculty thought her SRTE scores were lower because students perceived her as not caring about the class because she cut class short to dash out to pick up a child. “There just need to be mechanisms in place so that the women with children are not like the bad professors,” said one of the faculty participants.

Sick children or snow days can create other scheduling dilemmas. Furthermore, managing parenting and faculty responsibilities can be difficult when children’s school or daycare calendar does not mesh with the University calendar. One faculty member suggested the following:
“I think the University should be more sensitive in terms of how the University calendar aligns and doesn’t align with the State College [school district] calendar.”

When asked what Penn State could do to be more family-friendly, several faculty also suggested keeping meeting times within a certain time frame – meetings that start no earlier than 9:00 a.m. and end no later than 5:00 p.m.

**Workplace Flexibility: Staff**

Options for flexibility on the job depend on the particular unit or office in which a staff member works. Several staff were grateful for the flexibility granted to them when returning to work after parental leave in the form of temporary part-time work and/or telecommuting, and the flexibility to express breast milk (pump) throughout the day because they were breastfeeding their infants.

“I was fortunate with having the flexibility. My boss allowed me to be very flexible. Some positions I know you don’t have that flexibility and, I think that Penn State needs to see that... the priorities are hard as a working parent and to accommodate that. So, if you have a good boss, it’s fine, but if you have someone that just doesn’t understand, it makes your life that much harder.”

Some staff were dissatisfied because although granted flexibility, they perceived a stigma attached to working from home. They felt that their co-workers discounted them as a member of the team, assuming they were not really working unless they were at their desk.

Others wished for more flexibility in their jobs, but reported that the culture of their work environment did not allow for anything other than a strict 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. schedule. There is face time pressure in which the primary focus is on the time spent at work rather the completion of tasks. Being able to have compressed work weeks, alternate start or end work times, leave work in the middle of the day and make up that time in the evening, or work part-time at home are different forms of flexibility staff said they would like to have. These options would allow staff to better balance work with family commitments, such as their baby’s doctor visits or rigid daycare drop-off times which prevent an on-time 8:00 a.m. work arrival. Staff reported high levels of stress associated with not being able to get to work on time. Because most two-parent families operate as a functional unit, flexible work arrangements would allow staff to coordinate their work schedules with those of their partner or spouse so as to better accommodate the demands of both their families and their jobs.

Interestingly, many faculty suggested that Penn State could do better for staff in terms of providing job flexibility.
Leave: Faculty

Most of the faculty in the focus groups reported being satisfied with the amount of leave time granted them to care for the new child but noted that it was not the case University-wide. Many of them had colleagues who had had less favorable leaves offered to them. The level of support for their leave varied considerably by department/college. This is consistent with findings from the focus group in regard to work-family culture. For example, if a woman is the first in the department to request a leave, this may raise questions never asked before.

“When I told my department head that I was pregnant, the most recent person that he could cite who’d had a baby on the tenure track who was still here [but] her children are in college . . . but my department head was very supportive and put through the papers right away to stop my clock and give me a semester off from teaching with the baby and has been great about not making me come to things and letting me haul around the baby and stuff like that, so he’s been very good, but it’s very department specific.”

Some faculty questioned why there was no paternity leave available at Penn State. Those who have a partner employed by Penn State noted that the leave policies for men do not allow for equal balance of parental duties and leave. The lack of paternity leave places additional pressure on new mothers.

“My husband, who’s also on the tenure track, was given two weeks of release from teaching but he had to arrange for his own substitutes and as a result of my daughter being two weeks late, he had to return to teaching the day after she was born, and so that was a big difficulty for the two of us and so the biggest challenge for us has been the absence of any kind of real paternity leave or partner leave.”

“Even if my husband and I want to share all the child rearing fifty-fifty, the fact of the matter is I have the six-months leave, he doesn’t. You know, so if he spends half of his time taking care of her, he doesn’t get the institutional support to do that, in the same way that I do, and so that then sets up from the start, inequity in terms of sharing and childrearing at home.”

Time off for male faculty members greatly depends on the will of the department head. The department head can be accommodating in assisting with schedules and the ability to take leave.

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3 There are some fathers who have taken leave IF they were the primary caregivers, though none among the focus group participants in this study. The OHR policies may not permit BOTH parents from using this time, and department heads/ supervisors may ultimately make the decision.
“Yeah, I took my two weeks, but I was very fortunate, my department head helped me structure it so I wasn’t teaching that semester anyway and the baby was born just before Thanksgiving so it just kind of fed into the holiday breaks, so that just worked really well.”

Some faculty feel Penn State’s leave policy is accommodating, but faculty voiced concerns that the leave policy does not address the birth of a second child. There is no policy to stop the clock for a second child.

“The leave policy that we have is excellent and it is the reason why I came to this job instead of some other places where I had offers. But it – and just in general – the issues that we’ve been talking about have affected my choice about whether to have more than one child and have affected the spacing of my children and I mean, inordinately affected it.”

Another common theme voiced by the faculty was that finding the policies on maternity leave was extremely difficult and frustrating. Many found that simply determining who to go to for information was the hardest part about figuring out their leave.

“Even when I was told and met with the HR guy, you know, and I was filling out the forms, I didn’t really understand what I was filling out. They didn’t seem to line with what he had told me, so I kind-a was just trusting that there was this six month policy ‘cause the way I was filling it out, it didn’t seem that that’s what was happening, so, it was confusing.”

Given the variation in levels of knowledge and support about structuring leaves on the part of the department heads, and the difficulty faculty face in finding out accurate and complete information about the types and lengths of leave options, there was a widespread opinion among the faculty participants that leaves should not be left to negotiate by individual faculty.

“Just trying to find some mitigating factor for the variability of department head knowledge. Like, you know, not putting it all on department heads to kind of be the negotiators and know the policies and know what’s possible and whatever that may be. If there was some kind of, I don’t know, an HR person who specializes in maternity leave that you could go to, so that there’s more standardization, so that there’s more precedent, ‘cause I feel like the issue of best practices for women is just, it’s an X factor. You may have a head who knows a lot or you may have a friend who knows a lot and that’s great, but if you don’t, you don’t and you could actually be stuck in a situation where there’s just literally nobody around you who has the knowledge, and so it’s
like, oh, gee, I don’t know, I don’t know if women take time off;
and, again it puts a burden on the individual woman.”

In sum, those faculty who reported positive experiences in obtaining leaves were grateful for having the time to care for a new child. They appreciated the importance of having a supportive department chair/head in achieving work-family balance. They felt loyal to Penn State if their leave experience was positive. Nonetheless, most noted the lack of centralized information about leave options and preferred the onus not be on them to negotiate leaves given the varying levels of knowledge and support for leaves from department heads.

**Leave: Staff**

Most of the staff reported dismay upon learning after they were pregnant that Penn State offers them no discrete maternity leave other than what is provided for by federal law via the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Staff indicated that taking leave at Penn State means using accumulated sick and vacation time, and almost all reported thinking this to be unfair given the demands of having and caring for a newborn. Women who had not worked at the University long enough to accrue much time often were panicked and were unsure of what to do. As one staff member stated,

“I have a co-worker, she actually cried when she found out . . . she was pregnant, she took the test and she said . . . ‘oh, no, I don’t have enough sick time’ and she started to cry. I mean, you shouldn’t have to be put in a situation like that where, you know you. . . feel like it’s a burden, you know?’

One staff member had a medically difficult pregnancy and worried about using up her accrued sick days prior to giving birth:

“I begged my midwife to not put me on bed-rest because I knew I was gonna run out of time.”

Staff emphatically and uniformly articulated disappointment in being offered nothing beyond the FMLA-mandated leave provisions.

“It turns out we don’t actually have maternity leave.”

“I think especially, we should be allowed to keep five days of sick leave because your kid . . . gets sick, you have wellness baby check-ups; I mean, I felt like the first two months I was like – please don’t get sick, please don’t get sick – because I wouldn’t have any time to use. And at the same time . . . you also have a kid who’s going to probably bring home things from daycare. You’re gonna get sick and you’re gonna need those times.”
“At this point over a year later [after the birth of her child], I still have hardly any vacation or sick time.”

Staff also reported that one of the biggest issues and concerns with taking leave is the level of flexibility and support offered by a supervisor, which varies depending on where the employee works. Some staff were offered the chance to work at home or flexible hours while others were not. Such information is shared between employees and appears to be widely known, so staff tend to compare their situations to those of other staff members and even to those of faculty. One staff member recalled mistakenly assuming she got the same six month leave that faculty got:

“I originally thought I was getting six months paid, and then somebody cleared that up for me about two weeks before I had my son that that wasn’t gonna be the case.”

Consequently, this staff member had not made any arrangements for childcare and just two weeks before the birth, had to scramble to make the necessary arrangements.

A lot of staff reported confusion as to what FMLA really is and what it means to them. Focus group participants indicated that both staff and supervisors need more awareness and an understanding of how FMLA works. They noted they would like initial contact with Human Resources and a friendly, easier link on the Human Resources Web site to learn about and understand the policies.

**Breastfeeding: Background Information**

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends babies be breastfed for a minimum of one year. Breastfeeding is the act of mother and child having physical contact while lactating. The related act of breast pumping, that is, removing milk from the breasts using a pump, is necessary to support breastfeeding when mothers are separated from their babies for long periods of time (e.g., the duration of the typical workday). The U.S. Breastfeeding Committee, a national organization that promotes breastfeeding, suggests that for breastfeeding to succeed, women need: (1) facilities to breastfeed/breast pump, (2) a written lactation policy by the employer, and (3) resources to support optimal breastfeeding/pumping. For information on the economic benefits of breastfeeding to employers, see “Workplace Lactation Support” in Appendix A. For sample policies clarifying the role of employer and employee in supporting breastfeeding, see Appendix B.

**Breastfeeding: Faculty**

Most female faculty interviewed for this study were aware of the breastfeeding support services offered at Penn State. Most felt supported by the University in being able to take the time to pump and reported having their own offices available to use for pumping. In sum, breastfeeding/pumping did not arise as a key issue of concern for the female faculty participants in the focus groups.
Breastfeeding: Staff

Many staff members found breast pumping to be difficult while working, particularly those without their own offices. Some women chose not to breastfeed or stopped sooner after the baby’s birth than they wished because their supervisor was not accommodating. Several of the staff in the focus groups knew about the lactation services on campus and some had used the services to obtain information prior to the birth of their baby, but once the baby arrived, few of the women were actually able to use the campus lactation stations because of the time required away from work to walk to a station in another building.

In many of the cases, the level of support for breastfeeding depends on the supervisor in the unit or area. Some staff who have their own offices can close the door and pump in privacy, but for those who share office space the situation can be very unpleasant and not particularly hygienic.

“I was breast-feeding while I was at work . . . . It wasn’t encouraged, it was not, I couldn’t take time away from work . . . . I was stuck either having to be in an open, cubicle environment, sitting there; or I had to go to the bathroom. . . . it was very frustrating and thankfully for the summer, at least, a janitor was nice and gave me access to a classroom that wasn’t being used for the summer.”

“[My supervisor] wasn’t even going to allow me to go to the restroom down the hall; [let alone] the fifteen or ten minutes it would have taken me to get to a lactation station.”

“Nobody wants to do it [pump] in the bathroom. You know, I would’ve much preferred to sit in a supply closet with mops and buckets than in the bathroom.”

Staff were also confused about the time they are allowed to pump. Some were unsure if they should take time off to do this. Some thought they were being penalized for time spent pumping. One staff member felt she had to justify the time spent pumping as her “smoke break.” Overall, staff are unclear about how to account for time spent pumping.

“On the breastfeeding and the policies: It’s never really been made clear to me whether the time that you’re pumping is time that you’re working or not working. So I just lock my office door, do my thing, and try to work with one hand. You know, sort of, answer IM’s and maybe emails, but it’s one of those big questions again that I don’t really know if it’s time on or off or how to count it.”

Childcare: Faculty

Faculty found that the most disconcerting factors regarding childcare were the waitlist and limited availability and inflexibility of on-campus University-run daycare (e.g., Bennett Family
Center and the Child Development Lab). These on-campus daycare facilities were highly valued as the best quality, closest to work, and preferred option, but the average time from application to enrollment was reported to be eighteen to twenty-four months, and only twelve-month, full-time contracts are available.

“When I found out that I was coming here [to Penn State] I immediately started looking into daycares and I had put my daughter on the list when she was five-months old, but it’s almost impossible to get a child in the Bennett Center before the age of three.”

Also noted by many of the faculty in the focus group was the high cost of campus daycare.

“It’s very expensive . . . the monthly cost at the time was more than our mortgage.”

In addition, the hours that daycare is open do not always jive with their work schedules. The daycare on campus is closed when faculty have to work, such as when they have to teach an evening class or during spring break.

“One thing that’s happened on the campus facilities is that over the last three years they’ve successively taken more and more time off across the year so, Spring break used to be a covered time and now Spring break is no longer covered.”

Faculty noted several other childcare issues such as the challenge of traveling with a baby to an academic conference and the lack of informal caregivers/family in the State College area. Several reported strategies for balancing their families and careers including limiting themselves to local travel, paying airfare and hotel for a relative or nanny to accompany them to a conference, and delaying fieldwork abroad. Although this is an issue that affects both men and women, nursing and caregiving for very young children often falls disproportionately on women and may lead to inequalities in both promotion and retention.

**Childcare: Staff**

Staff members consistently reported that the cost of childcare on campus is prohibitively expensive, even with the sliding fee scale. None of the staff members participating in focus groups use the facilities on campus or have their child on a waitlist for campus childcare.

“Definitely unaffordable . . ., you know, after you calculate childcare, you know, is it worth it [working]?”

Using off-campus childcare, while more affordable, creates scheduling issues. Because the standard hours of work at Penn State are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and most childcare does not open until 7:30 a.m., some staff report difficulty in arriving by 8:00 a.m. Typically, childcare closes at 5:30 p.m., which means most staff are rushing at 5:00 p.m. to get to childcare in time. Long
commutes from beyond State College and the need to park at a location remote from the employee’s building contributed to the scheduling issues.

“My husband . . . [and I] take turns being the one that’s late to our office.”

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Level of Support for Work-Family Balance
The level of support from supervisors and colleagues for work-family balance varies considerably depending on where an employee works within the University. Discrepancies in levels of support appear to be widespread and well-noted by both faculty and staff. Penn State is perceived as a place where supportive work environments do exist, but not as an institution that promotes a family-friendly culture overall.

Workplace Flexibility
Scheduling insensitivities within some departments were noted by faculty, who reported facing conflicts with early morning or evening departmental commitments. For staff, the situation is more severe, with many respondents noting the challenges of juggling daycare drop-off with an inflexible job-start time. Many expressed the desire for such accommodations as compressed work weeks, alternate start or end work times, the ability to leave work in the middle of the day and make up that time in the evening, or to work part-time at home.

Leave
Most of the faculty interviewed reported being satisfied with the amount of leave time granted them to care for the new child, though they noted that leaves were determined locally by department/college rather than universally across the University. Faculty questioned why there was no paternity leave available at Penn State, perceiving that time off for male faculty members depended on the will of the department head. They voiced concerns that the leave policy does not stop the clock for a second child. Faculty reported that finding the policies on maternity leave was extremely difficult and frustrating. Many found that simply determining who to go to for information to be challenging.

Those faculty who reported positive experiences in obtaining leaves were grateful for having the time to care for a new child. They appreciated the importance of having a supportive department chair/head in achieving work-family balance. They felt loyal to Penn State if their leave experience was positive. Nonetheless, most noted the lack of centralized information about leave options and preferred the onus not be on individual faculty to negotiate leaves given the varying levels of knowledge and support for leaves from department heads.

Staff emphatically and uniformly articulated disappointment in being offered nothing beyond the FMLA-mandated leave provisions. Staff indicated that taking paid leave at Penn State means using accumulated sick and vacation time, and almost all reported thinking this to be unfair given the demands of having and caring for a newborn. Women who had not worked at the University long enough to accrue much time often were particularly anguished by the situation, as were
those who had medical issues during the pregnancy, which depleted their reserves of sick time available following the baby’s birth.

Staff also reported that one of the biggest issues and concerns with taking leave is the level of flexibility and support offered by a supervisor, which varies depending on where the employee works. Some staff were offered the chance to work at home or flexible hours whereas others were not. Such information is shared between employees and appears to be widely known; staff tend to compare their situations to those of other staff members and even to those of faculty. Staff also reported confusion as to what FMLA really is and what it means to them.

**Breastfeeding**

Breastfeeding was not an issue of concern for the faculty interviewed for this study. Most female faculty were aware of the breastfeeding support services offered at Penn State and felt supported by the University in being able to take the time to pump because many have their own offices available to use.

Staff, on the other hand, found breastfeeding to be difficult while working, particularly those without their own offices. Some women chose not to breastfeed or stopped sooner after the baby’s birth than they wished because their supervisor was not accommodating. Most did not have the time during their work day to use campus lactation stations because of the time required to walk to a station in another building. They reported being directed by supervisors to pump in open cubicles or bathrooms. Staff are unclear about how to account for time spent pumping.

**Childcare**

For faculty, the most problematic issue regarding childcare was the long waitlist for on-campus daycare. Cost was less of an issue for most. Some noted that daycare schedules do not accommodate evening teaching schedules. Faculty noted several other childcare issues such as the challenge of traveling with a baby to an academic conference and the lack of informal caregivers/family in the State College area.

Staff members consistently reported that the cost of childcare on campus is too expensive. Thus, none of the staff members participating in focus groups use the facilities on campus or have their child on a waitlist for campus childcare. Using off-campus childcare, while more affordable, created scheduling issues because drop-off and pick-up times make commuting, parking, and being at work on time challenging.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **More effective communication of existing family leave policies**

   Given that both faculty and staff report a difficult time finding and understanding leave policies, CFW recommends the following:

   a) The University should develop an easy-to-find, user-friendly link on the OHR Web site that contains a comprehensive menu of topics related to family leave policies. Some
institutions situate such information under the general heading of “Work-Life” that includes links for new parents as well as information on domestic partner benefits, dual career program, and eldercare. Presenting this information in one central location helps position the institution as cognizant of the challenges of combining work and family life.

b) Auto-generate a packet of relevant information or an email to an employee as soon as OHR is notified of a pregnancy or adoption.

c) Provide all deans, department heads/chairs, supervisors, OHR managers, and University ombudspersons with information and training about the University’s family leave policies. These personnel are in key positions to communicate accurate, consistent information about leave policies to other employees.

2. Improved support of breastfeeding/pumping

a) Penn State should develop a written policy covering faculty and staff that clarifies the role of both employer and employee in supporting breastfeeding. This policy should be viewed as an important step in setting the “climate” on campus – a strong and clear statement should be made about the importance of work-site support of breastfeeding/pumping as a means to retain female employees, improve employee job satisfaction, reduce employee absenteeism, and reduce health care costs. The policy should outline both employer and employee responsibilities in supporting breastfeeding/pumping. See Appendix B for example policies from other universities.

b) Provide centralized annual funding to offset costs of the Breastfeeding Support Program at Penn State. This program serves and supports faculty, staff, and students who combine work or school and breastfeeding/pumping. The program has six locations throughout the University Park campus where women can breastfeed or pump. The program also has subsidized pumps, a book lending library, classes on lactation during a return to work or school, and a part-time lactation consultant to assist mothers having lactation difficulties. Some of the program’s funding has come from the College of Health and Human Development through the Center for Childhood Obesity Research. Much of the initial funding came from a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The small remaining funds are from a grant through the Kraft Foundation. When this money is gone, the program may close. CFW recommends institutional support for this valuable program to ensure its future.

3. Provide flexible work conditions

a) Create and promote possibilities for flexibility in accomplishing work for those balancing work-family responsibilities. Flexible work arrangements are one of the top indicators of work-life quality and employee satisfaction.⁴ Penn State can proactively

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support and encourage supervisors to offer accommodations such as telecommuting, compressed work weeks, alternate start or end work times, the ability to leave work in the middle of the day and make up that time in the evening, or to work part-time at home, as appropriate, given an employee’s job duties. Such flexible work arrangements have the additional benefits of increasing women’s willingness to initiate breastfeeding and improving the duration of breastfeeding (see Recommendation 2 above).

b) Provide training for supervisors on how to create flexibilities within a job and to use cross-training as a way to allow more flexible assignments among staff members. Such arrangements must explicitly address the dual agenda of improving organizational performance and providing balance in employees’ lives.5

4. Foster a family-friendly climate

a) The University should strive to create a climate supportive of those employees who become new parents. Best practices abound and are well documented (see the Resource List in Appendix A); these can serve as models for transforming the University culture to become more family-friendly.

b) Top-level academic administrators must be charged with establishing a positive climate for balancing work and family responsibilities. Key components are having policies in place, educating deans, department chairs, and unit heads about the policies, and providing examples of how they work.

c) Department chairs need to know policies, apply them fairly, and educate their faculty about their use. Information needs to be communicated to faculty members who may use the policies as well to senior professors who evaluate their colleagues for promotion and tenure. Chairs need to maintain an atmosphere in which policy issues can be discussed forthrightly.6

d) Both faculty and staff groups expressed a desire for a support network of prospective and new parents across the University. Faculty, graduate students, and staff would benefit through information sharing on such topics taking leave, where to seek childcare, how to balance dual roles, and other common issues that transcend policy. OHR could proactively establish a network of people who have recently had or adopted a child so those expecting could get advice.

e) Valuing the ability of both men and women to balance work-family commitments, especially for dual-career couples, the University might consider stipends to assist with childcare, offer grants to support faculty travel, and permit flexible class and work scheduling.

f) Increase the number of childcare slots available on campus in University-run facilities.

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5. Assess progress

   a) Track and evaluate the use of policies to monitor their effectiveness.

   b) Conduct regular, periodic assessment of campus climate related to work-family balance issues.

   c) Monitor the external environment. Compare Penn State’s policies and climate to those of other research universities.
APPENDIX A: RESOURCE LIST

**Penn State Policies**

A comparison of Penn State faculty family leave policies to other Big Ten Universities: *Parental Leave and Modified Duties Policies across the Big Ten* by Robert Drago and Kelly Davis, April 2009.

Penn State’s College of Earth and Mineral Sciences provides easy-to-find information for expectant parents in a centralized location: [http://www.ems.psu.edu/faculty_staff/human_resources/child_care](http://www.ems.psu.edu/faculty_staff/human_resources/child_care).

**Other University Policies**
Family-friendly policies, programs, services, and benefits for faculty at the University of Michigan: [http://www.provost.umich.edu/faculty/family/](http://www.provost.umich.edu/faculty/family/)

[http://hr.umich.edu/worklife/index.php](http://hr.umich.edu/worklife/index.php)
[http://www12.georgetown.edu/hr/manual/policies.cfm?Sect=6&Page=80](http://www12.georgetown.edu/hr/manual/policies.cfm?Sect=6&Page=80)
[http://www.lehigh.edu/~insloan/](http://www.lehigh.edu/~insloan/)

**Establishing the Family-Friendly Workplace**
Definition of “family-friendly workplace”:
[http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=232](http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=232)


NSF ADVANCE Grant Initiatives: Increasing the Participation and Advancement of Women in Academic Science and Engineering Careers:

ADVANCE toolkit for chairs and other administrative leaders:
[http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance/toolkits](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advance/toolkits).

Work/life balance for faculty: Research and recommendations on family-friendly policies and practices (University of Washington Center for Institutional Change:

Family-friendly workplace policies: [http://www.law.berkeley.edu/2317.htm](http://www.law.berkeley.edu/2317.htm)


AAUW position on balancing work and life: [http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/actionpages/fmla.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/actionpages/fmla.cfm)

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE POLICIES CLARIFYING ROLE OF EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE IN SUPPORTING BREASTFEEDING

Texas A & M University

31.99.99.M1 Workplace Lactation Program UNIVERSITY RULE

Revised June 15, 2009
Next Scheduled Review: June 15, 2012

Rule Statement
Texas A&M University is committed to providing a work environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. The university acknowledges the challenges of balancing professional and personal responsibilities. Additionally, the university recognizes that quality of work life and support in maintaining equilibrium between work and family are necessary for optimized employee work performance.

Reason for Rule
The university is committed to supporting employees who choose to breastfeed and recognizes the importance and benefits of breastfeeding. To assist employees in balancing the particular challenges associated with workplace milk expression, the university has implemented a Workplace Lactation Program.

Rule and Responsibilities
1. SUPPORT FOR WORKPLACE LACTATION
1.1 University employees may work predetermined and approved variations of standard work schedules (reference University Rule 33.06.01.M1 and Standard Administrative Procedure 33.06.01.M1.01). Employees who wish to express milk during work hours may take reasonable breaks for that purpose. Break periods are typically up to fifteen minutes. Alternately, an employee may request a flexible schedule in accordance with University Rule 33.06.01.M1.
1.2 Supervisors are encouraged to support flexible work schedules to accommodate an employee’s needs associated with milk expression. An example of a flexible schedule adjustment for milk expression by a classified employee might include taking a fifteen-minute break in the morning and in the afternoon and a thirty-minute lunch break, or by arriving fifteen minutes early to work and leaving fifteen minutes late.

2. PROVISION OF FACILITIES FOR MILK EXPRESSION
2.1 An employee may use her designated work space or other locations suitable for the purpose of expressing milk.
2.2 The university is committed to providing employees clean, private, accessible facilities for milk expression. Employees who express milk or breastfeed are encouraged to take advantage of the designated unisex or family restrooms and lactation rooms.
2.3 The locations of designated unisex or family restrooms can be found by accessing the university map at http://aggiemap.tamu.edu and selecting Building Data and Family Friendly Restrooms under the Legend.
2.4 Employees who express milk during work hours may store milk in refrigerated space in their employing departments or in other refrigerated space available to them.
2.5 An employee who requires assistance in locating facilities appropriate for milk expression or sanitary refrigerated milk storage should contact Human Resources.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES
With regard to the responsibilities associated with supporting the Workplace Lactation Program, the following will apply:
3.1 Supervisors shall:
3.1.1 foster an environment consistent with the values expressed in Section 1 of this rule;
3.1.2 be familiar with the provisions of University Rule 33.06.01.M1 and Standard Administrative Procedure 33.06.01.M1.01 regarding Flexible Work Schedules; and
3.1.3 support employees in identifying facilities appropriate for milk expression and storage.
3.2 Employees shall:
3.2.1 communicate with the supervisor regarding scheduling or other needs as far in advance as possible;
3.2.2 comply with the provisions of Flexible Work Schedule agreements as established in University Rule 33.06.01.M1 and Standard Administrative Procedure 33.06.01.M1.01; and
3.2.3 apply judgment and, when appropriate, seek approval before bringing a child into the work area for the purpose of breastfeeding. Considerations should be given to the safety of the child, respect for colleagues and the employee’s work responsibilities.

Related Rule and Standard Administrative Procedure
Rule 33.06.01.M1: Flexible Work Schedule
http://rules-saps.tamu.edu/PDFs/33.06.01.M1.pdf
Standard Administrative Procedure 33.06.01.M1.01: Flexible Work Schedule Procedures
http://rules-saps.tamu.edu/PDFs/33.06.01.M1.01.pdf

Contact Office
Employees requiring more information on this policy and related matters should contact Human Resources at (979) 845-4141, or by e-mail at worklife@tamu.edu.
OFFICE OF RESPONSIBILITY: Human Resources
UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
BREASTFEEDING AND LACTATION SUPPORT PROGRAM
Originators: ADVANCE Office & URI Work-Life Committee
Date: November 20, 2008
Policy #08-1

Purpose:
The University of Rhode Island recognizes the importance and benefits of breastfeeding for both mothers and their infants, and in promoting a family-friendly work and study environment. Rhode Island Law provides for the needs of mothers who are nursing and their infants, as outlined in the End Note of this policy, and URI intends to fully comply with these provisions of state law by implementing a breastfeeding and lactation policy for students, faculty, and staff. By implementing a breastfeeding and lactation policy, the University strives to create an exceptional environment conducive to working and learning and attuned to both professional and personal needs, such as the needs of a mother who is nursing to feed and/or to express milk for her baby while she is at work or school.

Applicable To:
All female University faculty, staff, and students.

Responsibility:
All University supervisors are responsible for being aware of the policy and working with female employees to arrange mutually convenient lactation break times. The Office of Student Affairs will be responsible for making this policy known to female students.

Policy:
The University of Rhode Island recognizes the importance and benefits of breastfeeding for both mothers and their infants, and in promoting a family-friendly work and study environment. Therefore, in accordance with Rhode Island state law, the University of Rhode Island acknowledges that a woman may breastfeed her child in any place open to the public on campus, and shall provide sanitary and private space, other than a toilet stall, in close proximity to the work or study area for employees or students who are nursing to be used as a lactation room. Supervisors/chairs will work with employees who are nursing to schedule reasonable and flexible break times each day for this activity.

1. Lactation Breaks
a) Whenever possible, the University shall provide flexibility for staff and faculty mothers who give their Department Chair or Supervisor adequate notice identifying a need for lactation support and facilities.
b) Mothers are responsible for requesting lactation support prior to or during maternity leave, preferably no later than two weeks before returning to work.
c) The unpaid time (such as a lunch period), generally not to exceed one hour, ideally should run concurrently with an employee’s paid break time (if applicable), but the University shall make separate time available, if this is not reasonable. Supervisors and employees shall work together to establish mutually convenient times.

d) Alternatively, personal leave, vacation time, or flexible scheduling may be used for this accommodation.

e) It is assumed that no serious disruption of University operations will result from providing lactation time.

f) Consistent with URI’s efforts to recognize the importance of supporting the needs of working caregivers, supervisors will respond seriously, positively, and will ensure that there are no negative consequences to mothers who are nursing when lactation break times are needed.

g) Students and instructors planning to use lactation facilities must do so around their scheduled class times. Although any necessary student accommodations should be negotiated with individual professors, professors are not required to excuse tardiness or absences due to lactation needs.

2. Lactation Facilities

a) The University of Rhode Island shall provide sanitary and private facilities in close proximity to the work area across campus for mothers to breastfeed or to express breast milk.

b) The location may be the place an employee normally works if there is adequate privacy, cleanliness, and is comfortable for the employee.

c) Areas such as restrooms are not considered appropriate spaces for lactation purposes, unless the restroom is equipped with a separate, designated room for lactation purposes.

Procedure:

1. Supervisors who receive a lactation accommodation request should review available space in their department/unit and be prepared to provide appropriate nearby space and break time.

2. If the employee or student wishes to use designated lactation rooms, they are listed at http://www.uri.edu/advance/work_life_support/lactation_facilities.html. Included are descriptions of each lactation room, what, if any, pumping equipment is available, and whether provisions for the appropriate storage of breast milk are provided.

3. Mothers who are breastfeeding or expressing milk shall be responsible for keeping the facilities clean, and, where pumps are available, for cleaning and sanitizing the breast pumps after each use.

4. If an employee has comments, concerns, or questions regarding the URI Breastfeeding and Lactation Support Program Policy or other work-life balance personnel policies, she or he should contact the Office of Human Resources at (401)874-2416. Those who believe they have been denied appropriate
accommodation or need assistance on how to make or respond to a request for accommodation should contact the Office of Human Resources at (401)874-2416. Students and others who have questions regarding access and use of the lactation facilities or would like general information about breastfeeding in the workplace and other work-life balance topics may contact the ADVANCE Office at (401) 874-9422.

End Note. Rhode Island State Laws supporting breastfeeding are as follows:
§ 08-223 (amended 2008, Chapter 23-13.5-1). Breastfeeding in public places. A woman may breastfeed or bottle feed her child in any place open to the public.
§ 23-13.2-1 Workplace policies protecting a woman's choice to breastfeed. – (a) An employer may provide reasonable unpaid break time each day to an employee who needs to breastfeed or express breast milk for her infant child to maintain milk supply and comfort. The break time must, if possible, run concurrently with any break time already provided to the employee. An employer is not required to provide break time under this section if to do so would create an undue hardship on the operations of the employer.
(b) An employer shall make a reasonable effort to provide a private, secure and sanitary room or other location in close proximity to the work area, other than a toilet stall, where an employee can express her milk or breastfeed her child.
(c) The department of health shall issue periodic reports on breastfeeding rates, complaints received and benefits reported by both working breastfeeding mothers and employers.
(d) As used in this section: “employer” means a person engaged in business who has one or more employees, including the state and any political subdivision of the state; “employee” means any person engaged in service to an employer in the business of the employer; “reasonable efforts” means any effort that would not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business; and “undue hardship” means any action that requires significant difficulty or expense when considered in relation to factors such as the size of the business, its financial resources and the nature and structure of its operation.
§ 11-45-1 Disorderly conduct. – Protects mothers breastfeeding in public from disorderly conduct laws.
This publication is available in alternative media on request.
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