



Strategies for Effecting Gender Equity and Institutional Change

Strategic Intervention Brief #8

Flexible Work Arrangements

More than half of the ADVANCE IT projects in the first two rounds of grants developed policies to offer flexible work arrangements to faculty members encountering personal responsibilities or challenges with the potential to interrupt their usual work activities or time allocations. These arrangements varied in detail but typically offered adjustments to the tenure clock or to the duties required as part of active service. This Brief outlines specific policies addressing flexibility in the structure and expectations of work. Related topics are addressed in Brief 6 on tenure and promotion policies and Brief 9 on family-friendly initiatives.

Rationale

The rationale for these policies is that the recruitment, retention, and success of women are enhanced when formal policies accommodate both personal and professional responsibilities. While many men care for family members, women often handle a large part of family responsibilities; thus, policies that offer flexible work arrangements are especially important for attracting and supporting female faculty.

Institutions also benefit from offering flexible work arrangements. The existence of formal policies on flexible work arrangements enhances the institution's attractiveness to potential faculty candidates. Moreover, having made major investments to attract, hire, and provide start-up support for a faculty member, an institution benefits by making modest adjustments to work arrangements, when necessary, to ensure that the faculty member can succeed and remain with the institution. Even if informal arrangements have been made fairly regularly or easily in the past, the presence of formal institutional policies ensures fairness for all and alleviates concerns that individual chairs or deans might not consistently apply informal norms.

Purpose

Policies typically focus on providing support to faculty members in situations where personal responsibilities are unusually demanding and may require arranging or adjusting the amount of time and energy that can be allocated, for a period of time, to professional work. Such circumstances typically include the addition of a child to the family through birth, adoption, or fostering, primary caregiving to a child, elder care for a family member, or illness, injury, or disability to the faculty member or to an immediate family member.

Some institutions created and implemented new policies; others revised existing policies. In still other cases, the intervention has consisted of developing better processes for making these policies known or for implementing them. Typically, policy creation has involved efforts by university committees and approval by governing bodies such as an institution's faculty senate.

Audience

Typically, policies supporting flexible work arrangements are available to both women and men faculty. Specific institutional details vary by institution. Some institutions indicate that eligibility to access certain policies requires the faculty member to engage in the relevant personal duties for a certain percentage of time. For example, some policies relating to the addition of a child to the family require the faculty member who would receive any adjustment to the tenure process or modified duties to be engaged in caregiving for more

than 50% of the time. Attention to the percentage of time that a faculty member is actually engaged in caregiving is a way to offer policies to both women and men, while ensuring that a non-primary caregiver does not simply accrue more time to complete work by tapping into the policy.

Models

Policies for flexible work arrangements typically fall into three categories, and an institution might include several of these in its policy portfolio.

Stop the clock policies and tenure clock extensions

- These policies offer provisions for stopping the tenure clock or extending it under certain conditions, including the addition of a baby by birth or adoption (some institutions include the addition of a foster child), health issues for the faculty member or immediate family members, or elder care needs.
- Some policies add time automatically to the tenure clock in the event of a birth or adoption (although the faculty member is not required to wait the additional time to be reviewed for tenure, an “opt-out” policy), while at other institutions faculty apply to stop or extend the tenure clock (“opt-in” policies). Opt-out policies are thought to reduce any stigma around use of the policy.
- Institutional policies vary as to how often this provision can be exercised; once or twice in the career is typical, but, in some cases, the faculty member can enlist this provision as often as needed. In cases where the reason is childcare, some institutions require the faculty member to sign a statement that he or she provides more than 50% of the primary childcare duties.

Active service with modified duties

- These policies involve adjusting the responsibilities of a faculty member for a period of time, due to birth or adoption, death of a spouse, or other family matters. Some institutions automatically arrange for a faculty member to be relieved of a course or all teaching for a semester immediately after a birth or adoption, and for faculty without teaching responsibilities to get equivalent released time.
- Arrangements in situations where a faculty member needs to provide elder care or has other personal issues are often treated on a case-by-case basis involving consultations among the faculty member and the relevant department chair, dean, and human resources department.

Part-time tenure-track appointment policies

- These policies cover several situations, including the employment of a tenure-track faculty member at 0.5 FTE (full-time equivalent), shifting a 1.0 FTE faculty member to 0.5 FTE for a period of time, and filling a single faculty line with two 0.5 FTE faculty members. Such policies are not as common as the first two types, but they offer options for women and men with significant other responsibilities to engage in a full faculty life, including progressing toward tenure. These appointments usually involve adjustment of both regular responsibilities and tenure timelines.

Examples

While institutions may have similar objectives, the specific policies they develop usually reflect the particular cultures and circumstances within their unique organizational contexts, as these examples show.

At *Case Western Reserve University*, stop the clock arrangements are automatic for the addition of a child; for other family matters, such as elder care responsibilities, they are available by request and then at the discretion of a dean. At Case, faculty members can stop the clock for family leave as many times as needed.

At *Kansas State University*, a stop the clock policy covers situations of a new child, childcare duties, and health issues for the faculty member or immediate family members. Faculty members may use this provision two times in their career.

The Handbook of Operating Procedures at the *University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)* now indicates that both female and male faculty can request a delay of one year for legitimate family matters, including becoming a new parent, becoming the primary caregiver for an elderly, ill, or disabled family member, or if the faculty member is experiencing serious illness, injury, or disability. A delay of a second year may also be requested, but the tenure clock cannot be delayed more than two years. The process involves the faculty member writing a request to the department chair, the chair making a recommendation to the dean, and the dean applying to the provost, who makes the decision. Faculty members work closely with professionals in the human resources department to work out appropriate requests for their situations.

Utah State University established a practice that men and women may use the tenure clock extension option up to two times for birth, serious health issues in the family, or serving as a primary care giver. Faculty couples can split the benefit, with one doing half-time teaching for one semester and the other the second semester. The faculty member's college pays a portion of the related costs, the provost underwrites a small portion of the financial burden, and the faculty member is paid 90% of the usual salary.

The University of Montana modified duties policy enables any faculty member in a tenure-stream position who has caregiver responsibilities due to a birth, adoption, or care for a primary family member to be released from teaching, research, and service for one semester, with the provost's office funding the teaching replacement costs. The policy also provides a one-year tenure-clock extension and delays annual evaluation by one year. The University of Montana also drafted policies to address part-time tenure-track options.

In developing policies and practices on flexible work-life policies, institutions tend to work on several issues:

- *Processes and deliberations to create policies* usually involve senior-level administrators, faculty committees, and institutional governing boards. Institutional leaders report that policies are more likely to be politically acceptable, as they move through institutional governance structures, if they address the interests and needs of both women and men.
- Creating policies is not sufficient. A *communication plan* should address deans and department chairs, human resources staff, and faculty members themselves. Deans and department chairs must be aware of and knowledgeable about the policies and often need support in making faculty aware of their options. Professionals in human resources units also must be well aware of all policy options and prepared to help individual faculty members assess their situations and make appropriate decisions. Some institutions have developed special brochures or websites to spread the word about the policies that support flexible work arrangements.
- Just knowing about policies also is not enough; faculty members must feel that it is risk-free to use such policies and that they are encouraged to do so. Thus, some universities widely *advertise their policies* concerning flexible work arrangements and strive to normalize their use.

Evaluation

No specific evaluation has been conducted on the development of flexible work policies, but our interviews with institutional leaders, ADVANCE IT project leaders, and faculty members indicate that such policies are important signals of institutional commitment to the success of a diverse faculty. Faculty use of these policies can be tracked to document their popularity and costs and to look for any signs of stigma associated with making use of the policy; however, care must be taken to preserve individuals' confidentiality.

Affordances and Limitations

Institutional leaders and faculty members cite a number of benefits when institutions develop and implement policies that support flexibility in work arrangements. These benefits include the following:

- ***Support for individual faculty members.*** Arguably, institutional support in the form of policies for flexible work arrangements can enhance morale, institutional commitment, and energy for creativity and productivity (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007). Such policies also may help individual faculty members choose to have the families they want (Mason & Goulden, 2002, 2004).
- ***A more supportive campus.*** Policies that support flexibility in work arrangements help change the culture of an institution. One institutional leader explained that these policy changes are “more friendly and more reflective of what the needs of our female faculty are and what the needs of our faculty are who are going through certain transitions—male or female.”
- ***More attention to important campus issues.*** The process of developing and spreading the word about policies opens conversations and makes members of the campus community more aware of the diversity of circumstances of their colleagues, which can enhance understanding of the importance of diversity and its place in the institutional culture.
- ***Symbolic value external to the institution.*** When an institution has specific policies in place that support the diverse professional and personal lives of the faculty, it sends a message about its values and culture. Such symbolic messages may enhance its attractiveness to prospective faculty members.

Limitations related to policies to support flexible work arrangements include the following:

- ***Lack of use.*** Policies may not be widely used if faculty members fear that using them carries the risk of not appearing committed to one’s work responsibilities and career. Explicit, widespread, and consistent messages about the policies and institutional support for their use are important steps to ensure that policies become normalized aspects of employment practices.
- ***Concerns about overuse of flexible work policies.*** Such concerns are common, but institutional leaders have reported to us that initial concerns that the presence of policies would result in overuse by faculty members have been unfounded.
- ***External perceptions.*** External reviewers of tenure and promotion dossiers sometimes are unfamiliar with how to evaluate the materials of faculty members who have extended tenure clocks or who participated in modified duties or part-time tenure positions. Universities need to provide explicit information and instructions in regard to the use of such policies.

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For Further Reading

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