



## Strategic Intervention Brief #9

### *Practical Family-Friendly Accommodations*

A majority of ADVANCE IT institutions included practical family-friendly accommodations within their portfolio of interventions to support the recruitment and success of STEM women faculty. This Brief highlights and describes such practical family-friendly accommodations that address the daily lives and challenges facing many female faculty. Brief 8 addresses related interventions that target flexible work arrangements, including changes to appointments or to the tenure clock, while Brief 2 mentions grants that support personal circumstances. Together, Briefs 2, 8, and 9 provide an array of policy and programmatic initiatives to support faculty who are handling personal as well as professional responsibilities, showing how interventions to support individual circumstances can be implemented in diverse ways consistent with institutional contexts, history, and goals.

#### **Rationale**

Within American society, women often invest more time and bear disproportionate responsibility for family matters than do men, even as many men take on more duties within households. Furthermore, research shows other ways in which the relationship between personal and professional responsibilities varies for female as compared to male academics: women report more “spillover” of family responsibilities into their work lives than do men; the presence of babies in the household has more impact on the careers of women than of their male counterparts; and women are more likely than men to choose not to have children due to professional demands (Bracken, Allen, & Dean, 2006; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007; Mason & Goulden, 2002, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004, 2012). For many ADVANCE institutions, these trends have signaled the importance of interventions that recognize the complex, multi-faceted lives experienced by both male and female faculty, as well as the particular pressures that often fall more heavily on women.

ADVANCE institutional leaders have reasoned that a faculty member is a critically important institutional asset. The process of recruiting, hiring, and setting up a new faculty member, especially in STEM fields where start-up costs are often substantial, means that a university has invested much in a new faculty member and faces a major loss in terms of human and financial resources if the scholar leaves or is not successful. By supporting faculty in managing aspects of their personal responsibilities, especially in circumstances where such personal issues come up against their time and opportunity to engage in professional opportunities or responsibilities, universities can help women scholars to thrive. Ensuring her success in research contributes to the likelihood that a female scholar can achieve a positive tenure and promotion decision. Furthermore, interventions that support women faculty in managing their multiple responsibilities can help them see the feasibility of creating meaningful lives that include both personal and professional commitments, without a need to sacrifice one for the other. As some ADVANCE institutional leaders have pointed out, a family-friendly environment gives a university a better chance to recruit and retain excellent faculty.

Offering and highlighting practical family-friendly accommodations also has symbolic value that results in institutional benefits. The presence of such practices sends a powerful signal that an institution is attentive to both the personal and professional needs and interests of faculty, a message designed to attract talented potential faculty colleagues. Indeed, ensuring that female faculty have support as they handle both personal

and professional responsibilities may strengthen the potential flow of younger women into STEM careers. Female faculty who have diverse and meaningful personal and professional lives are important role models for female students asking whether they can envision a life as a STEM scholar (De Welde & Laursen, 2011). Some institutions also recognize that all students stand to lose when their teachers face difficult personal situations that divert their attention from their teaching; thus, practical interventions to help faculty deal with such challenges also redound to students' benefit. One ADVANCE leader explained that offering family-friendly accommodations relates to institutional excellence, saying "We are showing that we want people to be at their best.... If that means being able to breastfeed your child, that is important."

### **Purpose**

The purpose of family-friendly accommodations is to offer practical support for the range of life situations and challenges that confront many faculty members at some point in their careers. Within ADVANCE institutions, family-friendly accommodations often include grants to help faculty members continue their scholarly work during periods of major life transition, opportunities for family-related leaves, support and facilities for nursing mothers, and child care resources.

### **Audience**

Institutions vary in whom they primarily intend to support with their family-friendly accommodations. An important consideration is whether to make accommodations available to both men and women. For lactation rooms, the target audience is clearly women. In terms of family leave, the small number of institutions developing explicit leave practices tend to offer this opportunity to women and men who are doing the bulk of caregiving or managing a specific family need. Resources on child care within or external to the institution address the needs of both male and female faculty with parental roles, although women especially may benefit since they often are handling more of the responsibility for child care and related decisions. In most cases, individual grants for personal transition circumstances have been made officially available to both men and women faculty, although most individual grants at most ADVANCE institutions have been made to women.

Practices at Columbia and the University of Wisconsin illustrate two different rationales for the approach to eligibility. In explaining that their individual grants for life transition are designed for female faculty, the *Columbia University* ADVANCE IT team stated: "While we are expanding many of our activities to include men and women, we have also found that there are some life events that have a disproportionate impact on women" (Year 4 Report, p. 29). In contrast, at the *University of Wisconsin-Madison*, the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program is open to both men and women, with the rationale that success in advancing women cannot happen without the support of male colleagues, and, therefore, such a program should be open to all.

In terms of career stage, institutions also have varied in target audience. Some institutions have organized their life transition grants to be available to all faculty; a few target their grants to early-career faculty, since the goal is often to help pre-tenure faculty to achieve tenure success.

### **Models**

Family-friendly accommodations took several forms in ADVANCE institutions, each targeting an aspect of personal life and offering support to allow faculty members to continue their scholarly work during periods of heavy personal demands.

#### **1. Individual faculty grants in support of life transitions** (see also Brief 2)

These grants were designed to help faculty members continue their scholarly work during times of major life transformations (e.g., childbirth or adoption, serious illness in the family, death of a family member).

Typically, universities offering such grants allowed faculty members to use them in ways most useful for their

own scholarly progress. Thus, examples of the uses of such grants include supporting a leave of absence; buying out a portion of teaching responsibilities; hiring a graduate assistant to help with research; furthering research goals, such as keeping a lab open while the faculty member is away for personal reasons; providing for child care while the faculty member is engaged in fieldwork or attending a professional meeting; and hiring someone to assist with data analysis.

Grants varied in size across institutions, from a few hundred dollars to more than \$50,000, but individual grants tended to be \$5,000 or less. At some institutions, the application process is formal, with a set award limit, application deadlines, formal requirements and review criteria, designated review committees, and a specified number of awardees per cycle. Such formal guidelines fit well in the academic culture where faculty members are often engaged in grant writing. Other institutions prefer less formal processes, where applications can be submitted on a rolling basis and details of an award are based on the specifics of the case.

### **Examples of individual grant programs**

*Case Western Reserve University* offers ADVANCE Opportunity Grants to help women maximize their success at Case. The grants are typically small amounts (although they have ranged from a few hundred dollars to \$25,000) to supplement other available support or assist when funding is hard to get from other sources. Examples of grants include seed funding for research training or unusual research opportunities, travel funds to support attendance at meetings highlighting new technology, support for time to write a book, or support for child care to enable the scholar to attend a professional meeting or conduct research. While these grants originally were offered to departments working directly with the ADVANCE program, they are now available to faculty in all departments across the university.

The *University of Michigan* offers a Transitional Support Program for faculty facing major life transitions to meet their specific and unique needs. The purpose of the awards, which average \$18,000, is to assuage problematic impacts of such transitions on academic careers. Grants have provided special laboratory equipment, graduate student or post-doc support, conference or travel support, and release time.

The *University of Wisconsin-Madison* offers the Vilas Life Cycle Professorship Program, which originated with a program specifically for women but is now open to women and men from any divisional affiliation and any rank. This grant program supports faculty needs at critical junctures in their professional careers (e.g., birth or adoption of a baby, a death in the family, the period between grant funding). Recipients have reported many positive effects on their personal and professional lives as a result of these grants.

The Individual Growth Grants at the *University of Colorado Boulder* were aimed at tenured faculty members making career transitions such as to begin new scholarly or creative directions or restart scholarly work after a significant period of university service. While not limited to women in STEM, the majority of awards have gone to women whose careers had been affected by family and institutional service responsibilities. The results have been significant, with 90 percent of the recipients reporting that grant proposals, manuscripts, or artistic performances are underway or completed with the support of the grant.

### **2. Availability of family leave opportunities**

A few ADVANCE institutions have explored ways to offer a period of family leave when significant family-related issues arise, even if formal policies are not available (see Brief 8 for these). The cost of developing formal family leave policies was mentioned as a barrier by several institutional leaders. In response, some departments make informal, internal departmental arrangements to relieve a faculty member of some or all teaching responsibilities for a term, with the course covered by other colleagues. The arrangement is then reciprocated in a subsequent term, so that the needs of other colleagues can be covered. In tight budget times, such informal arrangements help universities move forward in creating environments supportive of family needs, even in times when creating a formal policy seems politically insensitive or unwise.

### Examples of family leave support

At *Kansas State University*, resources could not be allocated to family leave arrangements. However, recognizing the importance of such leave at specific times, department leaders have arranged individually developed “swaps,” in which faculty members “cover” the teaching of a colleague after a birth, knowing that the flexibility can be extended to them if personal circumstances create a need. ADVANCE leaders have made a point to share and highlight how these informal arrangements are handled.

At *Utah State University*, the ADVANCE leaders worked with human resources officials to arrange for faculty requests for a leave, to be treated on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with the relevant chair and dean. Recognizing that formal family leave after a birth would be difficult to provide in an official way, the university has an unofficial but widely known tradition of providing a term of reduced teaching responsibilities for women with new babies.

### 3. Support for pregnant or nursing women

These measures recognized the physical demands on pregnant and nursing women. A number of institutions have established lactation rooms for use by nursing women, either for faculty members or for all faculty, staff, and students of the institution. A few universities publicized their commitment to comply with existing state laws addressing the needs of nursing mothers and their infants. One institution provided parking permits to women in their third trimester. Several universities established creative ways to publicize information about lactation facilities and support for nursing mothers. One strategy is to appoint a breastfeeding advocate to meet with and support new mothers. Other institutions provide informational workshops or establish websites or offices to share information about lactation support and other family-friendly practices.

### Examples of pregnancy and lactation support

The *University of Rhode Island* made public its commitment to comply with Rhode Island state laws addressing the needs of nursing mothers and their infants, including the right of women to breastfeed and bottle-feed in any place open to the public.

The *University of Montana* established a permanent university breastfeeding advocate to work with new mothers. Service included helping mothers find facilities for pumping, arranging the loan of refrigerators at no cost, and talking with mothers about their breastfeeding needs.

*Georgia Tech* held sessions to provide information about lactation facilities for faculty, staff, and students.

### 4. Child care resources

Availability of high-quality, easily accessed child care is an issue of considerable importance to many early-career faculty members and one that has been tackled by a number of ADVANCE institutions. Institutions typically addressed the need for child care resources in one or more of the following ways: creating or expanding child care facilities on campus; developing contacts and child care spaces within the broader community; publicizing information about child care; and establishing a campus resource person or center tasked with compiling resource information and meeting with prospective and current faculty about child care needs. Efforts to expand child care options often are intended to benefit staff and students as well as faculty.

### Examples of child care support

*Utah State* took a comprehensive approach to child care support. Institutional leaders invested much time into creating a new child care facility on campus. Additionally, the institution developed its Aggie Care program, which identifies and offers referrals to child care providers in the community. The program provides training and certification to providers involved in the referral service, makes home visits connected

with the certification process, and offers books and games for providers to borrow. The university also offers a monthly Family in Focus luncheon for those interested in discussing child care.

At *Virginia Tech*, child care options were increased when each college dean and senior university administrators pledged five years of annual support from discretionary funds for a contract to a local daycare provider. The provider was able to expand the number of places available for children and guarantees 60% of the new slots to Virginia Tech families.

### ***5. General practices for offering family-friendly accommodations***

The availability of family-friendly accommodations does not guarantee their impact on the advancement, success, and retention of STEM women faculty. A widely cited and accepted truism across ADVANCE institutions is that faculty must know about available resources, programs, and policies, and they must feel that it is acceptable and safe for them to use these options. This implies that policies are equally available to different-sex and same-sex couples. Several strategies have emerged from ADVANCE institutions to ensure wide knowledge and to encourage acceptance of policies, resources, and practices. These strategies include

- creating, maintaining, and publicizing institutional websites dedicated to making full resource information available in one location;
- identifying a person or an office with the responsibility to maintain information about all relevant policies, programs, and resources, and making this person known to all faculty (men and women);
- training search committees so they are knowledgeable about resources and can provide relevant information along with a designated contact person available to all candidates for faculty positions;
- including information about family-friendly accommodations in the curriculum of chair training; and
- encouraging institutional leaders (including provosts, deans, and chairs) to emphasize frequently that the available resources, policies, and practices are intended for use.

### **Evaluation**

Assessment of the impact of these programs and accommodations generally is done through informal feedback, testimonies, and case examples of individuals whose lives and work are affected in positive ways. For example, faculty members who use lactation facilities informally express appreciation for the support. A faculty member at one university with a grant program said the support “saved my life” during a difficult period, enabling her to continue being productive while coping with family problems. In some cases, use of particular facilities or programs can be tracked, although great care must be taken to preserve individuals’ privacy.

Institutions with grant programs often collect statements from recipients about the outcomes and benefits of the support. In some cases, external evaluators of ADVANCE programs have interviewed faculty about family-friendly accommodations. Formal evaluation through self-reports of recipients of grants at *CU Boulder* indicated specific scholarly products resulting from the Individual Growth Grants. Common consensus among ADVANCE leaders is that informal evidence speaks to the important role of family-friendly accommodations in enabling women faculty to manage personal and professional roles.

### **Affordances and Limitations**

Institutional leaders and faculty members cite a number of benefits when institutions develop and implement family-friendly practices. These benefits include the following:

- ***Support for individual faculty members to manage multiple demands.*** Family-friendly policies help faculty members handle their professional responsibilities, even when challenges arise in their

personal lives. The result of such support is enhanced motivation, institutional commitment, the likelihood of enhanced productivity, and greater likelihood that the faculty member will remain situated at the institution (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007). Furthermore, family-friendly practices and resources contribute to the creation of academic environments in which both men and women can work productively while also believing they can choose to create the personal lives that they value (Mason & Goulden, 2002, 2004). Family-friendly resources make the academic career more attractive and feasible to today's young faculty, many of whom worry whether it is a life they can sustain. 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."

- *A more supportive and attractive campus.* Family-friendly resources and practices, along with flexible work-life policies, support and facilitate the flexibility that faculty need; they signal institutional cultures in which holistic and balanced lives are valued and in which faculty members are supported in creating such lives. In the words of one senior ADVANCE leader, such practices and resources "...make an environment permissible so that people can enhance both [personal and professional roles] and keep them in balance."
- *Symbolic value external to the institution.* An institution conveys its values when it ensures that practices and resources are in place to support the diverse professional and personal lives of the faculty. Such symbolic messages help enhance the attractiveness of the institution to prospective faculty members.

**Limitations** related to policies to support family-friendly accommodations include the following:

- *Concern about using such accommodations.* As with flexible work policies, faculty members may be reluctant to use some family-friendly accommodations if they fear that others will interpret their use as indication of diminished ability or commitment to professional responsibilities (Drago et al., 2005, 2006). For example, grants to support life transitions should not suggest to others that a faculty member is not thriving. Thus, explicit support from senior leaders, wide advertising of opportunities and accommodations, and the normalizing of the use of family-friendly accommodations help individuals as they conduct their work and contribute to a vibrant, productive institutional culture.

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### **For Further Reading**

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### To cite this document

Austin, A. E. & Laursen, S. L. (2014). Strategic Intervention Brief #9: Practical Family-Friendly Accommodations. In Laursen, S., L. & Austin, A. E., *StratEGIC Toolkit: Strategies for Effecting Gender Equity and Institutional Change*. Boulder, CO, and East Lansing, MI. [www.strategic toolkit.org](http://www.strategic toolkit.org)

This research study and development of the StratEGIC Toolkit and other products has been supported by the National Science Foundation through ADVANCE PAID grant #HRD-0930097. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent the official views, opinions, or policy of the National Science Foundation.