

Background

Tenure-track faculty may need to take time off or work part-time for family reasons, yet this may affect their ability to achieve tenure. At the University of California “for each year after securing a tenure track position, men are 20% more likely to achieve tenure than are women.”¹ Similarly, “a study of the promotion and tenure of faculty from 1969 to 2004 at the University of Minnesota Medical School showed that the same percentages of women and men progressed from assistant professor to associate professor, but a significantly lower percentage of women progress from associate professor to full professor...the result of many more women than men leaving the medical school after having achieved the rank of associate professor.”³ In fact, higher percentages of female faculty than male faculty at both institutions felt that family or personal reasons (and the need for parent-friendly options) were important factors in their delayed career progression.^{1,2}

Description

Faculty at the University of Michigan and the University of California can request a delay in tenure review to care for a newborn or newly adopted child (the University of Michigan also allows this delay to care for an ill parent, spouse, or child).^{4,5,6} Faculty at the University of Michigan may request a one-year delay, as well as a reduction of appointment to 50% or 75% time⁴; however, untenured faculty can only use this option once, “regardless of the combination of circumstances.”⁵ Faculty members at the University of California are allowed a “temporary relief of duties”⁶ for up to one year per child and no more than two years. While the University of Minnesota Medical School does not have a formal flexible tenure policy, the school treats faculty members who work at least 67% time as full-time employees eligible for full faculty benefits.³ This arrangement enables faculty to work on a part-time basis and still be on a tenure track, which does allow “for time off-track for either parent when a new child enters a family or when a faculty member needs to focus on an illness or care for an elder.”³

Results

Reviewers rated this practice as featuring the following gender transformative characteristics:

- Transform family, school, and/or work arrangements so that women are not economically or socially penalized/disadvantaged for caregiving (*critical criterion*)
- Change or attempt to change an imbalance of power or otherwise level the playing field (*critical criterion*)
- Challenge and change common discriminatory gender beliefs or norms (*critical criterion*).

By allowing faculty to remain on the tenure track without withdrawing from the process completely or forcing faculty to take a more formal leave, this practice transforms work arrangements and levels the playing field for faculty with family responsibilities. It legitimizes caregiving and challenges the belief that working mothers (or fathers) cannot also be committed to their work.

Some data are available on the practice's implementation. A survey of University of California-Berkeley faculty found that awareness of the practice had increased from 2003 to 2009, and that use of the option had increased from 4% of men and 33% of women whose children were born before 2003 to 33% of men and 62% of women whose children were born after 2007.² Most respondents who had used this practice, among other family-friendly policies, reported positive perceptions; however, 11% of women who used tenure clock stoppage felt that it had a negative effect on their careers (note that this represents only three individuals).²

Summary conclusions

Evaluations would further understanding of how this practice affects faculty members' career development and satisfaction. As the University of California noted, "[m]ore time is needed for an assessment of the long-term impact of these changes in policy and for a better assessment of potential gender differences in experiences of policy use."⁷ Nonetheless, this is a potentially gender transformative practice that provides faculty with the opportunity to remain on track professionally while also fulfilling family responsibilities.

Reference(s) and source(s)

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3. Shollen, S. Lynn, Carole J. Bland, Deborah A. Finstad, and Anne L. Taylor. 2009. "Organizational climate and family life: how these factors affect the status of women faculty at one medical school." *Academic Medicine* 84(1), 87-94. http://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/fulltext/2009/01000/organizational_climate_and_family_life_how_these.26.aspx (accessed June 16, 2011).
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7. Mason, Mary Ann, Angelica Stacy, Marc Goulden, Carol Hoffman, and Karie Frasch. 2005. University of California Faculty Family-Friendly Edge: an Initiative for Tenure-Track Faculty at the University of California. Report. <http://ucfamilyedge.berkeley.edu/ucfamilyedge.pdf> (accessed June 9, 2011).