

**Final Report to the  
Alfred P. Sloan Foundation**

**for the**

**Faculty and Families Project  
The Pennsylvania State University**

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<i>Table of Contents:</i>	<i>Page</i>
Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	3
I. Background and Hypotheses	9
II. Work/Family Benchmark	16
III. Focus Group Results	22
IV. Patterns of Family for New Penn State Faculty	30
V. Pilot Survey Results	41
VI. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations	53
References	60
Appendix 1: Equity Indicator	63
Appendix 2: Focus Group Instrument	65

Background papers available on-line at <http://lsir.la.psu.edu/workfam/faculty&families.htm>

The Consequences and Costs of Delaying Attempted Childbearing for Women Faculty (Varner)  
Adoption Issues for Faculty (Yang)  
The Changing Face of Care: The Elderly (Varner)

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**Executive Summary**

**Introduction**

In November of 1999, the President and Provost of The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) met with senior women faculty at the University Park campus, and incompatibilities between simultaneous commitments to the institution and to families were among the issues raised. Growing out of that meeting, the Faculty and Families project was initiated at Penn State in August of 2000. Major funding was provided by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, with internal funding from the College of the Liberal Arts, the Population Research Institute, the Children, Youth and Families Consortium, and the Office of Human Resources, and with internal endorsements from the Commission for Women and the Women in Sciences and Engineering Institute. Looking mainly at Penn State, the project sought to describe and understand the incompatibilities mentioned above with an eye to improving the ability of faculty to make and meet simultaneous commitments to career and family.

The context for and location of the research is found at Penn State, an institution whose policies and practices are arguably more advanced than most comparable universities. For some examples, tenure-track faculty with new children (including adoptees) are guaranteed paid leave, the tenure clock can be “stopped” (the formal term is “stayed”) for one year in such cases regardless of whether a leave is taken, and on-site child care can be found on four of the larger Penn State campuses. The University Park campus also includes an active program to attract and support dual-career families and coordinates its spring break with the local school district.

Even with this relatively high level of support, there was a perception that the University could and should do more, and that policy oriented research might help guide further efforts. That research, along with the results, is described after a discussion of the framework employed for the project.

**Theory**

The theoretical framework for the research is located in the “ideal worker” norm discussed by Williams (1999). The ideal worker is someone who enters a profession immediately upon receiving the relevant credential, works his or her way up the career ladder by putting in long hours without interruptions beyond short vacations, and continues in this fashion until retirement age. The ideal worker can contribute financially to the family, but cannot make substantial time commitments to children or other family members without endangering his or her career. Pay and promotion systems, rules around working time, and the beliefs of those from previous generations who have succeeded as ideal workers and currently manage our organizations, are all built upon the presumption that only ideal workers should be hired, retained, and rewarded.

Although the ideal worker norm developed in settings where only men were measured against this standard (Whyte, 1956), women have since entered positions where they too are expected to serve as ideal workers (Bailyn, 1993; Fletcher, 1999; Hochschild, 1997; Williams, 1999). Williams concludes that this system results in “discrimination” against women because they may experience career failure as a result of being more likely to take on substantial time commitments to family during the years when the ideal worker is typically climbing the career ladder. An important implication of this approach is that, although women are more likely to experience such discrimination, *men who take on substantial caregiving responsibilities will experience the same career difficulties.*

For faculty at U.S. colleges and universities, the ideal worker is someone who receives the terminal degree (typically a Ph.D.) in their late 20s, possibly completes post-doctoral training, and then takes a full-time position as an assistant professor on the tenure track. While on the tenure track, the ideal worker performs a modicum of service work, builds a teaching dossier, and strives to generate research resulting in publication. If an individual performs as an ideal worker, he or she will be granted tenure and promotion generally at the end of the sixth year. The ideal worker will then strive to generate an additional equivalent or superior record in the years following tenure to achieve promotion from associate to full professor. Although systems of tenure and promotion are the most obvious way in which those who fit the ideal worker norm are rewarded, note that other mechanisms, including pay systems, the scheduling of courses, and the allocation of resources within the institution may play a part. More broadly, peers at other institutions and in professional organizations are likely to reward those who fit the norm with accolades, citations, awards and leadership positions.

Given this background, we would expect that “discrimination” against caregivers of the sort described by Williams would exist at most colleges and universities, and specifically at Penn State. Such “discrimination” would occur not because of any dislike of children or other dependents, but rather because caregiving activities signal that the faculty member is not an ideal worker and is therefore a substandard academic. Such “discrimination” can also explain why even very progressive work/family policies might be unsuccessful: those who utilize the policies may be viewed as uncommitted and, at worst, experience the ultimate failure for an academic in the denial of tenure.

For the project, we developed the notion of “discrimination avoidance,” behaviors intended to minimize any apparent or actual intrusions of family life on academic commitments. The logic for this concept flows from the assumption that faculty members are cognizant of “discrimination” against caregivers, and respond pro-actively by either avoiding commitments to family entirely or by attempting to hide or minimize any apparent effects of family responsibilities on job performance. Such individuals can be viewed as engaging in strategies. Faculty members who successfully apply “discrimination avoidance” strategies will then appear as ideal workers, and enjoy career success.

For two reasons, we believed that women would be more likely to employ “discrimination avoidance” strategies more frequently than men. The first is that women typically perform more childcare than men, so would have a greater fear of “discrimination” and need to hide or minimize childcare commitments. The second reason is that women in the academy may be

subject to gender discrimination regardless of parental status (MIT, 1999), such that the appearance of family commitments would be even more risky for women than for men.

The project team gathered a variety of evidence relevant to this theoretical framework.

## **Research**

The research included four components: a benchmarking analysis, a series of focus groups, the collection of data on Penn State faculty hired from 1992 to 1997, and a pilot survey of faculty elsewhere. The research can be summarized as follows:

1. ***Benchmarking analysis for Penn State.*** We began by replicating a policy analysis undertaken earlier by the Families and Work Institute in conjunction with the College and University Personnel Association (Friedman, Rimsky, & Johnson, 1996). However, it seems likely that what amounts to a weighted count of the number of existing work/family policies may be a poor indicator of the extent to which an institution is responsive to family commitments, as noted by Fried (1998) and Hochschild (1997). Three alternative sets of indicators for the status of work and family relations were therefore developed. The first indicator captures the extent to which new parents utilized existing policies for leave, reduced workload and stoppage of the tenure clock. The second indicator captures the degree of gender equity as weighted equally among categories for the percentage of women assistant, associate, and full professors, along with the percentage of women among all new hires. The third set of indicators employed standard survey items used to capture the perceived work/family climate and supervisor support for the work/family commitments of employees. The survey items were later tested as part of the pilot survey effort.
2. ***Focus groups at Penn State.*** A series of 13 focus groups involving Penn State faculty parents were convened. The groups were stratified by the following criteria: gender, tenure status, school or college of employment, and by single versus married parent status. The sample ultimately included 19 men and 34 women. Among the problems identified were many directly related to the ideal worker norm and the extreme demands of the job and institution. As one respondent stated, "... I work as much as possible and the University would make it 24 hours a day." There was some evidence that work/family conflict varies across departments, disciplines, and schools and colleges, and that "discrimination" against caregiving exist. The evidence, however, mainly seemed to center around "discrimination avoidance" strategies, particularly for faculty women. Such behavior ranged from the sequencing of career and children, to the limiting of family commitments to one child, to not bringing children into the workplace when needed, to returning earlier than was desirable from parental leave. One participant responded negatively when asked whether she knew of any new parents on the Penn State faculty who had been turned down for leave, reduced workload or stoppage of the tenure clock, then followed up with, "... it is more being afraid to ask." Information from the focus groups was used in development of the pilot survey.
3. ***Patterns of family for new Penn State faculty.*** This portion of the project analyzed human resources data from a sample of over 1,000 faculty hired into Penn State between

1992 and 1997. Approximately half were on the tenure track and the other half were tenured when hired. The evidence did not fit the hypothesis that parents are subject to direct “discrimination” against caregiving, since the rate of attrition among women on the tenure track was only 20.3 percent for mothers as opposed to 39.7 percent for non-mothers (men exhibited a similar pattern). Instead, the evidence was consistent with the frequent appearance of “discrimination avoidance” strategies, particularly for women. Over the 1992–1999 period, the tenure track women faculty had an average of 0.57 children, while the tenure track men averaged 0.95 children. For that same time period, the proportion of multi-child families among tenure track women was 19 percent; the figure dropped to 17 percent for the sample of tenured women. Perhaps of greatest relevance to the notion of “discrimination avoidance” strategies, out of a total of over 500 faculty who became new parents while employed at Penn State, only seven parental leaves were reported between 1992 and 1999, and all of these leaves were taken by women.

4. ***Pilot survey of non-Penn State faculty.*** To avoid any later double sampling of Penn State faculty, a written survey was developed and administered to 329 faculty at another university late in the Fall semester of 2000. A total of 78 surveys were returned for a 23.7% response rate, a rate that was expected given the timing of survey administration. Although reported utilization rates for work/family policies were also low in the sample, results regarding the perceived fairness of work/family policies were more positive. The average respondent was highly supportive of a semester of unpaid leave for new parents on the tenure track and a one year stoppage of the tenure clock, and on-site child care. The only novel policy option receiving this level of support was a reduced workload (with reduced pay) opportunity for tenured faculty with long-term care-giving responsibilities. Reduced workload options for tenure-track faculty received less support, as did subsidies for adoptive parents.

In addition to fairness issues, we also included items on the survey, developed from the focus groups, concerning “discrimination avoidance” strategies. Over 25 percent of the women reported that in order to achieve academic success, they had fewer children than they wished, and an overlapping 25 percent reported waiting until after tenure to have a second child. Over one-half of the women sampled reported that in order to appear highly committed to their jobs, they missed important events when their children were young, while almost two-thirds of the women reported coming back to work sooner than they would have liked following childbirth in order to be taken seriously as an academic. In addition, over 40 percent of the women in the pilot survey reported attempting to time the arrival of new children during the summer break. However, “discrimination avoidance” strategies were not limited to women. Over 40 percent of faculty men responding to the pilot survey wished to but did not ask for parental leave and (in a separate response) to stay the tenure clock following the arrival of a new child. These findings suggest that the ideal worker norm indeed presents difficulties for both women and men with family commitments.

## Conclusions

For those concerned about easing the ability of faculty to contribute to both Penn State and their families, two immediate conclusions might appear to be reasonable, and both might be inappropriate or at least misleading. The first conclusion is that the system of tenure and promotion is responsible for the apparent incompatibility between faculty and family responsibilities. The theory and evidence suggests to us that the system of tenure and promotion is only the most obvious manifestation of the ideal worker norm. Although some tinkering around the edges might be warranted, there is no “magic bullet” in revisions to the tenure system that will eliminate the ideal worker norm and the expectations of faculty built around that norm. The second and related conclusion is the broader claim that changes in policy are needed in response to the problems identified in the research. Although we provide a list of such policy options below, the pervasive nature of the ideal worker norm suggests that changes in the culture, climate, day-to-day practices and expectations across all levels of the University will be required for long-term improvement. Absent such changes, even the most progressive work/family policies will likely be ignored by faculty. By implication, progress over the long term will require the involvement of men as well as women, parents and non-parents, and faculty and non-faculty members of the University community.

With that strong caveat, an abbreviated statement of policy options suggested in the conclusion is as follows:

### A) Communicate and Institutionalize Existing Policies:

- i) Establish a culture where leave, tenure-clock staying, and reduced hours for caregivers are the norm. Efforts to improve utilization rates might include:
  - a. Provide prospective or new parents with just-in-time and easily accessible information on Penn State policies and practices on the world-wide web.
  - b. A third party, such as an ombudsman, could be introduced into negotiations for parental leave and reduced workload to provide information and knowledge of successful arrangements in related cases.
  - c. Monitor leave, tenure-clock staying and reduced hours arrangements for new biological or adoptive parents and those responsible for elder care.
  - d. Monitor the perceived work/family climate across the University on an annual basis.
  - e. Include recognition in annual statements by various administrators of units where most new parents use one or more of existing policies.
  - f. Promote and advertise existing policies around dual-career opportunities, parenting, elder care, and family and medical leave.
  - g. Review applicable policies and culture with relevant bodies at Penn State.
- ii) Promote “Family Hours.” Faculty with caregiving responsibilities could take a reduction in salary in exchange for a one course per semester reduction in workload. For those in financial need, a “single caregiver fund” could be developed.
- iii) Provide partially paid, full semester leaves for the semester when a new child is due.
- iv) Make the children of faculty and staff welcome in the workplace. Potential policies include:
  - a. Permit parents among the faculty and staff to bring children to work for short-duration elementary and secondary school closings.

- b. Permit women to care for young children at work on a regular basis in order to promote breastfeeding.
- c. Design new buildings or refit of existing buildings to make them friendly to young children and parents.
- v) Make caregiving an issue for faculty women *and* men.

#### B) Enhance Existing Policies

- i) Make existing policies regarding new parent leave consistent across lines of gender and biological versus adoptive parent status.
- ii) Provide a consistent policy regarding requests for external letters in tenure cases for faculty who stay the tenure clock.
- iii) Shift the burden of requests for parental leave from the faculty member to the University.
- iv) Review policies regarding healthcare insurance benefits for caregivers who elect either a reduced workload or leave of absence.
- v) Establish a Work/Family subcommittee of the Faculty Senate to review policies, practices and culture, and to suggest revisions to policies as necessary.

#### C) Implement New Policies

- i) Provide handicapped parking privileges to women faculty in cases of a difficult pregnancy or post-pregnancy condition as defined by the individual's personal physician.
- ii) Add child care support in terms of:
  - a. Subsidies for faculty with child care needs, including those associated with non-standard work hours and travel.
  - b. "Flexible" schedules for childcare at Penn State facilities.
  - c. Provisions for sick child care in the home.
  - d. Cooperative initiatives to enhance the quality and number of child care facilities in the various communities associated with Penn State.
- iii) Provide subsidies to help defray the expenses associated with adoption.
- iv) Develop policies for circumstances where tenured faculty are engaged in long-term or potentially long-term caregiving for elders or other dependent family members.

It is worth highlighting the fact that even if a substantial subset of the policies listed above were implemented, improvement in the work and family circumstances of faculty would likely be slow. For substantial improvement, sustained leadership will be required over a long period of time. Leadership in this sense implies a coordinated effort among a combination of relevant individuals and organizations, including the highest levels of administration, but also including various deans and administrative heads, the Office of Human Resources, the Faculty Senate, the Commission for Women, the Women in Science and Engineering Institute and other interested parties. Further, as suggested at various points in the report and the policy recommendations above, successful improvement will likely involve a constituency, and related policies and practices, that expands well beyond faculty or parents to include administrators, staff and students. Together, these individuals and organizations could move Penn State forward, enabling faculty and other members of the Penn State community to better meet their commitments to the institution and to their families.