



Evaluation of Parental Leave Policy C215

Summary

Experiences with UNM’s parental leave policy C215 have been evaluated using the ADVANCE 2018 Main Campus Faculty Climate Survey, a series of junior faculty interviews, and concerns brought to the ADVANCE leadership. Key findings are:

- Women and STEM faculty are more hesitant to use family-leave policies, and perceive greater disadvantage in using them than men and non-STEM faculty
- Sharing of information about, and implementation of, parental leave varies significantly between units
- The attitude of the department chair and senior faculty strongly influence the experience of faculty who use parental leave
- Appropriately implemented, the parental leave policy contributes to faculty recruitment and retention

“So, I mean, that’s a really important policy. Because I have colleagues at other Universities who didn’t have that. And so, then they were basically trying to continue working on their research while they were on maternity leave, if they had that. I mean, I think that’s really impossible to be trying to simultaneously watch an infant and write a research paper... Yes, I was glad to have the stopped clock. That takes off a lot of pressure and to have maternity leave. Those were really important.”

UNM’s Parental Leave Policy

A recent study¹ of 205 Ph.D.-granting institutions in the US and Canada showed that 40% of these institutions do not have any form of paid parental leave. UNM’s Faculty Handbook Policy [C215](#) provides parents with one semester of paid leave, which includes “full relief from teaching duties and similar responsibilities”. Section 2.3 of C215 makes it the prerogative of each Dean to establish the guidelines for “relief”. As the quotes herein indicate, supportive implementation of this policy can contribute to faculty recruitment and retention. However, the very faculty for whom the policy is intended often indicate being hesitant to use it or having discouraging experiences when they do use parental leave.

This report utilizes the ADVANCE 2018 Main Campus Faculty Climate Survey (339 full-time faculty responses), a series of 57 junior faculty interviews² conducted by the ADVANCE Social Science Research Team, and questions frequently received by ADVANCE leadership to report on faculty experiences with UNM’s Parental Leave policy (C215).

¹ <https://aaronclauset.github.io/parental-leave/>

² Additional information on junior faculty interview demographics is in the Appendix

The 2018 Main Campus Faculty Climate Survey indicates that:

- Men are more comfortable taking any form of leave to which they are entitled than women.
- Women faculty and STEM faculty perceive a greater disadvantage in using family accommodation policies than men, non-STEM faculty, and faculty in leadership positions.
- Women perceive greater inequity in using work-family policies than men.
- Men more strongly agree that their “department/unit creates a climate that is responsive and supportive of family needs, including usage of work-family policies” than women and underrepresented minority (URM) faculty.

Parental leave was voluntarily mentioned in approximately 30% of the faculty interviews. Comments varied dramatically, indicating that for some faculty, the parental leave policy has worked well, while others have had problems.

Negative Experiences with Parental Leave

Some faculty interviewees and survey respondents reported that they were not appropriately informed, that they were informally discouraged from taking leave, or that they felt pressure to continue obligations, such as faculty meeting attendance, during leave:

“When I took it, we had the original chair that was problematic. And actually, I was not told about it at all. It was a fellow faculty member who quietly came up to me and handed me the printed-out policy of family leave and said you need to know about this because you are entitled to it. If that hadn’t happened, I wouldn’t have taken it....Because my chair was not going to tell me.”

“I was considered 'unreliable' during my parental leave and was pushed out of an important committee without any prior notice/discussion.”

“Parental leave was good. Did still have duties while on leave, but this is frustrating because if I do not do these duties, the students and reputation of the department suffers. Have not had any new hires, and have had people retire so not many people to pick up slack when I left.”

“I used family leave and my annual review (while I was out) was held to the same level as the rest of my department. I was also penalized when I did not attend faculty meetings during my leave.”

Faculty also report being overburdened with inflexible commitments when they returned, and that the leave was held against them in annual evaluations and tenure considerations:

“My college is very inconsistent with who gets to have a flexible schedule to support their families.”

“Many of the older tenured faculty members in my department did not understand at the time that family leave and tenure clock pause was not to be counted against me in reviews of my research productivity”

“Female faculty who use these policies are seen as "less serious" in their scholarship. This is incredibly demoralizing.”

Positive Experiences with Parental Leave

Other faculty interviewees and survey respondents reported having a very supportive department and no obligations during their leave time:

“The department was very respectful of the fact that I was on leave and whatever I decided to pursue in terms of work during that time was...I was under the impression that it was my own prerogative.”

“Took semester of no teaching and year delay in tenure for baby. It had just been implemented and it would have been a very unproductive semester with no sleep.”

“My chair gave me generous leave... I will always be grateful to her for this, as the new baby period was just incredibly difficult.”

“As a male faculty, I found everyone from the Chair on up supportive of this. In terms of my research agenda I was barely able to keep up and didn't submit and proposals or anything that semester, just managed the grants I had. Taking care of a baby is serious business.”

Some faculty reported great support and flexibility from their departments when they returned from their leave:

“I think it's fine with the teaching. I enjoy teaching, so I don't...there's been flexibility with the schedules at the department level, which has been great. Especially you know, having to take the kids to daycare very early in the morning. Like I used to teach at 8 A.M. in the morning. It was not working at all. So, there was flexibility also with the schedules to help me as well.”

“The maternity leave was great. I thought it was a really generous leave that I got to take the entire semester off. That I get to stop my clock for a year. When I came back to teaching, the department especially was really...um really emphasized for me that they didn't want me to do teaching right away that would involve a lot of new prep and new work. They wanted me to try to teach classes that I felt would be easy for me, so I could transition.”

The Importance of Chairs and Colleagues in the Parental Leave Experience

Section 1.1. of C215 states:

“Academic leaders and supervisors will attempt to foster an environment in which every eligible faculty member will be encouraged to consider freely the parental leave opportunity offered through this policy. Deans, department chairs, and program directors should make every effort to promote use of this policy. Individuals participating in reappointment, tenure, and promotion reviews shall not allow use of parental leave or family-related tenure-clock extensions to have a negative influence in the evaluation of any candidate.”

The range of comments below reflect how critical supportive and knowledgeable administrative leaders (particularly, department chairs) and colleagues are in shaping a positive, beneficial parental leave experience:

“My department worked collaboratively with me to flexibly interpret the family leave policy so that I could take leave in a manner most beneficial to my family needs. This turned out to be beneficial to the department as well, so it was a win-win situation.”

“My chair and colleagues were supportive of my leave.”

“It was amazing and I had a very supportive chair at the time.”

“This conversation [with a colleague] made a HUGE difference in how I thought about leave and made me feel really supported by my department and colleagues.”

“Our Dean was verbally supportive, however, distant with ways that we could use leave. In the end, internal faculty in our department were super supportive. They were happy that I took that time.”

“When my program Director or Dean were supportive, the process was relatively easy. [The respondent goes on to say that this changed when leadership changed.]”

“My chair gave me generous leave. I was quite surprised when a year or two later, our interim leadership let slip their surprise that family leave even existed. Not good.”

The key role of colleague and unit leaders is also apparent in the following comments about *negative* experiences with and perceptions of parental leave:

“At the time I felt significant procedural support from my faculty chair but little informal support from department and college administration (i.e. although I was not discouraged or denied leave, there were a number of passive-aggressive comments and offline discussion about how I “had extra time” to achieve tenure).”

“While taking family leave was the best decision for my family, it was devastating to my progress towards tenure. In reality the department, college, and university all chose to count time on leave as time that I should still be research productive.”

“First time, in problematic department did not have good support. Tried to look for mentorship from senior women however most told me to not have the child... did not have good support during or after the birth from department...”

“Compared to other universities and industries, UNM has a very generous family leave policy, but I don't think it is viewed positively by all faculty and administration, and sometimes women who use the policy face negative repercussions.”

The Influence of Parental Leave on Faculty Recruitment and Retention

The following quotes illustrate the significant effect that positive or negative parental leave experiences have on recruitment, retention, and job attitudes:

“This policy helped us recruit and retain faculty.”

“[Family leave] has helped keep [departmental colleagues] productive, and at UNM.”

“Had I known how my leaves at UNM would be reviewed, I would advise myself to take an unpaid longer term leave or found another job.”

“I am afraid of asking for family leave, and it has affected my personal life.”

Parental Leave and Promotion & Tenure

A number of women faculty have come to ADVANCE to discuss problems related to the timing of the tenure and promotion decision after using parental leave. The policy is meant to allow women who stopped the clock, but who are ready to apply for P&T at the time specified in their offer letter, to be able to do so. The process should involve a discussion with the department chair, and it does not require any special permissions. Nonetheless, women report being told:

- Not using the additional year will require extra accomplishments as they will be viewed as going up “early.”
- Special permission from the Dean and Provost are required.
- They should wait a year because their cases will be stronger, even when their records clearly exceed departmental and college or school expectations.

Negative comments about parental leave from chairs or senior faculty can create confusion about how to interpret faculty accomplishments, complicating departmental P&T decisions. Additionally, the Provost’s office has observed that chairs sometimes refer to parental leave in P&T letters, in ways that distract from evaluations or acknowledgement of the faculty members’ achievements.

For women faculty, the result of these discussions and actions is additional stress, an additional year without the salary increase and the job security, and an overall message that she is not valued as much as other faculty (e.g., men, women who do not use parental leave).

Conclusion

UNM’s parental leave policy works well in units in which the leadership understands the policy, is supportive of faculty using the policy, and can help departmental faculty with the implementation and subsequent evaluation of faculty accomplishments. Supportive colleagues clearly play an important role in the experiences of new parents. Likewise, unsupportive or uninformed leadership and senior faculty can contribute to stressful situations that impact faculty productivity and retention.

Plans and Recommendations

- ADVANCE at UNM will work with the Office of Academic Affairs to create an FAQ to be posted on the Provost’s website and the ADVANCE website, to clarify interpretation and implementation of the parental leave policy.
- Recommendations for academic leaders (acting in the spirit of C215 1.1):
 - President and Provost: The recent announcement of paid parental leave for staff is indicative of upper-level leadership support for work-family management. This support needs to be regularly expressed and demonstrated by the President and Provost. The Provost can help emphasize the importance of supportive implementation of C215 (and other work-family measures) to Deans.
 - Deans and Chairs: Leaders should be knowledgeable about the policy and recognize that it is a valuable recruitment and retention tool. For example, a discussion of the Parental Leave policy should be incorporated into New Chair’s School.

- Chairs: Chairs should exercise caution in how or if they refer to parental leave in annual reviews and P&T letters. Chairs should seek advice from their Dean or the Senior Vice Provost if they are unsure about whether or not to refer to leave in written reviews.
- Faculty who meet departmental expectations for P&T without the additional year should be encouraged and supported in applying.
- Faculty who need the additional time should be evaluated based on the same expectations as faculty who did not have parental leave. They should not be held to higher standards based on a false notion of “extra time”. Parental leave (and associated adjustment of the tenure clock) is designed to provide necessary compensation for time lost to scholarship during the relevant period. Voting Faculty may need to be reminded of this by Department Chairs in advance of milestone evaluations.
- Faculty who must manage research grants and/or research labs need some additional support since, as acknowledged in the policy, these efforts can’t be dropped for a semester. Some ideas include:
 - Facilitating the use of Zoom to have research group meetings
 - A Provost or VPR-level fund for one semester salary increases for a senior graduate student, post-doc, or research faculty member who can assist with lab management during the parental leave.
 - Establishing a UNM policy or process that would allow for overhead to be used for childcare if faculty want to come to campus while on parental leave

Appendix

Junior Faculty Interviews

Between December 2017 and November 2018, 119 junior faculty were invited to participate in an interview about their experiences and perceptions of campus life and policy. Fifty-seven faculty (assistant professors and newly-promoted associate professors) accepted, a 48% response. Of the faculty who completed an interview, 63% (N=36) were women, 42% (N=24) were URM, and 60% (N=34) were in a STEM department.

The interview protocol included questions on the clarity of expectations in the tenure process, specifically about junior faculty members' experiences conducting research, teaching, and service work at UNM. In addition, the protocol included questions regarding their experiences of being mentored by senior faculty, perceptions of department and campus climate, as well as their satisfaction with leadership at the departmental, college, and higher administration level. Further, participants who identified as women or URM faculty were asked how their gender and/or race might have influenced their experiences. Lastly, the respondents were asked to elaborate on and add any additional information they felt was important to share.

The interviews were transcribed, de-identified, and imported into Atlas.ti (Version 8) for coding. Codes fell into eight general categories which included: Climate, Discrimination/Insensitivity, Faculty Retention, Leadership, Rewards of UNM/New Mexico, Support, Tenure/Promotion, and Work/Family. Within these eight categories, there were 22 narrower codes to identify specific themes within the interviews. The interrater reliability, determined as identifying the same code within the same interview, was above 80% for each code and ranged from 82-100%.

2018 Main Campus Climate Survey

For the main campus climate survey, N = 339 full-time main campus faculty participated, with a demographic distribution that is representative of UNM faculty.

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