



Wayne State University

Gender Equity Advances Retention in STEM

Drives • Shifts • Accelerates

Executive Summary: Work/Family/Life Initiative

The National Science Foundation ADVANCE ADAPTATION: Gender Equity Advances Retention in STEM at Wayne State University ([WSU-GEARS, 2020-2024](#)) modifies, implements, and evaluates strategies used by other Advance campuses to improve gender equity and diversity of faculty at Wayne State. The goal is to implement evidence-based programs to improve the hiring, retention, and advancement of women and underrepresented faculty. Toward this goal, WSU-GEARS has developed [initiatives](#) to address supporting work/family/life, creating equitable workloads, and building healthy work environments.¹

The [WSU-GEARS Family Advocacy Network \(FANs\)](#) supports the integration of work/family/life:

- FANs is a comprehensive faculty-friendly resource for information on work/family/life policies and support at WSU, including care-related resources, other types of leave, and healthcare. The [FANs manual](#) and [at-a-glance policy guide](#) were developed in consultation with Human Resources and the AAUP-AFT Local 6075/Wayne Academic Union (WAU).²
- Faculty Family Advisors offer peer-to-peer, confidential support to assist faculty in navigating the complexities of work/family/life. They are available to discuss leaves of absence and other family and care related policies and resources.³
- The Job Candidate Program (launched Fall 2022-2023) supports a family-friendly and inclusive campus. Academic units (1) share the FANs manual to job candidate finalists prior to on-campus interviews and (2) include a confidential meeting with a FANs faculty advisor during their campus visit. Like the peer-to-peer meetings with current faculty, this meeting offers a confidential space for prospective colleagues to ask questions related to work/family/life at WSU.

What do we know about work/family/life in the academy?

In the academic landscape, where flexible work schedules can be a cultural norm,⁴ meeting the demands of academia amidst family⁵ and other non-work demands can be difficult for both women and men, particularly parents.⁶ However, career choices associated with family seem to weigh more heavily on women,⁷ particularly during their early career.⁸ Evidence from multidisciplinary scholarly literature suggests that parental and childcare policies can support hiring, retaining, and advancing women and underrepresented faculty members (URM). Women faculty say that strong leave policies are a recruitment plus when on the job market.⁹ Nearly half of women (45.9%) compared to 20.6% of men report that parental leave policies are somewhat or very important in choosing their current faculty position. Mothers are more likely than fathers to take extended leave time for the birth of a child. While the annual productivity rates of childfree women and men are similar, mothers' annual productivity decreases immediately after childbirth, compared to nonmothers or men. Parenthood explains more than 87% of the gender gap; however, the productivity gap shrinks over time as mothers become more productive.

In a national environment characterized by minimal support for childcare and early childhood education compared to other wealthy, industrialized democracies, affordable and adequate childcare may ease persistent conflicts of work and family demands, supporting retention and advancement.^{10 11} In addition, mothers who have institutional supports such as abbreviated teaching loads or graduate students can more effectively balance family life with a productive research agenda.¹² In fact, Ph.D. earning parents are more likely to secure a tenure-track position within 2 years of graduation than their peers without children; however, Ph.D. earning mothers often work at non-research institutions such as liberal arts, 2-year- and special focus-institutions.¹³ The preference for alternatives to R-1s could be, in part, because

parents perceive that research-intensive schools do not allow time to balance caregiving and the research productivity required to achieve tenure. Childcare remains a persistent issue for parents, particularly mothers who still are responsible for the lion's share of housework and caregiving.¹⁴ The pandemic heightened already existing disparities, despite some initial optimism; women faculty members have been significantly affected with regards to research, grant writing, and publication output during this time, compared to their male counterparts, and increased caregiving responsibilities has been noted as a major contributing factor.¹⁵ URM faculty disproportionately feel additional pressures from the pandemic.¹⁶ ¹⁷ Further complicating academics' career decisions and pathways is the two-body problem, particularly for dual-career academic couples. In these instances, partners may live apart, prioritize one career over the other, and/or delay advancement.¹⁸

To support work/family/life, universities may offer: (1) a tenure clock extension, usually by one year,¹⁹ (2) paid parental leave,²⁰ ²¹ (3) modified duties, (4) on-campus and/or subsidized off-campus childcare, and/or (5) a partner hiring program.²² Yet, these policies often do not adequately cover faculty needs or have uneven outcomes. Tenure clock stoppage may exacerbate the problem; men tend to be better situated to make use of the extra time to develop a stronger academic portfolio and women are less likely to secure tenure.²³ Making policies such as tenure clock extensions, including COVID-related, as an "opt-out" rather than "opt-in" system minimizes gender bias and reduces the stigma around taking leave or a tenure clock extension.²⁴ Faculty cite the importance of "opt-out" policies in encouraging faculty to consider taking paternity leave in a global survey of 900 public administration faculty.²⁵

The Family Leave Medical Act (FMLA) guarantees employees job-protected leave for a qualifying event (up to 12 consecutive weeks, e.g., pregnancy; illnesses). Per federal guidelines, however, employees are not eligible for FMLA until they have worked at least 1250 hours over the course of 12 months prior to requesting leave. There is no federally mandated provision for this time to be paid; it is at the benevolence of a university to provide this support. Parental leave offered by R1 universities ranges from nonexistent (0 weeks of leave) to moderate (10 to 15 weeks) and generous (32 weeks).²⁶ Further, modified duty leave may come with full or only partial pay or require a teaching overload in the future.

Policies are critical for work/family/life support, but they are most effective with a corresponding supportive environment, particularly strong leadership (e.g., chairs; deans). Departments with a diversity strategy tend to have chairs who are more knowledgeable about and more effectively promote family-friendly policies.²⁷ A diversity strategy "directs departmental commitment toward all types of family friendly policies, and particularly toward those innovative and less adopted policies such as spousal employment assistance, unpaid family leave and others."²⁸

What have we learned: Summary of findings from the NSF GEARS work/family/life initiative?

Based on data collected in the WSU-GEARS annual faculty surveys, focus groups, and evaluation of the job candidate program,²⁹ we find there are gaps in Wayne State's current leave policies and childcare supports. Below we summarize this evidence.

Recruitment

- Weaknesses in the current parental leave policy may be a factor for job candidates when considering whether to accept a faculty position at WSU. There is a lack of university financial support of paid leave for FMLA if the faculty member has not accrued enough sick days³⁰ Modified duties for up to 15 weeks at full pay is an option but see concerns raised below.
- From the FANs job candidate evaluation data, search chairs and department chairs report that they would like to see funding for on-campus daycare and improvements to other

parental/childcare supports and accommodations to increase their ability to recruit URM and women faculty.

- Another concern raised by chairs/search chairs was the lack of a formalized dual-career partner hiring process. Faculty advisors too noted that they were frequently asked what the university would do to facilitate employment opportunities for their partner, whether an academic or not.

Retention

- Evidence suggests WSU could do a better job in understanding and supporting parents who are on the tenure track. In focus groups, faculty stated, “publishing and obtaining tenure as a parent is an uphill battle,” or “the university seems out of touch with the realities of parenting while on the tenure track, or WSU “doesn’t understand that childcare responsibilities fall upon women.”
- Survey data support these statements; women faculty reported higher levels of work-family conflict; 16% of women had high work-family-life conflict as opposed to only 8% of men.³¹
- Faculty expressed concern about variations across departments and disciplines for the modified duty policy. The policy provides full-paid leave for up to 15 weeks, regardless of length of time at WSU, however differential teaching expectations and leadership impact implementation. A reduced workload may require adjusted compensation (up to \$3000) and/or in-load teaching or some other assignments. If the teaching workload is reduced and pay is not adjusted, additional teaching must be completed within the following 6 semesters. Given differential unit norms on the number of courses typically taught in a semester, the bar is higher for some T/TT faculty compared to others to get full release from classroom teaching. Since women are more likely than men to take parental leave, the burden on careers is uneven.
- Faculty in the focus groups also describe their experiences of ineligibility for FMLA due to a lack of overall hours or to have full-pay for the 12 weeks due to a lack of sick days.
- The average cost of full-time childcare (for one child) prior to full-time enrollment in school (typically kindergarten at about age 5) is about \$10,000.³² Over the course of those first five years, families can easily spend about \$50,000. The new AAUP-AFT/WAU childcare subsidy has been helpful to support faculty costs; however, given the current level of funding, it amounts to about one month of full-time childcare for one child enrolled. (\$924 average for one child enrolled in full-time care). Further, faculty and staff expected difficulties in covering childcare costs after the pandemic (from 27.4% to 41.9% for faculty and 41.1% to 57.4% for staff).³³
- On-campus childcare has been shrinking and has continued limited availability for faculty. Since the COVID pandemic in 2020-2021, on-campus childcare providers have limited their enrollment to 3–5-year-olds. There are no on-campus options for infant care, for faculty, staff, or students.

Advancement

- Women are in the minority at every faculty rank at WSU, but the gender gap is steep at the rank of Full Professor.³⁴ In 2022, the gender breakdown for Assistant Professors was 42% women, 58% men. That same year, 48.2% of Associate Professors were women and 52% were men. But when we examined the gender gap for Full Professors, we see a clear disparity: 27.5% of Full Professors were women in comparison to 72.5% men. Moreover, these statistics do not account for the loss of faculty prior to submitting their tenure dossier.
- According to the Provost's Daycare Implementation Committee Child Care Survey (2020), when asked if they had more access to childcare, 48.6% of faculty and staff said they would work more hours at their job; 40.7% would seek a promotion.

Recommendations from NSF WSU-GEARS

Based on analysis of data collected and the extant scholarly literature, we identify these priorities:

1. Modified duties/paid support for FMLA

The current modified duties policy is a critical leave policy for faculty when they have a qualifying event which includes caregiving of children (e.g., birth and adoption) but also other types of caregiving like eldercare or personal health circumstances, for example. We recommend the university:

- Revise the modified duties policy so all faculty members, regardless of teaching load, have full relief from their teaching responsibilities during the semester of leave. This removes the unequal burden placed on some parents because of disciplinary norms on number of courses taught.
- Eliminate the requirement that a reduced workload may require adjusted compensation (up to \$3000) and/or in-load teaching or some other assignments. This places undue financial hardship at the exact moment that families are already feeling financial constraints. In addition, the potential overload teaching in a future semester will jeopardize research productivity, likely impacting the ability to stay on track for promotion/tenure.
- Provide funds for remaining balance of FMLA “unpaid” leave time up to 12 weeks.

Changes to modified duties would support a broader population of WSU faculty who ask for modified duties and/or FMLA in cases of their own illness/chronic health condition, or in the case of providing care for an elderly parent or ill family member. The constituency who would benefit from these changes is larger than the parent/caregiver population.

2. Opt-out rather than opt-in policies

- Consider making policies such as tenure clock extensions related to primary caregiving (and COVID-related tenure extensions) an “opt-out” rather than “opt-in” system to minimize bias and reduce the stigma around taking leave or a tenure clock extension.
- Although tenure clock stoppages may assist in faculty retention and advancement, there is a financial penalty. It delays the tenure/promotion pay increase. Some universities have addressed this by retroactively adjusting the salary of faculty members who have stopped their clock.

3. Childcare

- We strongly encourage the persistence of the childcare subsidy benefit; however, consideration for increasing the amount available for the program is warranted, given costs of childcare. In addition, an expansion to include after-school care for older children may help to buffer financial burden for many faculty families.
- Improve affordable and accessible childcare, based on need. We suggest a follow-up from the 2020 childcare survey not only to WAU membership but broadly across campus to reassess the current childcare needs of the WSU community.
- Provide a coordinated effort to gather and distribute caregiving information in Southeast Michigan, including a list of current daycare providers, the age range for care (many places do not provide care prior to 18 months), and costs associated with the care.

4. Dual-career partner hiring

- Create a formalized written process for dual-career partner hires. Communicate this widely across campus and provide training for leaders who are in roles that hire faculty. This removes the additional burden and stress for potential new colleagues and sends a clear message that WSU is family-friendly and inclusive.

- ¹ Please note that the NSF WSU-GEARS grant is focused on full-time faculty, particularly those in tenure-track or tenured positions. However, many of the outcomes discussed in this summary may be similar challenges that other members of the WAU may experience. Thus, suggestions based on evidence from various data collection efforts would likely be useful and impactful for all WAU members, regardless of position and employment contracts.
- ² The AAUP-AFT/Local 6075 faculty union adopted the abbreviated name of Wayne Academic Union (WAU) in summer 2023. We will refer to the union as the Wayne Academic Union/WAU throughout the report.
- ³ FANs faculty advisors are not a replacement for human resource staff who should be consulted for specific details and procedures on policies.
- ⁴ Rafnsdottir, G.L. & Heijstra, T.M. (2013). Balancing Work-family Life in Academia: The Power of Time. *Gender Work and Organization*, 20(3), 283-296.
- ⁵ Family responsibilities include tasks related to the home like parenting but also caregiving for those with adverse health conditions and eldercare. Other non-work responsibilities include one's personal life, culture, and leisure activities that may compete with the work domain demands.
- ⁶ Rafnsdottir and Heijstra, 2013; Shen, H., (2013). Mind the Gender Gap. *Nature*, 495(7439), 22-24.
- ⁷ Rafnsdottir and Heijstra, 2013; Shen, H., 2013; Ecklund, E.H. & Lincoln, A.E. (2011). Scientists Want More Children. *PLOS ONE*, 6(8), e22590.
- ⁸ Spoon, K., LaBerge, N., Wapman, K.H., Zhang, S., Morgan, A.C., Galesic, M., Fosdick, B.K., Larremore, D.B., & Clauset, A. (2023). Gender and retention patterns among U.S. faculty. *Sciences Advances*, 9, eadi2205.
- ⁹ Morgan, A.C., Way, S.F., Hoefler, M.J.D., Larremore, D.B., Galesic, M., & Clauset, A. (2021) The unequal impact of parenthood in academia. *Sciences Advances*, 7, eabd1996.
- ¹⁰ Remarks by Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen on Shortages in the Child Care System. (2021). U.S. Department of the Treasury. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0355>.
- ¹¹ Feeney, M.K. (2019). Family-Friendly Policies, Gender, and Work–Life Balance in the Public Sector. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 39, 3, 422-448.
- ¹² Ward, K., & Wolf-Wendel, L. E. (2012). *Academic motherhood: Managing work and family*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- ¹³ Kulp, A.M. (2016, p. 86), The Effects of Parenthood During Graduate School on PhD Recipients' Paths to the Professoriate: A Focus on Motherhood. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 81-95. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20211>.
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- ¹⁵ Skinner, M., Betancourt, N., & Wolff-Eisenberg, C. (2021). The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and caregivers in academia. Ithaca S+R. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.315147>.
- ¹⁶ Fulweiler, R. W., Davies, S. W., Biddle, J. F., Burgin, A. J., Cooperdock, E. H., Hanley, T. C., ... & Ziegler, M. (2021). Rebuild the Academy: Supporting academic mothers during COVID- 19 and beyond. *PLoS Biology*, 19(3), e3001100.
- ¹⁷ Staniscuaski, F., Kmetzsch, L., Soletti, R. C., Reichert, F., Zandonà, E., Ludwig, Z. M., ... & de Oliveira, L. (2021). Gender, race and parenthood impact academic productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic: from survey to action. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12.
- ¹⁸ Monahan, T., & Fisher, J.A. (2023). Partnering through it: Confronting the institutional challenges facing dual-career academic couples. *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*, 29, 3, 87-101.
- ¹⁹ Quinn, K. (2010). Tenure Clock Extension Policies: Who Uses Them and to What Effect? *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, 3(1), 185-209; Tower, L.E. and L.M. Dilks. (2015). Work/Life Satisfaction Policy in ADVANCE Universities: Assessing Levels of Flexibility. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 8(3), 157-174; Pribbenow, C.M., et al. (2010). The Tenure Process and Extending the Tenure Clock: The Experience of Faculty at One University. *Higher Education Policy*, 23(1), 17-38.

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- ²⁰ For a comparison of R-1 research universities' paid parental leave policies, see <https://laboredlab.com/faculty/>.
- ²¹ Gorton, A.J. & Grainger, T. (2023). Why two scientist-mums made a database of parental-leave policies. *Nature* (Career Column). <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02544-2>. August 10. See also, <https://sites.google.com/view/parental-leave-in-academia/data>
- ²² See for examples of partner hires: <https://www.umass.edu/diversity/partner-employment-program>; <https://oed.ecu.edu/eo-and-hiring-practices/https://oed.ecu.edu/eo-and-hiring-practices/>
- ²³ Adamowicz, E.M. (2017). *FEMS Microbiology Letters*, 364, 201; Antecol, H., Bedard, K. & Stearns., J (2018). Equal but Inequitable: Who Benefits from Gender-Neutral Tenure Clock Stopping Policies? *American Economic Review*. 108(9), 2420–2441.
- ²⁴ Culpepper, Dawn, and Sarah Kilmer. (2022). Faculty-Related COVID-19 Policies and Practices at Top-Ranked Higher Education Institutions in the United States. *ADVANCE Journal*, 3(2), 2643-7031. <https://doi.org/10.5399/osu/ADVJRN.3.2.2>; Gonzales, L. & Griffin, K.A. (2020). Supporting faculty during & after COVID–19: Don't let go of equity. ASPIRE Alliance. https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/103/2020/04/Supporting-Faculty-and-their-Careers-During-and-After-Covid_Final.pdf; O'Meara, K., Culpepper, D., Lennartz, C., & Braxton J. (2022). Leveraging nudges to improve the academic workplace: Challenges and possibilities. In L. Perna (Ed.) *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (Vol. 37, pp. 277-346). Springer.
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- ²⁶ Paid parental leave policies for faculty in America's research universities. LaborED. <https://laboredlab.com/faculty/>.
- ²⁷ Su, X. and Bozeman, B. (2016). Family Friendly Policies in STEM Departments: Awareness and Determinants. *Research in Higher Education*, 57, 990–1009; Gilbert, J.A., Stead, B.A., & Ivancevich, J.M. (1999). Diversity management: new organizational paradigm. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 21, 61–76; Su, X., Johnson, J., & Bozeman, B. (2014). Gender diversity strategy in academic departments: Exploring organizational determinants. *Higher Education*, 1–20.
- ²⁸ Su & Bozeman. 2016, p. 1004.
- ²⁹ Baseline WSU-GEARS faculty survey (n=327; response rate 18.4%) administered in March 2021; focus groups conducted Feb.-May 2022 (n=29 women faculty). For full report, see <https://s.wayne.edu/gears-advance/3843-2/>.
- ³⁰ A full-time workday is considered 7.5 hours. New faculty begin with 22 days or 165 hours of sick leave per year. Faculty accrue 22 days/165 hours of sick leave per year, and they max out after 5 years at 990 sick hours. This is the equivalent to 26 weeks of paid leave. Faculty who are 12- month employees have a vacation bank of 173 hours. There is no vacation bank for 9-month faculty.
- ³¹ Gerring, N. & Brumley, K. 2023. Women faculty report lack of support to address work/family/life strains: A WSU-GEARS mini brief.
- ³² Wells, K. (2023). Childcare in Michigan costs more than \$11,000 on average. Michigan Radio. June 14, 2023. <https://www.michiganradio.org/economy/2023-06-14/childcare-in-michigan-costs-more-than-11-000-on-average>. See link in news article for the 2023 Kids Count Data Book; <https://datacenter.aecf.org/>.
- ³³ Provost's Daycare Implementation Committee. Child Care Survey. October 30, 2020. See also, https://wayne.edu/childcare-resources/documents/2021_ccs_exec_summary_final_10aug21_72_.pdf
- ³⁴ Institutional Research and Data Analytics. Wayne State University. Dashboards: Faculty and Staff by Primary Position, 2022. <https://irda.wayne.edu/dashboard/faculty-staff>.

We welcome feedback and questions that you may have. Feel free to contact Krista Brumley, Principal Investigator, WSU-GEARS, Sociology, kbrumley@wayne.edu; Nicole Gerring, Project Coordinator, WSU-GEARS, gears@wayne.edu. [WSU-GEARS website](https://www.wayne.edu/gears).