

# Recommendations for Family Leave Policies and Practices for Faculty and Instructional Academic Staff

Prepared by the Family Policy Action Group  
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The Family Policy Action Group, in collaboration with EDIC, informally collected feedback from 25 different employees (mostly faculty and academic staff) about their experiences navigating family-related issues on campus. Based on their feedback and suggestions, we have compiled the following recommendations. Most of these recommendations come at no cost to the university and we strongly believe these changes would result in increased workplace joy.

## Recommendations for Clarification and Improvement

### 1. General Clarifications and Revisions in Policies and Handbooks:

- 1.1. Based on the 25 different experiences shared with EDIC, there were a wide range of accommodations (or lack of accommodations) that faculty and academic staff received. These included buy outs, load shifts, teaching 7 week classes and online classes, colleagues covering courses, etc. **Recommendation:** Administrative Handbook should include a list of potential accommodations to have a “menu” of ideas and options to discuss with faculty and academic staff. **Recommendation:** Chairs should be offered training in best practices related to family-friendly policies and inclusivity.
- 1.2. GEN 3.B.6 says “Faculty and academic staff may be granted up to a year probationary extension for the birth or adoption of a child.” but the Academic Staff portion of the handbook doesn’t mention this possibility; only the faculty portion of the handbook mentions pausing the tenure clock. How would academic staff request this probationary extension? **Recommendation:** Allow for academic staff to claim a year probationary extension for their teaching contracts and renewal/evaluation cycles.
- 1.3. There is a lot of ambiguity around the rights of instructional academic staff, including those with administrative responsibilities and dual-positions. **Recommendation:** Clarify that instructional academic staff have the equivalent options for FMLA and workload accommodations. Give examples of what this might look like in the Administrative Handbook.

- 1.4. Several colleagues took sick leave to cover time away for their first child, but then their sick leave was depleted when they had a second child. **Recommendation:** Explore options for banking leave (including the creation of a parental leave bank), borrowing against sick leave, or other creative ways to accommodate individuals. It is especially important for new parents to be able to conserve some sick leave for when they are actually sick, e.g. in the first years of parenthood.
- 1.5. UWO's family leave policy consistently references accommodations for the "birth or adoption of a child." While this language is intended to be inclusive, it does not include guardianship proceedings, foster care placements, elder care, and other legal hurdles faced by families outside of the heterosexual nuclear family model. **Recommendation:** Revise UWO's family leave and tenure pause policies to be inclusive of all legal and familial milestones and hurdles.
- 1.6. How does income continuation insurance apply to faculty and instructional academic staff? **Recommendation:** Include information about income continuation insurance on the HR Parent's Resource page.
- 1.7. Is there a possibility for reduction of contract for a short time period (a semester? A year?) How would this work for faculty and academic staff?  
**Recommendation:** Allow for maximum flexibility for a limited basis (a year) to reduce workload for faculty and academic staff. 50%-75% workload (with corresponding reduction in pay) could be integrated as options for family accommodations, without owing classes in future semesters.

## 2. Faculty Issues Pertaining to Negotiating Leave and Tenure Pause

- 2.1. Several colleagues noted the inconsistency of accommodations from Chairs of different departments. It is imperative that the experience of people requesting family leave, accommodations, and tenure pause be treated equally.  
**Recommendation:** Clarify the system for reporting bias and unfair treatment with regard to requesting leave and accommodations. Establish a protocol for timely resolution of disputes related to family leave, tenure pause, and accommodations.
- 2.2. Tenure Clock pause policy states it pauses everything, but faculty are still being asked to file their curriculum modification paperwork according to their pre-existing schedule. Similarly, some departmental colleagues are still talking about faculty having had an "extra" year to have accomplished work and sometimes unconsciously holding them to a higher standard for tenure.  
**Recommendation:** Update the Administrative Handbook to clarify how Chairs

should respond to tenure clock pauses, including guidelines for Department Chairs and Chairs of Tenure and Renewal Committees about how to comply with the Tenure Pause policy.

- 2.3. When someone pauses their tenure clock, how does this affect the accomplishments that might still occur when they are on leave? For example, a faculty member who pauses their clock, but whose article that they submitted a year ago is accepted with minimal revisions when they are on leave, does that article “count” for tenure? In many cases (like grants or research supervision), faculty cannot completely take leave from university obligations.

**Recommendation:** Tenure Clock pause policy should clarify that while the year that is paused cannot count *against* the faculty member, there may be instances where accomplishments that happen during the paused year would still count towards tenure.

- 2.4. UWO currently has a Faculty Ombudsman, but like many people on campus, this person is not trained or well-versed in family leave policies and practices.

**Recommendation:** Since family leave and tenure-clock pauses are some of the most important and potentially difficult negotiations that new faculty will face, the Faculty Ombudsman needs to be proficient in family leave policies and issues. Some universities (e.g. Montana State University) have an ombudsman officially designated and trained in family leave issues.

- 2.5. How to determine Faculty workload in relation to FMLA and claiming sick leave?

GEN 3.2.B. states, “(10) For the purposes of collecting and reporting sick leave, each full-time unclassified employee will designate a work week consisting of 40 hours as required by 40.05(4)(bp)3.a., Wis. Stats. The work week will be pro-rated for a less than full-time appointment. The work week will include all scheduled classes, office hours and research, as well as other regular University meetings and professional activities. a) For purposes of this section, a normal work week is deemed to consist of 40 hours worked within a fixed and regularly recurring period of seven consecutive days. Hours worked per day may vary. b) The work week will be defined either by: automatic consent to the standard business week Monday through Friday for 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; *or by mutual agreement, in writing, with the department chair or other designated supervisor.*”

What does the “work week” look like for faculty who may not be teaching, but are doing research or service? What is the “work week” look like over interims, etc.?

**Recommendation:** Clarify these policies in ways that allow for maximum flexibility.

- 2.6. One consistent message when collecting experiences was that faculty and instructional academic staff wished they had taken more time off after birth. Many colleagues felt that they couldn’t or shouldn’t take leave; many of them reported that their mental and physical health suffered as a result of returning to work so quickly. Some of them reported putting their baby in daycare well before they felt they were ready and the child’s health and well-being suffered for it.

**Recommendation:** Seriously consider making family leave and tenure pause an *opt-out* rather than *opt-in* policy. Similarly, consider revising the “tenure pause” language and replacing it with the “extending the tenure clock.” This would potentially reduce stigma and pressure and allow for needed time to recover and bond with children.

### 3. Areas for Improvement in Human Resources:

- 3.1. Multiple colleagues expressed frustration with being told by HR some version of “Just call when you get out of the hospital and we’ll figure it out.” Several colleagues requested more reliable and precise information about the exact amount of paid and unpaid leave, how exactly the paychecks would continue and operate, etc. Several colleagues noted that this process was stressful, time-consuming, and unclear. Susan has met with HR about creating a website that would be a one-stop shop for information about policies and practices related to family leave, and while they were receptive to this suggestion, the website has not yet been created. **Recommendation:** Enact the previously agreed upon Parent’s Resource page (see attached memo from previous meetings with Human Resources).
- 3.2. At least 3 colleagues mentioned being told by Human Resources staff, either directly or somewhat indirectly, that faculty often gave birth in the summer and that this was the easiest way to avoid complications with regard to FMLA, family leave, sick leave, etc. **Recommendation:** Although I’m sure this is unintentional, HR staff must refrain from commenting about the summer timing of faculty births. The feedback from colleagues clearly indicate that these comments contributed to needless anxiety for them and that some felt that if they didn’t give birth at the ‘right’ time, that they would not be accommodated.

### 4. Looking Forward

- 4.1. Uniformly, almost all of the colleagues who gave feedback noted the inadequacy of the UW System’s approach to family leave benefits. Sick Leave is not the appropriate mechanism for family leave. **Recommendation:** Advocate to UW System administration for paid family leave. Additionally, advocate for changes in UWS health insurance coverage for fertility-related health care, which is currently not covered at all. These are critical issues that could improve quality of life.

Amid the ongoing budget crisis, this may be a hard sell, but we believe this issue could pay dividends way beyond its expense by increasing our competitiveness in terms of recruitment and retention. There is a vast body of research that supports this claim; here are some quick links: <http://worklifelaw.org/publications/business-case-for-reduced-hours/>

And also <http://worklifelaw.org/frd/more-on-frd/for-employers/>

EDIC would love to be involved in gathering and preparing research more formally to make this case. In an era where more men and women are striving for “work-life balance” in academe, UW Oshkosh could market its family-friendliness as part of the broader pitch of working and living in Oshkosh, WI, which was recently named #7 on a list of the Top Ten Cities for Working Parents.

## **What can EDIC do to help?**

### **Relevant Policies for Reference**

#### **COLS Administrative Handbook:**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/cols/info-for-faculty/administrative-handbook>

#### **Faculty-Academic Staff Handbook:**

GEN 3.B.2, Sick Leave

<https://www.uwosh.edu/provost/Main%20Highlight/handbooks/online-faculty-staff-handbook/general-personnel-materials-faculty-and-academic-staff/gen-3-employment-considerations/benefits/gen-3-b-2-sick-leave>

GEN 3.B.6, Family Leave

<https://www.uwosh.edu/provost/Main%20Highlight/handbooks/online-faculty-staff-handbook/general-personnel-materials-faculty-and-academic-staff/gen-3-employment-considerations/benefits/gen-3-b-6-family-leave>

FAC 3.2.B, Stopping or Suspending Tenure Clock

<https://www.uwosh.edu/provost/Main%20Highlight/handbooks/online-faculty-staff-handbook/faculty/faculty-chapter-three/faculty-appointment/fac-3-2-b-stopping-or-suspending-the-tenure-clock>

Academic Staff portion of handbook

<https://www.uwosh.edu/provost/Main%20Highlight/handbooks/online-faculty-staff-handbook/academic-staff>