



HUMPHREY INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

What: Parent leave policies vary greatly across planning programs

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Families and the academy: parent leave policies vary greatly across planning programs

Minneapolis, MN (12/07/10)—In addition to teaching courses on sustainability planning and conducting research on how to improve environmental decision-making, Assistant Professor Carissa Schively Slotterback of the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs is the mother of a two-year-old daughter. Based partly on her own experience, as well as the horror stories she heard for older colleagues, Schively Slotterback decided to investigate parental leave, tenure clock stoppage, and flexible work policies at planning schools across the country.

With financial support from the Association of Collegiate School of Planning, Schively Slotterback conducted two surveys—one of planning faculty and one of chairs of planning programs—in late 2009 and early 2010. The web-based survey achieved a 23% response rate, with good representation across demographic categories (gender, faculty rank, etc.).

Schively Slotterback's first finding was that things are a lot better than they used to be. "I've heard informally senior faculty say things like, 'it's so much better now than when I had my kids—there were no policies then,'" she recounts.

The findings support this recollection. More than 50% of respondents reported having access to paid parental leave, more than 70% had access to clock stoppage, and just under 50% reported access to flexible work hours.

But, just because the policies exist, doesn't mean that they are working. One of the most compelling findings in the study, says Schively Slotterback, is that, depending on the specific policy, 20 to 40% of respondents didn't know what was available to them at their institution.

Schively Slotterback found variation in perceptions of adequacy of policies across groups of faculty. While most agree that policies are insufficient to meet the needs of faculty members with children, male faculty and tenured professors take a slightly more positive view of available options do than tenure-track and female faculty members. Few faculty members of any rank or gender had much knowledge of birth and adoption policies.

This points to the second set of key findings: first, the lack of written birth/adoption policies; second, lack of guidelines for implementation; and third, lack of access to information about policies in some institutions and departments, leading to the need for negotiation.

“When policies are lacking, administrators have significant discretion in implementing policies, such as determining the length and conditions of a parental leave,” says Schively Slotterback. “This situation creates significant uncertainty for faculty members, as well as the possibility for unequal treatment. For tenure-track faculty members, often new to institutions and unaware of the likely reactions of their colleagues to clock stoppage or an extended leave, an upcoming birth or adoption can create significant anxiety and even disadvantage.

“For faculty in urban planning and other fields, documenting individual experiences and policies and raising awareness through studies like this can help bring the issue to the forefront of discussions at faculty meetings, as well as among administrators at all institutional levels,” Shively Slotterback says

To read the entire report, visit http://www.acsp.org/sites/default/files/FacultyBirthandAdoptionPoliciesReport_Final_5%2028%2010.pdf.

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