

[Welcome to Column 7 of Hey Jane! This is a project of the SWS Career Development Committee. Questions and answers are generated by the committee and SWS members. Answers are compiled from several anonymous sources. All columns are archived on our committee's page on the SWS website.]

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HEY JANE!

How do you negotiate family/pregnancy leave when there is no firm written policy? When do you tell people you are pregnant/going on family leave?

PART I: The view from expectant parents...

JANE SAYS:

** What is the policy on your campus? **

Unfortunately, there is rarely a set policy and much of the dealing is negotiated directly between you and your chair, dean, or whichever administrator handles these things at your campus. Before you go in to these negotiations:

1. Find out what arrangements others have made before you. On campuses where there is no set policy, there are likely to have been as many different arrangements as there were requests for them. You should have an idea of what has been done before but do not be afraid to ask for what you need and to negotiate.
2. Find out from folks whether the arrangement they made worked out for them or if they would do it differently next time and why. Use this information in your negotiations.
3. If you have a union, be sure to talk to your chapter president. Also check out the AAUP or other higher ed organizations' recommendations on family leave practices, best practices at other institutions, etc.
4. Check your faculty handbook.

** Who do I talk to? **

Whether you begin with your department chair, dean, or provost/VPAA will depend on your institution. You may have a very supportive provost, but a not so supportive chair or vice versa. Ask others who have gone through this before you who they spoke with, who was most supportive, who was most helpful, etc. Wherever you decide to start, begin by meeting to

discuss and explore your possible options (rather than jumping right in with a specific request). The administrator may suggest an arrangement you had not thought of.

**** What are my options? What can I ask for? ****

There are many ways to accommodate a faculty member in this situation. More on this with many examples in next month's column...

**** When do I tell people at work that I am pregnant? ****

The more lead time you can give the better, especially if it means changing your teaching schedule. But, you may not want to share news of a pregnancy until the second trimester or of an impending adoption unless the schedule is relatively set. But at the same time, your chair needs to find someone to take over your course load and other duties, if necessary. At some institutions, it is much harder to find adjuncts or others to fill in for your classes. Often, people tell their chairs sooner so they can make arrangements and tell the rest of their department later, in the second trimester.

**** What about grants? Can I take time off from my research grant? ****

When you are funded through a grant, you can ask for an extension on the grant, and you can justify it through a non-paid maternity leave. If you are in a research position, knowing this ahead of time can make it easier to negotiate time off with your PI. The PI's first concern is how the work on the grant is going to get done on time.

For those on grants:

1. Contact the granting agency to see if they would consider a split-appointment for the purposes of a maternity leave. Some funding agencies allow you to reduce your hours and use some of the savings to hire hourly consultants to do things like data entry and recruitment. This allowed one SWSer to still oversee her project and be a Project Director without the 100% time commitment.
2. If your position is IFR'd (income fund reimbursed) through the school (the grant essentially pays the school for your position) you need to consider how this will affect your salary and the budget of your department. If you have further questions on this, e-mail Hey Jane and she can put you in touch with an experienced SWSer.
3. Are you working on a grant solo, or are there any colleagues or grad students assisting you? Are there any timeline-pertinent things that you HAVE to have done while on maternity leave? What can you delegate out?
4. Have recommendations for people to fill in a temporary position if you absolutely cannot have a stop in the grant. One SWSer recommended her grad student (who was at 50% time) to have a raise and an increase in hours to full time while she was on leave. This benefited both the

student and the researcher. The money that usually went to pay the researcher went to the graduate student instead for this short time, and the university maintained the researcher's benefits, etc.

Don't be too discouraged! Some colleges and universities can be really lovely about the whole thing. One SWSer reports being sent flowers when the baby came! At the same time, be savvy and smart about the issue, knowing that the only parental leave employers are legally required to provide is the unpaid weeks on the Family and Medical Leave Act.

CAVEAT to all professional advice: Always check with your departmental colleagues, chair, dean, etc. to find out what the norms and expectations are in your institution.

I hope this helps! Stay tuned next month for Part II, the view from administration!

-- Jane