

[Welcome to Column 8 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!

PART II: The view from administration...

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

JANE SAYS:

\*\*One important note is that many of these arrangements can be used if an individual has other medical needs, such as dialysis or radiation.\*\*

Last month we talked about the perspective of the new parent. This month, we will think about the issue from the perspective of administrators. The difficult thing with maternity leave, in the words of one SWSer in administration, "is that babies don't come at predictable times and with predictable needs, but semesters (from an administrator's) perspective, MUST be predictable." For example, it is hard, especially in small departments, to get someone to fill in for a month or so when someone leaves for parental leave.

The key is that each individual case is highly individual depending on their accrued sick leave, the resources the individual brings to the negotiations, and the regular duties of the individual.

\*Leave laws\*

Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is a federal law that requires employers of 50+ employees (that should certainly cover universities and colleges!) to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for your own or a family member's medical needs. Childbirth and caring for children are covered in this. Check out: <http://www.dol.gov/esa/whd/fmla/> and be sure your rights are respected.

Many campuses have written policies that reference FMLA, but no other formal policy.

Some campuses have additional policies, such as the ability to use a certain number of weeks of accrued sick leave for birth and/or to care for a new baby. Sick leave is paid leave, unlike the unpaid FMLA leave. However, these weeks are often limited. Even if a new parent has 12 weeks of leave built up, she might only be able to take 8.

One SWSer says: “Human resources explained that maternity fell under medical disability (which I later learned was a way of making sure only women could get parental leave). It covered six weeks and the dean could at his discretion grant four more weeks to cover our ten week term.”

Keep in mind that weeks of leave are full 5 day weeks. It does not matter if you are on a T/Th teaching schedule.

No matter what the policies are, talking with your dean to arrange strategies is your best bet. One SWSer in administration says, “as long as the faculty member, the chair, and I are happy, we’re able to make things work out.”

Talk to others who have taken family leave and find out when they told people and what deals have been struck. You can use this as leverage in your conversation with your chair and/or dean. Work with your chair and dean to satisfy everyone’s needs. One SWSer in administration says, “I always appreciate it when faculty members come to me with some ideas about what they would like to do, if possible.”

**\*Ideas for strategies\***

-- faculty members can be given administrative duties (e.g., write a self-study for program review) or research time that can be done at home in lieu of teaching courses

-- teach your course for a longer block of time during the day than normal, so the course can finish sooner than the 15-week semester in time for your due date (e.g., a late March due date).

-- ask for a course release to develop a new course or an on-line course, which can be done from home.

-- team-teach where the pregnant partner takes more responsibility for the portions of the course that come before the due date, and the other partner finishes up the course.

-- shift your course load to other semesters

-- Some employers will let you take a partial leave, where you can use up accumulated sick leave and/or FMLA leave for a percentage of your appointment and work the other percentage (e.g., use sick leave for teaching duties, and keep working administrative and research duties that can be done primarily from home).

**\*What if I give birth earlier than planned?\***

You cannot perfectly plan the timing of a birth. If you need to leave your job suddenly, it is unfortunate for your students, but can be dealt with. Sometimes adjuncts or another faculty member can pick up your courses. In one instance, reports an SWSer in administration, a married couple was working in the same department so after the birth, her husband taught all of her classes as a volunteer. This way, they did not lose their paychecks or their health benefits.

\* When do you tell people you are pregnant/going on family leave?

You must give your chair and dean sufficient notice, regardless of how they will react. Keep their needs and perspectives in mind, too. They need to get courses taught, students advised, and programs administered.

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! Hey Jane will be on a summer hiatus, but will return in September. Have a good summer!

-- Jane