

Supporting Families at Institutions of Higher Learning: Recommendations for Faculty and Administrators

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1. Statement of Purpose

The Work and Family Interest Group of the Society for Music Theory (SMT WorkFam) provides resources and support to SMT members who seek to balance work and family obligations. Family and personal obligations can present special challenges to scholars at any point in their academic careers. We believe that such situations can be dealt with creatively and proactively, balancing the needs of both the institution and the individual. Because of the relative flexibility of schedules and other specific characteristics of academic life, there is great potential for achieving healthy work-family integration.

This document seeks to facilitate conversation and negotiation between administrators (Deans, Chairs or Provost) and faculty who need accommodation at work due to family and personal issues. It defines the idea of “family,” summarizes known best practices, and collates information on existing accommodations at various four-year institutions of higher learning, both public and private. We encourage SMT members to share this information with their administrators, and to work with them to come up with constructive responses and accommodations that allow scholars in music theory to achieve both professional and personal goals.

2. Definition of “Family”

A family is a lasting social unit, consisting of persons who are mutually dependent upon one another. This dependence is primarily financial, but also includes other forms of support that are necessary for leading healthy and fulfilling lives. Family members are often related by blood, but are not necessarily so, particularly with regards to spouses, long-term partners, and adopted or foster relatives. The validity of a family does not

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hinge on its legal status or the conventionality of its composition, but rather, its members' commitment to long-term and consistent mutual support.

Recommendations:

- **Needs awareness** - Administrators play a crucial role in raising institutional and community awareness of faculty needs. Administrators should seek opportunities to share their input with the institution and lead initiatives that address faculty members' needs with balancing work and family responsibilities.
- **Family recognition** - Administrators should support institutional implementation of policies that both recognize blended families and include domestic partners regardless of gender, dependents regardless of legal status and age, and other household members who live in a family group.

3. Supporting Planned Family Situations

[a. Pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care](#)

[b. Adoption and foster care](#)

[c. Childcare](#)

[d. Care of family members with disability or long-term health conditions](#)

a) Pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care

Pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care involve many uncertainties. These include physical condition of the mother and baby, timing of labor, recovery needs of both mother and newborn, feeding mode, and modifications of family life to respond to the needs of the child, all of which pose challenges to the parents' work routine. Women's needs and general health status during pregnancy are unpredictable, can vary tremendously from one woman to another, and for a single individual, from one pregnancy to another. Some of the typical symptoms associated with pregnancy (e.g., "morning" sickness, which can occur at any time of the day and last up to the entire duration of pregnancy) can have a detrimental effect on a faculty member's productivity and ability to be involved in institutional life.

The best policies and practices will make allowances for such unavoidable uncertainties. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) provides more detailed recommendations on accommodations pertaining to these situations in its [Statement of Principles on Family Responsibilities and Academic Work](#) (updated 2001). Canadians can start by consulting the [Maternity and Parental Benefits](#) through Employment Insurance.

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Recommendations:

- **Parental leave** - Both parents should be entitled to parental leave upon the birth of a child. Parental leave should be fully or partially paid, and its implementation should be flexible, allowing leave time to be shared between parents as needed.
- **Flexible schedule** - Expectant and new mothers should be allowed to request teaching, research, and administrative schedules that fit their physical and medical needs during pregnancy, recovery, and early child-rearing. Their life-partners should be able allowed to make similar requests so as to appropriately support them.
- **Stoppage of tenure clock** - Both parents should have the option of requesting temporary stoppage of the tenure clock commensurate with the individual's physical and medical needs as well as family obligations. In particular, administrators should recognize the challenges associated with physical and emotional recovery after childbirth and the continuing demands of feeding a newborn.
- **Working off-campus** - Technology and the Internet support many channels of communication and distance learning. Institutions with sufficient technological resources should allow faculty to propose means to fulfill their work obligations (especially teaching and administrative tasks) via telecommunication or online channels. If there is insufficient existing technological resources, administrators should work with faculty to negotiate for a mutually acceptable compromise.
- **Part-time work** - Administrators should seek institutional support for implementing measures that allow one or both parents to work part-time while maintaining their seniority, or adjusting the tenure clock to include a period of part-time work.

b) Adoption and foster care

Families may choose to have children through non-traditional means, of which two examples are adoption and foster care. In such cases, administrators should advocate for parents to have the same rights and privileges as those who have children through traditional means. The best workplace policies and practices empower and allow faculty to make such choices.

Recommendations:

- **Parental leave** - Both parents should be entitled to parental leave upon the arrival of a new adopted or foster child. Parental leave should be fully or partially paid, and its implementation should be flexible, allowing leave time to be shared between parents as needed.
- **Flexible schedule** - Families require time to adjust to a new child. During the

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initial period of adoption or foster care, both parents should be allowed to request teaching, research, and administrative schedules that fit their medical and logistical needs.

- **Stoppage of tenure clock** - Both parents should have the option of requesting temporary stoppage of the tenure clock commensurate with the individual's medical and logistical needs as well as family obligations.
- **Working off-campus** - Technology and the Internet support many channels of communication and distance learning. Institutions with sufficient technological resources should allow faculty to propose means to fulfill their work obligations (especially teaching and administrative tasks) via telecommunication or online channels. If there is insufficient existing technological resources, administrators should work with faculty to negotiate for a mutually acceptable compromise.
- **Part-time work** - Administrators should seek institutional support for implementing measures that allow one or both parents to work part-time while maintaining their seniority, or adjusting the tenure clock to include a period of part-time work.

c) Childcare

Working parents require routine and emergency childcare. Childcare can be provided by individuals, daycare centers, and public or private schools. The best policies and practices support parental choice in affordable childcare, allow for disruptions in childcare availability due to holidays, illness, or other circumstances, and make childcare options both available and affordable.

Recommendations:

- **On-campus routine childcare** - Sufficient resources should be available to accommodate demand and provide for children with special needs. Subsidized rates should be available for those who qualify.
- **On-campus emergency childcare** - Institutions and administrators should provide resources to find and arrange for emergency childcare. Administrators should also foster a culture where faculty support each other by covering one others' classes in case of emergency.
- **Financial support** - Various forms of financial support can be extremely helpful to faculty members with young dependents. Administrators should explore different options within the institution, including the creation of a fund for emergency childcare and childcare costs while attending professional events.
- **Alternative options** - If on-campus childcare is not available, administrators should seek financial support towards appropriate off-campus childcare for those who qualify. Efforts should also be made to provide information about community

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resources.

d) Care of family members with disability or health conditions

Given our broad and inclusive definition of “family” above, typical family situations that would impact work-life can range beyond pregnancy, childbirth, new-child care and childcare. Other family members, such as spouses, life-partners, and adult dependents may have or develop disabilities or health conditions, particularly as they age.

Recommendations:

- **Flexible schedule** - Families require time to accommodate emerging and existing health conditions of a family member. Administrators should work with faculty to adapt teaching, research, and administrative schedules to fit the faculty’s logistical needs.
- **Working off-campus** - Technology and the Internet support many channels of communication and distance learning. Institutions with sufficient technological resources should allow faculty to propose means to fulfill their work obligations (especially teaching and administrative tasks) via telecommunication or online channels. If there is insufficient existing technological resources, administrators should work with faculty to negotiate for a mutually acceptable compromise.
- **Part-time work** - If a flexible schedule or working off-campus are not possible, administrators should seek institutional support for implementing measures that allow the family member to work part-time while maintaining their seniority, or adjusting the tenure clock to include a period of part-time work.
- **Financial support** - Various forms of financial support can be extremely helpful to faculty members who are responsible for caring for family members with disability or health conditions. Administrators should explore different options within the institution, including the creation of a fund for respite care costs while attending professional events.

4. Supporting Unplanned Family Situations and Emergencies

[b. Pregnancy and childbirth complications](#)

[b. Care of family members with unexpected and acute health conditions](#)

[c. Familial trauma](#)

a) Pregnancy and childbirth complications

Pregnancy is sometimes complicated by serious and unexpected medical problems, which may require additional medical care and reduction of activities. In some cases,

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the newborn child may require an extended stay in the hospital and several medical interventions, which are likely to extend the recovery period significantly. Expectant mothers who are experiencing pregnancy and childbirth complications are also likely to need extra support from life-partners both during the pregnancy and recovery period. Such situations put additional strain on the new parents and may jeopardize the ability of a faculty member to fulfill work responsibilities both while the situation is on-going and in the recovery period. This is particularly difficult for junior faculty members who are working toward promotion or are facing a near-term tenure decision. Furthermore, the faculty member can continue to experience difficulties for an extended period of time after the acute phase of the situation has passed, which can further jeopardize their ability to be productive members of the university community.

Recommendations:

- **Standby resources** - Institutions and departments should maintain standby or back-up faculty and technological resources to facilitate adjustments of teaching load, teaching schedule and/or mode of pedagogy (in-person, online or mixed) in response to emergent medical conditions related to pregnancy and childbirth.
- **Flexible schedule** - New parents of any gender should be allowed to request teaching, research, and administrative schedules that fit their increased physical and medical needs during pregnancy, recovery, and early child-rearing.
- **Working off-campus** - Technology and the Internet support many channels of communication and distance learning. Institutions with sufficient technological resources should allow faculty to propose means to fulfill their work obligations (especially teaching and administrative tasks) via telecommunication or online channels. If there is insufficient existing technological resources, administrators should work with faculty to negotiate for a mutually acceptable compromise.
- **Parental leave** - Administrators should consider requests to extend parental leave for both parents in response to emergent medical problems during pregnancy and childbirth. Parental leave should be fully or partially paid, and its implementation should be flexible.
- **Stoppage of tenure clock** - Administrators should seek institutional support and work toward implementing procedures that allow committee evaluation of requests of tenure clock stoppages in response to emergent medical problems and extended recovery period of both parents and child.
- **Part-time work** - If a flexible schedule or working off-campus are not possible, administrators should seek institutional support for implementing measures that allow one or both parents to work part-time while maintaining their seniority, or adjusting the tenure clock to include a period of part-time work.

- **Financial support** - Administrators should explore different options within the institution for additional financial support to defray the increased medical and respite care costs of the faculty member.
- **Other forms of support** - Administrators should make efforts to stay informed of the situation and the faculty member's needs, and provide the faculty member with information on available resources within the institution and in the community, including financial support, mentoring, and counselling.

b) Care of family members with unexpected health conditions

Accidents and unexpected health problems could strike any member of the family at any time, creating the need for sudden adjustments of work schedule and responsibilities. These events may also have long-term consequences on a faculty member's family responsibilities and needs of support.

Recommendations:

- **Standby resources** - Institutions and departments should maintain standby or back-up faculty and technological resources to facilitate adjustments of teaching load, teaching schedule and/or mode of pedagogy (in-person, online or mixed) in response to unexpected health conditions among family.
- **Flexible schedule** - Faculty should be allowed to request teaching, research, and administrative schedule adjustments in response to unexpected health conditions among family.
- **Working off-campus** - Technology and the Internet support many channels of communication and distance learning. Institutions with sufficient technological resources should allow faculty to propose means to fulfill their work obligations (especially teaching and administrative tasks) via telecommunication or online channels. If there is insufficient existing technological resources, administrators should work with faculty to negotiate for a mutually acceptable compromise.
- **Leave** - Administrators should consider requests for leave in response to unexpected health conditions among family that demand in-person care by faculty. Such leave should be fully or partially paid, and its implementation should be flexible.
- **Stoppage of tenure clock** - Administrators should seek institutional support and work toward implementing procedures that allow committee evaluation of requests of tenure clock stoppages in response to unexpected health conditions of a family member.
- **Part-time work** - If a flexible schedule or working off-campus are not possible, administrators should seek institutional support for implementing measures that allow faculty to work part-time while maintaining their seniority, or adjusting the

tenure clock to include a period of part-time work.

- **Financial support** - Administrators should explore different options within the institution for additional financial support to defray medical and respite care costs that are incurred due to unexpected health conditions among family.
- **Other forms of support** - Administrators should make efforts to stay informed of the situation and the faculty member's needs, and provide the faculty member with information on available resources within the institution and in the community, including financial support, mentoring, and counselling.

c) **Familial trauma**

Familial trauma comes in various forms. It can arise from unexpected events as well as changes in familial relationships. Changes to the family unit can include new marital status and the death of a spouse or family member, both of which can destabilize the family unit and greatly impact other aspects of a faculty member's life. The faculty member may also need to provide extra support to another family member who has experienced a traumatic event. Familial trauma may cause the faculty member to seek out new living and childcare arrangements and will likely need support through the on-going grieving process. All of these changes may negatively impact work responsibilities and require sensitivity on the part of administrators.

Recommendations:

- **Standby resources** - Institutions and departments should maintain standby or back-up faculty and technological resources to facilitate adjustments of teaching load, teaching schedule and/or mode of pedagogy (in-person, online or mixed) in response to familial trauma.
- **Flexible schedule** - Faculty should be allowed to request teaching, research, and administrative schedule adjustments as needed to help the faculty member deal with unexpected events and changes in the family unit.
- **Working off-campus** - Technology and the Internet support many channels of communication and distance learning. Institutions with sufficient technological resources should allow faculty to propose means to fulfill their work obligations (especially teaching and administrative tasks) via telecommunication or online channels. If there is insufficient existing technological resources, administrators should work with faculty to negotiate for a mutually acceptable compromise.
- **Leave** - Administrators should consider requests to extend leave in response to familial trauma. Such leave should be fully or partially paid, and its implementation should be flexible.
- **Stoppage of tenure clock** - Administrators should seek institutional support and work toward implementing procedures that allow committee evaluation of

requests of tenure clock stoppages in response to familial trauma.

- **Part-time work** - If a flexible schedule or working off-campus are not possible, administrators should seek institutional support for implementing measures that allow faculty to work part-time while maintaining their seniority, or adjusting the tenure clock to include a period of part-time work.
- **Other forms of support** - Administrators should make efforts to stay informed of the situation and the faculty member's needs, and provide the faculty member with information on available resources within the institution and in the community, including financial support, mentoring, and counselling.

5. Other Online Resources

- The AAUP's website on "[Balancing Family and Academic Work](#)" (especially its Resources [webpage](#))
- Drago Robert and Kelly Davis. 2009. "[Parental Leave and Modified Duties Policies across the Big Ten](#)" report.
- "[Deans and Chairs Toolkit](#)" from UC Faculty Family Friendly Edge [website](#).

Task Force Members:

Dr. Clare Eng, Belmont University, Work and Family Interest Group, Chair

Dr. Robin Attas, Elon University

Dr. Sara Bakker, Indiana University

Dr. Gavin Lee, Duke University

Dr. Ève Poudrier, Yale University

Dr. Steven Rings, University of Chicago

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