

Shepherd University Family Leave Proposal

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Shepherd University has professed the importance of supporting its faculty to achieve and maintain work-life balance. Indeed, smaller universities like Shepherd are attractive places of employment particularly because they are perceived to better support faculty to bridge the often-conflicting demands of family and work. However, Shepherd has not yet adopted an official policy for family leave, which we see as an egregious oversight.

In what follows, we, the Women's Studies Committee, propose a university-wide family leave policy and outline its provisions. This proposal is in keeping with local, WV universities and COPLAC institutions' policies, which were consulted during the drafting of this proposal. To remain competitive and fair in the marketplace, we must adopt a family leave policy; to value the collegiality of our campus community, we must ensure its successful implementation and execution.

The aim of this proposal is to provide full-time faculty (tenure and tenure-track faculty on 9- and 12- month contracts who do not accrue other forms of leave) guaranteed family leave with full pay and full benefits. We propose that these faculty be released from teaching and other responsibilities following three family acts:

- Birth of a child
- Guardianship of a child
- Adoption of a child

Like Shepherd, we promote an inclusive understanding of parenting and the affiliated duties; we therefore purposefully avoid gendered language of "first" or "primary" parent and "second" parent. Both male and female employees should be able to request and be granted family leave. We recognize the diversity of family structures and are committed to inclusive policies that do not discriminate.

The release from a faculty member's traditional teaching duties should extend for the semester in which the birth/guardianship/adoption occurs. If the birth/guardianship/adoption occurs near the end of one semester, faculty may be released from the following semester's duties; if it occurs mid-semester, faculty will consult with their department chair and dean to determine when to best assume leave, taking into account the faculty member's anticipated needs. It is expected that regardless of timing, faculty will be granted and will take the equivalent of a full semester of release. For situations regarding extended release time beyond the semester timeframe (ie. associated medical emergencies of parent and/or child, etc.), faculty will consult with their department chair and dean to establish arrangements that adhere to the equanimous spirit of this document.

Faculty should request leave as soon as possible for the birth/guardianship/adoption of a child. Department chairs of faculty on family leave are expected to address the teaching needs of their departments when faculty request leave. If the faculty member and the department chair and dean cannot reach a mutually satisfactory agreement regarding leave in consultation with this document, the advice and guidance of the Provost should be sought.

Family leave is expected to be utilized by applicable faculty, and a request for family leave will not result in a reduction of the faculty member's standing, salary or meritorious performance reports. Likewise, faculty will not be "punished" for taking leave with unfair service or teaching assignments before, during or after family leave is taken; nor will faculty be required to "make up" courses not taught during leave. Faculty will also not be penalized for impending or requested leave by being denied courses requested in the semester or summer sessions prior to such leave (ie. as in the case of a faculty member being denied a summer teaching opportunity for a birth to take place at the end of summer or the beginning of the fall term).

While taking leave should not impact an untenured, tenure-track faculty member's path toward tenure in any way, it may be the faculty member's choice to apply for an extension of the critical year, as described in West Virginia University Board of Governors Policy 51, Extension of the Tenure Clock. Such an application is not in any way connected to these family leave guidelines. Further useful information may be found in "Family Friendly Practices for Faculty Members," available at <http://provost.wvu.edu/r/download/35947>. Applying for an extension of the tenure clock should not be used punitively and should be a decision of the faculty member's made in collaboration with his/her department chair.

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