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Policy and Practice: Evaluating Workflows and Communication for Maternity Leave at the University of Dayton

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**Policy and Practice: Evaluating Workflows and Communication for Maternity Leave at the
University of Dayton**

Gender Equity Research Fellowship Report

2022

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ABSTRACT

Maternity leave experiences and policy workflows at the University of Dayton have not been formally reviewed since the creation of an all benefit-eligible employee paid maternity leave policy in 2017. This study examines the lived experience of faculty and staff who have taken maternity leave since the implementation of the policy and faculty, staff, and supervisor perceptions of the current leave policies and workflows. Interviews and surveys found a need for clearer documentation in policies, an expansion of parental leave for the non-birth parent, and supervisory support. The report concludes with recommendations based on this research for implementing updates to the parental leave policies and communication and training strategies.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The implementation of parental leave policies is a crucial issue throughout the United States, being the only industrialized nation that does not offer universal paid parental leave. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) requires 12 weeks of unpaid leave annually for mothers of newborn or newly adopted children if they work for a company with 50 or more employees. Due to the lack of a national paid leave, individual institutions and companies are left to create their own policies. The University of Dayton approved their first formal faculty maternity leave policy in late 2004. The process for creating the policy was outlined in a 2008 article published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* titled "Giving Birth to a Good Policy" by former Associate Provost for Faculty and Administrative Affairs, Joe Untener. In the article, Untener describes some of the obstacles and challenges that UD faced in implementing the policy. He also repeated the importance of having a policy and process that was continually reviewed and revised.

In 2017, the university made considerable progress by offering all benefit-eligible employees, faculty and staff, either six or eight weeks of paid maternity leave, what is deemed by many to be the medically-necessary requirement after giving birth vaginally or by a cesarean section. During the maternity leave, 100% of the employee's base salary is paid and employees are eligible for the leave at the date of hire. The email announcing this update stated that "The University initiated the new policy to provide a health and economic benefit for employees and their families, and allow new mothers to retain accrued sick leave for future use, such as taking infants to scheduled doctor's appointments and providing at-home care when infants are sick."

However, it is more than just the formal policy that can have an impact on a faculty or staff member's experience with maternity leave. Confusing workflows, a lack of training by department chairs or supervisors, and the actual practices regarding the entire path to maternity leave and subsequent advancement are all factors to consider when evaluating how the policy is put into practice. A lack of clarity surrounding the process can lead to issues of inequitable treatment of faculty and staff taking leave across departments or units on campus.

Creating a benefit-eligible employee maternity leave policy was one step to advance gender equity at the University of Dayton. As a considerable amount of time has passed since the adoption of the policy and addition of expanded access, it is imperative to review the current processes. Preparing for maternity leave places additional stress on the faculty or staff member. Providing clear and transparent communications throughout the maternity leave approval process can help lighten both the physical and mental burden. By sharing the lived experiences of those who have taken leave, this project explores their hidden vulnerabilities and perceptions of the policy and practice.

Current Policies

At the time of this study, the University of Dayton's maternity leave policies were located on the University website based on position type. Faculty maternity leave policies and procedures were accessible from the Office of the Associate Provost for Faculty and Administrative Affairs website, as well as the Faculty Handbook, while staff policies and procedures were located on the Human Resources website within the Staff Handbooks.

Under the current policy, benefit-eligible staff receive six or eight weeks paid leave to cover the medical portion of a vaginal or cesarean section delivery respectively. Staff may use FMLA, unpaid leave, to take additional time off to get to a total of 12 weeks¹. In order to be paid during additional time off, staff must use accrued vacation time.

The maternity policy for teaching faculty and lecturers is more extensive. If the due date falls within a fall or spring semester, they are eligible for leave during that semester. If the due date falls within one month prior to the start of the semester, they are eligible for leave during the semester that immediately follows their due date. The policy does not apply to non-contractual time and leave time may not be saved and used later. Faculty can use accrued salary continuation to cover the remainder of the 12 weeks after the maternity pay is applied. If a faculty member does not have enough salary continuation accrued, they have the option to perform modified duties to receive full pay. Unpaid leave is also an option.

If a faculty or lecturer is out for a full 16 week semester, four weeks of modified duties must be performed to cover the additional time. A modified duties agreement is completed by the faculty member and department chair, in consultation with the Dean's Office. Final approval of the agreement rests with the Office of the Provost. The agreement lists a range of duties that the faculty member may complete to fill a specified amount of time. The duties must be "solid, deliverable, and beneficial to the department" and could include service responsibilities, teaching an additional course in another semester, research efforts, or other agreed upon duties. The website includes two examples of how a faculty member might structure their leave,

¹ If leave time beyond 6 weeks (vaginal birth) or 8 weeks (cesarean section) is determined by the employee's health care provider to be medically necessary, then up to a maximum of 12 weeks of leave time will be fully paid (6 additional weeks for vaginal birth, 4 additional weeks for birth by cesarean section) without the use of sick or vacation time. -per Troy Washington, Vice President for Human Resources

and provides three examples of the modified duty agreement letters that faculty members are asked to work on with their department chair.

Examples of faculty leave arrangements listed on the Office of the Provost website:

#1 - Ten weeks of accrued salary continuation may be used along with six weeks of non-teaching duties for a semester release with full pay.

#2 - Eight weeks of salary continuation, four weeks of non-teaching duties, and four weeks of unpaid leave may be taken for a semester release with twelve weeks of pay.

When this research project began in fall 2021, the policy documentation stated that non-tenure track faculty were required to have two years of consecutive full time service and expected to continue their contract in order to receive these benefits. Recent practice had not followed this stipulation and that clause was officially removed from the policy in spring 2022.

Faculty in the University Libraries have a separate policy due to a different workload and 12 month contracts. In addition to six or eight weeks paid leave, they can use accrued salary continuation to get to a total of 12 weeks paid. If faculty have worked at the university for less than two years and do not have salary continuation built up, modified duties can be approved to get a total of 12 weeks paid leave. Modified duties are temporary, transitional work that fit within the faculty member's health restrictions and reflect their individual functional capacities. For example, if a faculty member had restrictions on travel or a compromised immune system, an example of a modified duty could be teaching a lighter course load or teaching remotely. Additionally, both teaching faculty and library faculty maternity leaves qualify for an automatic pause of the tenure clock.

Additional parental leave policies are listed in the handbooks under short-term absences. The handbooks state: "An employee who wishes to take paid time off for paternity, adoption or foster care leave may do so and use the three days allotted for medical emergency of an immediate family member as noted above. Any time off beyond these paid days will involve the use of unpaid time off with the proper supervisory approvals." Teaching faculty also have an option for paid modified duties for the non-birth parent, as well as the potential for a tenure clock pause for the non-birth parent. This option is not listed in any of the current documentation on the website, but was shared through conversations the researchers had with Beth Schwartz, Director of Employee Benefits and Wellness. Human Resources staff also shared that before the COVID-19 pandemic began, preliminary conversations concerning updates to the paternity, adoption, and foster care leave policies had begun, but these conversations were put on hold due to the pandemic affecting workload and processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of maternity leave, and more broadly, parental leave, is a divisive issue in the United States, often becoming part of political parties' campaign platforms. Data from the World Policy Analysis Center (2020) shows that the United States is the only wealthy country in the world that does not offer any guaranteed parental leave nationally, though there are several states who do mandate some form of paid parental leave at the state level. This is important to note because the issues surrounding maternity and parental leave are not unique to institutions of higher education, and although the University of Dayton's employees primarily reside in the state of Ohio, there are benefit-eligible employees located in other states.

Postpartum and Medical Recovery

There are different definitions of what constitutes the postpartum period, or the time after birth when physiological changes related to pregnancy return to a nonpregnancy state. A commentary piece in the Washington Post (Shortsleeve, 2020) explores some of these differing definitions with experts. For example, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders defines postpartum depression as depression "with postpartum onset: defined as within four weeks of delivering a child" while other research in the field suggests that postpartum depression extends up to one year postpartum. Many OB GYNs schedule a postpartum visit around the six week mark at which time they screen for postpartum depression and then determine if the patient is cleared for a return to pre-pregnancy activities. Romano et. al (2010) suggests that the postpartum period is marked by three distinct phases, with the third phase lasting up to six months.

This inconsistency is also apparent against international standards such as the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendation that infants be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. In an analysis of existing studies, Kramer and Kakuma (2012) concluded that, "infants breastfed for exclusively six months have a reduced risk of gastrointestinal infection and no observable deficits in growth." This recommendation is at odds with the variable definition of a postpartum period, and what constitutes a medically necessary amount of leave. A Policy Statement from the American Public Health Association (2007) advocates for at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave, citing the issue of breastfeeding as a fundamental public health issue.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in a 2018 Committee Opinion, considers postpartum care to extend up to twelve weeks after delivery, and that postpartum care should become an ongoing process that is individualized and includes an assessment of physical, social and psychological well-being. Yet many policies consider six weeks for a vaginal delivery, and eight weeks for a cesarean section, as the medically necessary recovery time period.

Maternity Leave in Higher Education

The issues surrounding maternity leave in higher education have been explored in numerous popular and scholarly sources. A dissertation by Muneka Nwoko (2020) explores the connections between actual parental leave policies, and the communication and understanding

of the processes. They state, “In fact, it is this lack of standardized processes across policy discourses that seemingly inhibits people (individuals and couples) from understanding the parameters, processes, and protocols needed to make informed decisions related to accessing parental leave” (Nwoko, 2020, p. 3). With each higher education institution creating individualized policies, employees have an additional burden to navigate them.

A study by Stephanie Morain et. al (2019) looked specifically at the parental leave, lactation and childcare policies of US schools of public health. Selecting top ranked schools of public health from *US News and World Report*, the researchers found that the institutions had varying policies to support the birth or adoption of a child. The authors also noted their own confusion in interpreting these policies, stating “while all schools in this study had publicly available policies, policies were often unclear, difficult to categorize, and potentially contingent upon obtaining proof of medical necessity. Furthermore, as we discovered in contacting institutional representatives to confirm the accuracy of our classifications, oversight of relevant policies was often siloed across multiple administrative departments, which can create challenges for individuals who wish to ascertain their institution’s leave policies” (Morain et. al, 2019, 727). Given that pregnant mothers within the United States have faced pregnancy-based discrimination in employment, it is not surprising that some individuals may feel reticent to inquire about policies for maternity leave during an interview phase or after hire.

Maternity Leave for Catholic Institutions

The currently available parental leave, or a lack of leave, in Catholic institutions is often surprising to many and seen in conflict with Catholic social teaching. Nearly three decades ago, a sounding board piece in *U.S. Catholic* looked at the topic of parental leave in the United States and stated, “if anything, when it comes to family-friendly workplace policies, many Catholic organizations appear to be behind rather than ahead of the curve” (Scherer-Emunds, 1995, pg. 22). Looking specifically at Catholic higher education, Molly Jo Rose examines maternity leave again in *U.S. Catholic* over two decades later. The author states, “universities lacking policies that recognize God’s rich and diverse calling to women cannot say they are upholding the dignity of women...And universities with policies that do not extend paid leave to both parents cannot be considered pro-family” (Rose, 2019, pg. 26).

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been supportive of paid parental leave even before the passage of FMLA in 1993. In 1986 they issued the pastoral letter, “Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy.” Within this statement, they proclaimed that, “the lack of a mutually supportive relation between family life and economic life is one of the most serious problems facing the United States today. The economic and cultural strength of the nation is directly linked to the stability and health of its families” (1986, USCCB, pg. 4).

All of the articles and research that address parental leave in Catholic institutions center around the same set of core values and beliefs. This is in direct contrast to many of the academic research studies that only look at the medical and economical benefits. Annie Selak in

Commonweal (2020), a Catholic opinion journal, states, “but what if we shifted the question away from what kind of parental leave is medically necessary to what kind of family policy is just? What if we created a culture of life?...Imagine if instead of simply talking about a culture of life, Catholic employers actually started to build one.” (Selak, 2020).

BENCHMARKING

To situate the findings from the surveys and interviews in the higher education landscape, the parental leave policies of 24 institutions were researched. These institutions are internally considered to be the University of Dayton’s peers for purposes of institutional research. This included 20 private institutions, and four public ones. The policies for nine institutions recognized as aspirational peers were also reviewed, including six private and three public. These institutions, some classified as R1 research institutions, are often used for benchmarking in projects such as this because of their robust work-life policies. The investigation of these institutions examined maternity leave offerings for faculty and staff, paternity leave offerings for faculty and staff, and adoption policies, often by using information publicly available on an institution’s website.

Of the 20 private peer institutions reviewed, three did not have a publicly accessible maternity leave policy for review but each alluded to having a policy that provides full salary payment for some fraction of time during FMLA. Six institutions did not have institution-specific policies and only followed FMLA, with some allowing for use of sick time or a combination of sick time and vacation time to be used. Four institutions were impacted by state or district laws that offered more benefits than federal legislation, those states and districts being: New York, California, and the District of Columbia. New York offers 8-12 weeks with 60-70% pay for all parental leave and adoption, California offers paid family leave that offers eight weeks at 60-70% pay, and the District of Columbia offers 6-8 weeks of prorated pay.

In total, three institutions provided twelve weeks of paid leave, with only one being required to by law. One institution offered 10 weeks of paid leave (with an additional two if using sick time), five institutions offered eight weeks of paid with only three being required to by law, one institution provided six weeks of paid leave, one institution provided three weeks of paid leave, and six institutions did not have a policy for paid leave. While the University of Dayton’s policy affords maternity pay from date of hire, St. Louis University requires one year of continuous full-time service before an employee is eligible for their childcare leave benefits.

Notably, other Catholic, private institutions, including Xavier University, St. Louis University, DePaul University, Loyola Chicago, and Duquesne University offered paid parental leave to the non-birth parent and to those adopting, based on years of full-time service. Some institutions, like St. Louis University, used a paid parental leave scale based on years of service, from three weeks paid to six weeks paid. Others offered a standard of two weeks (DePaul) or three weeks (Loyola Chicago) based on one year of service. Duquesne University offered two weeks of paid parental leave for the non-birth parent after six months of service. Local to Ohio, Xavier

University offered eight weeks of paid parental leave if the employee qualified for FMLA and noted that this was guided by their Jesuit principles and to support employee work-life balance. The layout and communication of leave benefits reviewed were straightforward and concise. Villanova University, in particular, had a user-friendly layout, with an interactive guide and downloadable checklist.

METHODS

A mixed methods approach was used to provide a more comprehensive look at experiences with the maternity leave policy workflows. By gathering and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, correlations and trends by position type could be determined. Two IRB approved online surveys were developed, using a similar instrument as the online survey created by Myerchin (2012). The surveys were then distributed through multiple communication channels across campus, including the announce list from the Provost's office, the Women's Center website, Porches, the Bombeck family list, Flex Teaching list, Chairs Collaborative, UD Men for Gender Equity list, Campus News Digest, and as an announcement at Academic Senate. The surveys were created in Qualtrics and invited voluntary faculty and staff participants to share their experiences anonymously. Participants did not receive compensation for their participation.

The surveys were open from September 30, 2021 to November 19, 2021. The first survey, open to all benefit-eligible employees, received 398 responses. Since no questions were required to proceed, not all respondents addressed each question. Within the survey, logic was utilized to ask participants to identify as faculty or staff, with further differentiation between tenured/tenure track faculty versus non-tenure faculty and exempt versus non-exempt staff. Different questions were displayed depending on this selection and the complete survey instrument can be found as Appendix A.

The second survey was open to all supervisors of benefit-eligible employees and was shared within the same communication messages with the first survey. This survey received 83 responses and the survey instrument is available as Appendix B.

In addition to the surveys, semi-structured voluntary interviews with those who have taken maternity leave since 2017 were conducted during the same time period. The 30-minute Zoom sessions were recorded for transcription purposes, with 19 interviews conducted; 8 faculty and 11 staff. For added context, a request was submitted to Human Resources for the number of maternity leaves taken from July 2017 to December 2021, broken down by faculty and staff employees. During that time period 35 faculty maternity leaves were taken and 85 staff maternity leave. This does not correlate to the number of individuals, since for example the authors took two faculty maternity leaves each during that time frame that would be part of the total number of leaves. This information was then compared against the total number of full time employees at the University of Dayton using the University of Dayton Factbook (Table 1).

Table 1

Year	University of Dayton Full Time Employees	# of Faculty Maternity Leaves	# of Staff Maternity Leaves
2017	2589	11	12
2018	2679	5	20
2019	2798	6	18
2020	2699	4	17
2021	2767	9	18

Note. The data for maternity leaves taken in 2017 begins in July after the policy expansion. The numbers for maternity leave taken in 2021 are through December 14, 2021.

FINDINGS

Employee Survey

The survey for all benefit eligible employees aimed to understand the level of satisfaction with the current maternity leave policies, while also gathering anonymous feedback from those who had taken maternity leave since 2017. This survey received 398 total responses. 199 employees indicated they were exempt staff, 67 as non-exempt staff, 43 as non-tenure line faculty and 66 as tenure-line or tenured faculty. From the 398 responses, 23 people did not select whether they were faculty or staff.

Faculty Findings

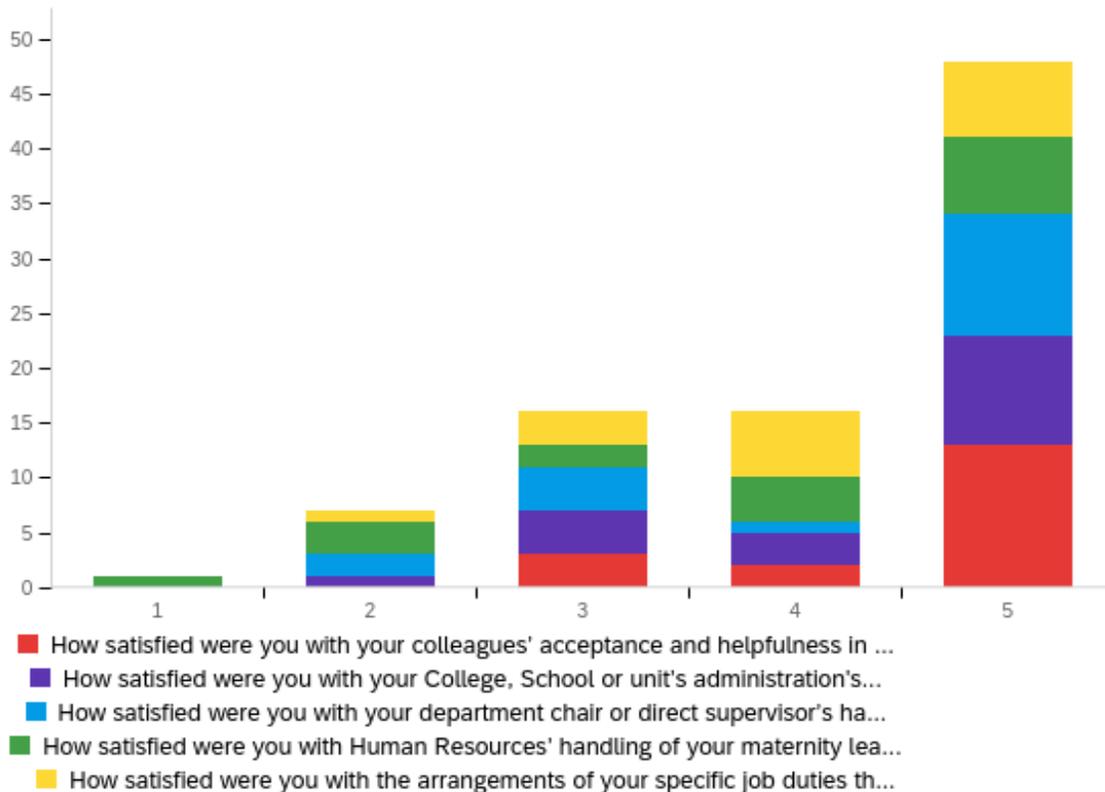
A Likert scale was used to measure faculty satisfaction with maternity leave policies, with one being very dissatisfied, three being neither satisfied or dissatisfied and five being very satisfied. The highest response (48%) was neither satisfied or dissatisfied, while 26% indicated having some dissatisfaction. In the comments, faculty shared the difficulty over the timing of giving birth, with one stating, “both of my kids were born in the summer. I wish I could have taken leave after they were born.” While others shared their thoughts on the process, “there is still a lot of confusion over policy and what exactly is needed in terms of what is allowed or not allowed, what the pay is exactly, what the process is to apply, what format the modified duties agreement needs to be in.”

Of the faculty that responded to the survey, 19 had taken a maternity leave. These respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the handling of their maternity leaves, with the same Likert scale. In the results, the blue bars represent satisfaction or dissatisfaction with direct

supervisors or department chairs, while the green bars represent Human Resources (Figure 1). 63% had some satisfaction with their direct supervisor or department chair, while 58% were satisfied with Human Resources. Faculty who had taken leave expressed that their highest satisfaction was with their colleagues' acceptance and helpfulness throughout the process.

Figure 1

Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, 3 being neither satisfied or dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied.



Note. This figure illustrates the University of Dayton faculty response to satisfaction with the handling of their maternity leave based on a Likert scale of one being very dissatisfied, three being neither satisfied or dissatisfied and five being very satisfied.

Modified duties were performed by 79% of the faculty who had taken maternity leave. Results were evenly distributed between faculty who created a draft of modified duties on their own and then shared it with their supervisor and the faculty and supervisor working on the draft together. Throughout their maternity leave, 55% felt no pressure from their colleagues, department, or university administration, while 18% felt pressure about money and health care accommodations if they were to take an unpaid leave of absence.

When asked if they felt like they had job security before, during and after their maternity leave, 94% responded “yes”. One faculty member acknowledged the role their department chair

played in their experience, stating “I felt protected by the terms outlined at the time of my hire/my contract/my progress toward tenure and MOST OF ALL the support of my department chair.”

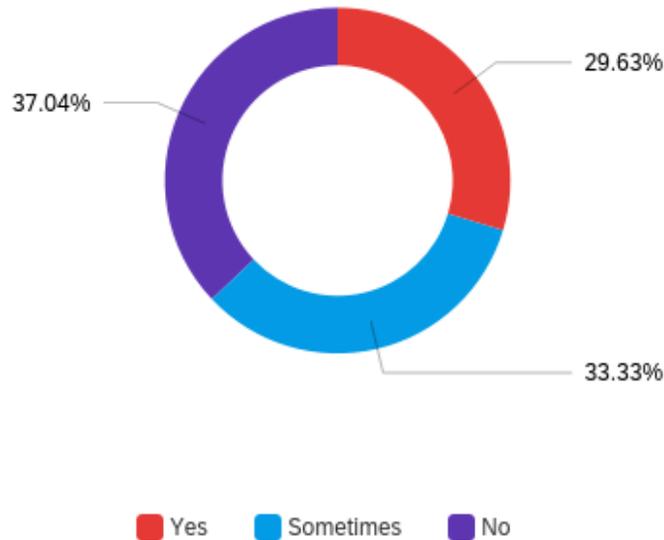
Some faculty noted a disconnect between the Marianist devotion and the maternity leave policies, with one stating, “From a University that uses a symbol of a mother and child to represent them in various ways, I did not feel that the University cared or was compassionate towards my need for recovery and time with my child.” Other comments shared dissatisfaction with the level of information supplied to them regarding the policy. The need for a graduate student teaching assistant parental leave policy was mentioned a few times in the survey comments.

Staff Findings

Of the 266 staff that responded to the employee survey, 32 had taken maternity leave since the 2017 policy expansion. One question asked respondents if they felt that they had to make concessions concerning maternity leave arrangements (Figure 2). 29% answered yes and 33% answered sometimes, while 37% of respondents answered no. Some of the comments included, “Although my management was supportive of leave, I knew I had a lot to still deal with when I came back and didn’t feel like I could take my full leave” and “I had to make the choice to either lose out on pay but get to create a bond with my child or maintain my position and get paid full time but lose out on time with my child.” Other respondents cited an impact on their promotion track, losing out on paid vacation during leave, and expectations to complete certain tasks or take phone calls while they were on leave.

Figure 2

Do you feel like you had to make concessions concerning your maternity leave arrangements?



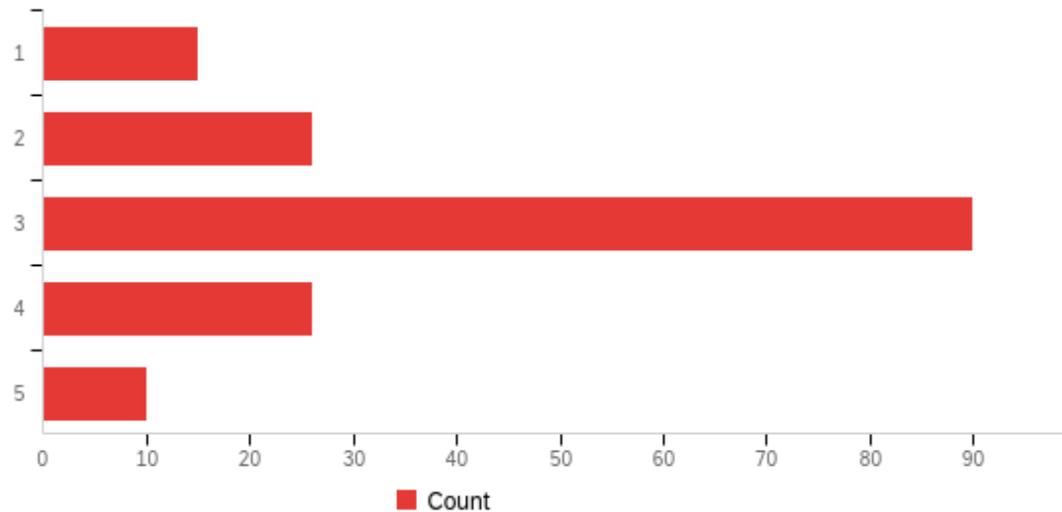
Note. This figure illustrates the University of Dayton staff response to concessions around maternity leave.

Another question asked whether staff felt pressure regarding maternity leave. Respondents were given a list of options and asked to check all that apply. 33% indicated feeling pressure in regards to money and health care accommodations if they were to take an unpaid leave of absence, while 31% indicated pressure from working with other staff to cover daily duties while on leave. The data indicated that staff felt more pressure when taking a maternity leave compared to the results of the faculty responses.

Looking at overall satisfaction with the current University of Dayton maternity leave policy, using a Likert scale, with one being very dissatisfied, three being neither satisfied or dissatisfied and five being very satisfied, the majority of staff, 54%, were neither satisfied or dissatisfied. Additionally, 25% of staff have some level of dissatisfaction with the current policy. While some staff shared that they were appreciative of the extension of the policy, they feel that there is still room for improvement. One staff member commented “I’m grateful that the University has updated its policy regarding maternity leave, but it is unfortunate that sick leave cannot be used for the remaining 6 weeks after University covers the first 6 weeks. Vacation time must be used. MATERNITY LEAVE IS NOT A VACATION.” Other staff pointed out the disparity between the faculty and staff policies, suggesting that they “feel that the inequities that exist between faculty and staff policies must be explored.” With most faculty already receiving higher salaries than staff, this contributes further to the faculty/staff divide and affects staff morale.

Figure 3

How satisfied are you with the University of Dayton's maternity leave policy?



Note. This figure illustrates the University of Dayton staff response to their satisfaction with the maternity leave policy based on a likert scale of one being very dissatisfied, three being neither satisfied or dissatisfied and five being very satisfied.

Supervisor Survey

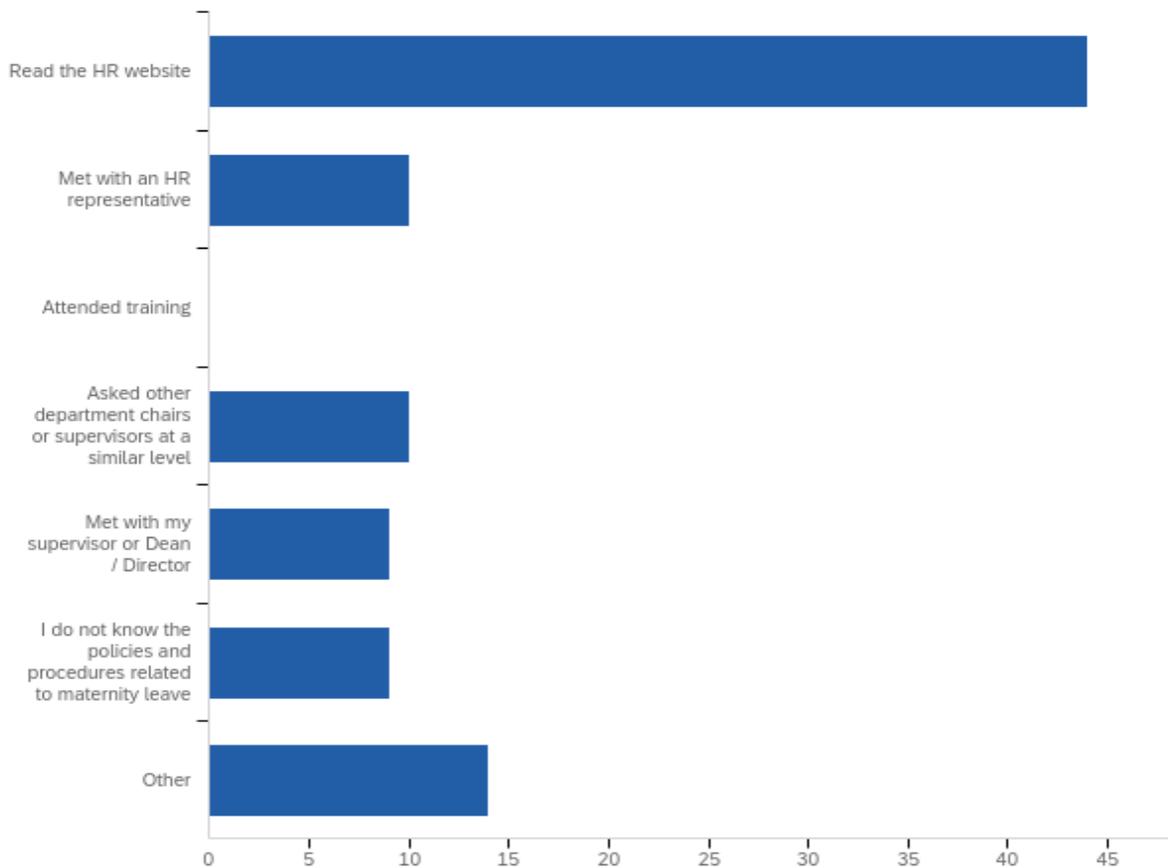
A supervisor survey was developed to gauge the knowledge and understanding of the current maternity leave policies by those in leadership roles at the university, which includes both faculty and staff. Supervisors can influence an employee's comfort and stress level when taking leave. It is important for those in University leadership positions to have an understanding of parental leave policies and workflows and be able to support their employees throughout the process. The workplace environment can affect both pre- and post-natal health. A recent study of 118 pregnant employees found that "women who benefitted from supportive coworkers and supportive supervisors during pregnancy reported the lowest levels of prenatal stress, which were, in turn, associated with lower incidence of postpartum depression and quicker recovery times from birth-related injuries" (Jones et al, 2022, p. 369). These findings underscore the importance of ensuring that university leadership and colleagues provide a community of empathy and understanding.

The supervisor survey received 83 responses, 65% of those from women. Since the 2017 policy expansion, the respondents had supervised eight faculty and 16 staff that had taken maternity leave. Supervisors were asked how they learned the policies and procedures related to maternity leave. Many respondents (45%) learned about the policies from the HR website (Figure 4). Responses listed in the "Other" category were learning from Academic Senate, their own experience taking maternity leave and working with the Provost's Office. A recent review of the maternity leave website content found outdated information and broken links. As this is a convenient and common location for leave information, it is integral to keep this content

updated and easily accessible. A full review of maternity and parental leave content on the Human Resources and Provost’s Office webpages should be conducted and information updated accordingly.

Figure 4

As a department chair or supervisor, how have you learned the policies and procedures related to maternity leave? Check all that apply.



Note. This figure illustrates the University of Dayton supervisor response to how they learned maternity leave policies.

None of the supervisors who submitted the survey indicated that they attended or received any training on maternity leave policies. With the change in policies just five years ago, it was surprising to see that training had either not been offered or had not been attended by supervisors. Additionally, nine supervisors indicated that they did not know the policies and procedures related to maternity leave. One supervisor shared that “Training on these new policies is very hit or miss and often is just in time as one has the issue come up. Some better condensed training packages are needed.” Although supervisors are only part of the larger maternity leave workflow, their knowledge or perceived lack of knowledge can impact the stress level and morale of those planning leave. Supervisory awareness of leave policies should be a touchstone to improve upon. The creation of a short, required webinar or tutorial on faculty

and staff parental leave policies for supervisors could have a positive impact on communication with their employees.

In regards to sharing maternity leave policies and benefits during the interview or hiring process, 78% of supervisors did not share any information (Figure 5). Some supervisors (9%) did not share any information, but referred candidates or new hires to Human Resources. Only four supervisors shared information about the policies with candidates, two during the interview stage, and two during the hiring process. One supervisor stated that they “rely on Beth Schwartz in HR to explain maternity benefits to my staff.” Another had more comments concerning the website: “It is so confusing to work with the outdated HR forms. There is different information on different websites. The information for faculty and staff are kept in different places and it's not always obvious what applies to whom.” Updated website content is essential to attract quality candidates during the application and interview process.

Figure 5

Did you share information about the maternity leave policy during the interview or hiring process?



Note. This figure illustrates the University of Dayton supervisor response to whether they shared maternity leave information with candidates during the search process.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight faculty and eleven staff members who self-identified as having taken maternity leave while employed at the University of Dayton since the expansion of the maternity leave policy in 2017. Several themes emerged from these interviews after analyzing the transcripts. The transcripts will be made available for future

institutional research after additional anonymization, and it is therefore possible that the interviews could provide information for a different research focus.

The Policy

Both faculty and staff interviewees overwhelmingly indicated confusion about the policy itself and whether or not the policy offered any flexibility for particular scenarios. On the one hand, the researchers recognized that some of the vagueness of the policy may be intentional, especially for faculty members as there are many different variables and this allows greater flexibility. However, in the interviews, the participants indicated their frustration with this approach and found the policy, even after using it once, sometimes twice, to be unclear.

For example, more than one interviewee indicated that although they were not necessarily dissatisfied with the arrangement that they received, they didn't believe that they received as much time as possible, or that the modified duties were as equitable as they could have been. Some interviewees mentioned relying on other colleagues who had taken maternity leave before them as a resource about the process, who to contact, and what different options may be available given the timing of an expected due date. For those newer to the University of Dayton or in areas with certain demographics, this could potentially lead to inequitable outcomes.

"It was like if you didn't have the time, the resources, the connections, to really be able to advocate for yourself, you were basically left with no options, it felt like there were no options for me, unless I really like fought, which I did." 17_Interview_11.12.2021

The role of a staff member's supervisor or a faculty member's department chair also factored into this, as some mentioned supervisors who were actively involved in supporting their employee by asking questions to Human Resources and advocating for an employee to receive the accommodations they needed and were eligible for. For others, although the supervisor may have been supportive in an employee being allowed to take the leave for which they were eligible, the supervisor may have been unaware of the specifics of the policy and left the burden completely on the employee to figure it out and communicate it to them. This corroborated data from the supervisor survey which indicated varying levels of policy comprehension. One interviewee shared,

"Plus she like also doesn't have a good understanding of the policy. I had to like explain it to her, my boss that is." 03_Interview_10.12.2021

There were also discussions about sick leave versus vacation, and the difference between six weeks for a vaginal delivery and eight weeks for a cesarean. With the current policy, a person may extend the six or eight week leave by using vacation time or unpaid leave. More than one staff interviewee indicated that they were frustrated by this change. As six or eight weeks is considered the "medically-necessary" portion throughout the United States, any additional time does not qualify for sick leave. Some participants noted that even at six weeks they were still physically and mentally recovering, and also some chose to take unpaid time rather than use all

of their accrued vacation time. A participant shared,

"I had always said that I would at least be out for eight weeks because I didn't feel like it was anybody's business to know how I delivered my baby." 06_Interview_10.19.2021

Expectations and University of Dayton Culture

While many interview participants expressed gratitude at the amount of leave they were able to take, or the ability to complete modified duties, there was also a sense of doing more than what was expected in order to not appear as though motherhood was affecting their performance.

"Again, I think the first time I was super nervous about leaving and I kind of was like 'I want to make sure they know that I'm still dedicated to this job' because I just started and now I'm asking for leave, so I think I put a lot of it on myself."

11_Interview_11.02.2021

Another participant stated,

"I think you know my tendency is to like fear that I'm asking for too much."

18_Interview_11.12.2021

The sense of guilt was a prevalent theme expressed by many interview participants. One of the questions asked of interview participants was whether they completed any work tasks while on leave. When answering, several of the participants noted that they may have done certain tasks during leave such as answering an email or responding to a request, but many were also quick to note that it was their choice to do so rather than a directive. In some cases it was due to strong relationships with colleagues and a desire to assist them while they were dealing with the additional burden of covering tasks for an employee. In other cases, it was a commitment to the position itself, especially if there was direct impact on students.

"Most of our communication falls with students and so, if they don't read the email response that they get that tells them what they need to do to follow up, then they don't, and we have processes that already in place that would take care of it....so I didn't feel any pressure, I think more it's just my natural inclination to know that either this is a high priority student or this is a high priority issue that I want somebody to be in the loop about." 04_Interview_10.12.2021

While the expanded policy does allow for leave eligibility immediately upon hire, more than one participant noted their experiences of interviewing while pregnant and when to disclose the request for leave. For staff, there is less room for a negotiation of different leave options, but there are still many details to be worked out with a supervisor regarding coverage of duties while on leave which may lead to anxiety about perceptions of commitment.

COVID-19

Interview participants who had taken a maternity leave since spring 2020 often touched on

some of the positive and negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the negative side, the potential for furloughs and layoffs added an additional layer of stress and anxiety to those who were planning on taking a maternity leave. One participant shared,

“I had another layer of anxiety because I was expecting and in my head I’m like, ‘I told them awhile ago, they’ve budgeted for this from an HR perspective’ so part of me thought maybe I’m not going to be furloughed or laid off.” 03_Interview_10.12.2021

On the other hand, some did note the silver linings with the timing.

“Because of the pandemic actually, that afford me more flexibility than you know if I had returned to eight credits of teaching and a typical year.” 18_Interview_11.12.2021

A staff member humorously shared that at least during the pandemic no one was traveling so she felt proud of the amount of vacation leave that she was able to save in preparation for her leave. Others noted that they were afforded additional time to find child care, especially since for a long period of time childcare centers were not allowed to be open within Ohio. This also went in tandem with additional stress and anxiety about sending a newborn into any type of childcare setting during a pandemic without a vaccination available for the age group.

Catholic and Marianist Values

Nearly all of the interview participants directly mentioned, or alluded to, the University of Dayton’s values as a Catholic and Marianist institution. Some participants specifically mentioned the university’s connection to the Virgin Mary, the mother of God. While the overall project focused on the policies and implementation of maternity leave, interview participants were asked if they had any comments they wanted to share about parental leave in general at the University of Dayton. Many of the comments echoed similar sentiments shared in the employee survey by faculty and staff. For example, a participant shared,

“It blows my mind as a Catholic, Marianist university, just the family values and just like we talked about, we talk about it, but then like it’s not there in the policies and benefits.” 02_Interview_10.12.2021

Many noted that without overarching parental leave, the partner who gives birth is left without support both physically and mentally. The duration of the leave afforded non-birth parents reinforces outdated stereotypes about caregiving and who should be doing the caregiving.

“Taking the medical approach with it, I don’t think is encompassing of UD’s values necessarily.” 06_Interview_10.19.2021.

Again, many expressed their appreciation for what UD did offer and were aware that this issue is not unique to the University of Dayton. Some cited an awareness of longer leaves at other academic institutions, private corporations, and government agencies. This, they noted, has a direct correlation with attracting and retaining talent, which can be connected back to the

University of Dayton’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 2020-24 strategic plan.

“Especially at the University of Dayton, our Marianist values and what we say we are and what we say we do and yet there is a complete disconnect in how that’s carried out. In many times I think the policies are written for those who manipulate the system, like I think sometimes people’s viewpoint goes to ‘well we have to account for the people who are going to manipulate it and who are going to take advantage of it’ but that’s not the people you should be writing the policy for.” 04_Interview_10.12.2021

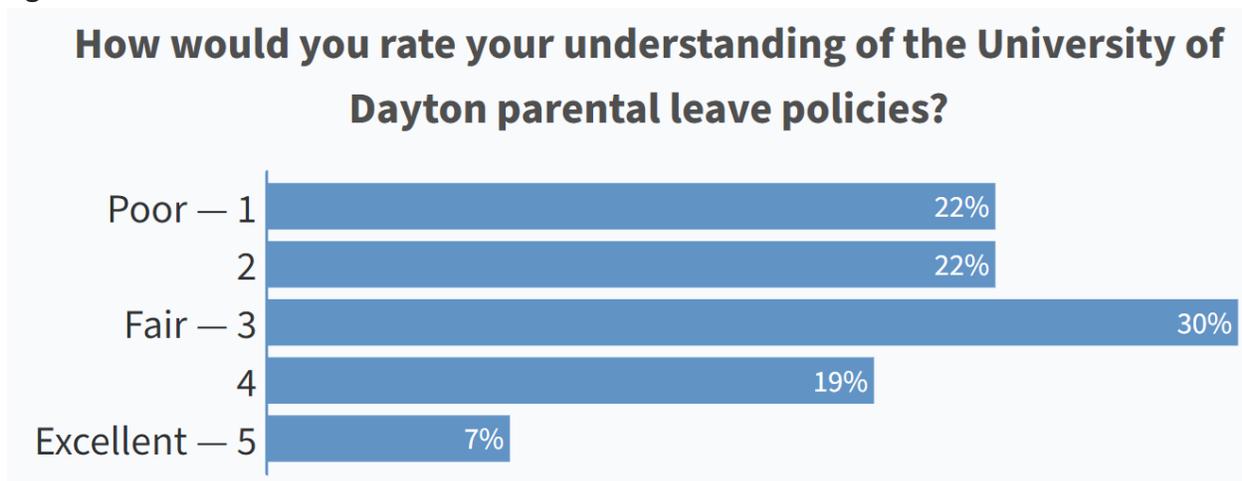
Finally, one participant noted the significant opportunity that UD has to be a leader among Catholic academic institutions in this area. They insightfully shared that,

“We don’t have to follow the trend of everyone else.” 02_Interview_10.12.2021

Gender Equity Research Colloquium

On April 8, 2022, Beis, Harris and Campana presented initial findings from their research in a campus-wide presentation at the 2022 Gender Equity Research at UD Colloquium. During the presentation, feedback was solicited from attendees that included faculty, staff, administrators, and students. First, using the online engagement tool, Poll Everywhere, attendees at the presentation were asked to rate their understanding of the University of Dayton’s parental leave policies on a scale from 1 to 5 (Figure 6). Attendees were able to see the results in real time, with 74% of attendees indicating a fair to poor understanding of the policies.

Figure 6



Note. This figure illustrates live attendee results at the Gender Equity Research at UD Colloquium held April 8, 2022.

At the conclusion of the formal presentation and the Question and Answer portion, attendees were asked again to provide additional feedback based on initial results using either a Google Form link or an anonymous handout. Generally, the comments echoed findings from the research - confusion regarding the actual policies, the need for expanded parental leave, and a disconnect between practice and values. One attendee shared in the anonymous feedback,

“I think this presentation highlights the dichotomy of being a business and a faith-based institution at the same time. It looks like, in the case of parental leave, the business side wins out vs. our values-based side. I think the typical response to issues is ‘ultimately we’re running a business here,’ but I find that mindset to run completely counter to UD’s culture and values.”

Another attendee offered a potential recommendation to address the issues of stress.

“Perhaps each expecting parent should receive a packet of information and resources (congratulatory and supportive messages included) when individuals file for leave. This might help mental health and pressure individuals put on themselves too.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the surveys and discussions in the interviews, the researchers propose the following recommendations to the University of Dayton Leadership team. The recommendations include both short-term and long-term action items that will provide a more positive and equitable experience for those taking parental leave.

Short-Term

- Convene Task Force or Add Charge to Existing Committee

For greater transparency and accountability it is recommended that University of Dayton convene a new task force with broad representation of faculty, staff, and administration to review the recommendations and implement a plan for addressing the issues resulting from the findings. If it is not feasible for a new task force, an additional charge could be added to an existing team or committee to complete this work.

- Audit of Handbooks and Websites

Given the confusion regarding maternity leave policies it is essential that an audit is conducted of all official handbooks and websites regarding parental leave. These should be updated to reflect current practices. For example, a Faculty Maternity Leave Panel is mentioned on the website for the Associate Provost for Faculty and Administrative Affairs which is no longer in use. There is no mention on this website of modified duties for a non-birth parent faculty member.

- Incorporate Inclusive Language in Existing and Newly Created Materials

During the audit of employee handbooks and existing language regarding leave, it is suggested that references to paternity leave be updated to be more inclusive by referencing leave for the non-birth parent.

- Standardize Leave Report / Timesheet Submission Process

When an employee is on maternity leave it should be standard procedure that they are not responsible for completing or submitting any leave reports or timesheets. Interviewee participants noted difficulty knowing what day of the week it was in the early postpartum period and that remembering to submit a timesheet was not something they wanted to think about. As leaves can be configured in different ways using vacation time, salary continuation etc., it would make sense to either clarify that this process will be done by HR, or provide instructions in the supervisor training that would allow supervisors to complete it on behalf of the employee.

- Provide More Examples of Modified Duties for Faculty

While the composition of modified duties performed while on maternity leave will be different for every faculty member, additional examples of potential options from various disciplines would be beneficial. As faculty librarians, the researchers recalled their own difficulties constructing modified duties for their non-teaching positions when taking their own maternity leaves.

Long-Term

- Develop Supervisor Training Process for Parental Leave

The survey and interview data indicated a clear need for supervisors to have a better understanding of the policies to effectively support their employees. During the Gender Equity at UD Colloquium, an attendee noted in their feedback:

“As a supervisor of existing staff and someone in a position to hire and develop new employees, I have the responsibility to be MUCH more fluent in UD’s parental leave policies...I think this work really highlights a need for supervisor training at a minimum and a need to convene a task force to consider the recommendations of the research and take appropriate action on the policies.”

- Create Concise, Standardized Documents on Parental Leave for Prospective / Current Employees

In addition to clarifying the policy for current employees, interview participants noted the benefits of parental leave policies as a recruitment tool. In a competitive job market a candidate may not feel comfortable requesting information about leave, especially during interviews that do not include personalized benefits information. The researchers suggest the creation of concise, standardized documentation that supervisors can share with candidates at the time of interviews, or with existing employees when they indicate a request for leave.

“As part of our new faculty orientation they put on all of these different trainings and programs throughout the year and I don't know if there's ever been any program dedicated to just informing faculty and staff about maternity leave process, I think that could be really helpful just in terms of maybe said it could be, at the start, it like open enrollment or at the are part of new faculty or staff orientation.”

13_Interview_11.05.2021

- Expansion of Policy

It was evident that both survey and interview participants support an expansion of the policy in multiple areas, including additional paid leave for adoption, foster care, and the non-birth parent beyond the current three days. As this project primarily focused on the experiences of taking maternity leave, additional research would be needed to understand and address the specific needs for an expanded and more inclusive policy. Attendees at the Gender Equity Research Colloquium shared in their post-presentation feedback,

“UD’s policy is still unclear, demonstrating a total lack of understanding of what ‘adoption’ or ‘foster care’ involves. And children come into families in other ways, such as custody being assigned by the court and this is totally ignored by the policy.”

“There is so much that goes into fostering and adopting because the child has trauma, getting their transition into another school if applicable and separation from either the birth home or foster care, emotional instability and emergencies that can come up, caseworker appointments, court, etc. that calls for a lot of time for a child to feel settled. More needs to be considered. Sometimes adopting and fostering is the only option and parents shouldn’t be docked leave because they were not able for whatever reason to give birth.”

- Consider Expansion of Child Care Services and Support

The interview participants who gave birth during the COVID-19 pandemic while most University of Dayton employees were working remotely saw the flexibility as a silver lining of the pandemic. Currently the University of Dayton’s Bombeck Family Learning Center (BFLC) only offers full-time enrollment. Demand for on-campus daycare is high, and there are waiting lists to be admitted. University of Dayton employees do receive a discount on tuition, 15% or 30% based on income, but interview participants desired more flexible, on-campus options for child care services.

- Plan for Continued Assessment

With the University of Dayton’s employee size it is difficult to publicly report on many data points regarding maternity leave without identifying individuals. Therefore there is a need for continued evaluation and assessment of how the policy is being enacted for faculty and staff across campus. For example, there may be value in establishing time frames for when similar research to this should be conducted again.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument for Administrators, Faculty and Staff

1. How many years have you worked at the University of Dayton?
Less than 1
1-3
4-6
7-9
10 or more

2. What is your current role at the University of Dayton?
Administrator
Tenured/Tenure Track Faculty
Non Tenure Track Faculty
Exempt Staff
Non-Exempt Staff

LOGIC: If Exempt or Non-Exempt staff is selected, go to question #16. If faculty or lecturer is selected, they will receive the following questions:

Faculty & Lecturer Maternity Leave

3. Have you taken maternity leave since the University of Dayton's expanded maternity policy was implemented in 2017?
Yes
No

LOGIC: If no, skip to question #14. If yes, then:

4. What was your role at the University of Dayton when you took maternity leave?
Administrator
Tenured/Tenure Track Faculty
Non Tenure Track Faculty
Exempt Staff
Non-Exempt Staff

5. During your maternity leave period, were you tenured or non-tenured?
Tenured
Non-tenured (working towards tenure)
Lecturer
Other (please specify)

6. In regards to pursuing maternity leave, did you feel any of the following? Select all that apply.
Pressure from your colleagues NOT to take a leave

Pressure from your department chair to NOT take a leave
Pressure from your unit or university administration NOT to take a leave
Pressure about tenure and promotion guidelines
Pressure from students
Pressure about finding adjuncts to cover your daily duties
Pressure about money and health care accommodations if you were to take an unpaid leave of absence
I felt no pressure from my colleagues, department, or university administration
I felt no pressure about money or health care concerns if I took a leave of absence

7. Did you perform modified duties while on maternity leave?
Yes
No

LOGIC: If yes then:

8. How were the modified duties negotiated?
I crafted a draft and shared it with my supervisor
My supervisor and I worked together to create a draft
My supervisor created a draft and shared it with me
Other:
Comments:

For the questions #9-11, please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, 3 being neither satisfied or dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied.

9. How satisfied were you with your colleagues' acceptance and helpfulness in you taking maternity leave?
10. How satisfied were you with your department chair or direct supervisor's handling of your maternity leave?
11. How satisfied were you with your College, School or Unit's administration's handling of your maternity leave?
12. How satisfied were you with Human Resources' handling of your maternity leave?
13. How satisfied were you with the arrangements of your specific job duties that needed to be managed by others while you were on your maternity leave? This does not include any duties you may have continued to perform as part of a modified duties agreement.
14. Did you feel like you had job security before, during, and after your maternity leave?
Yes

No
Sometimes
Explain (optional)

15. Do you feel like you had to make concessions concerning your maternity leave arrangements.

Yes
No
Sometimes
Explain (optional)

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least comfortable and 5 being the most comfortable, please rate your comfort level with the following:

16. Knowledge and understanding of the faculty maternity leave policy since it was expanded in 2017.

1 2 3 4 5

17. Knowledge and understanding of the creation and approval of modified duties for faculty.

1 2 3 4 5

LOGIC: If exempt or non-exempt staff is selected, they will receive the following questions:

Staff Maternity Leave

18. Have you taken maternity leave since the expanded maternity policy was implemented in 2017?

Yes
No

LOGIC: If no, skip to question #24. If yes, then:

19. What was your role at the University of Dayton when you took maternity leave?

Administrator
Tenured/Tenure Track Faculty
Non Tenure Track Faculty
Exempt Staff
Non-Exempt Staff

20. In regards to pursuing maternity leave, did you feel any of the following? Select all that apply.

Pressure from your colleagues NOT to take a leave
Pressure from your supervisor to NOT take a leave

Pressure from your unit or university administration NOT to take a leave
Pressure from students
Pressure about working with other staff to cover your daily duties
Pressure about money and health care accommodations if you were to take an unpaid leave of absence
I felt no pressure from my colleagues, department, or university administration
I felt no pressure about money or health care concerns if I took a leave of absence

For questions #21-27, please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, 3 being neither satisfied or dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied.

21. How satisfied were you with your colleagues' acceptance and helpfulness in you taking maternity leave?
22. How satisfied were you with your direct supervisor's handling of your maternity leave?
23. How satisfied were you with your College, School or Unit's administration's handling of your maternity leave?
24. How satisfied were you with Human Resources' handling of your maternity leave?
25. How satisfied were you with the arrangements of your specific job duties that needed to be managed by others while you were on your maternity leave?
26. Did you feel like you had job security before, during, and after your maternity leave?
Yes
No
Sometimes
Explain (optional)
27. Do you feel like you had to make concessions concerning your maternity leave arrangements.
Yes
No
Sometimes
Explain (optional)

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least comfortable and 5 being the most comfortable, please rate your comfort level with the following:

24. Knowledge and understanding of the staff maternity leave policy since it was implemented in 2017.
1 2 3 4 5

Questions for all respondents:

Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, 3 being neither satisfied or dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied.

25. How satisfied are you with the University of Dayton's maternity leave policy?

26. What comments would you like to share regarding parental leave (maternity, paternity, or adoption) at the University of Dayton and your experience?

Demographics

27. What is your gender identity?

Man

Woman

Non-binary/Genderqueer

Other (specify)

Prefer not to answer

28. What is your age?

18 - 20

21 - 30

31 - 40

41 - 50

51 - 60

61 - 70

71 - 80

81 - 90

91 - 100

Prefer not to answer

29. Please specify your race

White

Black

Latino or Hispanic

Asian

Indigenous (Native American or Alaska Native)

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Two or More

Other _____

Prefer not to answer

Appendix B: Survey Instrument for Supervisors

1. How many years have you been in a department chair or supervisor role?
Less than 1
1-3
4-6
7-9
10 or more
2. Do you supervise faculty, staff, or both?
Faculty only
Staff only
Faculty and staff

Faculty Maternity Leave

3. Has a faculty member that reports to you taken maternity leave since the expanded maternity policy was implemented in 2017?
Yes
No
N/A
4. If yes, have you had a faculty member perform modified duties while on maternity leave?
Yes
No
5. If yes, How were the modified duties negotiated?
Faculty member crafted a draft and shared it to me
Faculty member and I worked together to create a draft
I created a draft and shared it with the faculty member
Other:
Comments:

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least comfortable and 5 being the most comfortable, please rate your comfort level with the following:

6. Knowledge and understanding of the faculty maternity leave policy since it was expanded in 2017.
1 2 3 4 5
7. Knowledge and understanding of the creation and approval of modified duties for faculty.
1 2 3 4 5

Staff Maternity Leave

8. Has a staff member that reports to you taken maternity leave since the expanded maternity policy was implemented in 2017?

Yes

No

N/A

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least comfortable and 5 being the most comfortable, please rate your comfort level with the following:

9. Knowledge and understanding of the staff maternity leave policy since it was implemented in 2017.

1 2 3 4 5

Training and Communication

10. As a department chair or supervisor, how have you learned the policies and procedures related to maternity leave? Check all that apply.

Read the HR website

Met with an HR representative

Attended training

Asked other department chairs or supervisors at a similar level

Met with my supervisor or Dean / Director

I do not know the policies and procedures related to maternity leave

Other:

11. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least clear and 5 being the most clear, please rate the clarity of the policies and procedures related to maternity leave.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

12. Since the implementation of the expanded maternity leave in 2017, have you hired any new employees?

Yes

No

13. If yes, did you share information about the maternity leave policy during the interview or hiring process?

No, I did not share any information about the maternity leave policy

No, I did not share information about the maternity leave policy but referred them to Human Resources

Yes, I shared information about the maternity leave policy at the interview stage

Yes, I shared information about the maternity leave policy at the hiring stage

Additional comments:

14. Other comments you would like to share regarding parental leave (maternity, paternity, or adoption) at the University of Dayton and your experience as a department chair or supervisor?

Demographics

15. What is your gender identity?

Man

Woman

Non-binary/Genderqueer

Other (specify)

Prefer not to answer

16. What is your age?

18 - 20

21 - 30

31 - 40

41 - 50

51 - 60

61 - 70

71 - 80

81 - 90

91 - 100

Prefer not to answer

17. Please specify your race

White

Black

Latino or Hispanic

Asian

Indigenous (Native American or Alaska Native)

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Two or More

Other _____

Prefer not to answer

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Faculty

1. Tell us a little bit about your position at the University of Dayton when you took maternity leave.
[Tenure-track or non-tenure track status, department or unit, year, timing].
2. What was it like communicating your request for maternity leave to your direct supervisor?
3. Did you complete a modified duties agreement, and if so, describe the process of developing that agreement.
4. What type of tasks, if any, did you perform while on maternity leave?
[Pressure or expectation to answer certain questions, other work]
5. Did you find the maternity leave policy easy to understand?
6. Is there anything about your maternity situation that you would have changed?
7. What else would you like to share about your maternity leave experience?
8. Do you have any feedback or comments that you would like to share about parental leave in general at UD?

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Staff

1. Tell us a little bit about your position at the University of Dayton when you took maternity leave.
[Exempt, non-exempt, department or unit, year, timing].
2. What was it like communicating your request for maternity leave to your direct supervisor?
3. Describe the process of developing plans for your work tasks during your absence.
4. What type of tasks, if any, did you perform while on maternity leave?
[Pressure or expectation to answer certain questions, other work]
5. Did you find the maternity leave policy easy to understand?
6. Is there anything about your maternity situation that you would have changed?
7. What else would you like to share about your maternity leave experience?
8. Do you have any feedback or comments that you would like to share about parental leave in general at UD?

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