Working Proposal for Improving Family Policies at Duke University

Prologue
Parents at Duke, which consists of a wide cross section of Duke University staff and faculty, emerged in the spring of 2002. We united as a response to inadequate and inequitable family related policies at Duke and as a means of improving the general climate on campus for people with family responsibilities. We see our work as an extension of the work begun at Duke during the 1970s, which resulted in the current maternity leave policy described in the Faculty Handbook. We also see our work as intersecting with the increasingly visible efforts of people across the nation to create workplaces that foster and value healthy relationships between work and family.

Problem
The current maternity leave policy reflects profound inequity between faculty and non-faculty employees at Duke. Moreover, the policies now in place perpetuate general acceptance of an increasingly archaic and rigid family model by excluding male and/or adoptive parents. Compounding this situation, there is no central place to identify the necessary resources provided by the University; therefore, important information is not being disseminated effectively and in some cases is completely unknown to employees. Perhaps most importantly, the resulting social climate is one where hopeful and expectant parents—particularly women—fear penalties and missed promotion opportunities once a pregnancy is announced.

Goals
Parents at Duke is working to accomplish the following goals:

➢ Increase efforts to gather, maintain, and disseminate current information and resources related to child care, leave policies, lactation facilities, and maternity classes available to Duke employees. This may be accomplished by improving funding and visibility of Staff and Family Programs, or by any other means.

➢ Dissociate maternity leave from medical leave in order to facilitate the following:

  o expand family leave and benefits to include broader categories such as paternity, adoption, and care for ailing family members.

  o acknowledge the emotional, psychological, and social benefits of employees being home with their newly arrived children during the first several months.
Extend family benefits that are currently enjoyed by faculty equally to all Duke employees, including, for instance, all classifications/ranks of faculty, bi-weekly and monthly staff, and postdocs. Current faculty benefits, as specified in the Faculty Handbook (Sections 4-4 and 4-5), include:

- a minimum of three months paid leave.
- salaries for replacement employees that are paid from University funds.
- continued payment by the University of the employer’s share of the cost of fringe benefit programs while an employee is on leave.

Ensure affordable, quality, accessible child care for all university employees, by providing on-site centers, by actively facilitating the establishment of affordable child care centers in close proximity to the Duke workplace, or by other means. Expand, in particular, child-care space for infants.

Increase the number and visibility of lactation rooms available around campus and make them more comfortable, clean, bright, and accessible.

Implement a viable policy for flex time to accommodate such responsibilities as caring for sick children, nursing, and visiting children at day care, and extend this policy to all Duke employees, regardless of rank.

Adopt proactive measures to improve the campus climate surrounding pregnancy, child birth, and child care. The university should devote sustained energy toward mitigating the current climate of fear and secrecy on the part of parents and/or potential parents and the intangible and tangible means by which managers and colleagues unfairly penalize family activities. These measures would include such efforts as developing and implementing awareness programs, public relations, and resource development.

Conclusion
These goals address only the most significant existing problems. Given President Keohane’s ongoing gender initiative to improve the status of women on campus, there has never been a better time for the University to work toward these goals. Moreover, accomplishing these goals will benefit the Duke community at large in at least two other ways. First, it will improve the public image and international status of the University. Duke has the potential to be a leader among similar institutions for recruiting and retaining quality employees as well as instituting progressive, innovative policies. Second, these improvements, which would enhance such programs as Live for Life, will result in happier, healthier, and more productive employees. We, Parents at Duke, have confidence that Duke University will recognize the justice of our goals and the ethical imperative to realize them.

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