Policy Change Is Not Enough: Measuring the Impact of Work/Life Policies at a Research University

Peggy Layne, Ane Johnson, Patricia Hyer
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Abstract

Virginia Tech is currently in the fifth and final year of a National Science Foundation ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Grant. A priority for the *AdvanceVT* program has been institutionalizing a suite of work/life policies for faculty, including tenure clock extension, modified duties, part-time employment, and dual career hiring assistance. These policies are recommended by the American Council on Education as part of their "Agenda for Excellence: Creating Flexibility in Tenure-track Faculty Careers". Tenure clock extension is now automatic at Virginia Tech for both parents in the case of childbirth or adoption, and can be requested for other extenuating circumstances. The modified duties policy allows a faculty member to continue as a full time employee with a change in duties for a semester, usually a reduction in teaching. Funding is available from the central administration to hire an instructor to cover the faculty member's courses if necessary. Part-time employment at a commensurate reduction in salary can be negotiated for a fixed period of time for pre-tenure faculty, with a commensurate extension of the tenure clock. At this point in the *AdvanceVT* project, all of these policies are now in place, but the work is not complete. Research shows that women faculty can be reluctant to take advantage of work/life policies for fear of backlash or resentment from colleagues, even though the policies are available to and utilized by male faculty as well. In order to increase awareness of the policies, information has been shared through meetings with and presentations to department heads and promotion and tenure committee chairs, as well as faculty members themselves, and distributed through printed brochures and print and online newsletters. With support from the provost and the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, *AdvanceVT* is tracking the utilization of these policies and the career progress of faculty who take advantage of them. This paper presents data on utilization of these policies to date and impact on faculty career progression.

Introduction

Research university policies are evolving in order to accommodate the personal needs of faculty members. The goals of these policies are to create a welcoming and supportive environment for all faculty members so they can succeed and are not required to make unacceptable choices between family and career. Retention of a talented faculty workforce requires not only good start-up packages and opportunities for professional development, but policies that allow faculty

members the flexibility to manage family and personal needs throughout their careers. These policies, referred to as work/life policies, include tenure clock extension, modified duties, part-time employment, and dual career hiring assistance. Yet women faculty can be reluctant to take advantage of work/life policies for fear of backlash or resentment from colleagues (Etzkowiz et al. 1994; Mason and Goulden 2002; Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004b). A priority for the *AdvanceVT* program at Virginia Tech has been institutionalizing a suite of work/life policies that facilitate the career trajectory of all faculty members and increase faculty retention at the university. This paper presents data on utilization of these policies to date and impact on faculty career progression.

In the following pages, this paper will first briefly review the literature on the work/life issues of both female and male faculty and underscore the need for work/life policies at research universities. Next, this paper will provide a description of the *AdvanceVT* program and outline the policies that are currently in place at Virginia Tech that facilitate the work/life balance of faculty members. Finally, a discussion of the data on the utilization of these policies and the career progress of faculty who take advantage of them is presented, as well as implications for further research and policy change at Virginia Tech.

Literature Review

Faculty members often report experiencing stress managing the balance of family and work roles when employed at higher education institutions (Hagedorn 2001; Hogan, Carlson, and Dua 2002; Mason and Goulden 2004; Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004; Hult, Callister, and Sullivan 2005; Damiano-Teixeira 2006). This stress appears to be associated with several key variables that exist at the university: perceived lack of institutional support, the heavy focus on time-sensitive research and publication, tenure requirements, departmental climate, collegiality (COACHE 2006), job satisfaction and faculty compensation. Female faculty at research institutions often report a higher level of stress than male faculty when managing these complex roles (Damiano-Teixeira 2006; Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004; Mason and Goulden 2004) and may favor one role versus the other early in their careers (Damiano-Teixeira 2006; Mason and Goulden 2004).

The impact of these variables fluctuates among faculty members. There is evidence that younger faculty members, both men and women, experience this stress disproportionately amongst one another and in comparison to older faculty members (Hogan et al., 2002). The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at Harvard University conducts, annually, a comprehensive survey of tenure track faculty at colleges and universities across the nation. The 2006 COACHE survey results demonstrate that junior faculty men tend to understand the tenure process better than women; that junior faculty women found the expectations of the tenure process less reasonable than men; and junior faculty women were less satisfied with the support they received from the institution (COACHE 2006). Overall faculty men and women appear to experience the process of tenure differently.

In addition, researchers (Mason & Goulden 2002; Williams 2004) note that women who have children soon after receiving their PhDs are less likely to achieve tenure than men who have children at the same point in their careers. Often new faculty who have families or want families must balance their responsibilities against institutional requirements for tenure (Ward and Wolf-Wendel 2004b). Mason and Goulden (2002) also found that women who have tenure are much

more likely than tenured men to not have children; tenured women in science are less likely than women in other fields to have children; and women with children are more likely to consider leaving academe.

There is a renewed focus on women faculty and role conflict, particularly in science and engineering (Hult et al. 2005; Settles, Cortina, Malley and Stewart 2006). Balancing work and life are high priorities for many female faculty members. More and more, younger male faculty members are also reporting conflict between work and life responsibilities (Hogan et al. 2002). There are several variables that may alleviate this stress, such as faculty support mechanisms like work/life policies; or increase stress, such as lack of tenure process clarity (COACHE, 2006). Thus, faculty support policies may affect recruitment and retention of qualified faculty and may be particularly important to female faculty (Curtis 2004). Yet little research has tracked the utilization of such policies or demonstrated the positive impact of these policies on faculty lives and careers.

AdvanceVT at Virginia Tech

In 2003, Virginia Tech received a five-year National Science Foundation ADVANCE Institutional Transformation grant. The NSF ADVANCE program seeks to "develop systemic approaches to increase the representation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers, thereby contributing to the development of a more diverse science and engineering workforce"(NSF 2008). As a research intensive university, Virginia Tech is ranked 29th nationally among public universities and boasts over 27,000 students. The College of Engineering at Virginia Tech is ranked 14th nationwide, 8th among public universities, and awards over 1000 bachelor of science degrees, nearly 500 masters and over 100 Ph.D.s in engineering annually. In fall 2007, Virginia Tech had 1382 tenured or tenure track faculty members, 24% of whom were female. The College of Engineering had 315 tenured or tenure track faculty members, of whom 13% were female. The American Society for Engineering Education reported that in the 2006-07 academic year Virginia Tech had the third highest number of female engineering faculty in the United States.

With the receipt of the ADVANCE grant, key Virginia Tech administrators and faculty created *AdvanceVT*, housed in the Office of the Provost. *AdvanceVT* seeks to contribute to the development of an academic science and engineering workforce that includes the full participation of women and minorities at all levels of faculty and academic leadership, particularly at the senior academic ranks, through the transformation of institutional practices, policies, climate and culture at Virginia Tech. The program has four major elements: advancing women and minorities into faculty careers, increasing the representation of women and minority faculty in science and engineering, empowering women and minorities as leaders and scholars, and institutionalizing change.

AdvanceVT addresses institutional transformation in a variety of ways. The program funds PhD and post-doctoral fellowships for women researchers at the institution. Seminars and workshops target women graduate students and faculty members and address skill attainment in writing grant proposals, interviewing for academic jobs, negotiating academic job offers, and obtaining leadership roles within the university. The project also challenges university deans, department heads and administrators to uncover unconscious bias, to institute diverse hiring

practices, and to develop mentoring programs for untenured faculty. The program supports faculty recruitment though visiting scholar programs and collaboration with the Office for Equal Opportunity to create a database and attend recruitment fairs for prospective minority faculty.

AdvanceVT has undertaken several data collection efforts at the university to further understand faculty status and needs. Project research has shown that 61% of tenured and tenure-track faculty members at the institution believe it is difficult to have a personal life and earn tenure and that family responsibilities often slow career advancement. In addition, female faculty members indicated that they have considered leaving the university in order to obtain better career opportunities for their spouse or partner (46%), as well as to achieve a better personal/professional balance (51%). To address these university-wide concerns, *AdvanceVT* has been instrumental in developing and instituting work/life policies, educating the university community about the availability of these policies, and the creation of a dual-career hire assistance program.

Work/Life Initiatives at Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech, with the assistance of *AdvanceVT*, has made several changes in university policies and procedures over the past five years. Accomplishments to date include the development and dissemination of dual-career assistance guidelines and establishment of a dual-career assistance office. Successful faculty recruitment and retention often depend on suitable employment opportunities for a spouse or partner, a special challenge for land grant institutions like Virginia Tech that are located outside of major metropolitan areas. To address these needs, Virginia Tech formalized dual career hiring guidelines, hired a full-time coordinator, offers referral services, publicizes its support for dual career couples, and provides search exemptions and transition funds for partner appointments where there is a fit with a hiring department. Central funding for the dual career assistance program has also increased since its implementation.

Stop-the-Clock, a university policy used to allow tenure track faculty to suspend the tenure process temporarily in order to manage personal obligations, has been available at Virginia Tech for many years, but was revised in 2005 and now provides automatic tenure clock extension for new parents. Extensions may also be granted for other personal or professional reasons. A new Modified Duties policy was adopted in 2006. Special family or personal health circumstances may substantially alter a faculty member's life for a period of time. While in the past such situations were handled informally at the discretion of the department, a formal policy is now in place. Tenured or tenure-track faculty members may request a semester of modified duties at full pay to create a more flexible schedule to better manage family or personal issues. Central funding is provided for the support of department accommodations, such as the hiring of additional instructors to cover the faculty members' courses.

A Part-time Employment policy for tenured and tenure-track faculty was adopted in 2007. Pre-tenure faculty may request a *term* (one semester to two years, renewable) part-time appointment for child/dependent care or personal health reasons with a commensurate extension of the tenure clock. The maximum probationary period is capped at 10 years. Tenured faculty members may request *term* or *permanent* part-time appointment for family or health reasons, or for professional practice or outside entrepreneurial activities.

An increase in childcare opportunities, a pressing need for Virginia Tech's faculty and staff, has also been a focus of the university's commitment to work/life balance. In 2005, a part-day, part-year lab school on campus was converted into full-day, year-round daycare and currently options to expand the number of daycare slots available in the community are being explored.

Work/Life Policy Utilization at Virginia Tech: The Data

At this point in the *AdvanceVT* project, all of these policies are now in place, but the work is not complete. Research indicates that women faculty are often disinclined to use these policies due to apprehension and fear of reprisal from other faculty members, despite the fact that these policies are also accessible to and often used by male faculty. In order to increase awareness of the policies, information has been shared through meetings with and presentations to department heads and promotion and tenure committee chairs, as well as faculty members themselves, and distributed through printed brochures, websites, and print and online newsletters. With support from the provost and the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, *AdvanceVT* is tracking the utilization of these policies and the career progress of faculty who take advantage of them. The following section presents data on the use of these policies to date and the effect of these policies on faculty career progression.

Dual-Career Assistance Program

Many academics are partnered with other academics who are also pursuing faculty careers (Wolf-Wendel et al. 2000). This has been shown to be especially true for women whom Virginia Tech is recruiting as the primary faculty hire, more so than for male recruits. Table 1 shows the number of cases handled by the Dual Career Assistance Office in its first two years of existence, and Figure 1 shows the outcomes of those cases. In many cases, the university has been enriched in the process, managing to recruit outstanding faculty members using the dual career hiring guidelines. Virginia Tech has been able to accommodate quite a number of faculty dual career hires—22 in 2005–2006, and 25 from the 2006–2007 cohort. Because dual hire services and placement is an on-going process, it is important to note that this is a snapshot of their employment status as of fall 2007. Not all employment offers are for permanent positions, and concerns about secure, appropriate employment for the spouse or partner may continue for a number of years before they are successfully resolved.

2005	*2005—2006*	*2006 – 2007*
Dual-Career Assistance Office opened	61 Total cases 45 new hires 6 retention cases 10 subsequently declined offers 38 male/23 female primary hires	67 Total cases 39 new hires 19 retention cases 9 subsequently declined offers 46 male/21 female primary hires

Table 1. Data on dual-career assistance office use at Virginia Tech

Of faculty members surveyed who took advantage of Virginia Tech's dual-career hire assistance program in 2005—2006, 41% had a very positive experience. While most respondents reported having a good experience with dual career hiring whether they used the office or were

hired directly by the department, other participants in the program had greater expectations than program was able to accommodate, and reported somewhat positive and negative experiences. Despite this, one participant noted: "Guidelines and the existence of the Dual-Career Office at Virginia Tech made us feel more secure about accepting Virginia Tech as an employer for my husband. It is a good indication that Virginia Tech cares for the employees and their family, which is one of the most important factors to consider while looking for a new job."

Error! Objects cannot be created from editing field codes. Figure 1. Employment outcomes for dual-career hires at Virginia Tech

Stop-the-Clock

* Through Dec '07

The stop-the-clock policy at Virginia Tech is not new, and it was in use prior to the revisions to the policy in June 2005, but the revised policy has resulted in increased usage, as shown in Figure 2.

The increase can be attributed to several reasons:

- The newly revised policy makes clear that male faculty members may stop-the-clock at the time of childbirth and adoption and the significant upsurge in male requests in 2006— 2007 illustrates that many male faculty members are now using the policy for that purpose.
- Virginia Tech has appointed 360 new junior faculty members in the past five years, a third of whom are women, and the policy serves their needs as they start their families.
- The stop-the-clock policy also accommodates faculty members with other special circumstances.
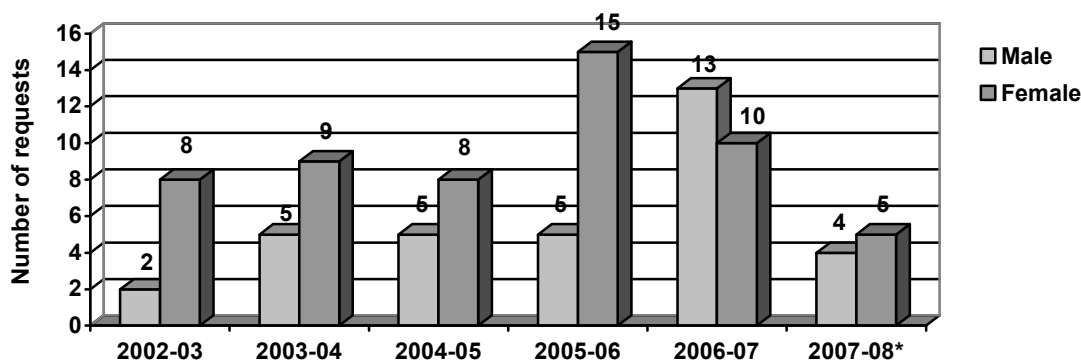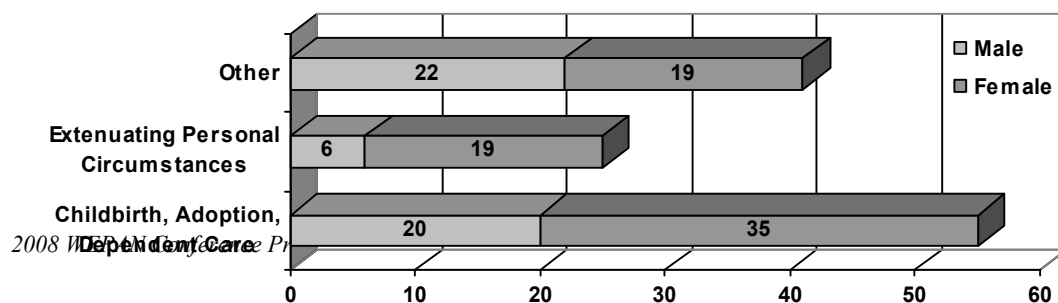

Figure 2. Stop-the-Clock requests by gender

Figure 3 illustrates that the most common reason for stopping the tenure clock is childbirth or

adoption. However, Virginia Tech has a fair number of requests for a halt in the tenure clock because of extenuating personal health reasons, or extraordinary professional circumstances not of the faculty member's own making. Virginia Tech's policy is somewhat unusual in allowing extensions for such reasons. However, it has worked well in assisting faculty members to be successful when they have encountered difficulties with access to promised laboratories or equipment, or their assignments have been dramatically altered during their probationary period.

Figure 3. Reasons for tenure clock extension, by gender, 1996-2007

A long-time faculty member at Virginia Tech and patron of the stop-the-clock policy remarked, "These new policies are helping us retain outstanding faculty who now feel that they can work at the institution they love and still take care of the people they love."

AdvanceVT continues to monitor whether using the policy actually assists faculty members to successfully achieve tenure. Figure 4 shows the tenure outcomes for those faculty members who stopped the clock for childbirth or dependent care reasons only.

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Figure 4. Outcomes for faculty who stopped the tenure clock, childbirth and dependent care cases only, 1996-2007

Modified Duties
In the 2006—2007 academic year, the first year of the modified duties policy, four participants utilized the service, with $15,000 of central funding distributed to departments. In 2007—2008, there were 15 participants and $117,500 was distributed to departments. Most of the modified duties requests to date involve childbirth, while several others relate to the impact of the shootings on campus in April of 2007.

Implications
It is yet too early to draw firm conclusions about the impact of the new and revised work/life policies on faculty careers at Virginia Tech. *AdvanceVT* plans to conduct a faculty wide climate survey in fall 2008 as one attempt to gauge the impact of program initiatives on campus, and will continue to track policy utilization and tenure outcomes for pre-tenure faculty. While increasing the numbers of women and minorities in faculty positions is good, it is not sufficient. Institutional transformation requires changes in policies, practices, norms, and culture—it requires that the entire fabric of the institution be changed in order to achieve equity. Furthermore, it is important that initiatives at the university seek to merge institutional priorities and commitments to excellence *and* diversity, not one at the expense of the other. The comprehensive suite of work/life policies described in this paper are an attempt to make it possible for all faculty members to combine successful careers with fulfilling personal lives.

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Author Contact Information

Peggy Layne, P.E. AdvanceVT Program Director playne@vt.edu