

**CLA-DEI Committee
Report on Parental Leave
February 18, 2022**

Executive Summary: The CLA DEI committee conducted a survey to determine faculty, staff, and graduate student experiences with paid parental leave. Minimum paid leaves are guaranteed at 6 weeks across the college for faculty and 2 weeks for staff, but the actual experience of these leaves with respect to course release, administrative work, and research is highly variable as a function of negotiations with department heads, department size, leave timing, and available funds. We believe that these discrepancies may overlap with equity concerns in that faculty expressed feeling pressure to take minimum leaves or negotiate with heads in order to take full advantage of leaves, and because too much discretion regarding the leave is placed within the individual circumstances of a relationship with a head and unit resources rather than within consistent and clear policies. Importantly, we do not wish to take action that would result in reducing leaves to the minimum proscribed. Rather, we urge CLA to consider college-level funds and policy to relieve teaching and service demands during parental leaves, compensate those leaves appropriately, assign coverage equitably, and mandate parental leave for all who are eligible as a default.

Our Charge: Investigating how CLA allocates 6 week paid leaves for FMLA and paid parental leave reasons (childbirth, adoption, serious family illness), the nature of those leaves in practice, and whether our policies are consistent, fair, and competitive with those of institutions we aspire to be like.

Context in North America: A 2018 survey of 197 North American Universities (<https://github.com/aaronclauset/parental-leave>) found that about 60% of institutions have some form of paid parental leave for new mothers or fathers. For universities with paid leave policies, the average duration is 14.2 weeks for women and 11.6 weeks for men; Among universities that offer paid leave, 68.3% have gender-neutral policies, where the same leave is offered to parents regardless of who was the birthing parent. Private institutions have slightly longer leaves, granting an additional two weeks. Our committee created an additional list of 21 peer institutions drawn from the Big 10, Midwest AAUs, schools with strong STEM and Liberal Arts programs. Many institutions differentiated between faculty, grad students, lecturers, and staff, with the most generous benefits accruing to tenured/tenure-track faculty. Purdue offers 6 weeks of paid parental leave, placing it in the bottom tier of this group and below the average paid leave policy from the North American dataset. Notably, Indiana University offers 12 weeks.



In their parental leave documents, several institutions made explicit comments about the unique issues faced by teaching faculty, notably including:

- (1) Leave policies that made specific comments about the need for semester leaves because of unfair burdens to faculty and students when professors leave midway through a semester
- (2) Developing policy when two university faculty/staff/students employed by the institution face parental leave simultaneously because they are having the baby together
- (3) Waiving the 12-month requirement for benefits to accrue for faculty with the recognition that academic hiring in the 21st century precludes faculty strategically taking a position with the malicious intent of giving birth to a child.
- (4) Recognizing the particular challenges of birthing parents, although some used the gendered term women faculty in discussing these challenges - In recognition of the multiple forms of family-making at Purdue, we suggest that birthing parent is most accurate to capture the special needs of nursing and birth faced by people who give birth.

Parental Leave at Purdue

Because of the confidential nature of the leaves, department heads could not share specific information while HR representatives were helpful in pointing the committee toward stated policies. A key parental leave issue suggested by the CLA Senate discussions is not so much Purdue's official policies as the highly variable and not-officially-documented individual arrangements that particular heads offer particular people at particular times.

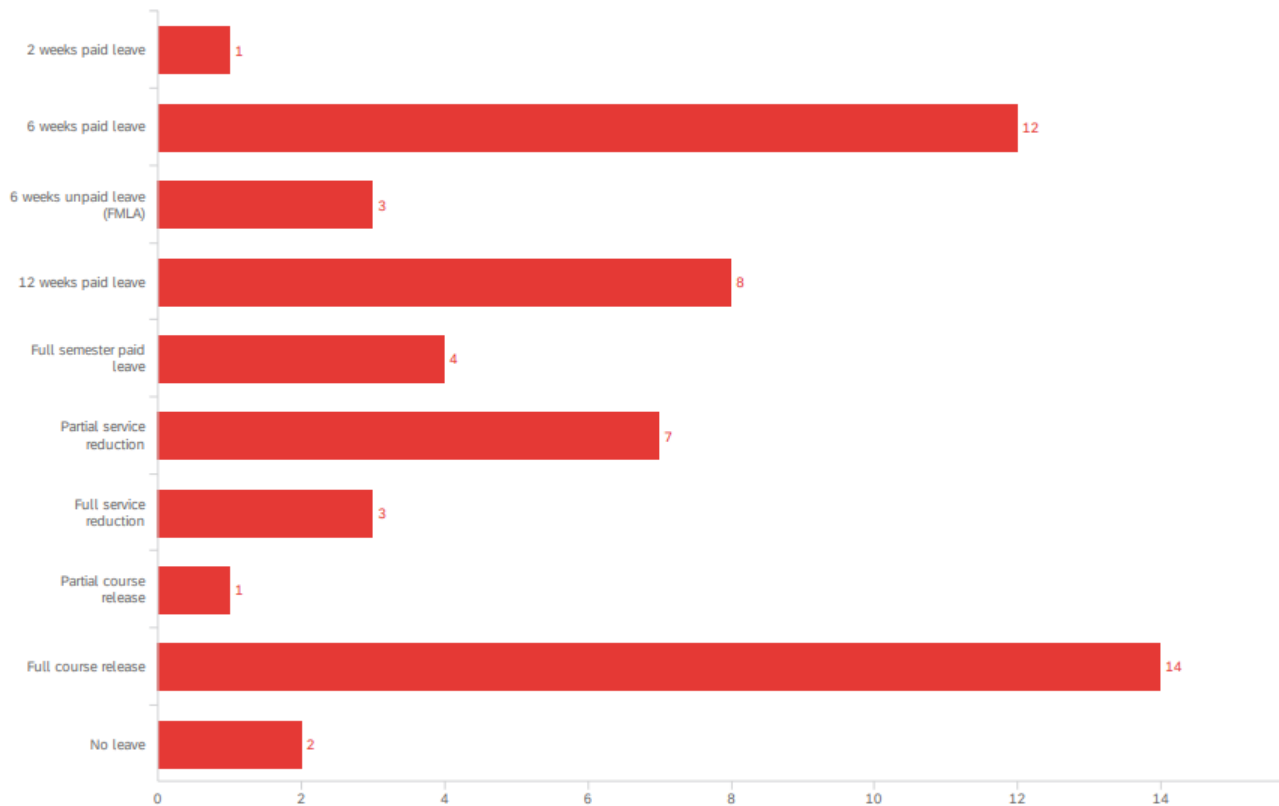
To understand this variability in leave experiences, the CLA DEI committee sent out a survey to the CLA faculty, staff, and graduate students on January 25. 165 people completed this survey, with 113 responding that they have not taken a parental leave in the last five years and 39 responding that they had. Tenure track/tenured faculty provided the greatest number of responses (77), followed by staff (18), graduate students (16), and non-tenure track faculty (16). Of these

respondents, 21 reported being the birthing parent while 11 reported that they were not the birthing parent. Respondents who identified their departments (127) showed evidence of wide participation across the college including all units except for Bands & Orchestras. Of the 132 respondents who identified a race/ethnicity in the survey, the vast majority described themselves as White (101, 76.52%), followed by Other (17, 12.88%), Asian (7, 5.3%), Black or African American (5, 3.79%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (2, 1.52%).

Survey Results

Experiences of this leave were highly variable across CLA.

Figure 1: Which of the following describes your leave? Check all that apply



Faculty also spoke to this discrepancy in their qualitative feedback, both thanking their heads for special arrangements and expressing their frustration with minimum policies. In these and all quoted excerpts from the qualitative feedback, responses are unedited except in circumstances where they have been condensed the sake of space, indicated by an ellipsis (...):

“I was fortunate enough to have a Head who, when I informed them of my pregnancy, first congratulated me and my family and then said she would work with me so that I could have a full semester away from teaching. We figured out a way for me to augment my 12 week paid leave with a small administrative project that could be completed on my own time and allow me to get paid for the remaining 4 weeks. I’d be released from

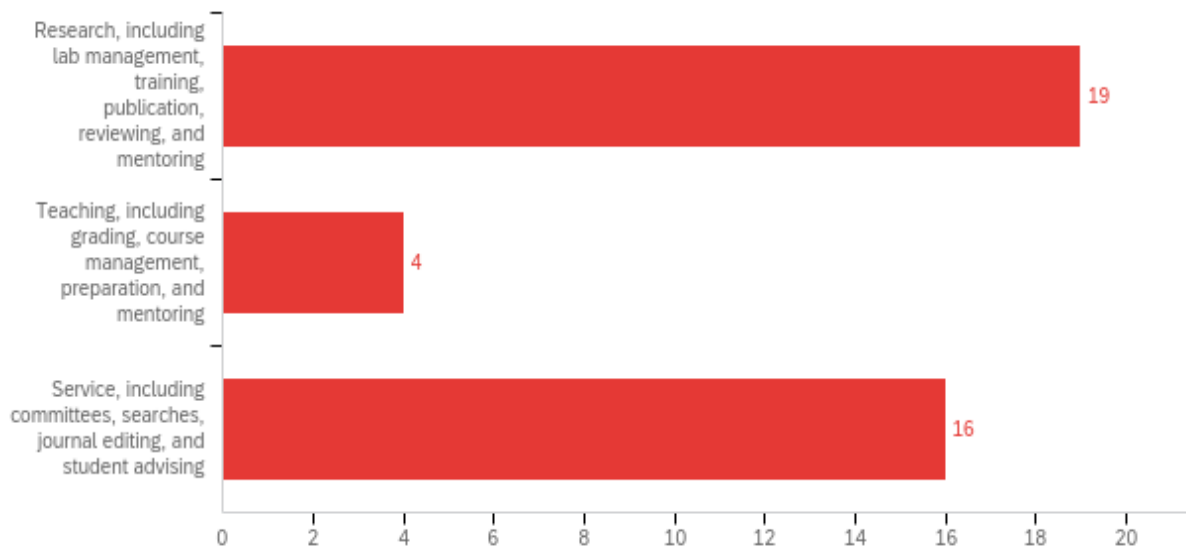
teaching and any other service work for the semester. She enthusiastically worked with me to come up with the plan, and never made me feel as if I was letting my department down by taking time off.”

“It was my understanding that parental leave, strictly speaking, consisted of 6 weeks paid leave. I was able to supplement it with additional leave time from the accumulate sick days I had available. In addition, the head of my unit was extremely understanding and accommodating and provided a full course release for the semester during which the baby was due. As I understand, it is not a standard procedure and depends on the good will of each individual leading the academic unit in question.”

“I negotiated these parental leaves with my department head and HR, taking 6 weeks of paid leave, overloading on service in the previous semester, and then returning to teach one class after and before the leave. Because I was leaving and returning to teaching, I by default continued course management duties and correspondences with students. As an advisor of undergraduate and graduate research, I continued to meet with and advise students. I also continued serving on a search committee, continued journal editing duties, continued reviewing and writing research. Having to leave and then return to teaching was extraordinarily disruptive, and I was frustrated to hear about people granted full semester reprieves across other departments.”

“My leave was 2012 with a different head. Course releases were common then. Now, it seems to have changed. Full leave for set weeks - no teaching, service, etc. This is difficult as it means faculty are asked to help out with class, and that person isn't doing service...Those who teach 2-2 have a harder time getting out of teaching than those with lower teaching load. The dept is not provided any teaching support if someone goes on leave.”

Faculty also reported a wide range in continuing research, teaching, and service activities during leaves:



Respondents were also asked to describe their experiences taking and covering for leaves. In the qualitative responses, 11 faculty responded that they received full course releases during the semester of a birth, while 12 indicated that they continued/resumed teaching or working directly with students in some respect. Nineteen, three, and 25 people, respectively reported that they were asked to cover course, research, and administrative duties for a colleague taking leave.

Of these respondents, 23 left qualitative feedback in response to the prompt: “Please use this space to describe your experience taking parental leave as it relates to your duties at Purdue, including but not limited to time off, course management, service, research obligations, and committee duties” and 52 respondents left qualitative feedback in response to the prompt: “Please use this space to describe your experience as a colleague professionally affected by a parental leave in your department as it relates to your duties at Purdue, including but not limited to time off, course management, service, research obligations, and committee duties.” In practice, these qualitative boxes transgressed these neat categories and many respondents discussed their own and others’ leaves in both boxes.

In their feedback, respondents expressed both their gratitude to colleagues, departments, and department heads in arranging leaves, as well as their frustration with being asked to take on unfair coverage and with unfair treatment across departments and timeframes. Respondents agreed that these policies are important, while also signaling that there are important structural barriers to equitable leaves including the size of a department, special or creative deals negotiated with particular heads, and financial resources available to fulfill faculty duties when leaves arise.

In the nine reflections stating that leave was not an imposition to their unit and the 14 positive reflections expressing gratitude to their units, respondents emphasized the special individual considerations given by heads and departmental colleagues, noting that they went above and beyond what was required officially, moved with flexibility, and provided support:

“Our department has been generous with parental leave, and I strongly endorse and support it even though I have not taken it myself.”

“Parental leave has not been an imposition on me at all, and it is critical to job satisfaction and retention of many of my colleagues. Flexibility in covering these teaching and service tasks is simply not a big issue compared to the huge benefits of these policies.”

“I have had several colleagues take parental leave, and in my experience, our department was able to cover teaching responsibilities without much problem because we had sufficient time to plan.”

In the 22 statements indicating that the leave was insufficient or the 26 statements indicating that they felt they had been treated unfairly, respondents indicated that heads did not always make special arrangements with faculty, felt that their career progress was being unfairly stunted as a result of parental leave, worried that duties fell to overworked colleagues during parental leaves,

and felt that units had no option to grant fuller leaves to faculty because they were too underfunded:

“My head and program directors couldn't decide how using "hours" to get out of teaching times would translate to being released from two full courses because they couldn't agree how many hours each course counted for. Ultimately, they decided it didn't make sense for me to come back at the end of the spring semester and jump into a class and teach for 3-5 weeks, so the associate dean approved a full course release. I was also directly told by my head that it would not be a good idea for my career security for me to take parental leave.”

“As a new/incoming PhD...I had no leave, and I was incredibly exhausted after leaving for a week. A very clear parental leave (or more accommodating parental leave) could help future students in this regard. What is the point of making your department aware when they do little to help with providing resources like parental leave.”

“I had a child over the summer, entitling me to the right of maternity leave, but I haven't taken it because of the fear that people would think that I was gaming the system or abandoning my job since I didn't absolutely have to take the leave to recover.”

“I've not been asked to cover any obligations for colleagues on parental leave, however I would not be happy about having to do so - if someone is on leave, the university needs to hire a temporary employee to fill their position instead of putting the work on other people who are already underpaid and overworked.”

“As a program director, I had more responsibilities and challenges scheduling and accommodating graduate students with parental/ birthing/ childcare issues. I would estimate that half of lost time (pre-pandemic) was grad student childcare issues. I am not complaining about it but recording it. Just-in-time and reduced flexibility in scheduling to bare-bones levels has taken its toll especially in CLA, and we could not today accommodate the demands of parental leave if it happened [now as in the past]”

“When my children were born (when I was pre-tenure), my wife had complications from the birth of our first child and it was incredibly difficult. But I had overheard a senior colleague mention in a faculty meeting that "In my day men didn't take parental leave and my kids turned out fine" and no one pushed back, so I didn't dare ask for leave. I think this attitude still prevails amongst many of the "good old boys" who run this place and who have nice docile little wifeys at home to care for their kids. Those of us whose spouses work for a living (often at Purdue) are screwed over by the continuing sexism at the highest levels (i.e. the publicly expressed expectation that men should always marry less-educated women and such bullshit, presumably so they stay at home with the kids and no parental leave is needed).”

“I have only been here 6 months, so have not had the chance to be impacted by it, really. But I am expecting to take leave in the fall myself, and it has been a shitshow trying to

even figure out what leave is available to me. It seems like I have to do all of the work to figure out how to take leave.”

Some faculty emphasized how much has changed over the past 20 years:

“I was personally never able to take parental leave at the time of raising our children, since Purdue didn't do this at the time. At that time, for instance, "maternity leave" was only an option if it was treated as being on "sick leave"! I don't want to sound like the person who "walked 5 miles to school uphill both ways" when I was younger, but it needs to be mentioned that things have come a LONG way. Purdue's parental leave policies are much better than the were at that time and, in my opinion, are more than generous...”

“I've been at Purdue a long time, and I had three children without having any access to parental leave at Purdue. Children were supposed to be planned carefully so that births would occur in the summer or during sabbatical. If births occurred during the semester, as it did for me, you needed to use all your sick leave to recover (in other words, there was only sick leave, not maternity leave). Since then, Purdue's policies have much improved, but what isn't clear or transparent is how much heads can accommodate new mothers and fathers. I think CLA faculty should be encouraged to discuss a variety of accommodations with the Head of their departments and that Heads should be encouraged to offer a full range of support to enable faculty to achieve work-life balance. Surely committee work could be suspended for new parents? Perhaps additional course releases could be negotiated? Or perhaps a special departmental project could be assigned to the new parent in lieu of a course?”

“During my time serving as a department head, I several times needed to deal with the need to grant parental leaves to faculty. Finding ways to cover their classes without creating undue burdens on colleagues was a major challenge...many of us older people who came up in the days before there was ANY leave allowed other than sick leave for the week of the delivery, if you were female. It was unfair that pregnant women had to use sick leave disproportionately. And it was a true challenge that many of us had to use unpaid family leave to manage the female side of early parenting without appropriate paid leave. It was also ironic that many women's biological clocks "went off" and had children when in grad school, while men with younger partners got their tenure track jobs in time to get parental leave--so the first parental leaves at a previous university were for men...there should be strong administrative support to cover the needs so that colleagues do not have to do too much. Each faculty member needs to have the time and support they need for success, unaffected by colleagues' reproductive decisions.”

Finally, two respondents took issue with the notion of parental leave as a special class not available to faculty and staff who not having children:

“Wondering why an equivalent benefit isn't available to single faculty and staff”

“I don't know if the type of leave really matters so long as it is a legitimately sanctioned university leave, and I don't really like the idea of parental leave being treated as exceptional, especially since parental leave can typically be adequately planned for in advance, rather than sudden medical or family leaves that require a sudden accommodation.”

Recommendations

Given the wide range of flexibility that departments have in offering leaves, the official policy of 6 weeks of parental leave is, in practice, replaced by a negotiated leave with department heads as a function of that personal relationship, availability of coverage, and funds. This is a clear disadvantage to people seeking leaves from smaller programs, programs without funds to hire temporary teachers, or those with difficult relationships with their heads. Because of the complexities of staffing, teaching/research/service/work specialty, available funds, and confidentiality, we recognize that this is a difficult and often idiosyncratic process. Below we list some possible action items for consideration:

- Designated CLA funds for VAPs, TAs, and lectureships to cover class or lab work not tied to departments

This suggestion is designed to pool money between departments to lessen the burdens faced by individual units and instead house that course and or lab coverage funding at the college level.

- Mandatory parental leave to prevent people from limiting themselves

As some respondents noted that they limited themselves because of a fear of repercussions, a blanket mandatory leave policy could make this request easier and less politically charged.

- Form committees at the departmental level to assign leave responsibilities and coverages, thereby moving that discussion away from the head and into a committee body

If some of the discrepancy in leaves and satisfaction comes from particular negotiations with heads, then a committee could take that role and share the burden of approval and negotiation of leave particulars.

- Normalizing a full semester course release

Respondents expressed frustration with teaching half classes, finishing classes despite immediate postpartum or post adoption needs, or working to cover partial classes in equitable ways. A full semester course release policy would avoid this situation while allowing for creative means of coverage through service, advising, or other administrative duties in other areas.