

President and Provost's Council on Women (PPCW)
Task Force Report: Work-Life Integration
 March 2021

Task Force Members

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Grand Challenge

Create a workplace culture at Ohio State University where women are encouraged and empowered to define (and redefine) work/life integration without stigma.

Context

Work/life integration remains one of the most critical aspects of employee satisfaction and directly affects employee engagement, performance and retention. Women face particular challenges to achieving this balance, as the pandemic has proven nationally with millions of women leaving the workforce in the past twelve months, often to prioritize caregiving. Several issues pose barriers to work/life integration: the pressure to put in “face time” (presenteeism); insufficient child and elder care options; and stigma about exercising boundaries. If the only options to achieve balance require reducing hours or responsibilities, these trends impact women’s life-long earnings, retirement savings, and career progression. While these disadvantages can especially challenge single parents or low-income households, work-life integration should be achievable for all Ohio State employees.

Rationale and Data

A review of “documented areas that impede the development of women at Ohio State and slow the attainment of parity for women in the workplace” from 2002 to 2016 suggests numerous challenges: inadequate on-campus childcare, inconsistent standards for caregiver leave, leadership not supportive of flexible work arrangements, dominant male culture, and poor work/life balance (2016 PPCW Report). More recent reports continue to recommend work in these areas to improve gender equity. The 2018 PPCW survey of Senior Human Resources Professionals across 15 large units in the University found that only one was utilizing job share as part of flexible work arrangement opportunities and that 25-40% of those requesting flexible work arrangements were denied largely due to “inflexibility of job duties.” Faculty in particular were at risk of not having access to accepted guidelines for flexible work arrangements and as many as five units noted that additional training was needed (2018 PPCW report, p. 2). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic brings renewed attention to long-standing challenges and underscores the critical need for supportive policies, practices, and culture going forward that will ultimately help all employees have vibrant and fruitful careers at the University. For example, The Women’s Place university survey in May 2020 indicated that 87% of surveyed staff would like the option to continue working remotely at least one day a week when the university returns to full operations. During the work-at-home period, many employees expressed appreciation for improvements in their daily life, including not needing to commute, being able to prepare and eat a healthy lunch, and having the flexibility to take breaks when needed. These preferences overlap with employees’ high interest in having the option to continue working from home.

The recently published McKinsey Report, [Women in the Workplace 2020](#), also provides additional statistics

on the impact of caregiving and how the needs have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Develop and approve a remote work policy for the upcoming academic year that provides guidance to faculty, staff and their managers.

Background: PPCW's 2012 report from the Subcommittee on Technology and Work Life Balance concluded that: our interviews indicate very clear differences among units on campus in the areas of flexibility and being able to adjust work to life demands. . . The varying policies, expectations, levels of communication and amount of flexibility provided to employees leads to serious inequities that do not reflect our values or our goal of being "one university". During the COVID-19 crisis, The Women's Place has actively advocated for increased access for remote work.

Justification: The [McKinsey Report: Pandemic's Gender Effect](#) indicates that the COVID-19 crisis has driven as many as 2 million women—particularly mothers with young children—to consider leaving the workforce or stepping back from their careers. Lack of flexibility at work was identified as a top predictive factor in whether employees are considering downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce

- Considering downshifting career: women with children overall (15%), women with children under the age of 10 (17%)
- Considering leaving workforce completely: women with children overall (18%), women with children under the age of 10 (23%)

Where Flexible Work can be generalized as a change from the typical business hours of any given unit and can include Remote Work options, Remote Work specifies working outside of the physical boundaries of the unit and campus. Currently, there is no specific policy for telework. Yet as far back as 2012, there has been strong evidence across campus on the "high value employees put on having a flexible work place." At the time, although "telecommuting" was "one of the most utilized types of flexible work arrangement" at the university, there was persistent discomfort with technology including speed of work (i.e. internet connections) and "how we will work together using this technology" which may have impeded the development of a specific Remote Work policy. Now, nearly a decade of broadband improvements and a major pandemic later, we have learned innumerable lessons on how to leverage technology to work remotely and communicate with our teams. Nevertheless, managers need to be engaged in mitigating the expectation that technology allowing remote work means that employees "are always on duty...feel pressure to respond to inquiries 24/7." And new policy should include guidance on creating boundaries despite the theoretical ability of technology to create 24/7 work capacity.

Recommendation #2: Normalize the consistent use of the Flexible Work Policy [6.12](#) across all campuses and units

Background: This request dates back to a report provided by PPCW in 2012. See additional background section under Recommendation #1.

The 2016 PPCW Report notes flexible work as one of the "documented areas that impede the development of women at Ohio State and slow the attainment of parity for women in the workplace". Most recently the PPCW Task Force on Flexible Work Policy, Final Report dated February 5, 2019 notes, "*While there is a great deal of interest in flexible work as a university benefit, there are also questions about how consistently it is implemented, who is eligible and how to shift the culture toward more openness about flexible work arrangements.* The task force noted both barriers to increasing awareness of existing policy

and the lack of an institution-wide unit tracking use of the policy.

Justification:

The need to balance familial obligations in response issues such as widespread school closures and familial health crises in the setting of a pandemic has normalized flexible work arrangements for many across the university, across all levels from hourly workers to senior leaders. As such, the lessons learned from this experience can contribute to renewed policies and a workplace culture that support flexible work arrangements to their fullest extent. Encouraging flexible work arrangements, especially from senior leaders, can mitigate the number of women who either delay their career progression or leave the workforce entirely.

Resources and strategies for maintaining work-life integration, including an explanation of the Flexible Work policy, should be available during new employee orientation and new supervisor training, and readdressed yearly. Additionally, there should be a committed effort to track the use of flexible work arrangements across the university and share the results on an annual basis.

Recommendation #3: Update the Ohio State Paid Time Off Policy (6.27) to reflect diverse paradigms of kinship

Background: PPCW was charged with examining this initiative during the initiation of the 2018-2020 council year.

Justification: The designation of extended family should be expanded to include “niece,” “nephew,” “aunt,” “uncle,” and “cousin” as well as an option for “other loved one” where the employee is trusted and time off usage monitored to prevent abuse of expanded policies.

These updates would recognize the varied arrangements of modern families, the intergenerational and extended model of families of color and immigrant communities, and relationships beyond immediate (spouse or domestic partner; biological, adoptive, step, or foster parent; individual who stood in loco parentis to an employee when the employee was a child; biological, adopted, step, or foster child; a legal ward; or a child of a person standing in loco parentis) and extended family (Any one of the following: sister, brother, grandparent, grandchild, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, grandparent-in-law, grandchild-in-law, or corresponding relatives of the employee's domestic partner) structures which are already defined in the policy. While current policies are broader than Chapter 123:1-32 of the Ohio Administrative Code where only “the employee, the employee's spouse or a child residing with the employee” or “immediate family” are given consideration in leave policies, revising the Ohio State policy language would better accommodate care for and by unmarried, unpartnered, and childfree people who are not identified as “an immediate family member” or “extended family member” in the current policy. For example, an employee may be next of kin or geographically closest to a great-aunt who requires temporary or permanent care, necessitating the use of employee sick time. In addition, the current policies do not acknowledge employees’ possible responsibilities for non-relatives for whom they may permanently or temporarily serve as caregiver.

Recommendation #4: Develop a long-term plan for caregiving support across the continuum

- Develop projections for expanding on-site childcare services available to Ohio State faculty, staff, and

students by 25% by 2025.

- Develop expanded options for backup and emergency caregiving services.
- Create community partnerships to provide access to adult day care options

Background: The recommendation is taken from the “Closing the Loop” Report (page 4 in original document). The 2004 Faculty Survey (2005 PPCW Report, p. 13) and PPCW focus groups in 2016 (2016 PPCW Report, p. 3 and 7) both address the need for caregiving support from childcare to elder care.

[previous PPCW reports](#)

Justification: Childcare is consistently identified as an impediment to women at The Ohio State University. In a list the PPCW compiled for 2002-2016 “documented areas that impede the development of women at Ohio State and slow the attainment of parity for women in the workplace,” childcare appears on four separate occasions. The existing onsite childcare program has limited space and a lengthy waitlist for parents seeking a spot. Furthermore, the so-called “sandwich generation” has a growing need for robust resources for eldercare. Mid-career faculty and staff employee promotion and retention is particularly at risk without adequate eldercare options as this is when childcare needs lessen but caring for aging loved ones becomes a harsh reality.

There has been a long-standing need to expand the availability of childcare options by instituting a long term projection for a new childcare facility and/or contracting additional childcare services with an external vendor such as Bright Horizons [Family Solutions for Employers](#), which is a provider locally to Nationwide Children’s Hospital, OhioHealth and Battelle Research Institute. The OSUWMC has partnered with [Juggle](#) beginning in 2019 to provide backup/emergency childcare for medical center faculty and staff. This benefit is not available to faculty and staff outside of the medical center and it is therefore recommended that the University evaluate the feasibility of offering this benefit to faculty and staff across all campuses.