



Attention: Members of the Faculty Senate, American Association of University Professors (AAUP-PSU), and the Office of Academic Affairs

The Work/Life Balance Committee would like to express its support of PSU's efforts to allow for some flexibility as it relates to the last-minute hour reduction by the Helen Gordon childcare center. It's great to see our University rally around this situation. We know that childcare concerns affect many of our employees. A 2009 Child Care Survey conducted at PSU found that 37.6% of PSU Faculty, Staff and Administration are parents, with 41% indicating that finding child care is somewhat or very difficult. 35% of the faculty and staff surveyed were on the waiting list for campus child care.

As we've seen in recent [press](#), this is not an isolated issue. Daycare availability nationwide [is operating at 88% of its pre-pandemic capacity](#). Furthermore, it's well known that spots at Helen Gordon are limited and most parents on campus need to seek alternate arrangements. A [2017 childcare survey](#) sent out by the Work Life Balance Committee found that 47 percent of participants used child care five days a week and 58% of respondents indicated that lack of childcare options created a moderate or great deal of challenge at work. We are especially concerned with how reduced daycare availability might create particular vulnerability for students, faculty and staff without job security. Unclear guidance from PSU surrounding acceptable ways to deal with lack of childcare can create further anxiety.

Another concern is how work-life challenges exacerbated by the pandemic will widen pre-existing inequities, such as career pay gaps that fall along gender and racial lines. Research suggests that [women and minoritized racial and ethnic groups](#) are disproportionately impacted by family responsibilities due to the Covid-19 pandemic (and acknowledging it is likely that [trans, non-binary, and other diverse genders](#) were not included or investigated in meaningful ways). Stop-gap measures, such as short-term daycare or bringing your dependent to campus briefly (the latter of which is already a vulnerable thing to do), are now even more restricted due to safety concerns and with family room spaces closed. Without these resources, caretakers are struggling to maintain work life balance and run the risk of being pushed out of the workforce. While policies designed to accommodate work-life challenges are critical, they must also be accompanied by equity adjustments to ensure that accommodations (e.g., tenure clock extensions) do not result in career pay gaps.

Childcare, including school, is a tenuous situation during the pandemic. At any moment if a class becomes quarantined, families have to manage the consequences. We would like to see a shift in perspective, so that if and when that happens, it doesn't become the sole burden of the individuals affected. In response to our work life balance survey, nearly 30 percent of respondents said that they chose not to take any family leave due to concerns over professional challenges and implications.

We would like to see a cultural shift from the top. If PSU leadership truly values parents and families, it needs to clearly and overtly act on that value. When concrete policies are designed to enact accommodations, they should be implemented consistently and not rely on the discretion of supervisors and course instructors on a case-by-case basis, as this opens the door to disparate treatment. PSU has so much potential to be innovative and change policies and

procedures to be more universally supportive. If PSU really wants the return to campus to be successful, family accommodations need to be part of the plan.

Sincerely,

The Work/Life Balance Committee

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