Information for Leaders, Faculty, Instructors and Staff with Family Caregiving Responsibilities

Since the onset of the pandemic and the start of remote work in March, many of our colleagues unexpectedly became full-time caregivers on top of their roles at work.

Many experience challenges presented by the decreased availability of childcare due to physical distancing and the hybrid and remote learning approaches taking place in local school districts. Variations and fluctuations in school configurations present ongoing uncertainties. Additionally, we must be mindful at this time that some are experiencing added caregiving responsibilities for elderly or disabled loved ones that are complicated by the pandemic.

As the semester progresses, we know that variations in care arrangements will persist and our colleagues will continue to provide care for others while performing their professional responsibilities. These fluctuations require significant flexibility. This pandemic has already magnified existing inequities, particularly of gender and race. A recent survey conducted by The Women’s Place found that faculty and staff attested to the disproportionately gendered impact that COVID-19 is having on women and their professional development, especially for women of color and caregivers.

It is incumbent upon all of us to demonstrate compassion and flexibility with an awareness to these additional burdens. The Women’s Place has published guidance for supporting faculty, staff and students who are simultaneously providing care and performing work responsibilities. Additionally, the Office of Human Resources has comprehensive guidance and options for employees with caregiving responsibilities, including telework, flexible work and various leave options during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Below, we highlight measures the university has already taken and resources across the university that provide some options to those responsible for care giving to help address the challenges in care, especially the unexpected fluctuations that call for even greater flexibility. Beyond policies, we encourage all to operate with an ethic of care for all as we negotiate these unprecedented circumstances.

Let us do our shared part to build a culture of care within our college so we can best support our valued faculty, staff and students.

Benefits and Resources
Ohio State is extending several benefits deadlines and expanding program options to help support employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes to the health benefit enrollment,
flexible spending accounts and coverage of COVID-19 related diagnostic expenses can be found here.

Caregivers of elderly loved ones may have heightened anxieties and worry given the higher risk for COVID-19, and the university is providing Telephonic Coaching with an Eldercare Specialist. Eldercare Specialist Resources can be reached by calling 800-678-6265 or by submitting an online request for support and guidance on how to best prepare and protect your loved one during this challenging time.

The State of Ohio through its COVID-19 childcare for families website provides tips on talking to children about COVID-19, addressing children’s concerns and offers tips for educating early learners at home.

Tenure Clock Extension
ALL tenure-track faculty who were in their probationary period during spring 2020 as well as those who joined Ohio State in autumn 2020 are offered automatic approval for a one-year extension of the probationary period. This is available to all applicable tenure-track faculty. In addition, OAA provides extensive guidance in navigating tenure track appointment concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teaching
Faculty members, in consultation with their department chairs, were able to choose the modality of their fall teaching to align with their pedagogical preferences and personal/family circumstances. Similarly, the university will maintain multiple teaching modalities this spring semester including face to face, online and hybrid courses. Faculty and instructional staff are encouraged to discuss these options with their chairs and supervisors proactively.

During spring 2020, the university administered SEIs with special instructions to students to assess the "holistic instruction provided to you this semester."

In addition, OAA suggested language for inclusion on instructors’ dossiers stating, “the review of a candidate for appointment, reappointment, promotion or promotion with tenure must holistically consider the candidate’s full teaching portfolio.”

Paid/Unpaid Leave
The university is exercising a number of leave options during this time to help faculty, staff and graduate associates through this uncertain time. All are encouraged to explore all work and telework options before exercising leave options. A number of leave options support those who are unable to telework. The Office of Human Resources offers a detailed flow chart to help establish eligibility for these options and a step by step document to help identify which type of leave best suits your needs.
In addition, the Department of Labor offers detailed information on the U.S. Families First Coronavirus Response Act – Family and Medical Leave, which provides an expansion of family and medical leave act policies and can aid in supporting leave options.

**Tips and Best Practices for Supporting Faculty and Staff with Care Giving Responsibilities**

- Regularly check in with faculty and staff to determine if there are ways the university can support their efforts to balance caregiving and work responsibilities.

- Be mindful that the Employee Assistance Program provides services to faculty and staff that can assist in managing care demands. EAP services are available to benefits-eligible faculty and staff, members of their household, parents and parents-in-law, *even if you did not enroll in an Ohio State medical plan.*

- The chief wellness officer is providing wellness tips and strategies to deal with the challenges of COVID-19 stressors, with many geared toward care providers.

- In making decisions on departmental workload and assignments, include caregivers and their concerns in decision-making for return-to-campus and post-pandemic responses.

- Support staff in devising flexible arrangements under the terms of Flexible Work Policy 6.12. This policy provides opportunities to negotiate changes to work scheduling and location, including “a compressed workweek, telecommuting or starting/ending times that change periodically.”

- We urge chairs and supervisors to clarify your unit’s practices to allow faculty, staff and student parents to bring their minor children to campus in the occasional absence of alternative childcare.

- Avoid requiring employees or students to always turn on their cameras during meetings and classes. Caregivers may need additional privacy to care for loved ones while fulfilling work responsibilities. Participants may still be engaged while not appearing on video.

- Think about caregivers when scheduling meetings and requiring synchronous meetings. Where possible, schedule meetings and events at times less likely to conflict with school drop-off/pick-up times or the beginning and end of virtual school days. When possible, record meetings, meeting minutes and events to later circulate to people who must be absent.

- In addition to adopting a flexible approach to meeting schedules, we likewise encourage creativity and flexibility around fulfilling service commitments, including limiting synchronous meetings to those that are essential to departmental functioning.
• Where possible, we encourage reducing faculty and student service assignments and associated staff support assignments for service activity.

• Extend non-urgent deadlines and maintain communication about what assignments must be prioritized to alleviate pressures on those who are normally expected to perform such assignments.

• Invite faculty, staff and graduate associates into a conversation on their personal care plans should they become unable to deliver on their usual responsibilities.

• Recall that K-12 school schedules will vary widely across the region and care providers may be faced with differing scheduling demands; therefore, we cannot make assumptions based on one local school district’s schedule. We can expect variations across and within school districts.

• We must anticipate fluctuations in care demands as school schedules shift, so maintaining maximum flexibility will best serve everyone.