

# PART-TIME TENURE-TRACK POLICIES: ASSESSING UTILIZATION

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**Abstract** – As part of its National Science Foundation ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Award, the University of Washington received a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to explore part-time faculty careers. The UW has both a permanent and a temporary part-time option for tenure track faculty. Study results highlight implementation issues as well as differences in pre- and post-tenure faculty experiences in a major research institution. Recommendations based on faculty experience include improving communication of policy availability and details and making policy implementation more consistent. To this end, guidelines are offered for departments.

**Index Terms** – ADVANCE, faculty careers, balancing family and careers, part-time faculty.

## INTRODUCTION

Family-friendly policies, and an environment that supports policy utilization, are necessary due to the nature of academic careers if faculty with caregiving responsibilities are to be successful. While the common assumption holds that the flexibility of a faculty career provides the perfect opportunity for work and family balance, it has been demonstrated that this flexibility blurs the boundaries between work and life and typically results in *less* time for the personal lives of faculty [1-4]. In addition to the challenges caused by the blurred boundaries between faculty work and life, the tenure structure creates barriers for faculty with caregiving responsibilities.

Research has shown that the tenure track is modeled on a traditional career trajectory that either had a full-time caregiver in the home or had no family obligations [3, 5-12]. There was no need to balance work and life because life was handled by a full-time caregiver or comprised of work itself [10, 11, 13]. The fixed probationary period for tenure was designed to provide ample time for undistracted faculty to be productive and demonstrate the ability for continued academic success, without delaying the protections tenure provides [2, 14]. This outdated model has been shown to jeopardize the attainment of tenure for the growing ranks of women and men faculty who are caregivers [2, 5, 7, 10-16].

Colleges and universities have begun to implement policies such as tenure clock extensions, family leave, and reduced work loads to help faculty balance work and family

responsibilities. The extent to which family-friendly policies are utilized as intended has emerged as a recurring theme in the literature [5, 17, 18]. Research at Pennsylvania State University [5] demonstrated that, even in the presence of seemingly supportive family-friendly policies, faculty with caregiving responsibilities did not feel that the environment was supportive or that the policy options were viable solutions to balancing work and family.

The University of Washington (UW), likewise, has a strong package of family-friendly policies in place that faculty are not fully utilizing. The UW was one of the initial institutions to receive an ADVANCE Institutional Transformation Award from the National Science Foundation to improve the recruitment, retention, and advancement of female faculty in science, engineering, and mathematics. As part of its ADVANCE program, the University received funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for an exploratory study of the implementation of a part-time tenure track policy. Part-time tenure track faculty members at research institutions are not common. In her study of work-family policies, Raabe [17] found that 11% of the sample institutions had policies in place to allow tenure for part-time faculty. The paper which follows presents current part-time tenure track policy options and conditions for part-time faculty at the UW, summarizes preliminary data from the study, and offers recommendations for policy modifications.

## PART-TIME AND TENURED

Part-time faculty status in higher education has been portrayed as an “academic underclass” [19] that is both undesirable and negative. Reports on part-time faculty have focused on part-time faculty’s lack of status, perceived exploitation, tenuous job security, and lack of recognition [20-22]. As colleges and universities have sought to become more family-friendly, however, part-time faculty careers are being explored as both a desirable and viable option in higher education. Part-time options are especially favored as a means to support female faculty members [6, 17]. Despite changes in family structures, women continue to serve as primary caregivers and their careers are disproportionately negatively impacted by the addition of children to the household [7]. The primary difference in the new part-time faculty model is that the positions would be tenure-track

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with all of the status and privileges associated with university tenure.

Tenure for part-time faculty is a relatively new model of faculty employment. According to a study which used data from the 1993 National Study of Post-secondary Faculty, only 131 faculty members reported that they were part-time and tenured [23]. Almost half of those were at community colleges and less than 3% were at research institutions. One of the initial models of part-time faculty tenure was proposed by Robert Drago and Joan Williams in 2000 [6]. Their model is specifically designed to accommodate faculty with caregiving responsibilities. Faculty make formal application to be part-time for a fixed period of time and must document that the change in status is needed for caregiving. Thus, part-time status is temporary and available only to existing tenured or tenure-track faculty members. Cost savings from the part-time faculty member's salary is to be used to hire a replacement. The model discourages the use of existing departmental colleagues to cover the part-time faculty member's teaching load or other departmental duties. It includes provisions for how time is to be counted toward the mandatory tenure review year and explicitly prohibits additional expectations based on the length of time lapsed prior to the review. In 1998, the UW developed a part-time faculty policy with many of the provisions outlined in the Drago-Williams model.

Prior research on work-family policies has not addressed faculty perspectives on utilization of part-time tenure track policies. Perna [23] excluded part-time tenure-track faculty from her analysis due to their small number. Raabe [17] included part-time tenured faculty in her research on utilization of work-family policies, but her study was limited to administrative perspectives on utilization. The research project funded by Sloan at the University of Washington was designed to gather administrative perspectives about implementation issues as well as faculty perspectives about policy utilization.

## STUDY DESIGN

A mixed method study design combined a review of existing records with structured interviews. The primary research questions for the study were:

1. What policies are in place to allow tenure-track faculty to work less than full-time at the UW?
2. Who has utilized the part-time tenure track policies, for what circumstances, and does implementation of the policies at the departmental level influence utilization?
3. Are the part-time tenure track policies at the UW effective at reducing conflict between work and family responsibilities for faculty members?
4. Do faculty members have different needs and recommendations for part-time policies according to stage of career or gender?

A review of records in the Faculty Senate archives and interviews with people who were instrumental in developing and implementing the policies provided contextual and historical data on policy development. Analysis of Provost Office records and faculty personnel data allowed the researchers to better understand the extent to which the policies were utilized and identify prospective participants for the study. Faculty identified as having experience with the policies were contacted by the Provost's office and asked to participate in structured interviews. The structured interview protocol addressed questions such as: What do faculty experience utilizing these policies? How satisfied are faculty with the experience? What challenges do faculty members face as a consequence of utilizing the policies, both personally and professionally? What recommendations for modification in the policies or process are offered by faculty who utilized them?

Audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and references to department names were removed to protect confidentiality. An inductive approach was used to discover patterns and themes from the data.

## UW POLICY

The University of Washington has two policy options for tenure track faculty who wish to work less than full-time: 1) a permanent part-time tenure track option, and 2) a temporary part-time option that combines partial leave and tenure clock extension. Both options provide full benefits to faculty with appointments of 50% or more. Family status is accorded to same-sex domestic partners in all UW policies. The administration views the availability of these policy options as recruitment and retention tools.

### Permanent Part-Time Policy

The Schools of Medicine and Public Health were the primary motivators behind the UW part-time tenure track policy. They approved a recommended policy in 1995 and the UW Faculty Senate approved a revised version in 1998 [24]. The policy allows for either an initial appointment or a change to a less than full-time appointment. Faculty must be appointed at least 0.50 FTE to be on the tenure track. The policy language specifically requires written documentation of the part-time appointment by either the department chair or college dean. The policy is also specific about the timelines for initial and mandatory review for part-time faculty who are not yet tenured. The initial review occurs at the end of the third year. The mandatory review deadline is pro-rated based on the percentage of time worked up to a maximum of nine years following the initial appointment. The policy has no explicit language about tenure or promotion review criteria or coverage of teaching duties.

Faculty can choose to be part-time for any reason, but are permanently part-time. Although the policy states that

the faculty member may change the percentage of the appointment at any time with written approval by the college dean, he or she must apply and compete for open positions to move to full-time status. The chair of the committee that initiated interest in part-time options expressed the opinion that a temporary part-time option was the desired outcome because faculty did not want to be permanently part-time. However, Academic Human Resources indicates that it is too difficult to manage replacement planning when temporary part-time employment exceeds two years. Thus, the policy was adopted in a manner that requires long-term part-time status to be permanent.

### **Temporary Part-Time Policies**

The University's family leave policy permits faculty to request a temporary leave to care for infants, newly adopted children, or seriously ill family members. The temporary leave may be full-time without pay or part-time with prorated pay. Temporary leave is initially available for up to six months and is renewable after review. Full- or part-time leaves for infant care may not be extended beyond a two year period. A year in which six months or longer of medical and/or family leave is taken is not counted as a year towards mandatory tenure review. Faculty members may request that the tenure clock be extended when he or she becomes a parent but chooses to take less than six months leave, or when other illness or family care responsibilities interrupt the regular dedication to teaching or scholarship.

Faculty sick leave policies with tenure extension were first adopted in the early 1970s. They were amended in 1996 following enactment of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 to broaden the reasons for taking leave and tenure extension. The intent of the policies is to "assist faculty women and men who become parents or are needed to care for a family member" and to provide temporary relief due to a serious health condition that impacts the faculty member's ability to perform his or her job [24, 25].

### **POLICY UTILIZATION**

Tracking utilization of the permanent part-time policy is easily managed due to the requirement that the appointment details be in writing. However, no mechanism for tracking utilization was implemented at the time that the temporary part-time policy was adopted and, as a consequence, it is difficult to analyze its utilization or effectiveness.

Under the current temporary leave policy, part-time faculty leaves, if granted for any reason other than personal medical (including pregnancy), are not paid and are not tracked. If a faculty member utilizes partial leave for caregiving, this unpaid leave is recorded in his or her personnel file and the faculty member remains coded as full-time during the period of temporary reduction. This process prevents faculty utilizing the option from being identified as "part-time." A tracking system is currently being created,

but, in the interim, the researchers found it virtually impossible to identify any faculty who were temporarily part-time unless they also took a tenure clock extension.

Tenure recalculation letters, resulting from granted tenure extensions, have been tracked by the Provost's office since 2000. This allowed the researchers to identify faculty who were given tenure extensions and then identify who in that pool utilized the temporary part-time option. It is very likely, however, that this identification process did not capture many of the faculty members who utilized the temporary part-time option. The use of leave does not automatically recalculate the tenure clock and many faculty members and department chairs are unaware that the policy is applicable for caregiving other than childbirth. Many department chairs are also unaware that they must send a letter notifying the Provost's office of the need for recalculation. This may cause faculty to not receive, or even request, waivers that they are entitled to receive. Thus, they would be absent from the utilization records maintained by the Provost's office.

Data regarding tenure clock extensions were obtained from the Provost's office. Data regarding permanent part-time faculty appointments were obtained from the Academic Human Resources office and reflect faculty status as of July 2003. Faculty from the Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Public Health, and Social Work were excluded from the analysis. Faculty with appointments less than 50% are not tenure eligible and faculty holding two part-time appointments are considered to be full-time and thus both were excluded from the study.

To supplement the list of faculty who received tenure clock extensions between January 2000 and July 2003, the Equal Opportunity Office provided a list of faculty, hired into tenure track assistant professor positions between 1985 and 1995 and promoted to associate professor, who had tenure probationary periods longer than six years. Faculty can take extra years before mandatory tenure review as a result of tenure extension, postponement, and part-time appointment. Postponement is a departmental decision based on factors beyond the scope of this study, thus faculty with extra years to tenure resulting from postponement were excluded. Faculty can request that a year not count toward tenure retroactively, as long as the request is made prior to the mandatory year of review. For this reason, the academic years (AY) waived in the tracked extensions range from AY 96-97 to AY 02-03.

Between the permanent part-time faculty and the faculty who received tenure clock extensions, 62 faculty were identified as eligible for participation in this study. Two are no longer with the University, leaving 60 faculty members: 30 men and 30 women representing 23 permanent part-time appointments and 37 tenure extensions.

The tenure extensions in this study were utilized by 24 women and 13 men. The breakdown by reason and gender can be seen in Table I. Births and work-related issues were the most-often cited reasons for utilizing a tenure extension.

“Work-related” refers to any reason not involving birth, caregiving, personal medical, or part-time status. Work-related reasons include loss of office and lab space, delays in research funding promised at hire, visiting professorship, and, in one case, excessive service.

TABLE I  
BREAKDOWN OF TENURE EXTENSIONS

Reason	Totals by Gender		Of Total Extensions		Of Total by Gender	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Births	4	14	10.8%	37.8%	30.8%	58.3%
Caregiving	0	3	0.0%	8.1%	0.0%	12.5%
Work-related	9	5	24.3%	13.5%	69.2%	20.8%
Part-time	0	1	0.0%	2.7%	0.0%	4.2%
Medical	0	1	0.0%	2.7%	0.0%	4.2%
Totals	13	24	35.1%	64.9%	100.0%	100.0%

The twenty-three faculty members using the permanent part-time tenure track policy option represent both pre- and post-tenure status. There were 17 full professors (3 women and 14 men), 5 associate professors (2 women and 3 men), and 1 woman assistant professor. The breakdown by rank and gender is in Table II. Six of the seventeen full professors are within the College of Architecture and Urban Planning, which has a tradition of faculty maintaining active roles in both the academic and the professional realms. Typically, these faculty have “part-time” academic appointments and “part-time” careers in private firms, totaling a full-time commitment. Other part-time full professors may be using the reduced appointment in the later stages of the career as a transition to retirement. This was suggested by a part-time full professor during an interview.

TABLE II  
BREAKDOWN OF PART-TIME TENURE TRACK FACULTY

Rank	Totals by Gender		Of Total Part-time		Of Total by Gender	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Full	13	4	56.5%	17.4%	81.3%	57.1%
Associate	3	2	13.0%	8.7%	18.8%	28.6%
Assistant	0	1	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%	14.3%
Total	16	7	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%	100.0%

## FACULTY INTERVIEWS

Of the 60 faculty contacted for participation, 12 faculty (3 men and 9 women) volunteered to be interviewed about their experience utilizing the policies. Four of the twelve interviewed addressed first-hand the issues of being a part-time tenure-track faculty member. These perspectives include 2 pre-tenure women and 2 post-tenure male experiences, from 3 permanent part-time faculty and 1 temporary part-time faculty that utilized tenure extension. The analysis which follows is limited to the interview data from these four faculty members.

Two major themes emerged from the four faculty experiences: 1) Negotiation with chairs about eligibility to utilize the policies and 2) Negotiation about how to implement the policies at the departmental level. Neither policy sets forth guidelines for adjusting departmental culture to accept part-time faculty. Likewise, the concept of

part-time is relatively new in academe and the policies offer no guidance for how to set up a part-time faculty position, what to expect from a part-time faculty member, or how to evaluate part-time faculty for tenure, promotion, or merit reviews.

Negotiation over policy utilization stems from infrequency of use and lack of awareness of policy availability. The four part-time faculty interviewed indicated that they were the first person in the department, and sometimes in the school or college, to utilize the policy. This brought about a negotiation process whereby both the faculty member and the department “arranged” for the policy to be utilized. Marie demonstrates this in her comment about the experience requesting to use the policy: “I felt like it was sort of a negotiation discussion the whole time, it wasn’t automatic.” Similarly, there was a tendency for faculty, especially pre-tenure, to feel that there was a sacrifice to be made in this negotiation process to be granted the policy use. Susan, who negotiated her use of the policy during the hiring process, expressed her feeling about the discrepancy between her start-up package and that of a comparable full-time female peer hired at the same time in this way: “That, I just decided, was part of the price of what I was paying. . . .” Hopefully, with increased use and communication of policy availability and legitimacy, faculty will not feel the need to negotiate to utilize these policies.

The second major theme involved negotiation of how to implement the policy at the departmental level. There was a general lack of clarity about what it means to have a part-time faculty member in the department and what to expect from them in terms of service, teaching, and evaluation of academic merit. No information is provided for departments to support the academic merit of a part-time faculty model. Since the tenure track has traditionally been a full-time commitment, part-time tenure track faculty are seen as anomalies. Alan addressed this issue saying: “People had to think about what a 50% position means – that challenges a lot of existing culture.” The idea that part-time faculty models are not common, or commonly accepted, is a prevalent theme across gender and tenure status.

An apparent shortcoming of both part-time policies is that neither offers guidelines for setting up a part-time faculty position and, consequently, it is unclear what to expect from a part-time faculty member. This creates the need for faculty to negotiate over expectations. The ambiguity in expectations is best seen in the area of research. Alan said it most succinctly:

It is not clear to other people what are the research expectations of me. Should I be doing half as much research because I am spending half of my time at home? Or should I do more research because I actually have more time? Or should I be doing the same amount of research because there is some kind of balancing act there? . . . it is clearly not an easy thing for anyone to look at.

Service expectations are as vaguely defined as the research expectations. There is concern on the part of the faculty members for ensuring that students are adequately

supervised. Service to the college varies more as a function of rank than of FTE status, with service expectations lowest for assistant faculty. Service on national committees depends on the faculty member, as these are not mandatory, even if they are vital to remaining active in the larger research community.

Teaching is seen as the easiest aspect to view as part-time, as the regular teaching load can be reduced proportionately to the reduction in FTE. Even teaching load, however, is imprecise for part-time faculty taking leave because some quarters have no teaching expectation. This is especially critical for medical leave for childbirth. If a faculty member gives birth and takes leave during a “research quarter,” whether a teaching release is granted depends on the department chair. Some faculty women receive a quarter teaching release upon return from leave, but others return to teaching obligations. Neither the part-time policy nor the family leave policy addresses the idea of whether faculty women are entitled to a teaching release upon return from leave.

Compounding the lack of clarity over expectations for part-time faculty is the evaluation process. Without clearly defined expectations, it is difficult for review committees to objectively evaluate part-time faculty, especially outside of the faculty member’s department. Susan expressed her reservations about the review process this way:

My biggest concern is how the college P&T committee is going to evaluate me, I just don’t know how they are going to do it. . . . there really aren’t many examples across the country.

Susan’s concern seems reasonable in light of Bill’s experience on review committees evaluating part-time faculty. He shared this on the subject:

Often the classic case is someone who was female and wanted to be part-time because they wanted to stay home with their kids for part of the time – legitimate thing – but when you get a half-time person to review for tenure, oh, it was hard for people to get their minds around that. And, again, you saw the question of did they do enough and you had to have people reminded, well they were only here half time. I mean, let’s adjust our expectation. So, I think it is a struggle for the faculty in the tenure process to deal with this.

The issues around the lack of guidelines in both policies frame many of the challenges part-time faculty face, but faculty mentioned other aspects as well. Bill suggested that pre-tenure part-time faculty “run into the question of how serious” they are. For Susan, the hardest challenge is watching “colleagues and contemporaries achieve more than you can.” The idea of slowed progress resonated with other part-time faculty, as well. Marie did not feel that she made any progress in her research when she was half-time and recommended that faculty not go below 75%. Alan was prepared to watch his career stagnate when he reduced his FTE, but found that, with the assistance of good graduate students, his research has not been slowed.

While all four faculty members could list challenges that part-time faculty members may face, each stated that in their experience the benefits outweighed the challenges and

that they would use the policies again. Part-time permits greater flexibility for pre- and post-tenure faculty to be with their families. For a self-proclaimed “late career” full professor appointed part-time, the policy enables the pursuit of interests outside of the University. This aspect of the career cycle was not a primary focus of the study, but its addition provides insight into how differently part-time faculty models can benefit faculty at various stages of the career. Both post-tenure men acknowledged that pre-tenure part-time faculty members face challenges significantly different than those faced by post-tenure part-time faculty.

## FACULTY PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY

Each of the four faculty interviewed had recommendations to offer other faculty members and the University regarding the successful utilization of the policies. Some are from an “if I knew then what I know now” perspective of learning from previous mistakes. Recommendations include:

- *Establish clear guidelines and processes for handling requests for part-time status.* Having requested to use the policy and gone through the experience, faculty realize that the policies do not offer guidelines for how to set up a part-time faculty position and now see that they could have negotiated the deal better.
- *Avoid part-time status until research and teaching programs have been established.* “Being established” makes the transition to part-time smoother and enables the part-time faculty member to self-advocate. It was suggested that this also makes the faculty member more of a “known quantity” within the department and helps to reduce the stigma of not appearing to be as serious a scholar because of the reduced appointment.
- *Learn to say no.* Bill offered this caution for faculty considering part-time, “[Other faculty] will take what they can get and so you have to learn to say no . . . if you aren’t willing to say no, you will have a hard time with a part-time situation.”
- *Improve education about policies.* Faculty felt that it is important to educate both faculty and department chairs so that the campus community is aware of the availability and legitimacy of the part-time faculty option. Making the availability of the policies known should remove some of the feeling of “special accommodation” that faculty currently experience while “negotiating” to shift to part-time.
- *Clarify what faculty members are entitled to and what is negotiable.* Ensure that the policies are implemented consistently between departments and colleges.
- *Have zero tolerance for unacceptable behavior from tenured full-time faculty toward part-time faculty.* As the threat of termination is empty, as is the threat of withholding pay raises given the state of the budget, it was suggested that the only recourse is for the department chair to make it clear that unacceptable

behavior will not be tolerated and that there will be consequences.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study demonstrates that faculty and department chairs are largely unaware of the availability of either part-time policy. To ensure that the part-time policies are implemented consistently, and to assist departments in routinely handling faculty transitions to part-time, guidelines should be established to assist departments when a faculty member shifts to part-time status. Guidelines should include:

- *Communicate broadly about the policy availability.* Details about the policies' importance should be communicated to all faculty, chairs, deans, and human resources administrators for the colleges so that part-time faculty careers can be acknowledged as legitimate.
- *Establish equitably reduced workloads and compensation.* It is recommended that a half-time faculty member be expected to teach half of the standard full-time teaching load. Similarly, the research expectation should be half of that for full-time faculty for the same amount of time. Faculty receiving half of the standard salary should not be asked to perform in excess of half the standard duties.
- *Clarify what is expected from a part-time faculty member and how to evaluate him/her.* It is recommended that, once an equitably reduced workload is established, the part-time faculty member be evaluated by that standard, by internal and external referees. The UW part-time tenure track pro-rates additional years to tenure review based on FTE. Therefore, the quantity and quality of work submitted in a tenure package, after the extended period of time, should equal that of a full-time faculty member. Likewise, tenure clock extensions waive years from the probationary period and should not be treated as additional productive years.
- *Establish routine methods to meet departmental teaching requirements.* When a faculty member temporarily shifts to part-time status, the salary recapture funds should be utilized to secure teaching coverage.

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