

# Workplace Flexibility in Higher Education: Reflections on the National Challenge for Higher Education Conference

Heather Wyatt-Nichol, PhD  
University of Baltimore

The American Council on Education and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation recently hosted the *National Challenge for Higher Education Conference*, in Washington, D.C. Among the impressive list of speakers was our own USM chancellor, Dr. Kirwan. His presence and remarks demonstrated institutional support at the highest level. Dr. Laura Koppes Brian, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Baltimore was also a speaker at the conference. The conference was divided by keynote speakers with a variety of parallel sessions throughout the day, and active audience participation. Workplace flexibility was the common theme and numerous sub-topics were addressed.

## Tenure Clock Stop

Freshly minted PhD females often encounter the simultaneous ticking of the biological clock and tenure clock. To retain talented new faculty, many universities across the nation have adopted some variation regarding a tenure clock stop.



## Family Leave

The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to eligible employees to care for one-self or an immediate family member. There are numerous constraints under the existing legislation. For example, employees may not have accumulated enough paid leave to afford to take the full 12 weeks.

The USM provides eight weeks of paid parental leave for eligible faculty and staff to help balance professional and family demands during and after the birth or adoption of a child (USM II-2.25 and USM VII-7.49).

## Childcare

Universities that provide on-site child-care or contract off-site child care exist; however, the majority of universities do not provide either. There are numerous constraints with childcare availability, such as limits on enrollment, hours of operation, preferred geographic location of care (e.g., close to work or close to home), associated costs and affordability among a diverse employee group, and regulatory considerations. On-site childcare works particularly well at universities with early childhood education programs.



## Phased Retirement

The ongoing retirement of the Baby Boomer generation deserves greater attention in higher education. Retirements often result in the loss of a nationally or internationally recognized scholars or key staff within departments. Retirements also result in the loss of institutional memory. Phased retirement is mutually beneficial to both universities and faculty near retirement, as it allows universities to retain faculty while adjusting to retirement by reducing the workload. Phased retirement does present issues, such as reduced service time and retirement benefits.

## Organizational Culture and Institutional Support

Organizational culture and

institutional support are essential factors to consider when it comes to workplace flexibility. Policies should be updated to address flexibility issues. Training on flexible workplace policies should include those in leadership positions.

## Concluding Remarks

The conference represented a snapshot of conversations, research, and practices surrounding workplace flexibility in higher education. Readers are encouraged to visit the links below and further explore the wide and varied research on workplace flexibility.

## Resources:

ACE Women's Network

<http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/ACE-Womens-Network.aspx>

Alfred P. Sloan Projects for Faculty Career Flexibility

<http://www.acenet.edu/leadership/programs/Pages/Alfred-P-Sloan-Projects-for-Faculty-Career-Flexibility.aspx>

College Presidents Encouraged to Join Workplace Flexibility Initiative at National Challenge Conference  
<http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/College-Presidents-Encouraged-to-Join-Workplace-Flexibility-Initiative-at-National-Challenge-Conference.aspx>

Making the Business Case: The Imperative for Supporting and Promoting Workplace Flexibility in Higher Education  
<http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Making-the-Business-Case-for-Workplace-Flexibility.aspx>

National Challenge for Higher Education Conference  
<http://www.acenet.edu/events/Pages/National-Challenge-for-Higher-Education-Conference.aspx>

Toolkit: Faculty Career Flexibility  
<http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Toolkit-Faculty-Career-Flexibility.aspx>



## Workplace Flexibility cont.

Supporting the Culminating Stages of  
Faculty Careers: Legal Issues

[http://www.acenet.edu/leadership/  
programs/Documents/SLOAN-report-  
FINAL-legal.pdf](http://www.acenet.edu/leadership/programs/Documents/SLOAN-report-FINAL-legal.pdf)

Work and Family Researcher's  
Network

<https://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/>

### About the Author

Heather Wyatt-Nichol is an Associate Professor and Director of the MPA Program in the College of Public Affairs at the University of Baltimore. She was appointed to the USM Women's Forum in November 2013. She is a Commissioner on the Commission on Peer Review Accreditation for the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA). She also serves as Chair Elect for the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), Section on Democracy and Social Justice and is a board member of ASPA's Section on Women in Public Administration.

[http://euroradio.fm/files/field/  
image/2013/12/savemoney.jpg](http://euroradio.fm/files/field/image/2013/12/savemoney.jpg)



## Tuition Remission cont.

### 4. How much tuition is waived?

For employees, tuition is waived for up to 8 credits per semester. The number of credits is pro-rated for employees working less than full-time.\*

### 5. Are retirees eligible for tuition benefits?

Yes, the same rules apply for both retirees and active employees.

### 6. Are there any programs that are excluded from this program?

The M.D. and D.D.S. degree programs at the University of Maryland, Baltimore are excluded. Employees should contact the Records and Registration Office at the institution to be attended to learn if there are other programs that are excluded.

### 7. Is tuition remission taxable?

For employees - Yes, per IRS guidelines if the value of the tuition remission for graduate level courses in a calendar year exceeds \$5,250. The value of the tuition remission will be added to the employee's earnings and taxed by the Maryland Central Payroll Bureau.

**For retirees** - Yes, retirees will be billed by the university where the employee is employed for the taxes owed on any taxable tuition remission.

### For spouses and dependents -

Yes, separate taxation rules apply for spouses and dependents. All graduate level courses are taxable.

Contact your institution's Human Resources Office for additional information about the taxation of tuition remission benefits.

### About the Author

Patricia Hoffmann is the Director, Compensation and Benefits at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. She has been a member of the USM Women's Forum since October 2009, and served as Chair from 2011 to 2012.

*\*This article is intended to summarize the provisions of the USM Policy VII 4.10 Policy on Tuition Remission for Regular and Retired Faculty and Staff Employees of the USM and USM Policy VII 4.20 Policy on Tuition Remission for Spouses and Dependent Children of USM Employees and Retirees. For specific information, please refer to the appropriate policy. The information presented in this article is not intended to represent contractual terms of employment, and the USM policies that govern tuition remission benefits shall prevail. Further, the USM reserves the right to terminate, suspend, withdraw, amend, or modify the tuition remission benefit plans in whole or in part at any time with the approval of the Board of Regents.*

