



News, Views and Careers for All of Higher Education

Sept. 23

More Flexibility on Tenure — If You Ask

Research universities increasingly offer flexibility on the tenure track to help academics balance their professional and family obligations, according to a [survey](#) released Thursday by the American Council on Education.

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But the survey found that many benefits designed to help professorial parents must be negotiated — and the details don't always sound as great as the generalities. For example, the survey of 26 research universities found that 92 percent offered child care services for faculty members. But only 81 percent offered on-campus facilities, only 42 percent had sliding scales for the fees for such services and only 23 percent offered emergency child care for when a regular care giver is unavailable.

On extending the tenure clock, 73 percent of the universities reported that such adjustments are normally granted. But at 46 percent of universities, these adjustments must be “requested and negotiated.” Many experts have said that new parents — especially women — fear that asking for such adjustments can disadvantage them when they come up for tenure review, even if the adjustments are granted. That's why Princeton University recently made tenure-clock extensions [automatic](#) for new parents, an approach that has been widely praised by female academics but not adopted elsewhere so far.

Another issue on the survey focused on the number of extensions someone could receive on the tenure clock and the number of leaves one could take during the pre-tenure period:

Percentage of Universities Reporting Number of Extensions and Leaves Permitted During Tenure-Clock Period

Number permitted Extensions of Clock Pre-Tenure Leaves

| | | |
|-----------|-----|-----|
| 1 | 39% | 35% |
| 2 | 42% | 15% |
| 3 or more | 19% | 50% |

The survey also asked the universities which benefits they offered to the domestic partners of faculty members and other employees, and found that most offer at least some benefits.

Percentage of Universities Offering These Benefits to Domestic Partners

| Benefit | Percentage |
|----------------|-------------------|
|----------------|-------------------|

| | |
|------------------|-----|
| Health insurance | 71% |
|------------------|-----|

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| Access to campus events | 69% |
|-------------------------|-----|

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| Use of campus facilities | 62% |
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| Dependent leaves | 62% |
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| Family and medical leave | 62% |
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|-----------------------|-----|
| Dual career placement | 46% |
|-----------------------|-----|

The survey was conducted of 26 research universities that are participating in a conference this week on flexibility in the tenure track. The universities include both private institutions (such as Duke, Harvard and Syracuse Universities) and public institutions (such as Auburn and Ohio State Universities and the Universities of Virginia and Washington).

— [Scott Jaschik](#)

Comments

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