

# OCUFA

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations  
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

**Submission to the Ontario Human Rights Commission  
Consultation on Human Rights and the Family in Ontario**

**July 2005**

## **Ontario Human Rights Commission Consultation on Family Status OCUFA Recommendations**

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) commends the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) for undertaking this study of family status in Ontario. Ontario university professors and librarians face significant, unique challenges to achieving work/life balance. As the provincial voice for more than 13,000 academic staff in Ontario's universities, OCUFA is pleased to present a series of recommendations which would assist the Commission, employees, employers and governments in addressing work/life balance issues.

### **Recommendations to Universities as Employers**

- Hire new faculty and librarians to bring workloads down and reduce the overload hours expected of current staff;
- Campaign to increase awareness of the importance of work/life balance;
- Increase awareness of the benefits and accommodations which are already available to assist in achieving work/life balance;
- Ensure that employees who utilize available benefits/policies are not penalized;
- Create an advisory committee within the workplace to monitor support for work/life policies;
- Negotiate with the faculty association opportunities for voluntary part-time work or compressed work weeks, as well as flexibility in terms of work hours and location;
- Where childcare on location is not available to faculty and staff, make a commitment to provide it, as well as emergency child and elder care;
- Initiate an interactive dialogue on the barriers to achieving and maintaining a satisfactory balance and work towards making changes;

### **Recommendations to the Ontario Government**

- Invest in public school and child care programs which make it easier for mothers to continue paid work;
- Make policy decisions which would allow workplaces to provide flexible work schedules which can help parents remain in the workforce and balance job requirements with the day-to-day needs of their children;
- Provide legislative support for the idea that family-friendly policies in the workplace make good business sense because they increase workforce motivation and improve productivity and profitability;
- Work towards consistency in labour standards pertaining to work/life balance;
- Strive to be a model employer, providing creative solutions to the problems faced by workers struggling to manage the conflicting demands of work and life;
- Work with the Federal Government and the other Provinces and Territories to develop and implement affordable national programs of child and elder care which will assist working Canadians immeasurably;
- Strengthen the system of employment supports for those on income support to reduce long-term and inter-generational benefit dependency and child poverty;
- Enhance the family-friendly nature of workplaces through the introduction of subsidies to employers for participating in assessment processes that provide advice on family-friendly workplace needs.

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**Introduction to OCUFA**

On behalf of Ontario's 13,000 university professors and academic librarians, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) is pleased that the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has undertaken a study on family status and human rights in Ontario, and appreciates the opportunity to participate in the consultation process. OCUFA's mandate is to express the views of university professors and academic librarians to the government and public, to maintain the quality of higher education in Ontario, and to advance the professional and economic interests of teachers, researchers, and librarians at Ontario universities.

**Work/Life Balance**

For university faculty and academic librarians, work/life balance has become a major family status issue that must be addressed. One of the greatest obstacles to achieving work/life balance is an increasing workload, resulting from large numbers of students entering the university system, at a time when faculty numbers have failed to keep up. The number of full-time faculty decreased by 15% over the 1990s while full-time student enrolment increased by 10%. Since that time, the number of full-time faculty at Ontario universities increased by approximately 10%; however, over the same time period, full-time student enrolment increased by 24%. The net result has been an increase in the student/faculty ratio to the level of 24:1 – up from 18:1 in 1995-96.

This dramatic increase in student numbers has many implications for faculty workload, including more classes taught in the early morning or evening hours, demands to increase office hours to mentor and tutor students, an increase in course administration, more grading and supervisory responsibilities, and increasing demands to teach courses on an overload basis. At the same time, faculty are expected to publish more than ever, and the research expectations for achieving tenure have been rising. With fewer faculty to sit on university committees or hold administrative positions in university departments, the service burden on each faculty member rises as well. For librarians, more students results in an increase in service and reference demands, additional administrative responsibilities and less time for research and development.

Many professors and librarians find themselves struggling to reconcile the demands of a university career with family responsibilities. As the OHRC notes in its *Discussion Paper*, employers and governments alike are realizing the importance of work/life balance as they witness the effects on both personnel and businesses of the many workers who are pressured by competing demands. As a result, there is an increased willingness to implement policies designed to assist in achieving work/life balance.

OCUFA believes that as employers and community leaders, universities have an opportunity to take the lead in changing the way our culture responds to the issue of work/life balance. University administrations have addressed these needs in varying ways, but academia presents some unique

challenges to employees hoping to achieve work/life balance, and there is a long way to go. The government has a role to play in encouraging all employers to support and adopt policies which encourage work/life balance for Ontario workers.

### **Issues Unique to Academia**

The common traditional model of academic life was one where the male faculty member had a female spouse at home to care for children and parents and essentially enable the academic lifestyle. Things have changed within academia, just as they have in greater society, as more women pursue academic careers and families increasingly send both partners into the workforce. The competitive academic social culture still dictates that long hours and constant attention to the workplace are essential to good job performance.

Tenure and promotion processes, sabbaticals and study/teaching leaves, as well as irregular teaching hours and the responsibility to mentor students, are specific stressors to the working conditions of faculty. Within the extremely competitive environment of academe, men and women begin their careers later than average after additional years of education, and often face the stressful process of achieving tenure – which takes approximately seven years – during one of the busiest and most stressful periods in the family life cycle.

As the Baby Boom generation retires, universities will be forced to recruit and retain large numbers of faculty, many of whom have differing expectations of work/life balance. Universities are already experiencing the changing demands of incoming faculty. For example, there is increasing prevalence of universities offering the services of Faculty and Recruitment Coordinators to help faculty and their families negotiate the transition to a new job and community. As well, more universities are assisting the spouses of new faculty in finding employment – the practice is widespread in the United States, and is becoming more acceptable in Canada.<sup>1</sup> As Canadian universities compete internationally to attract excellent faculty, they will increasingly be forced to consider the work/life balance needs of a generation of academics who will demand accommodation for issues such as their own health, as well as child and elder care.

### **Isn't this a Women's Issue?**

Within the academic community, however, work/life balance has largely been seen as an issue specific to women, partially in response to the changes stemming from women's increased participation in the workforce. It is true that gender is an important element. Women continue to shoulder a disproportionate amount of the responsibility when it comes to family life, including child and elder care and looking after the home. While not likely a surprise to many female academics, research out of the University of California which surveyed thousands of faculty members found that female professors with children spend considerably more time fulfilling family care duties than do their male counterparts. This fact was true even among young academics who grew up familiar with

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<sup>1</sup> “When hiring, some universities find they can't have one without the other.” *Ottawa Citizen*, August 3, 2004, B1.

the concept of gender equality.<sup>2</sup>

Women academics find themselves in a particularly challenging position when it comes to balancing an academic career and family responsibilities. Women report feeling forced to choose between childbearing and aggressively pursuing tenure. Despite maternity and parental leaves, which are ubiquitous on university campuses, women still worry about the career consequences of taking maternity leaves and raising small children while fulfilling the grueling requirements of earning tenure. Studies on work/life balance in Canada demonstrate that women continue to experience more work/life conflict than men, and that motherhood is more stressful than fatherhood. Females report higher levels of stress than males, and women with children report higher levels than those without. Interestingly, whether or not a man is a parent seems to have little effect on reported stress and depression levels. In fact, it seems that fatherhood is associated with lower levels of stress and depression, which demonstrates that the experience of working mothers is dramatically different from that of working fathers.<sup>3</sup>

The traditional academic career was not created with the female life cycle in mind. As they pursue academic careers, women have been forced to adapt to the traditional career path in terms of tenure and promotion but feel as though they are expected to perform their role as teachers and role models in a traditionally feminine way. As a consequence, many women faculty feel like outsiders in their profession. In order for things to change dramatically on university campuses, “a critical mass of women academics is required to promote change in Canadian academia.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The “Baby Gap”**

Unlike promotion in other careers, the tenure process is particularly lengthy and grueling. For many female academics, this process overlaps directly with the peak period for childbearing. Many junior female faculty experience intense anxiety about the potential harm to their careers if they choose to have children prior to achieving tenure. Women with very small children often have less time to devote to research, which is a significant precursor to achieving tenure. Universities have enacted policies allowing academics to “stop the tenure clock” in order to take maternity leaves so as not to disadvantage women in the process, but this policy seems to decrease the perceived negative impact of such leaves only partially.

There is a consistent and large gap in achieving tenure between women and men who have babies early in their careers – within five years of receiving a PhD. Men with so-called “early babies” are 38% more likely to achieve tenure than their female counterparts. Essentially, this research demonstrates that being married with children prevails as a recipe for success for male academics,

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<sup>2</sup> Scott Jaschik. “Disparate Burden.” *Inside Higher Education*, March 21, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Duxbury and Chris Higgins. “Work-Life Balance in the New Millennium: Where Are We? Where Do We Need to Go?” *CPRN Discussion Paper* No. W12. October 2001, p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> Carmen Armenti. “Gender as a Barrier for Women with Children in Academe.” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2004, p. 7.

while the opposite is the case for women, whose careers suffer from such a “baby gap.” Using data from the American Survey of Doctorate Recipients, researchers determined that women were more than twice as likely (38%) as men (18%) to state that they had fewer children than they wanted.<sup>5</sup> Many female faculty reported feelings of guilt associated with trying to combine family and work.<sup>6</sup> Academic expectations of long hours, evening time commitments, no time off for parental leave or family care, and staying in one community for many years were largely formed during a time when the vast majority of university faculty were male and with a spouse at home to care for family.<sup>7</sup> Women faculty in particular need better policies to support work/life balance, as well as more role models to demonstrate success and provide support.

There is a need for societal rethinking on the issue of work/life balance. By moving the dialogue away from discussing the issue as solely the concern and responsibility of women to one recognized as affecting all employees and all workplaces, society as a whole will benefit. Employers and governments are slowly coming to the realization that these are issues which affect both male and female employees and have a dramatic effect on workplace performance, employee stress levels and health, absenteeism, and loyalty to the employer. It is in the role of educator and watchdog that OCUFA believes the OHRC recommendations on family status and work/life balance can have the greatest impact.

### **Support for Work/Life Balance for Ontario Faculty: Best Practices**

Despite the challenges, faculty associations at Ontario universities have been successful at negotiating, either into collective agreements or through agreed-upon guidelines, policies which support the relationship between work and life priorities for university faculty. The academic community can be proud to contribute these initiatives as examples to the ongoing public debate about this issue. Below are some best practices which reflect these efforts.

- Maternity/pregnancy/parental leaves upon the birth or adoption of a child – in accordance with provincial legislation, university faculty have negotiated some of the best provisions available in terms of length and amount of top-up pay to Employment Insurance while on parental leave;
- Transitional/gradual retirement to allow faculty some control over the transition into this phase of life;
- Tuition waivers to provide free access to courses at the university for faculty and their family members;
- Compassionate leaves for faculty who may need time away from work to fulfill family responsibilities;
- Access to athletic facilities to encourage improved physical and mental health;

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Mason and Marc Goulden. “Do Babies Matter?” *Academe*, November/December 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Carmen Armenti. “Gender as a Barrier for Women with Children in Academe.” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, 2004, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Harriet Eisenkraft. “In a Family Way.” *University Affairs*, June/July 2004.

- Emergency leaves for child or elder care;
- On campus child care and reimbursement for child care;
- Accommodations for nursing mothers.

One of the challenges facing university faculty in achieving work/life balance is the attitude within academia about utilizing such benefits. Some faculty evidently feel that to utilize such benefits to the full would be detrimental to their career. OCUFA encourages the OHRC to examine this issue in particular with respect to other sectors, and make recommendations to ensure not only that policies encouraging work/life balance are available, but that their use does not damage career prospects.

Another challenge is that where there is awareness on Ontario university campuses of the need to accommodate family needs through compassionate or special leaves, the reference is overwhelmingly in relation to childcare. As noted in the *Discussion Paper*, while childbearing and rearing are an important element of the struggle to achieve and maintain work/life balance, the reality of family responsibilities for many of today's workers demonstrate that elder care is an area increasingly in need of attention.

## **What Can Employers Do?**

As noted earlier in this paper, the traditional academic climate has been slow in practice to accommodate faculty with family responsibilities, or to acknowledge the pressures of the profession on the personal lives of faculty. While universities have specific needs, OCUFA believes that many of the suggested initiatives below can be translated for use in other sectors.

- Hire new faculty to bring workloads down and reduce the overload hours expected of current faculty;
- Campaign to increase awareness of the importance of work/life balance;
- Increase awareness of the benefits and accommodations which are already available to assist in achieving work/life balance, don't hide behind the excuse that employees aren't using the provisions, so they must not be needed;
- Ensure that employees who utilize available benefits/policies are not penalized;
- Create an advisory committee within the workplace to monitor support for work/life policies;
- Negotiate with the faculty association opportunities for voluntary part-time work or compressed work weeks, as well as flexibility in terms of work hours and location;
- Where childcare on location is not available to faculty and staff, make a commitment to provide it, as well as emergency child and elder care;
- Initiate an interactive dialogue on the barriers to achieving and maintaining a satisfactory balance and work towards making changes;

In this time of increased demand for higher education and the looming shortage of faculty, issues of work/life balance and job satisfaction will become even more important as universities struggle to attract and retain faculty. The changing demographics of faculty members, and an increased awareness of the importance of encouraging wellness in the workplace will provide a fertile climate for making positive change in terms of improving the situation for stressed-out faculty. Universities have an opportunity to lead the charge in making this positive change.

## **What Can Government Do?**

While employers and employees can work together to make significant inroads on university campuses, government has a role to play in ensuring that work/life issues receive adequate attention and support. A study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Babies and Bosses*, provided recommendations to governments that would help families balance work and family life. The study notes that families striving for work/life balance are considering things such as whether and when to have children, how many, and who will care for them. The organization argues that governments can encourage family-friendly policies that will have long-term and wide-ranging benefits, such as reducing child poverty, promoting child development and family well-being, encouraging economic growth and bolstering pension programs. In Ontario, the newly created Ministry of Health Promotion may well provide an avenue for the advancement of this agenda. We would urge the OHRC to monitor carefully the mandate and progress of the new Ministry.

If governments invest in policies and frameworks which encourage work/life balance, there will be societal benefits for the next generation. Governments can make positive change in the following



ways.

- Implementing progressive taxation schemes which ensure that work is financially rewarding for all parents;
- Investing in public school and child care programs which make it easier for mothers to continue paid work;
- Make policy decisions which would allow workplaces to provide flexible work schedules which can help parents remain in the workforce and balance job requirements with the day to day needs of their children;
- Provide legislative support for the idea that family-friendly policies in the workplace “make good business sense because they increase workforce motivation and improve productivity and profitability”<sup>8</sup>;
- Work towards consistency in labour standards pertaining to work/life balance;
- Strive to be a model employer, providing creative solutions to the problems faced by Ontario government workers struggling to manage the conflicting demands of work and life;
- Work with the Federal Government and the other Provinces and Territories to develop and implement affordable national programs of child and elder care which will assist working Canadians immeasurably;
- Strengthen the system of employment supports for those on income support to reduce long-term and inter-generational benefit dependency and child poverty;
- enhance the family-friendly nature of workplaces through the introduction of subsidies to employers for participating in assessment processes that provide advice family-friendly workplace needs.<sup>9</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In short, university faculty face challenges to work/life balance that are both unique to the academic career and general to the workforce. Women academics, in particular, experience a large degree of stress related to accommodating the demands of both career and family. In its recommendations stemming from this consultation process, the Ontario Human Rights Commission has an opportunity to encourage and influence government to think about the needs of its citizens.

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<sup>8</sup> “Babies and Bosses: OECD Recommendations to Help Families Balance Work and Family Life.” *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development*, October 2004.

<sup>9</sup> “Babies and Bosses: OECD Recommendations to Help Families Balance Work and Family Life.” Notes on Canada. *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development*, May 2005.