STUDY OF UTILIZATION OF ACADEMIC FAMILY POLICIES 1990-2008:

A CASE STUDY FROM ONE UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

In the last 20 - 30 years, universities have joined the ranks of other organizations that are addressing the challenges that professionals face when they are starting families while simultaneously pursuing upward mobility in their careers. Too often, trying to pursue an academic career and fully participate in family life becomes a calculus of tradeoffs, rather than a practice of integration. For women, according to an annual enrollment report from the Council of Graduate Schools (2011)\(^1\), who comprise slightly more than half of all doctoral degree recipients (50.4%), these tensions are frequently exacerbated by the conflicting imperatives of tenure clocks that coincide with biological clocks.

As a result, many universities, such as Columbia University, Princeton University, and UC Berkeley, have instituted family policies for faculty that are intended to ease these stresses. While implementing such policies is a major step forward, the impact of the policies—whether they are, in fact, facilitating positive outcomes for those that use them—is even more important.

Currently, Columbia has three parental leave policies and one statutory policy for full-time tenure-track and tenured officers of instruction at its Morningside campus. These policies, which include child care leave, part-time career appointment, parental workload relief, and statutory tenure clock stoppage, are intended to help faculty balance teaching, research, and parental obligations. The goal of these policies is to provide individuals with the flexibility and time necessary to care for their children while still pursuing academic careers. Significantly, these family leave policies also benefit the University by increasing the recruitment pool and retention of talented faculty who do not want to choose between academic careers and family.

To measure whether these policies are having their intended effect, the Provost’s Office of Work/Life and Office of Planning and Institutional Research conducted a study at Columbia’s Morningside campus using data from 1990-2008.\(^2\) The overall goal of this study was to discover and

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2 The data used for this report is as accurate as the information that was entered into Columbia University’s employee record systems. However, we cannot confirm that the information on the incidence of policies utilization and which policies Columbia University
elucidate any utilization patterns of the policies, including demographic factors, as well as to discern any impact that the policies may have had on the career trajectories of those who have used them.

**Why Leave Policies Were Developed**

In universities, family leave policies were first developed in the late 1980’s primarily in response to the changing composition of the professoriate. From the beginnings of the profession until quite recently, faculty at institutions of higher education were almost exclusively male. If they chose to have families, they traditionally had stay-at-home wives who could take responsibility for their children and home life.

While some faculty still fit this mold, women have increased their pursuit of academic careers, altering the typical academic profile. One half of all doctorates are now being granted to women (Council of Graduate Schools, 2011), so ideally women would become half of the professoriate.

Moreover, today there are many more dual career couples, who want to have both successful careers and children. The challenge for women is still greater than that for men - research shows that eighty-nine percent of female faculty members have spouses who are employed full-time compared to only fifty-six percent of their male counterparts.³

For years, universities failed to accommodate faculty who sought to integrate parenthood with their professional lives. As a result, women began “falling out of the academic pipeline” because the expectations of their work conflicted with their duties in the home as primary caregivers.⁴ Less noticeable is the way women’s ability to have children is impacted by the tenure clock, which is not the case for men. In 2004, *University of California’s Faculty Family Friendly Edge* surveyed the tenure-track and tenured faculty in the 12 campuses of the University of California system to assess how they used family policies. This survey showed that tenure-track and tenured women faculty had

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fewer children than their male peers, and compared to male faculty, women faculty more frequently desired more children.\(^5\)

Another study, by O’Laughlin and Bischoff, supported UC Family Edge’s findings and demonstrated that women in academia reported greater levels of stress in trying to balance their clashing familial and academic responsibilities.\(^6\) Tied to this was a feeling more common among women than men that there was not sufficient institutional support for their attempts at balancing work and family.

Accordingly, administrations came to see these policies as necessary for a productive, supportive, and equitable academic work environment. Once implemented, however, the question of their effectiveness in promoting family and career formation for both female and male faculty arose. Research on similar policies in corporations has shown that the simple existence of work-family policies is not sufficient, as administrators and employees must be encouraged to use them to meet the intended purpose.\(^7\)

**History of Leave Policies at Columbia**

Columbia was one of the earliest university adopters of parental policies, starting in the 1970s with part-time career appointment. Maternity disability was added in the 1980s, followed by workload relief (on the Morningside campus only) and infant/child care leaves in the early 1990s.

**Part-time Career Appointments**

As a first step in assisting full-time tenure-track faculty in raising a family, the University created part-time career appointments (PTCA) in the 1970s. This reduced appointment allows tenure-track faculty to retain their full-time status, benefits, privileges, and half of their salary, while

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performing half of their normal duties. Moreover, to provide additional time before an officer of instruction must be reviewed for tenure, each year of a PTCA is treated as half a year in determining the up-or-out date for tenure. To be eligible for this appointment, the officer must be the primary caregiver of a child under the age of nine and must plan to devote the time taken off to tend to this responsibility (as opposed to holding an additional position elsewhere).

**Maternity Disability**

Since the 1980s, New York State has had a state maternity disability plan in place. This policy provides women, whose physicians indicate they are unable to work during pregnancy and/or post delivery, with a reduced but uninterrupted salary. For a normal pregnancy and delivery, this period of time is usually six to eight weeks immediately before and after delivery. This right to paid maternity disability leave applies to most employees with benefits, though faculty receive full pay during their disability leave.

**Infant/Child Care Leave**

In 1990, Columbia University implemented infant care leave, which was recently renamed “child care leave.” A full-time tenure-track or tenured officer of instruction is eligible for child care leave if she has a baby; if the spouse or same-sex domestic partner has a baby; or if he or she adopts a child of less than school age, becomes a foster parent to a child, or if the child meets New York State’s definition of “hard to place” and is less than 18 years old. Faculty who meet this criteria are eligible to take leave from their positions without pay or teach a reduced course load with partial salary for up to a year. Women who give birth to a child may use this leave after taking a paid maternity disability leave (see above). Importantly, fathers and adoptive parents are also eligible to use child care leave. The right to the first twelve weeks of any child care leave is covered under the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which was implemented in 1993.

**Parental Workload Relief**

In the mid-1990s, the University Senate issued a resolution that the deans adopted entitled parental workload relief (PWLR). The deans on the Morningside campus implemented this resolution

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in the spring of 1994; it is not available at the Columbia University Medical Center. Tenured and
tenure-track faculty taking PWLR are excused from teaching and serving on administrative
committees, though they must still make themselves available for consultation with students and
continue with their research. To be eligible for PWLR, the full-time officer of instruction must hold an
appointment title of professor, associate or assistant professor, instructor, senior lecturer, lecturer, or
associate. Additionally, the officer of instruction must be the primary caregiver to either a newborn
child, a newly adopted child either of less than school age or under the age of 18 if meeting New York
State’s legal definition of “hard-to-place,” or a child that is disabled.

Officers of instruction who decide to utilize the PWLR policy, must do so within the first year
of the birth or adoption of the child. When on PWLR, officers of instruction may either receive
workload relief for one term at full salary, one year at half salary, or one year at full salary while
teaching half of their normal course load. The officers must continue to make themselves available for
a comparable portion of their administrative assignments, and continue to meet with students and
conduct research. Additionally, if the faculty is tenure-track, the tenure clock is stopped for one year.

Because this study included those who took leave from 1990-2008, it should be noted that
during the period of time reviewed, faculty members were only allowed two PWLR leaves regardless
of the number of children newly brought into the home. The policy changed in 2008 to allow a PWLR
leave each time a faculty member has a new child, rather than being limited to two children. What
remains the same is that the tenure clock is still only stopped twice per tenure-track faculty member
regardless of the number of children born/adopted.

**Tenure-Clock Stoppage for Primary Caregivers**

The tenure-clock is automatically stopped when tenure-track faculty request a PWLR, unless
they request that it not be stopped. For the purpose of this study, we are assuming that all tenure-track
officers who took PWLR during the study’s timeframe stopped their tenure clocks.

Alternately, tenure-track faculty may request that the provost stop the tenure-clock even if they
do not choose to take a leave of absence or partake in the University’s workload relief option. To be

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eligible for tenure-clock stoppage, the faculty member must be the primary caregiver of a child less than a year old for a minimum of three continuous months. For the purpose of this policy, officers are the primary parent if they are a single parent or, when there are two parents, the other is working full-time or enrolled as a full-time student. As with PWLR, a tenure clock may be stopped only twice, for up to one year each time it is invoked.

In 2008, the university modified the procedure for requesting tenure clock stoppage. Previously faculty members could only request the stoppage from their department chair or dean, but now the faculty member can choose to request it directly from the senior vice provost of academic administration instead. Having a choice is helpful to those faculty who may not feel they will receive support for their request from the chair/dean.

**Analysis**

For the purposes of this study, the Office of Work/Life and the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) analyzed human resource faculty records from 1990 – 2008 to identify tenured and tenure-track faculty who had taken child care leaves, part-time career appointments, and/or parental workload relief at the Morningside campus. Columbia University Medical Center faculty were not included because that campus does not have the workload relief policy. Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory faculty were not included because the few tenure-track and tenured professors there are members of other Morningside campus departments and therefore were already included in this review. Professors of practice or professors in discipline were not included in this study since these individuals are not subject to a tenure-clock.

For this period, 167 individuals were identified as either tenure-track or tenured faculty who used at least one of the parental policies identified above. The human resources records for each employee included gender, date of birth, department, hire date, start and end dates for each leave, date of tenure (if tenured), and if applicable, the date that either the individual left Columbia University or left the tenure-track for other employment at Columbia.

To understand the utilization of these parental policies, the following factors were examined: who used a policy and when, how many times the policies were used, whether or not more than one
type of policy was used, and the tenure-status at first use. As a result, a clearer picture of the utilization rates is presented, as well as evidence of the effectiveness of the policies in supporting the careers of the policy users.

Tables 1A and 1B provide detailed breakdowns of the study sample by gender, tenure status at first use and the policy which was utilized. The data gathered from this sample of 167 faculty who used those policies suggests that the vast majority (125 or approximately 75%) used their first parental policy while on tenure-track, while only 25% of policy use was by tenured faculty.

Parental Workload Relief (PWLR) became the most widely used parental leave policy after its implementation in 1994. The data revealed that 89% of policy users—109 tenure-track and 40 tenured faculty took the PWLR option. For the most part, individuals who used either infant/child care leave or part-time career appointment did so only before PWLR became available. PWLR probably became the most widely used policy due to financial reasons – child care leave is unpaid and part-time career appointment is half pay. In addition, faculty prefer not to leave their academic roles altogether and would most likely continue some research, working with doctoral students, etc., regardless of pay status, with an obvious preference for paid, reduced work vs. unpaid.

Table 1a: Type of Parental Policy by Gender and Tenure Status: Tenure-track

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of first policy</th>
<th>Tenure Status at first use</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TENURE-TRACK</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Workload Relief (PWLR)</td>
<td>51 (47%)</td>
<td>58 (53%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant/Child Care</td>
<td>8 (73%)</td>
<td>3 (27%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Career Appt (PTCA)</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1b: Type of Parental Policy by Gender and Tenure Status: Tenured

Columbia University
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of first policy</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Workload Relief (PWLR)</td>
<td>9 (23%)</td>
<td>31 (77%)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant/Child Care</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (50%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time Career Appt (PTCA)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not reflected in the tables is that most of these 167 faculty members used a parental policy once, but 32 individuals (about 20% of the sample) used it two or more times. Though not a significant difference, the majority of the “two or more users” were men (18 men compared to 14 women). For those who used PWLR twice (12 men and 8 women) pre-tenure, there does not appear to be a negative impact on obtaining tenure or remaining on tenure-track. If the increased use by men indicates that they had more children than women while on tenure-track, it is consistent with research findings that male faculty have more children than female faculty.8

GENDER:

Though there are a fairly equal number of men (58) and women (51) using PWLR, the male and female subpopulations of tenure-track and tenured faculty at Columbia University are not equivalent. In fall 2008, for example, despite the concerted focus on additional hiring of women faculty since 1990, 73% of the tenure-track and tenured professors at Columbia were male and 27% were women. Proportionally, more females than males have taken advantage of parental policies. Perhaps more women than men identify as primary caregivers.

Post-tenure, as shown in Table 1b, 77% of the policy use was by men; men used PWLR for the first time (31) much more frequently than women (9) post-tenure. The majority of these PWLR users have remained employed at Columbia, with only 10% leaving Columbia after utilizing PWLR while tenured.

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There is much speculation as to why men use PWLR post-tenure more than women. Some possible explanations follow. Men who choose to parent, unlike women, are not hindered by age as it relates to ability to conceive. A growing number of fields are requiring lengthy postdoc appointments and given the increasing number of years before attaining the first tenure-track position, many women are not able to conceive and give birth to children by the time they achieve tenure due to age. Another explanation is that some tenured women who then have children are not the primary caregivers but have spouses/partners who are. For others, by the time they have achieved tenure, these women do not envision starting a family. Because of their focus on career they might not have had the opportunity to form relationships in which to raise a family and choose not to single parent. As is true also for men, regardless of other circumstances, some women do not choose to raise children.

Why do men use PWLR post-tenure so frequently, compared to those who use it pre-tenure? One theory is that tenured men are older than their wives/partners who are at an earlier stage of their careers and don’t have the same latitude in taking the time off to be primary caregivers. Another assumption is that these are men who have second families, and because of their tenure status are in a better position to be primary caregivers than with their first family while they were in graduate school or on tenure-track.

Women (and men) are often advised by senior faculty to wait until tenure to have children, but as Table 1b shows and Table 2a and 2b support, women’s use of parental policies demonstrates that women are not waiting to have children post-tenure. In fact, the age of women who use PWLR for first-time pregnancies is quite old, even with the trend of increasingly fewer years between hire and policy use.

AGE:

Table 2a.
Tenure-Track and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure-track at first use, only PWLR</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Columbia University
The differences between men and women faculty on tenure track in terms of years from date of hire to first PWLR is negligible, 3.5 for women vs 3.7 for men.

The age range of woman taking first PWLR on tenure track was 29.4 – 47.4 years old with a mean of 36.6 years. For women, the ability to conceive and birth a child, especially when it is a first child, in the mid 30’s - late 40’s is difficult.

Table 2b. 
Tenured and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total average age at 1st PWLR</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total average age at hire</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of faculty</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean ages of women’s and men’s first use of PWLR post-tenure is quite high (41.8 women and 45.5 for men). Clearly women cannot assume fertility over the age of 40 and that is probably one significant reason why we don’t see more women using parental policies post-tenure.

CAREER PROGRESSION

Of the 109 people who took PWLR, 49 individuals (45%) were still on tenure-track in January, 2009. Of those faculty, most (42) remained on tenure-track at Columbia. Only seven (five men and two women) left to be on tenure-track at another university or college.

Columbia University
Table 3.
Faculty Career Progression for Tenure-Track Professors who used PWLR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total by Location</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total by Outcome</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtained Tenure</td>
<td>At CU</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left CU</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Tenure-Track</td>
<td>At CU</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left CU</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Track</td>
<td>At CU</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left CU</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>At CU</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Left CU</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of the same 109 tenure-track individuals that took PWLR, 47 of them (43%) obtained tenure after using parental policies. Of those who obtained tenure, 25 faculty were at Columbia and 22 at other universities/colleges as of January 2009. The numbers for men and women were almost equal in those two groups. For those not remaining at Columbia, we contacted their former department and/or searched the web to learn where they went and if they had achieved tenure.

There were 13 faculty members who did not remain in tenured or tenure-track roles. Of these 13, five people are still at Columbia but in non-tenure track positions as researchers, lecturers, and administrative positions. Only eight have left Columbia, six of those women. Without knowing the reasons for the 13 people who went off-track it is difficult to comment.
To summarize, 51 women and 58 men utilized PWLR while on tenure-track, and men’s and women’s career trajectories appear statistically similar.

**Use of policies in 2008 as a snapshot current view**

In 2008, there were 295 tenure-track and tenured women at the Morningside campus. Of these women, 149 of them were of childbearing age, which is defined here as ages 45 and below. There are 784 tenure-track and tenured males at the Morningside campus. In 2008, nine women and 19 males, totaling 28 people, utilized the parenting policies. Nine female PWLR users out of 295 women faculty is approximately a 3% utilization rate. Nineteen male PWLR users out of 784 male faculty is approximately a 2.5% utilization rate, showing negligible percentage differential by gender in PWLR use.

While the percentage of people who used the policies is a small number, there is some reason to believe there is a trend of increasing utilization of parental policies by faculty over time. As there was only a total of 167 people who used the policies since inception, and 109 who used only PWLR (which started in 1994), 28 people represents a significant number for one year. If evenly distributed over the 14 years of PWLR 1994-2008, the average use would be less than eight faculty per year.

The nine women who used the parental policies in calendar year 2008 were all on tenure-track. Their average age was 36 with the youngest policy user being 33 and the oldest, 40. Among the nineteen men who used parental policies, nine were tenured faculty members while ten were tenure-track. The average age of tenured male policy users was 42 years old. The average age of men who utilized the parental policies while on tenure-track was 35.

This snapshot shows that women and men generally do not use the parenting policies until they are in their thirties and forties. Women, however, might experience increased complications resulting from having a child past the age of 35.

Another way to understand parental policy utilization is by looking at a year of Columbia University health benefits data. These data show that approximately 69 faculty had new children enter Columbia University
their homes in 2007 and 2008. Because these data were extracted from health benefits information, the number may not equal the total of children born 2007-2008 (not all faculty add their children to their Columbia health plans). Of the tenured faculty, two women and 26 men had children born in 2007-2008. Of the tenure-track faculty, 13 women and 28 men had children born in 2007-2008.

We do not know if the tenure-track and tenured faculty were primary caregivers, as they are ineligible for the parental policies if they are not primary caregivers. Assuming that all or most of these children could make parents eligible for using parental policies, the fact that 19 men and nine women, 28 total, used the policies in one year, out of 69 new parents in two years, indicates general use of the policies in 2008.

It appears that women are increasingly, over the time period of this study, using parental policies. This may be attributable to one or more of the following trends: increasing numbers of female tenure-track faculty having children, and/or an increased comfort with using parental policies.

**Schools/Departments**

Looking specifically at the different departments and schools, the faculty from the Social Sciences utilized parental policies most frequently with 64 out of the 167 individuals (38%) belonging to that division. Thirty six of the faculty users (21%) belonged to the Humanities and School of the Arts.

Those faculty at the professional schools such as Architecture, Business, Journalism, Law, School of Engineering and Applied Science (SEAS), and Social Work utilized the policies less frequently, with 38 (23%) faculty members using the policies in an 18 year period.

The division of Natural Sciences and SEAS had the fewest number of faculty members utilizing the policies with only six individuals (4%) from SEAS and 23 individuals (14%) from the Natural Sciences doing so between 1990 and 2008. Furthermore, the only departments that did not have anyone using parental policies were in Natural Sciences and SEAS. Specifically, in the division of Natural Sciences, there were two departments that did not have any faculty use the parental policies;
and except for Electrical Engineering, there were no other departments in SEAS that had faculty who utilized any of the parental policies.

**Major Challenge in Conducting the Study**

The most significant challenge of this study was the collection of data and the confirmation of the accuracy of the different sources of data. There were obstacles in accessing the information that needed to be studied and establishing the accuracy of the records that were obtained.

**Conclusion**

While this study has provided much descriptive data on policy utilization, there is not sufficient data to draw statistically significant conclusions. Nonetheless, this study does not suggest that there is a correlation between the use of Columbia University’s family policies and the ability of tenure-track faculty to achieve tenure status, leading us to the conclusion that the policies are effective in meeting their stated goals for both men and women.

What appears to be increasing use of the policies by faculty indicates the increased comfort with use due to diminished fears of negative career consequences. As with the introduction of any new policy, more time is required to learn if policy utilization will become even more commonplace.