



Best Practices for Supervisors Supporting OSU Faculty, Staff, and Student Caregivers During COVID-19

The Oklahoma State University Women's Faculty Council, Staff Advisory Council, Graduate and Professional Student Government Association, and College of Arts and Sciences Equity Advocates propose introducing revised professional practices and expectations to help supervisors best support faculty, staff, and students who are caregivers. A possibility exists that K-12 schools could go online or hybrid for the coming school year. Daycare programs (for children and adults) could remain closed. Even if these institutions open, families might still feel uncomfortable sending their loved ones. Caregivers could find themselves overseeing the schooling of children and/or the full-time care of adults in their households; their presence at home will become integral. We encourage supervisors to be flexible, creative, understanding, and compassionate in their leadership and to recognize that this situation will severely disadvantage faculty, staff, and students who are caregivers.

Research suggests that, prior to the pandemic, caregivers have long experienced disproportionate challenges in achieving academic career success in relation to their non-caregiving peers (Sallee, Ward, & Wendell, 2015). Further, while all caregivers face challenges in academia, research suggests they disproportionately affect women faculty, students, and staff (O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Drago et al., 2006). Given the intensification and uncertainty of caregiving in the pandemic and OSU's commitment to faculty, student, and staff diversity, it is more important than ever to understand and alleviate these challenges as much as possible.

The suggestions below could help supervisors empower caregivers to succeed as professionals while balancing the care and schooling of their families under the circumstances posed by COVID-19.

Give advance notice for required commitments

Provide as much advance notice as possible for required commitments. Consider the preparatory work necessary to attend a meeting or complete a task and negotiate an appropriate timeline with your caregiving employee. We recommend giving a minimum of five to seven business days' notice.

Allow for telecommuting and/or teaching online

Instructor caregivers should have the option of teaching online or hybrid courses to facilitate flexibility in their work schedules, and decisions regarding online instruction should be made as quickly as possible. Supervisors should remain cognizant of resources (e.g. technology, internet, etc.) needed for telecommuting and/or online teaching and should afford caregiving faculty, staff, and students the option to work remotely if necessary.

Allow negative course-banking

If possible, supervisors should assign instructor caregivers fewer courses during this period. Caregivers could be given the option to make up those courses in future semesters.

If additional work is produced within a department due to accommodations made for caregivers, consider distributing this work among those in the best position to absorb it.

If appropriate, provide caregivers a partial administrative appointment

Allowing qualified caregivers to serve partial administrative appointments (in lieu of heavier teaching loads, for example) could assist in providing flexibility to their schedules.

Allow supportive reassignment

Following discussion, consider reassigning caregivers to courses, tasks, etc. that facilitate flexibility of schedule.

Minimize required synchronous meetings

Consider the necessity of synchronous attendance at in-person or video meetings. If a discussion could be held through email, consider this substitution for all. If the meeting is necessary, consider facilitating the option for asynchronous participation.

Provide GTA support

If appropriate, consider providing caretakers with GTA support, particularly in the form of grading assistance.

Be flexible with deadlines

Consider allowing flexible deadlines, such as the removal of penalties for late work for students.

Be empathetic during annual reviews

Consider that COVID-19 will affect people differently depending upon their home situation, and be sensitive to such inequities and potential implicit biases when completing future annual reviews.

References

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- Sallee, M., Ward, K., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2016). Can anyone have it all? Gendered views on parenting and academic careers. *Innovative Higher Education*, 41(3), 187-202.