

**UUP FAMILY LEAVE STUDY**  
**MEMBERS' EXPERIENCES, PERCEPTIONS, AND NEEDS**

**Information collected for the UUP, 2006-2007**

**By**

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Information from this report was used during contract negotiations and is part of the written record of information presented to the state in 2007. Information not used at that time may be used by UUP in the future.

# Research Report: Family Leave Focus Groups and Interviews

## Summary of Findings

Family leave problems encountered by members include the following:

- Difficulties meeting tenure standards during the traditional time frame
- Insufficient sick-leave accruals for birth and other family care incidents
- Inability to manage mid-semester incidents
- Strained relationships with colleagues and administrators
- Continuation of work during leave periods
- Inaccurate and incomplete information about policies and options
- Lack of accessibility to and high cost of campus child care centers
- Inappropriate use of Drescher and sabbatical leaves as child care leaves.

## Recommendation

Information collected during focus groups and interviews leaves little question about the hardships imposed by inconsistent and inadequate institutional policies on family leave. UUP should continue to collect information about members' experiences at the chapter-level in order to assess recent gains made in the 2007-10 Agreement in order to prepare for possible future efforts to expand on those gains.

## Sample Design and Information-Gathering Process

Information about UUP members' experiences with and perceptions about family leave was collected between September, 2006 and August, 2007 in a series of focus groups, personal interviews, and open meetings. A non-probability sample (a sample that did not involve random selection of subjects) was utilized. The research objective was to gather detailed information from a particular constituency within UUP – those members who had something specific to convey to the UUP leadership about the issues under investigation. Calls for participation in campus-based focus groups and open meetings were publicized through statewide vehicles such as *The Voice* and Delegate Assembly meetings, as well as campus-level outreach through e-mail lists, fliers, and announcements at UUP-sponsored meetings. Information was systematically gathered and recorded for a total of 97 UUP members. There were 79 females and 18 males, 32 Professionals and 65 Academics, 8 part-time and 89 full-time members. There were additional

participants in open meetings at which general information was collected, but specific information about subjects was not recorded. A detailed explanation of the research methodology and additional information about the characteristics of those who participated in this study, are presented in the last section of this report.

## **Overview of Issues Related to Family Leave Needs and Experiences**

In order to understand the context within which the specific family leave problems discussed in this report occur for UUP members, it is important to consider a number of general issues raised by interview and focus group participants. First, many members underscored the significance of their perceived “uniqueness” in relation to other state employees. They pointed out that SUNY institutions recruit UUP members from national, and sometimes international, markets so most do not have networks of family members who can help with family care responsibilities, particularly childcare. On the other side of the care giving spectrum, elder parents often live far away and travel distance exacerbates the demands of elder care. UUP members called for recognition of their particular circumstances as workers and family care givers who lack the informal networks of support that can enhance workers’ ability to balance work and family responsibilities.

Second, many members emphasized their difficulty in meeting standards for continuing and permanent appointment within the traditional time-frame of the pre-tenure years. The pros and cons of stopping the tenure clock by moving to Qualified Academic Rank, an option that has been available to Academics (though not equitably utilized), are discussed in this context. (Professionals now have the same option as a result of the 2007-10 UUP contract).

A third overarching issue was the inadequacy of provisions for time off during family care episodes. Members reported having insufficient sick leave accruals for maternity and for use as “family sick days” (for paternity, adoption, elder care, and sick relative care). They underscored the financial consequences of unpaid leave, which has been the only option for many. Respondents discussed the effects of returning to work too soon after major family care episodes such as births and being unable to attend to family members’ needs because of inadequate leave provisions.

Fourth, coupled with the insufficiency of leave time for many members is the disruption to the workplace caused by mid-semester incidents that interfere with the “integrity of the semester.” Academics and Professionals reported these problems and explained their immediate impact as well as long-term repercussions. The absence of institutional help and resources needed to deal with mid-semester incidents often causes strained relationships with colleagues and administrators who can be “put out” by having to fill in (often without compensation) or make adjustments that cause difficulty for the flow of work in their offices and departments. Furthermore, many members reported continuing to work during official leave periods because they felt they had no choice – either because of their commitment to students or others for whom their work was crucial or because they sought to reduce “bad feelings” caused by their absence. More generally, respondents discussed the extent to which they confronted family leave needs in the context of unsupportive work environments and a “chilly” campus climate.

Another important dimension to the family leave problems experienced by UUP members is the absence of a coherent and comprehensive set of policies and guidelines. Given the patchwork system SUNY institutions have for confronting family leave needs, and the flexibility and ambiguity surrounding possibilities for members, this is perceived as a major

source of inequity. In particular, members see mid-level supervisors/administrators and department chairs as gatekeepers who affect employees' options and outcomes. Considerable concern is expressed about the role of Human Resources departments given members' anecdotes about receiving inaccurate or incomplete information about policies and options.

Other issues discussed include the high cost of and lack of accessibility to campus childcare centers, the inappropriate use of Drescher Leaves and sabbaticals as "childcare leaves," and the significance of a paid family leave policy for recruitment and retention of UUP members.

While most of the report focuses on the general circumstances of Academics and Professionals, consideration is given to the specific problems experienced by part-timers and members at Empire State College. While focus groups and interviews were conducted at Upstate Medical University, much of the information collected there is excluded from this report. Given the unique circumstances of that campus, it was not possible to present the findings and maintain confidentiality since it might be possible for readers to associate the information collected with specific individuals. Information about UMU will be presented to UUP leaders outside of the context of this report.

Finally, though most of what is presented focuses on problems, members' experiences with positive strategies for accommodating family care needs and supportive practices in use at various institutions are also discussed.

## **Specific Family Leave Problems**

### **Disruption of Progress for Continuing/Permanent Appointment**

Academics voiced strong concerns about the continuing appointment review process and what they saw as disadvantages for women associated with the traditional tenure model. Professionals

were less likely to see family leave problems as interfering with their ability to secure permanent appointment.

For Academics, the fact that the pre-tenure years tend to coincide with early child-rearing presents particular problems for women. It is common for female academics to enter employment at SUNY in their early 30's after having spent many years completing doctoral degrees. It is typical to have postponed child-bearing until degrees are completed and employment is secured. These pre-tenure years are likely to occur when the "biological clock" presents a relatively short time span for child birth at the same time that there is considerable pressure to publish, develop new courses, refine teaching techniques, and engage in service to establish one's reputation as a colleague who will contribute to the department and campus community. Similar time pressures are likely for adoptions, since the age of prospective parents is a factor for many adoption agencies and practical considerations related to the physical demands of child-rearing make postponement less desirable.

An untenured academic with a 4 ½ month old child articulated her anxieties about publishing enough to secure tenure. She saw her child's birth as "disadvantaging" her in light of the typical tenure path because of her inability to find enough time to bring major scholarly projects to completion. She described herself as having done "considerable research." She was successful in obtaining research grants, involved in collaborative research with a colleague in another country, and in the process of completing a book manuscript. She mentioned the Drescher leave program and her dismay at the fact that it was not available to her when she needed it most because of pending contract negotiations. *"If I don't get a Drescher, I'll have problems. Without it, my scholarship productivity will decline. It's hard to balance work with the demands of a baby. When am I going to write?"*

One Academic who adopted two children during her pre-tenure years emphasized that the child-rearing experiences of those who adopt are no different from the experiences of birth parents. Commenting on the difficulty she had in meeting the pressures of her pre-tenure years while raising two young children, she revealed that she had “no time to sleep,” was continually sick because of sleep deprivation and overwork, and needed more time to complete required scholarship than the traditional tenure time-line allows.

A faculty member who was denied tenure by her department spoke about her difficulties in meeting scholarship expectations when trying to care for two young children. She'd also had a miscarriage during one of her early years at SUNY. This person had published one article and written and submitted an NSF grant. She also completed a substantial research project and was in the process of writing it up for publication. She had a very heavy teaching load, covering service courses with large enrollments every semester. She pointed out that intensive childcare during the summers, when most scholars concentrate on their research, slowed her down considerably. *“Those who voted against me have no sense of context or balance. How could they think what happened during my first years [at the college] would reflect my overall potential for productivity?”*

Some respondents revealed that the traditional tenure model, combined with the absence of a clear family leave policy that provided reasonable options, affected their family formation patterns. One Academic stated she had no choice but to “put off having children” until she received continuing appointment. As a result, she was not able to have a second child. *“Had there been more support, especially a clear statement of policy and what they allow, I wouldn't have waited as long as I did to have my first child.”*

Intensifying anxiety about the coincidence of pre-tenure pressures and child-rearing demands was respondents' view that standards for tenure were ambiguous and/or changing. One person asserted that the perception among untenured faculty at her institution is that standards for tenure are getting tougher. This view was expressed fairly evenly by respondents at the university centers, comprehensive colleges, and medical universities. Some cited recent increases in the number of external reviews required for a tenure review and others cited increases in the number of publications required. One respondent explained that departments at her institution are reevaluating tenure standards because they've been asked to "articulate clearer expectations." She asserted that "expectations are changing" which is very unsettling to those who are trying to manage competing demands for teaching, scholarship, and service at a time when tenure standards are being reevaluated. *"It's a moving target. More anxiety is created. This compounds problems for those trying to have children during pre-tenure years."*

While for some precise criteria for continuing appointment presented problems because of the absence of flexibility in reviewing the balance of a person's achievements, for others a lack of specific criteria created anxieties about evaluations that might be too subjective and unfair. The following examples illustrate each side of this issue. A person who was denied tenure explained that she was hired to do something that involved more service and administration than the traditional tenure model at her institution allowed for. *"I was hired to bridge the gap between two different programs and it cost me my tenure."* She pointed out that she was hired by a different Dean than the one who presided over her tenure case and the latter's recommendation that she be denied was a critical factor in a "split decision" across multiple levels of review. The opposite problem, i.e., the absence of clear criteria, was illustrated by a subject who had a prolonged episode of family care responsibilities that prevented her from

completing a research project underway before her tenure review. She decided to leave her tenure-track position because she expected her department to recommend against granting her continuing appointment. While she had published scholarly articles, her questions about “how many” and “what kind” of publications (in terms of the quality of journals) were never clearly answered in the absence of written criteria. *“I kept getting mixed signals about whether I did or didn’t have enough to pass a tenure review.”* It is not unreasonable for Academics to assume that leaving a position before denial of tenure is better in terms of future marketability than being denied tenure by a former employer.

### **Option to Stop the Tenure Clock**

SUNY offers Academics a vehicle for stopping the tenure clock by temporarily moving from an academic rank to qualified academic rank (QAR). Respondents revealed many instances in which this option had been used to their benefit. Only one respondent (a male who made the request for a temporary move to QAR because of pressing elder care responsibilities), reported having such a request denied. Nevertheless, two major problems with the current QAR option were revealed. First, many respondents said they had no idea they could ask to be temporarily taken off of the tenure track in order to gain more time for completion of work. Those who had been informed of this possibility learned of it through informal networks of colleagues. In a few cases, it was suggested by department chairs or higher level administrators. In the absence of a clear family leave policy that identifies the QAR option, many UUP members remain unaware of their ability to use it. The second problem respondents perceived was the potential for an extension of the tenure clock to be held against them in the future. One person who decided not to move to QAR despite the fact that she was having difficulty finding time to write scholarly articles after losing summer work time following the birth of her second child said she felt that

stopping the tenure clock was a “double-edged sword.” Her department had no clear criteria for scholarship and she feared that stopping the tenure clock would have “upped the ante” with higher expectations from colleagues. Others echoed this concern, indicating that it was made clear to them by colleagues that stopping the tenure clock would be viewed as “getting an extra year” relative to the time-frame others had to work with. The fact that the “extra year” was needed because of family care responsibilities would be “lost on those making decisions about tenure.” One person pointed out that even if department colleagues understood the situation, it was unlikely that people on school-level personnel committees would take it into account. She emphasized the importance of having an explicit policy that identifies the QAR option for those with family care responsibilities that interfere with completion of work necessary to secure tenure. In the absence of such a policy, many respondents expressed fears that “stopping the clock” could hurt them later, regardless of whether they used the time to increase their scholarly productivity.

### **Insufficient Sick Leave Accruals**

The use of sick leave as the primary vehicle for paid time off for maternity purposes presents problems for our members. First, it limits the standard 6-week parental leave to birth mothers, thereby excluding birth fathers and adoptive parents from more extended possibilities for paid leave. Second, it can take up to 4 years to accrue enough for a 6-week maternity leave. If the member gets sick and uses any of those sick days in that 4-year period, a longer time would be required to secure a 6-week leave. As a result, newer members and members who use accruals because of their own illnesses or other family members’ illnesses often lack enough for a standard 6-week leave for birth (At the time of the interviews 15 sick days could be used for family care purposes. The 2007-10 contract extends this to 30 days).

One Academic interviewed before her first child was born reported that because of complications during pregnancy, all of her sick leave was used before the birth. *“When I deliver in August, if I need a few weeks to physically recover, there is no more sick time for me. I’ll have to go off payroll. I can’t afford this. I’ll have to report to work immediately after giving birth.”* A follow-up interview with this person after the birth revealed that this is exactly what happened.

Another Academic reported having a miscarriage during her second year of employment at SUNY, which required her to use a number of sick days. She was, however, preoccupied with “using too many” because she had so few accruals and was thinking ahead to the possibility of a future pregnancy. *“If I use a sick day, I’m thinking do I want to give my future child over to daycare one day earlier? How are you valuing me if I have to make that kind of cold, calculating tradeoff?”* Similarly, another member stated that she “bled in her office for two weeks” after a miscarriage because she didn’t want to take time off because of insufficient accruals and her hope that she would have a child in the near future.

A faculty member who directs an academic program reported the following:

*“A new hire in our department was forced to go back to teaching her class, which met every day, just two weeks after having a C-section. This seemed barbaric to me! Please look closely at the progressive policies some other universities have.”*

A Professional who gave birth to her first child 1 ½ years after starting work at a SUNY institution had only 13 paid sick days to use for her leave and had to take additional time as unpaid leave. She used sick days before the birth because of her own illness during the pregnancy. She returned to work with no sick days accrued but soon found herself needing occasional days off because of her child’s chronic ear infections. Her only option was to take unpaid days, and she was put on “medical restriction” as a result of being labeled a “sick time abuser.” She was told that even when she accrues sick time in the future, she will have to provide

a doctor's note to use sick days, even for minor illnesses that don't require a doctor's care (e.g., a severe cold or flu). She believes that having insufficient sick leave accruals and exhausting them within three weeks after giving birth drew attention to her situation. She asserted that an employee who had not exhausted sick leave because of childbirth and had sufficient accruals to address health needs would not have been singled out in this way.

Another Professional who has primary responsibility for the care of two elderly relatives also reported getting "written up" for sick time use and was also put on medical restriction. She stated that "one day a month" was considered an excess use of sick time in her department. In addition to the punitive nature of the medical restriction designation, she was deemed to be ineligible for a Discretionary Salary Increase as a result of it.

Many respondents argued that using sick days as the vehicle for maternity leave is inappropriate and inadequate because it cannot offer employees a guaranteed period of paid leave and it fosters perceptions that people who exhaust sick leave accruals are abusing leave privileges. In addition, many respondents pointed out that giving birth is not an illness and should be accommodated through a separate leave provision that incorporates birth, adoption, and other family care incidents that require time off. They expressed the view that separating family care leave from sick leave would foster recognition of its legitimacy.

### **Inadequate Provisions for "Family Sick Days"**

At the time of the interviews and focus groups, the UUP contract allowed for use of 15 sick days for family care purposes. The 2007-2010 Agreement extends this to 30 sick days. In view of members' comments about the need for paid time to cover major family care episodes such as adoption, illness of a spouse, domestic partner, or child, and elderly parents' illnesses or changes

in circumstance, UUP should keep track of whether the new 30-day allowance adequately addresses the problems identified below.

A new father whose wife became seriously ill after giving birth needed more than 15 days to deal with the crisis he was in: having to care for both his wife and new baby. An academic who had plenty of sick days for herself, needed more than 15 family sick days when her 91-year-old mother, who lived out of state, was going through the last few months of her life. This person lost pay for the days she needed to take beyond 15. She is single and the sole support for herself and her mother. She experienced tremendous financial hardship during this family care episode. The required traveling added to her expense – not an unusual situation for our members with family elsewhere. After her mother's death, she sent the following e-mail to a colleague after incurring medical expenses as the result of a fall which resulted in a serious ankle break that required surgery:

*I am in a pinch with regard to the timing of insurance reimbursements for the accident medical costs and when I need to pay cash – out of pocket. This is something I have never had to do in my life before. Can you loan me \$100? I'll start getting the reimbursements within the next couple of weeks so things will look up. I need to pay one bill by Tuesday of this week. Boy, this brings me back to how shitty our salaries are. Sure wish I had that \$900 that I had to lose because of taking family leave when my mother was sick!*

An issue raised by those who voiced concerns about elder care was the potential effect of depleting sick days for family care purposes at the end of one's career since they are converted to payment for health insurance upon retirement. One person pointed out that many people facing elder care are themselves getting older. *"We worry about using up sick leave at the end of our careers."*

## **Inability to Afford Unpaid Leaves**

UUP members often have no choice but to take unpaid leaves when major family care incidents occur. This happens when they don't have enough accruals. Many respondents indicated that they can't afford to take unpaid leaves. This was revealed by those in dual income families and was even more problematic for families in which the UUP member's salary is the only or primary salary.

Because our academics and professionals tend to relocate to take jobs at SUNY institutions, their spouses or partners are often giving up jobs in their previous locations and they may not find full, desirable employment right away. The need for paid time off for a major family care incident is critical under such circumstances.

A former UUP member had relocated her family to take a SUNY job at a campus in a more rural setting. Her husband was a computer programmer and had great difficulty finding full-time employment during her first few years at the college. Her SUNY salary was their primary salary. She had her first child during her 3<sup>rd</sup> year with SUNY and did not have enough sick time accrued for a standard 6-week leave. She took an unpaid leave and lost substantial income, which was a serious financial blow. In addition, she continued working while she was supposed to be off on an unpaid leave. Colleagues were covering her courses and she basically had to do all the course prep because they weren't qualified to take over for her. She ended up leaving SUNY as a result of her "bad feelings" about this experience.

Other members emphasized the cumulative effect of losing pay during family care episodes. One Professional, who had two children, three years apart in age, reported losing four

full weeks of pay with the first child. Because of insufficient accruals and the need to take more time off when her second child was born (having two pre-school children to care for) her best option was to move to a reduced workload, thereby losing 40% of her pay for a period of 12 weeks. She noted the financial hardships this caused her family and expressed resentment because her campus “made money on the deal” by hiring a part-time employee to cover the work she couldn’t do during her reduced load period at less than the amount saved through her reduced salary. An Academic related a similar experience. She worked out a half-time arrangement that kept her teaching two courses while her third course was hired out to an adjunct and her committee work and advisement were taken over by colleagues. She lost half of her salary (while teaching a total of 130 students in two course sections) while the college hired an adjunct at less than \$2500 and colleagues absorbed other parts of her workload with no compensation.

The 2002 family leave survey administered by the UUP Family Leave Committee yielded the following information about financial hardships that followed unpaid leaves. Out of 236 UUP members who filled out the survey, 37 Professionals reported using unpaid leaves of absence for family care purposes, at an average salary loss of \$5,025. Twenty-three Academics used unpaid leaves at an average salary loss of \$16,741 (Kathleen Burke, Jamie Dangler, and Lisi Krall, *“Family Leave Survey: Preliminary Summary Report for UUP Family Leave Committee,”* 2002).

### **Unsupportive Work Environments/Long-Term Repercussions**

Even when a UUP member has enough accruals, time off for family care requires negotiation at lower supervisory levels. It also requires cooperation by colleagues whose workload is often increased to fill in for a person on leave. The absence of a standard, evenly applied family leave policy leaves employees (particularly untenured employees) in a very vulnerable position. Many

of our members stated that even when they have enough accruals, they take shorter leaves than they need because there's no one to replace them and they feel they have no choice but to return to work prematurely. This often happens because they feel a very strong professional obligation to their students and colleagues and there isn't anyone available to cover for them. It also can happen because they fear long-term consequences for their job security and general "status" in their workplaces.

While many supervisors and department heads are accommodating when people need time off, many are not. One of our members sums up a common complaint. *"Depending on whom your supervisor is and what department you work for, you can get a good family leave situation or a bad one. This is unfair. Policies should be standardized."* Another member's comments echo what we have heard from scores of academics. *"My leave generated lots of animosity toward me by the department chair. I don't know if a better policy would resolve this issue, but surely leaving such decisions up to each department chair leaves a pregnant, untenured woman in a very vulnerable position."*

A UUP member who's been involved in clinical practice and teaching at one of SUNY's medical universities for more than 10 years explained the consequences she experienced around the birth of her two children. She went back to work when her first child was a few weeks old, and because of the difficulties that caused (health problems for her and her child, daycare problems), she decided to take a 7-month unpaid leave (allowable under NYS law) when her second child was born a few years later.

*Clinical work – infiltrates every waking moment. If you don't give every waking moment, you're resented by your colleagues. You're not a team player who's sharing the load. There are value judgments placed on people, especially women. There's a belief that men will be more reliable and steady.... After returning to work after my leave, people were incredulous. They thought I shouldn't be able to come back after being off for so long.*

People who adopt also have their requests for time off viewed negatively. An academic who needed time to travel overseas to adopt a child and then wanted some time home with the child afterward, explained the reaction she got at work:

*It was seen as my personal “problem” – comparable to the fishing and bird watching hobbies of other department members. I was really harassed for taking time off for my daughter’s adoption – by my chair and through “anonymous” complaints. This was really infuriating because I had already covered all of my teaching responsibilities. In my opinion, this is the major issue UUP should fight for in the new contract.*

One of our Professionals articulated another dimension to the problems at hand – the lack of understanding about the intense demands of family care. Even when people make sure that their work is being done, a change in their work patterns during a family care crisis is often perceived by supervisors as a “slack off.” One person who had to care for her father during a month-long illness that preceded his death made the following comments:

*As I was in charge of a large project at work that was due at that time, I worked mostly half days, but while at the hospital I worked continuously and religiously on my project, spreading my papers out all over the hospital room. The report was turned in approximately 2 weeks late. In my evaluation that year, the late filing was noted – not my dedication to my task during a very difficult time in my life – a time when I watched my father die a long, slow death.*

### **Disruption Caused by Mid-Semester Incidents and Inadequate Replacements**

The dual problem caused by mid-semester incidents and the absence of adequate replacements for people on leave are illustrated by an Academic who explained the problems she faced because of a mid-semester birth.

*There are “verbal pressures” from colleagues because we don’t have people to teach my courses. The approach is ‘what will you do to accommodate us.’ You’re made to feel bad if the timing of your birth is bad. You want to be accommodating because the department will vote on your tenure. The feeling of my department chair is “if it happens, it’s your responsibility.” I had to make arrangements for others to cover my classes. They weren’t compensated. This puts you in an awkward position.*

Respondents revealed that it is not uncommon for women who have taken time off for birth or other family care incidents to be expected to fill in for other women who have similar needs. Two Academics who gave birth during different semesters of the same year were expected to cover each other's courses during their respective leave periods. One commented that it was a quid pro quo. *"The women were expected to help each other out, but we weren't the people who should have been asked. It put a lot of pressure on us with the new demands of caring for a baby."*

Another illustration of these problems came from one of our part-time Professionals who has been with SUNY for 33 years, working for two different SUNY campuses. She went through a 7-month period when her elderly father got very ill and could no longer live alone. She spent lots of time traveling back and forth from her home to his (almost one hour away). This involved lots of trouble-shooting, planning, and making arrangements to figure out how to provide the best care for him. He went to an assisted living facility for a while and then needed more substantial care. He had periodic stays in the hospital as well. She used her vacation days to get time off, but consistently faced a major problem - no one to cover her responsibilities when she needed to be away. She supervised student teachers and said there were many times when she needed to make a choice between covering a mandatory meeting for student teachers and traveling to her father on a day when she received a call indicating that he had taken a turn for the worse. She was left totally on her own to deal with this crisis, with no back-up help provided by the college.

### **Continuing to Work During Leave Periods/Overloads After Leave Period**

A number of UUP members reported working during their official leave periods. For example, it was common for Academics who gave birth toward the end of the semester to retain

responsibility for finishing their courses despite the fact that they were on sick leave for maternity. One woman complained about having to use sick days despite the fact that she was grading papers within a week of her child's birth. Another said she did some work during her six weeks of time off for maternity because "people were counting on me to do these things," which included working with graduate students, writing letters of recommendation, and reviewing grant proposals. She recorded at least 40 hours of work during the six-week leave period and asked Human Resources whether she could get a week of sick leave restored as a result. The answer was "no."

Another situation confronted by some Academics was the expectation that they would "work" to put together materials for reappointment or continuing appointment even when their review process occurred during official leave periods. This affected people on leave for maternity as well as people on temporary disability leave. In more than one case, not only did people have to work to put an initial file together, but were also asked to submit additional materials at various stages of the process. In some cases, this involved considerable time and effort. For example, one respondent, who had complications during her pregnancy and difficulty completing her portfolio by its due date (within three weeks of her child's delivery), had a deadline extension request denied. Aside from the hardship these situations caused for our members during difficult medical incidents, they raise questions about whether SUNY institutions are violating the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, the protections of which run concurrent with contractual and legal provisions for UUP members' leave possibilities.

In addition, a few Academics reported being required to work overloads when they returned from maternity-related leaves or during semesters subsequent to ones for which they negotiated reduced loads. They emphasized that this not only caused hardships as they struggled

to meet work demands with new childcare responsibilities but also reflected a lack of understanding of the intense demands that follow the immediate period of maternity leave, including sleep deprivation. In their view, expecting new mothers to work extra time after a maternity leave undermines their ability to construct a new balance between work and family demands, thereby making it more difficult to resume their “normal” levels of productivity.

### **Absence of Family Networks**

Many UUP members pointed out that they see themselves as different, on average, from most other workers on their campuses, which has a bearing on their options for handling work-family conflicts. SUNY’s academics and professionals are highly unlikely to live near extended family members since institutions recruit from the national and international market. Most UUP members don’t work at institutions in or near their hometowns. This means they’re unlikely to have parents who can help with their childcare or siblings living in the same place who can help in caring for elder parents. Furthermore, their elder parents often live in distant places, requiring extended travel when an elder care emergency arises. This problem was emphasized by many respondents who see provision of adequate family leave options as a necessary aspect of recruiting and retaining high quality workers for jobs at academic institutions.

### **Inaccurate Information/Inconsistent Application of Policies/Need for Written Guidelines**

Many respondents stressed their frustration at not knowing exactly what options they had when a major family care incident arose. In addition to the fact that SUNY has a “patchwork” system that leaves many people without adequate accommodations, the provisions we have in place are not being communicated accurately and fully in all cases across our campuses. For example, an Academic who didn’t have enough sick leave accruals for a 6-week maternity leave and was

concerned about potential negative repercussions for her tenure possibilities was told that she might be able to get an extension on the tenure clock, but she didn't know what her options were.

*One of the things I had trouble with was thinking what the best direction is. I was told by HR – there are no policies. It gets resolved at the department level. I like the fact that there isn't a stringent policy and there can be flexibility at the department level, but it's at the whim of the chair. Some get better options than others. It depends on the politics of the department. There are a lot of other schools I've been at that get a full semester off from teaching with pay. There are no rules here. We don't know when to ask, who to ask. A lot is up in the air. Male professors don't have to worry about this.*

A long-serving part-time employee expressed her frustration at not knowing that she could use 15 of her sick days for family care.

*[During a one-year period] my mother who is over 80 had 10 surgical procedures (mostly life threatening). I am her medical advocate. I never knew there was any family leave available. I used vacation time for her doctor's appointments and hospital stays....How are employees supposed to know about this? Is there an application?*

The lack of a coherent, written policy that spells out options for meeting family leave needs was identified by many respondents as a serious problem for a number of reasons. In addition to inconsistencies and inaccuracy in the information often provided by supervisors and Human Resources Department, it creates a situation in which many of our members have to spend considerable time “reinventing the wheel” and trying to figure out what their options are. A Professional who recently gave birth said she “had to go to HR seven times to get information. I had to figure it out on my own.” Another person from the same campus stated that she was the “test person for new HR person to figure out what was available.” A Professional whose wife was expecting a baby and anticipating some medical problems surrounding the birth, was told by the Human Resources Office that he could use only 5 of the 15 sick days allowed for family care for this purpose. Only with UUP's intervention was this situation corrected. Ironically, a person

from the same campus reported that he was given “tremendous flexibility” in the use of family sick days when he needed time to care for relatives.

The lack of a coherent policy was also seen by many as fostering distrust of members whose need for leave time comes to be equated with “time abuse.” A Professional who had extensive complications during and after her pregnancy and made arrangements to use compensatory time to be able to stay home longer than her sick leave allowed, stated that the treatment she got from her Human Resources Department was “really bad.” She was troubled by the distrust that was conveyed to her by people who implied that she was abusing her time off.

*“I felt harassed. One person from HR would call and ask when I was returning to work. Then, the first day I got back I got a call from HR to make sure I was at work. They could have called my supervisor.”*

An untenured Academic who reported struggling to meet the demands of work while caring for a toddler revealed her frustration at being told that her request to “buy out” a course was not possible. UUP leaders informed her that there was no obstacle to meeting her request and that there were examples of similar accommodations made at many SUNY institutions.

*“What has been a real problem for me is getting work/salary reduction. I’m told that it is impossible for [my campus] to ‘buy out’ a course. Any work reduction must be across-the-board on teaching, research, and service. [There are] problems with this. I can’t just reduce my number of thesis advisees – they need me! My department has come to count on my considerable service contribution. Reducing it would involve someone else doing substantial retraining. A reduced level of research won’t get me grants. Anything less than full-time status earns no credit towards sabbatical.*

Aside from complaints about inconsistency in the way Human Resources Departments handle people’s family leave needs, members pointed out that there is no consistency in the way campus Presidents’ use “Presidential Leave” (Title F of the Board of Trustees Policies). This research yielded examples of presidents granting fully paid leaves for family care purposes as well as examples of presidents denying such requests. Even within campuses, there was reported

inconsistency over time in the way presidents used their discretion with regard to Title F leaves. One Professional whose request for paid “Presidential Leave” was denied said she knew of six women who did not have enough sick leave accruals to cover pregnancy leaves but got fully paid leaves from the President and another person who got such a leave at ½ pay. She commented that “the most frustrating thing is that there is no guide. There’s nothing written and nothing consistent.”

### **Flexible Options: Inconsistency and the Pros and Cons of Ambiguity**

Many respondents reported their success in working with supervisors and department chairs to solve family leave problems in creative ways. Their solutions included temporary shifts to part-time work, changes in work responsibilities in order to allow for more home-based work, course reductions in one semester followed by “make up” courses in subsequent semesters or during summer sessions, and flexible schedules. Such arrangements often required funds to hire part-time replacements or increased workloads for colleagues (often without compensation). While respondents were “grateful” when efforts were made to help them address their family leave needs, many acknowledged the tenuous nature of their situations and the drawbacks of relying on individuals’ ability to “make deals” in order to address their needs. One Academic who was satisfied with her leave arrangements stated that colleagues in other departments are not getting the kind of support she was fortunate enough to get from her department. Others commented that their department chairs would like to see more standard policies because “it puts pressure on them to have to negotiate on an individual basis.” Furthermore, some had negative experiences with department chairs “changing in mid-stream.” In other words, they negotiated a particular arrangement under one department chair and had difficulty when a new department chair who was not supportive of the arrangement took over.

Most respondents revealed an understanding of the paradox created by flexibility at the campus level (and at lower levels within campuses). While some benefit from that flexibility and work out “sweet deals” that satisfy their needs, others are not in a position to successfully bargain for accommodations. Still, most respondents were adamant about the need for a firm, standard family leave policy that would be evenly applied to all. Some, however, expressed their concerns that a “rigid policy” might limit possibilities for flexibility and “creative solutions” that meet differential needs and circumstances.

### **Misuse of Drescher and Sabbatical Leaves**

Some individuals reported that they had no choice but to use Drescher and Sabbatical Leave time as part of their strategy to manage the care of new children in the face of heavy work demands. They pointed out the dilemmas this caused, since both of these leaves are meant for scholarship or professional development and individuals are held accountable for the project proposals they submit with their applications for these leaves. As one respondent put it, *“a sabbatical is meant for professional development and not child care. In my case, I had to use my leave time for personal reasons.”* Some respondents reported that when they asked about leave possibilities for birth or adoption they were explicitly told by department chairs or administrators to apply for Drescher Leaves.

### **Particular Problems for Part-Timers**

Discussion of the particular problems faced by part-time Academics and Professionals focused on the extent to which they are often excluded from existing provisions for time off (e.g., use of sick leave) because they are simply “let go” if they have a family care incident. For example, a part-time Academic who is hired on a semester-by-semester basis is not likely to be offered work or to be rehired for a subsequent semester if she is pregnant. Additionally, part-time members

have even more difficulty than full-time members obtaining accurate information about their options for addressing family care needs because they often are separated from informal networks of colleagues that can provide helpful information and/or work during evening hours when Human Resources Departments and other places where they could seek help are closed. Additionally, some members explained the consequences of their move from full-time to part-time work because of their inability to balance family care needs with work on a full-time schedule. One Professional explained that because of the high cost of childcare, she had no choice but to move from full-time to part-time after the birth of her child. *“This has disadvantaged me professionally. I’ve missed opportunities for projects, conferences, and further advancement in my career. If you don’t participate in these things, you get passed up for promotion.”* An Academic related a similar experience. *“I made a choice not to work full-time for family reasons. That choice has affected my career. I would not be a part-timer if I hadn’t had kids.”*

### **Empire State College’s Unique Circumstances**

Academics from Empire State College revealed particular problems with the existing family leave possibilities offered by SUNY. They pointed out that because they have 12-month contracts they have less flexibility than most other SUNY Academics. One Academic explained that because there are five terms over the course of a year, there are no definitive times off except for a 4-week “reading period” in the summer that is generally used for class preparation and scholarship. This makes it difficult to get a block of time off for family care purposes. Another Academic asserted that because Empire State College faculty do a lot of individualized work with students, “it’s more difficult to spread work around” when someone needs to take a leave.

*“My major concern with taking leaves is that there seems to be no provision, at least at my Center, for who would cover the work of the person on leave. This is certainly true when we take short vacations. One comes back to a pile of work, phone calls, and e-mails and I can’t imagine what it would be like to take an extended leave. In my opinion, the administration needs to look at this issue. It is not a simple issue of allowing leaves. In order for leaves to be useful and worth taking, there has to be a procedure for who will cover your work while you are gone.”*

Finally, since Empire State College faculty are not based on campuses, they are less likely to have easy access to state-supported SUNY daycare centers.

### **Insufficient Daycare Availability**

Seventeen of New York State’s 38 worksite childcare centers are located on SUNY campuses. These centers serve the families of UUP Professionals and Academics, as well as other SUNY employees, students and community members. The problem respondents revealed is that on many campuses, our members have difficulty getting their pre-school children into the network daycare centers. One academic said she was in a panic two weeks before she was to return to work after the birth of her baby because she couldn’t find childcare. *“The University makes no attempt to provide its professors with childcare. The center waiting list is 3 years long. I haven’t met one faculty member who has gotten a child in the daycare center.”* One respondent stated that the childcare center on her campus designates a particular number of “slots” for students, faculty, and other campus employees, but is more student-focused. *“There’s a long waiting list for our daycare center. Even when there has been underutilization of student spaces, we haven’t had any success getting more spaces for faculty.”*

Adding to the space limitation problem is the high cost of childcare. One respondent reported paying more than \$900 a month for her child’s spot in a daycare center. UUP members on a different campus reported that it was less a shortage of open spots for children than the high

cost that was most pressing for them and their colleagues. A person who has used babysitters in her home rather than daycare centers for her two pre-school children reported that over the past five years one-half of her salary has gone to pay for childcare.

### **Benefits of a Standard Paid Family Leave Policy for SUNY**

UUP members emphasized the long term benefits to SUNY that could accrue from having a standard paid family leave policy that allowed adequate time off for family care episodes. The following comment from a new mother captures the points made by many respondents:

*My justification is not just so we can stay on the payroll longer (which would be nice in itself). It is that if people have to return to work early because they are off the payroll, they often stop nursing (which is linked to greater illness in children), and usually have to put their children in daycare, where they are more likely to get sick, causing the parent to have to use his/her sick time anyway to care for a sick baby. This not only disrupts the workplace (a worker returning from maternity leave, and then repeatedly being absent to care for a sick baby), but it increases health care costs. This is coming directly from personal experience. As soon as I returned to work and put my daughter in daycare, she got her first illness, and has had a never-ending stream of illnesses since then. So, while I only used 6 weeks of sick time after her birth, I am using a lot of sick time now to care for her when she is sick. Does that make sense?*

In addition, respondents emphasized the significance of a paid family leave policy for recruitment and retention of employees. Whether an academic institution has paid family leave and tenure clock suspension options has become a major factor for academics and professionals on the job market and SUNY has lost good people as a result of its shortcomings in this area. One member reported losing an academic in her department because of inadequate family leave provisions. She had her first child during pre-tenure years at SUNY and lost much needed income because she had no option but to take unpaid leave. This individual was so soured by what she perceived to be the lack of support for women with children, she left SUNY for the

California State system, where her second child was born under a much more supportive policy structure.

Members also provided the information about prospective employees whose decisions to declined job offers from SUNY institutions were related to inadequate family leave options. One department chair communicated the following to department faculty via e-mail:

*“I regret to report that, after much effort and negotiation, [ X ] has declined our offer of a position as a tenured associate professor. The biggest issue is that she is expecting a baby.... [X] University’s highly enlightened combination of paid pregnancy leave and paid primary caregiver leave, together with deferred sabbatical, allows her to spend the next two years in [the city] where her husband will be doing a dental residency program.... Although she had no doubt that [our] University has a better... Department than does [X University] ...we simply could not match her two years off for one and one half years of pay.”*

When an academic chose another college over a SUNY college. She wrote the following e-mail to the faculty in the department that offered her a position:

*“This was one of the hardest decisions of my life, the kind with big tears and pros/cons lists. I wanted to come to SUNY so much.... Calculating maternity leave based on the 1.25 days earned per week of work (as per the faculty handbook)...I would have approximately 23 work days accrued after 2 years of work, presuming I didn’t use any in those 2 years. It was surprising that the SUNY system does not offer more in maternity leave to attract and retain top female faculty. My other offer included a full paid semester of maternity leave, which was really a huge consideration for us.”*

## **Methodology**

Information about UUP members’ experiences with and perceptions about gender inequity, salary inequity, and family leave was collected between September, 2006 and August, 2007 in a series of focus groups, personal interviews, and open meetings conducted by J. Dangler. A non-probability sample (a sample that did not involve random selection of subjects) was utilized. The research objective was to gather detailed information from a particular constituency within UUP – those members who had something specific to convey to the UUP

leadership about the issues under investigation. Calls for participation in campus-based focus groups and open meetings were publicized through statewide vehicles such as *The Voice* and Delegate Assembly meetings, as well as campus-level outreach through e-mail lists, fliers, and announcements at UUP-sponsored meetings. The basic “pitch” for participation is captured in the text below, which was provided to UUP chapter leaders:

*UUP needs to know about our members’ needs, experiences, and views about*  
*\*FAMILY LEAVE (birth, adoption, elder care, sick relative care)*  
*\*GENDER INEQUITY*  
*\*SALARY INEQUITY*  
*PLEASE SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES AND CONCERNS*

UUP members were given the option to sign up for a private interview if they did not want to discuss their experiences with others present or if they were not available during the scheduled focus group or open meeting times. A non-probability (purposive) sample was used to select the campuses for the study. The campuses selected were chosen for one or more of the following reasons:

- 1) Visible support of the study from the chapter leadership. This was important because success in publicizing the study and soliciting participation was heavily dependent on chapter initiatives and help. Most of the selected campuses had representatives on the statewide Family Leave Committee or Women’s Rights and Concerns Committee. Those representatives were critical in helping to schedule and make arrangements for J. Dangler’s visits to the campuses;
- 2) Existence of an active committee centered on family leave or women’s issues. In a few cases, such committees made specific requests to have their campuses included in the study;
- 3) Identification of a “critical mass” of UUP members who had expressed an interest in having UUP address family leave and gender equity issues. Participation in the UUP Family Leave Committee’s 2002 survey on family leave needs and experiences was considered since some campuses had much higher levels of participation than others.
- 4) Consideration of the need to have each campus type represented.

## **Final Sample for the Study**

The total number of campuses covered was determined by practical constraints. The aim was to cover as many as possible within the time frame of the study.

1. Focus Groups

Conducted at Albany, Empire State College regional meetings, New Paltz, Plattsburgh, Potsdam, and Upstate Medical University.

Total number of participants: **49** (17 professionals; 32 academics)

2. Personal Interviews

Interviewees came from Albany, University of Buffalo, Buffalo HSC, Cortland, Empire State College, New Paltz, Oneonta, Plattsburgh, Potsdam, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook HSC, and Upstate Medical University.

Total number of interviews: **30** (5 professionals; 22 academics; 3 medical doctors)

Most interviews were conducted in person. A few were conducted via telephone.

3. Presentations and Open Meetings

Presentations about family benefits and family leave were given at chapter meetings at Oneonta and University of Buffalo. Open discussions followed the presentations. Members' comments and suggestions were noted. Approximately **25-30** people attended the Oneonta meeting. Approximately **35-40** people attended the UB meeting. Some individuals requested personal interviews after each of these meetings.

4. E-mail exchanges and special meetings

Through the course of the study, J. Dangler received more than **50** e-mails from people who were unable to attend focus groups or open meetings during her campus visits. Many of these exchanges contained explanations of members' problems as well as their perceptions and suggestions.

A special meeting was held with **5** UUP members and the chapter president at Binghamton in August, 2007. The meeting was arranged by the chapter president in response to comments and requests for help he received from members confronting family leave problems.

## **Profile of Research Participants and Informed Consent**

Each respondent who participated in a focus group or personal interview was asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 2). Focus group participants were asked to fill out a short

questionnaire to provide the following basic information: name, phone number, e-mail address, department/position, number of years at SUNY, part-time or full-time status, and age. The questionnaire also asked them to indicate whether they were academics or professionals, had children (and their ages), and had permanent or continuing appointment. Those who participated in personal interviews were asked the same questions. The above information was recorded for the **79 people** who participated in focus groups or interviews plus an additional **18 people** who participated in either an open discussion or small group meeting on their campus or had an extensive e-mail exchange with J. Dangler about their experiences. This information was not collected for most of the people who participated in the open meetings because of the nature of those meetings. They were less formal than the interview and focus group situations, with people filtering in and out at different times because of their work obligations. The profile of research participants presented below is based on the **97** people for whom this information was systematically collected.

**N=97**

Males: 18 (19% of total)

Females: 79 (81% of total)

Professionals: 32 (33% of total)

Academics: 65 (67% of total)

Part-Time: 8 (08%)

Full-Time: 89 (92%)

Age: Mean – 45

Median – 43

Mode – 36

Yrs at SUNY: Mean – 11

Median – 8

Mode – 3

Permanent/Continuing Appointment:

Number/Percent Reporting **Yes**: 42 (56%)  
Number/Percent Reporting **No**: 33 (44%)  
**N=75** (22 respondents did not provide information on Permanent/Continuing Appointment)

Currently Responsible for One or More Minor Children: 44 (45%)

*Note: This figure includes those who were pregnant or had pregnant partners/spouses at the time of the interview/focus group. Some respondents indicated that they did not have children, but were planning to. Some respondents indicated that they were currently responsible for primary care of elder parents or contemplated being so in the future. A precise count of people in the latter two situations was not taken, but illustrations are presented in the narrative section of this report.*

### **Limitations and Benefits of the Methodology**

The research methods used for this part of the study do not provide information that can be generalized to the full population of UUP members. In other words, we cannot determine the precise proportion of the total UUP membership with similar experiences or similar views as those who participated in this study. However, the purpose of the research was not to randomly sample the total population of UUP members, but to obtain detailed information about the nature and scope of specific problems from the point of view of members who have experienced them. The research approach involved qualitative methods (in-depth interviews and focus groups) that yield descriptive and explanatory data to highlight the context within which problems emerged, their personal and professional impact on UUP members, successful and unsuccessful attempts to resolve them, and members' suggestions for resolving them.

Since identification of subjects for the study did not involve random selection techniques, *self-selection* of participants yielded a sample that is not fully representative of the UUP membership. There were much higher proportions of females than males, academics than professionals, and full-timers than part-timers.

### **More Females than Males**

The high proportion of females can be understood as a reflection of the reality of contemporary care-giving practices. National research continues to indicate that women do the bulk of care-giving, though men's involvement is increasing slowly. It is not surprising that female UUP members were more interested in and experienced with family leave issues than their male counterparts. Similarly, interest in gender inequity sparked more interest among women than men since historically (in SUNY and society-wide) gender inequity has been experienced and defined as a women's issue.

### **More Academics than Professionals**

Based on information collected during the study, it is hypothesized that the higher proportion of academics than professionals is the result of the following factors:

1. For three of the campuses, publicity for the study and calls for participation were organized by women's groups or networks of women that were composed almost exclusively of academics. On those campuses, previous efforts to organize UUP members to address family leave and gender inequity issues were initiated and maintained by academics. Since the study depended mostly on campus-based publicity to elicit participation, these groups were the avenues for tapping into the network of people who had concerns about and experience with the issues under study. Accordingly, publicity about the study probably did not filter out to professionals in an effective manner since word of mouth encouragement of participation and actual contact of prospective subjects by campus leaders were important in reinforcing general chapter announcements via e-mail and fliers. In other words, we were more successful in tapping into a network of academics that had relevant experiences than we were in reaching out to professionals.

2. Information collected through the 2002 Family Leave Survey and reinforced by this study, indicates a greater general “urgency” about family leave problems for academics compared to professionals. The majority of participants in the study were motivated to participate because of family leave specifically, though that was often integrally connected to perceptions about gender inequity more generally. This is not to imply that professionals have less significant needs and less problematic experiences than academics *on an individual basis*, but to suggest that as a group, academics seem to experience family leave problems on a more extensive level than professionals in the following way. Aside from difficulties surrounding family leave incidents themselves (i.e., the need for time off for family care reasons), academics reveal significant concern about the impact of family leave problems on their prospects for tenure and promotion. These concerns stem from short-term effects on scholarly productivity and strained relationships with colleagues and administrators that often result from family leave incidents that require time off. In other words, many academics were motivated to participate in the study because they felt that they were significantly disadvantaged *in their career development and job security* relative to their male counterparts. While some professionals voiced similar concerns, this was a much less common element of their depiction of needs and problems. Professionals, as a group, were more centered on inadequate provisions for paid time off around specific family leave incidents and salary inequity they connected to gender discrimination. In contrast, Academics were highly motivated to have UUP address family leave and gender equity issues because of the perceived connection to their job security and inability to follow the career path generally expected of Academics (i.e., significant scholarly productivity during the pre-tenure years).

### **More Full-Timers than Part-Timers**

The greater proportion of full-time vs. part-time members may be attributed to the following general problems. First, part-timers are often not available to participate in activities beyond their work obligations because they are more likely to work multiple jobs and during evening hours. Second, publicity about the study may not have reached them, particularly through the informal networks of women's groups and chapter activists that they are less likely to be a part of. Finally, the greater extent of their job insecurity may make them more hesitant than full-timers to make their complaints and problems known to others.

### **Summary of Methodology Issues**

The study accomplished its objective, which was to gather detailed information that would provide a comprehensive picture of members' perceptions and experiences with regard to family leave and gender inequity problems. The aim of the study was not to document the proportion of the total UUP membership that experienced these problems, but to describe the nature of the problems from the point of view of a segment of the membership that is or has been affected by them. The study's under-representation of males, Professionals, and part-timers does not diminish the significance of the information provided by females, Academics, and full-timers. Rather, it cautions UUP to put additional effort into soliciting input from these groups in the future so their views and experiences are more fully understood.