





TO: College Deans, Department Heads/Chairs/School Directors

FROM: Ron Fricker, Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs 
Rachel Gabriele, Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs 

Cc: Executive Vice President and Provost
Associate Deans for Faculty Affairs
College Human Resource Division Directors

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SUBJECT: Faculty Support Programs for Birth or Adoption of a Child

1. **Purpose.** To describe the programs and policies available to faculty after the birth or adoption of a child and to promote the use of these programs and policies to maximally support faculty.
2. **Background.** The Virginia Tech [Faculty Handbook](#) provides for automatic probationary period extensions for the birth or adoption of a child and a modified duties program for tenure track and continued appointment faculty (see chapters 3 and 4, respectively). Commonwealth of Virginia [Executive Order Twelve](#) provides eight weeks of paid parental leave to all Virginia Tech salaried employees who met certain eligibility requirements.

Automatic probationary clock extensions are provided in recognition of the demands of caring for a newborn child or a child under five newly placed by adoption or foster care. They are granted to either or both parents on the tenure or continued appointment track if the request is made within a year of the child's arrival in the family and upon submittal of a [Request to Extend the Probationary Period](#) form.

The [modified duties program](#) recognizes that special family circumstances, such as the birth or adoption of a child, severe illness of an immediate family member, or even issues of personal health, can create the need to construct a modified workload and flexible schedule for a period of time. In such circumstances, the Provost's Office may provide funding to allow the buyout of a faculty member's teaching to facilitate the modified schedule.

Paid parental leave provides eight weeks (320 hours) of paid leave to all employees. It can be taken in increments or all at once as long as it is used within six months of the birth or adoption of a child. Eligibility criteria include that the employee is benefits-eligible, has been employed by the state for a minimum of 12 months, and must have worked for at least 1,250 hours in the previous 12-month period. See the [HR website](#) for additional information.

3. **Discussion.** Achievement of Virginia Tech's goal to become a top-100 global university depends on the success of our faculty, and their productivity is directly linked to maintaining an effective work-life balance. Particularly for junior faculty who are simultaneously preparing for promotion and tenure while also starting a family, achieving a productive work-life balance can be challenging. Furthermore, our most successful and productive faculty have options, so it behooves the university to maintain a competitive edge in our policies and procedures to help retain them.

Eight weeks of paid parental leave for faculty with teaching responsibilities does not align well with a 15-week academic semester. While faculty can take their leave in increments to allow for teaching, doing so is generally not in the faculty member's best interests, nor does it typically provide the best pedagogical experience for students. Similarly, trying to combine paid parental leave with modified duties in the same semester, while perhaps helpful to a department's teaching schedule, generally places a faculty member's family responsibilities second to the department's teaching interests.

4. **Guidance.** Since Executive Order Twelve was established in 2018, the Provost's Office and Faculty Affairs have sought to combine the various policies to the maximal benefit of faculty. Along with the automatic approval of a tenure clock extension, this has involved encouraging the use of paid parental leave in the semester the child is born or adopted, followed by the use of modified duties in the succeeding semester. This approach provides the faculty member with a semester away from their regular teaching duties followed by a semester with lighter teaching duties to ease their transition back to the classroom, and the probationary period extension allows for additional time on the tenure clock that accommodates the time away.

With this in mind, to maximize the flexibility for faculty after the birth or adoption of a child, and to protect the quality and experience of our students in the classroom, Faculty Affairs encourages departments to not assign teaching responsibilities to faculty in the same semester the birth or adoption of a child is expected to occur. In addition, Faculty Affairs strongly discourages departments and schools from asking faculty members to use their paid parental leave in increments throughout the semester to accommodate teaching. We recognize that this places an extra burden on the department or school to allow for and to accommodate the faculty member being out of the classroom for the entire semester and we very much appreciate the cooperation of college leadership in facilitating this for faculty.

Please note that, if there are remaining weeks in the semester before or after the paid parental leave period, departments could make alternative arrangements to structure the faculty member's work assignment such that they maintain a full-time set of responsibilities. This may mean reassigning a faculty member's workload to be primarily focused on research or assigning them a special project that would take the place of their teaching responsibilities. However, a faculty member should not be expected to make up any paid parental leave or make up for any reassignment that was arranged in the leave semester.

In the semester that follows a faculty member's paid parental leave, Faculty Affairs will approve the use of modified duties to support the reduction or elimination of a teaching assignment while the faculty member continues to meet ongoing, but more flexible, research and graduate student supervision obligations. As previously described, the reason for sequencing modified duties in the semester following the use of paid parental leave is to maximize the benefit to the faculty member, allowing for greater work-life balance after the birth/adoption of their child, and to ease their transition back into the classroom.

5. **Thank You.** On behalf of our faculty, thank you for your support of these guidelines. Should circumstances arise which may require a deviation from them, please contact Faculty Affairs in advance to discuss the situation. And, as always, please do not hesitate to contact us with questions.