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About Balance@UW

Balance@UW is a comprehensive package of policies and programs designed to support UW faculty in balancing productive academic careers with satisfying personal lives.

By supporting faculty through the various stages of life, Balance@UW enhances the ability of the UW to recruit and retain the best and brightest faculty, and enhances the ability of faculty to perform their best teaching and research.

Balance@UW began with the University of Washington receiving a 2006 Alfred P. Sloan Foundation "Flexible Faculty Career" Award. This award provided a $250,000 accelerator grant to implement the eight goals listed in the competition proposal.

The goals include:

» Piloting a bonding option for biological fathers and adoptive parents

» Addressing work-family topics in leadership development workshops for department chairs

» Tracking utilization of flexible policy options

» Increasing the use of these options

» Using flexible policy options as recruiting and retention tools

» Assessing campus climate for work-family balance

» Creating a peer support group for faculty with young children

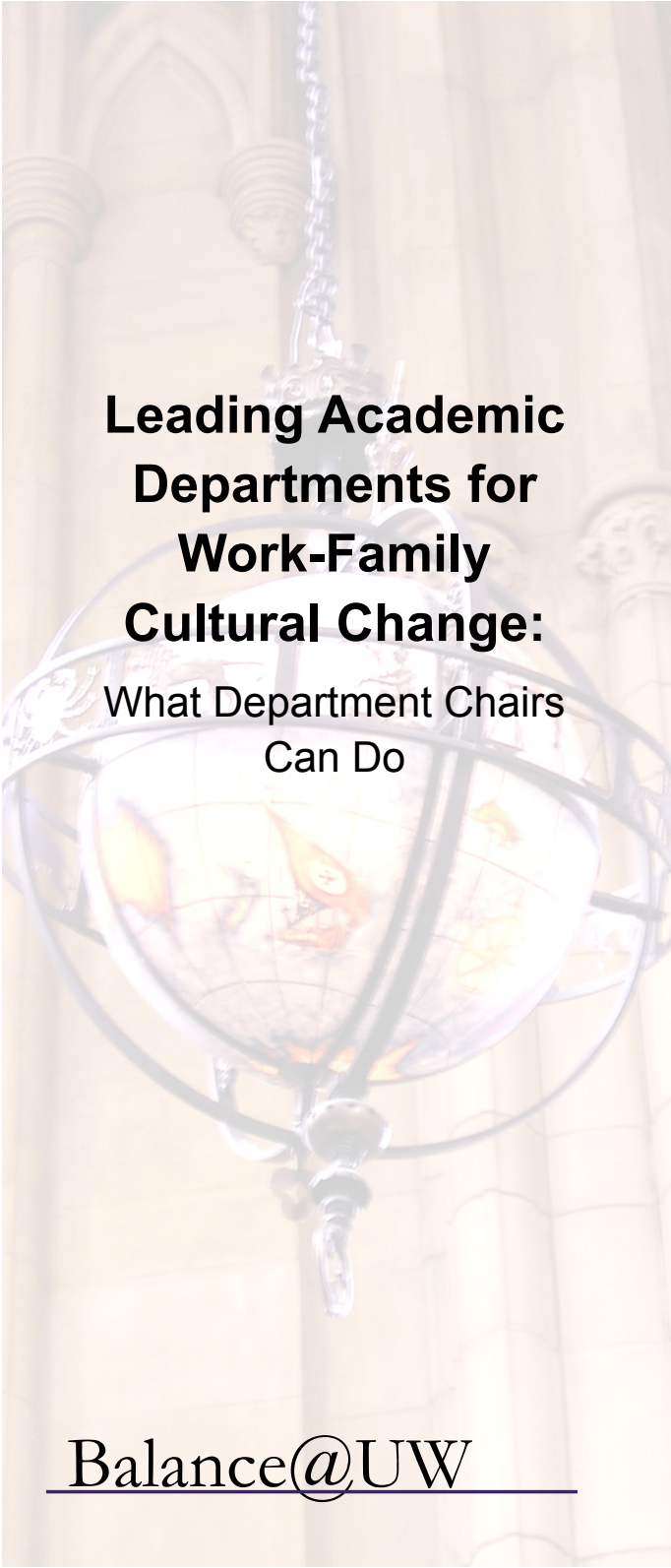» Increasing the amount of childcare available

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Questions? Suggestions?

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Leading Academic Departments for Work-Family Cultural Change:

What Department Chairs Can Do

Balance@UW

> *What could the department achieve if flexible policies and work-life supports helped recruit and retain the best and brightest faculty?*

The Call for Change

According to the National Academies of Science *Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering*, "The evidence demonstrates that anyone lacking the work and family support traditionally provided by a 'wife' is at a serious disadvantage in academe. However, the majority of faculty no longer have such support" [1, p. S-3.]. Therefore, flexible policies and an environment that supports policy utilization are necessary to support an increasingly diverse faculty [2].

Transformative Leadership Needed

Colleges and universities may adopt family-friendly policies to support faculty members, but these policies are typically implemented at the department level—where prevailing cultural norms may prevent faculty from utilizing them [3-6]. Department-level leadership is needed to create a supportive environment where a democratic community can work for work-family cultural change [7]. Cultural change "requires people to think differently as well as to act differently" [8, p. 5.]. The process takes time and commitment to change not only processes, but also attitudes [8]. There are many gendered assumptions embedded in the concepts "work" and "family" and many faculty may have been socialized to "Ideal Worker" norms that call for dedication to career above all else [9].

A Five Step Agenda for Change

Kim Cameron and David Ulrich identified a "five step agenda" that transformational leaders use to bring about cultural change in higher education [10]. This agenda provides a framework for department chairs to address work-family cultural change within their academic units [11].

Step 1: Create Readiness

For work-family cultural change efforts to be successful, department members need to "buy-in" to the necessity for change and be ready for change to occur. Chairs can create this readiness by:

» Conveying their critical analysis of the department's work-family culture. What about the climate makes recruiting and retaining women faculty or graduate students challenging? Why are so many junior faculty or faculty with children being recruited away? This analysis is not about assigning blame; it is about moving toward positive change [8].

» Helping group members recognize and unlearn outdated or faulty assumptions related to work-family, such as the idea that faculty, particularly women, will be less productive across their careers if they have children. Research indicates that work-family flexibility is a recruitment tool for the 'best and brightest' faculty [1, 12].

Step 2: Overcome Resistance

To overcome resistance to work-family cultural change, the chair needs to create a safe environment in which department members can cope with the need for change [11, 13]. This "safe" space is not meant to be one free from conflicting ideas, but one where all members can move beyond their "comfort zone" without fear of repercussion [14]. One strategy is for the chair to establish "ground rules" for meetings and department interactions that call for respecting the opinions of all members. Be alert for the "hazing mentality" of "if I could do it without help, why can't they" and keep in mind that for faculty who may have foregone having families to succeed in academe, there may be regret and bitterness behind the resistance to change.

Step 3: Articulate a Vision

By sharing their view of what the department will look like after undergoing work-family cultural transformation, department chairs can effectively sell the vision to the department.

» What will the department look like when the work-family balance of faculty members is supported and all faculty can achieve their highest potential as teaching and research scholars?

» What could the department achieve if flexible policies and work-life supports helped recruit and retain the best and brightest faculty?

Chairs can use the language from national reports [see 1 and 12] that connects flexibility in faculty careers with excellence.

Step 4: Generate Commitment

Chairs can create opportunities for department members, particularly the senior faculty, to "own" the work-family cultural change process, thereby engendering a sense of commitment [8, 15-17]. One strategy is for the chair to form a faculty task force to generate strategies for change, sharing leadership with department members and encouraging active participation in departmental cultural transformation. A cross-generational group can help members understand each other's needs and concerns and can make the work-family cultural change process personal and relevant.

Step 5: Institutionalize Change

So that work-family climate is not at the whim of the sitting chair, processes must be changed. A faculty committee on department norms could be formed to establish practices related to "family-friendly" meeting times, equitable service and teaching distributions, and other aspects within the control of the department. A campus-wide "best climate" competition could recognize and showcase best departmental practices.

> *What will the department look like when the work-family balance of faculty members is supported and all faculty can achieve their highest potential as teaching and research scholars?*