

Family-Friendly Scheduling

To: Department Chairs and Program Directors

From: FEC

Date: Spring 2015

Re: Family-friendly Scheduling

This memo is intended to increase awareness of the challenges posed by afterhours programming and to offer concrete suggestions by which chairs and directors can continue build the research capacity of the university without marginalizing or disadvantaging faculty members with young families.

Brown's research infrastructure has grown dramatically over the last decade. New centers and institutes are hosting a dizzying array of programs to nourish the intellectual lives of the faculty. Departments are investing more in lecture series and seminars, and there are increasing opportunities for faculty to locate funding to support interdisciplinary working groups. All told, this has raised the research profile of the university and positioned individual faculty to attain the prominence necessary for tenure, promotion, and continued professional growth. However, the robustness of Brown's scholarly programming has also significantly lengthened the workday and placed stress on the schedules of faculty whose family obligations make it difficult to participate in events commencing at 5:30 pm or later. Scholarly programming in the social sciences and humanities often runs 5:30-7:00 pm, with the consequence of excluding a sizable portion of faculty from these opportunities for intellectual growth and professional networking. Afterhours programming places particular demands on junior faculty, the cohort most likely to have young children and most fearful of being perceived by senior colleagues as disengaged from the scholarly life of the university. Likewise, midcareer faculty (especially those carrying substantial administrative responsibilities in smaller departments, holding joint appointments, or affiliated with interdisciplinary centers) are facing pressures to organize and attend events multiple nights a week. The preponderance of post 5:30 scholarly programming conveys the mistaken impression that research is an extracurricular activity for the faculty. Such programming creates difficulties not only for faculty parents, but for faculty members with other family commitments (such as eldercare) or those seeking the elusive, but much celebrated, work-life balance.

While Brown has increased its support for childcare, there are logistical limitations that make 5:30 events unfeasible for faculty with young and school-aged children. The daycare and preschool providers with direct relationships to the university (Mt. Hope YMCA, BrownFoxPoint Early Childhood Education Center) close at 5:30. Caregivers associated with "Backup Care" (the benefit providing subsidized in-home babysitting) cannot pick children up from daycare or preschool (they are not permitted to drive with the children and daycares do not let unfamiliar people pick up children). Nor do after-hours programs for school-aged children (e.g. at the JCC or Boys & Girls Club) last late enough to allow a faculty parent to attend 5:30 lectures at Brown. It is also important to remember that young children may go to bed as early as 7:00, so that an early evening spent at a lecture may mean not seeing one's child until the following morning. Already, Brown's scheduling grid (with undergraduate and graduate seminar blocks lasting until 5:30 and 6:30) places a significant burden on faculty parents.

This burden may disproportionately affect female faculty members. Although data on Brown's faculty is not

available, national statistics indicate that male faculty members (of every rank) are more likely than female faculty members (of every rank) to have a spouse or partner whose comparably flexible work schedule allows that spouse or partner to handle the bulk of evening-time household responsibilities. Put differently, male faculty members are more likely than female faculty members to have the household support to attend campus events after 5:30. We must be attuned to issues of gender equity when we think about program scheduling. We must also take into consideration the particular challenges faced by single parents on the faculty when required to attend events outside the regular hours of childcare.

Faculty with young children are of two minds regarding the university's responsibility to provide equitable access to the scholarly opportunities that come from participating in lectures, seminars, and workshops. Some argue that Brown should provide onsite drop-in childcare between 5:00 and 8:00; if you can drop your child off in the lobby of Ikea or the Boston Sports Club, surely you should be able to drop your child off at Brown. Others contend that offering more babysitting can hardly be considered family-friendly; Brown should avoid forcing faculty to choose between work and family on multiple nights a week by making a conscious effort to steer the research life of the university towards working hours. What's clear is that the status quo is not tenable for a sizable segment of the faculty. Over the last year, attention to family-friendly scheduling has yielded new accommodations: the monthly university faculty meetings now adjourn at 5:30; some departments have moved meetings from late-afternoon to lunchtime; and some programs such as the Watson Institute have made thoughtful efforts to incorporate faculty parents by utilizing more of the work for scholarly programming and asking standing seminars and workshops to vary their schedules (e.g. lunchtime meetings one semester, late afternoons the other).

Family-friendly scheduling does not mean that all events after 5:30 should be prohibited. Rather, it means that those engaged in programming should be conscious of the exclusions created by after-hours events and should take proactive steps to accommodate faculty unable to stay on campus into the evening. It requires chairs and directors to recognize the baseline pressures created by the scheduling grid and the fact that many faculty with children must teach courses that extend beyond the time of the university's daycare provision, forcing an acknowledgement that there is no perfect time for a lecture on campus; a 5:30 lecture excludes some faculty just as a lecture at 12:00, 2:00, or any other time typically associated with classroom teaching excludes others. Too often we hear that "5:30 is the only time that everyone can make," but this is patently not true. Of course, faculty members recognize that their responsibilities can periodically extend into the evening; a faculty member serving on a search committee well understands that the task requires dinners with the candidates. The larger problem is when a center, institute, program, or department puts the bulk of its programming at 5:30; a faculty member with family responsibilities may be excluded from conversations crucial to his or her professional development for a period of years.

Consider a 5:30 talk by a distinguished visiting scholar in a given field. The junior faculty members who cannot attend the talk due to family obligations is disadvantaged in multiple ways: he or she loses access to the most current research questions that arise in the lecture; he or she loses the chance to interact with a senior scholar who might be a useful contact for future collaboration or who might be a future tenure evaluator; he or she misses the chance to interact with Brown colleagues and loses the crucial, if intangible "face time" that often determines whether a junior faculty member is seen as "promising," "engaged," "civil-minded," or any of the other subjective descriptors that figure into evaluative processes. Especially in the humanities and social sciences (or any disciplines in which labs do not structure faculty interaction with fellow researchers), talks by visiting speakers are often the only time that faculty members and graduate students convene for scholarly exchange. In this light, the stakes of family-friendly scheduling are high. But

Let's say that the talk will remain at 5:30: chairs and directors should make particular efforts to create opportunities for faculty to interact with the visitor earlier in the day. The chance for a mid-afternoon coffee with a visiting scholar should not require special pleading by the faculty member with small children. Rather, chairs and directors should recognize the exclusionary nature of after-hours programming and proactively build other opportunities for interaction into the visitor's itinerary.

Programs might seek to differentiate between "public programming" and "research programming" – the former meant to serve the community, the latter to serve the faculty (and graduate students). There are invariably lectures or other events meant to attract a non-Brown audience, and it often makes sense for them to take place in the evening.¹ In contrast, research programming is intended to boost the scholarly productivity of the faculty—and insofar as scholarly production is the key determinant of tenure, of salary increases, and of the mission of the university, it is certainly important enough to happen within the normal confines of the workday.²

It is also important to note that basic departmental governance should take place within the confines of the workday. In particular, department meetings and job talks should conclude before 5:30 to assure that no faculty members are disfranchised by virtue of family responsibilities.

Finally, there is a need to reconsider the course scheduling grid. In disciplines where 150 minute seminars constitute half of a faculty member's teaching responsibilities, we must locate blocks of time that end earlier than 5:30 or 6:30. Until seminar blocks are established that do not create hardships for faculty with family chairs should consider allowing such faculty to teach seminars "off the grid" in departmental space.

¹ Some faculty report that public programs scheduled at 8:00 pm might actually accommodate a larger number of faculty members than programs scheduled at 5:30 (it being possible to return to campus after children have gone to bed).

² It is notable that after-hours programming is deemed most necessary in those departments where faculty teach a 2:2 course load. There is substantially less afterhours programming in departments where faculty teach 2:1. Faculty in Economics and STEM fields report the fewest conflicts; faculty in interdisciplinary Humanities fields report that greatest pressures posed by afterhours programming.

Best Practices for Chairs and Directors

Recognize that 5:30 is not a time at which "everyone is free."

Acknowledge the challenges (logistically, financially, and interpersonally) that 5:30 events and late afternoon teaching blocks pose to faculty with family responsibilities.

Distinguish between programming meant to serve the broader community and programming meant to bolster the research capacity of the faculty. Programming in the latter category should happen during the workday.

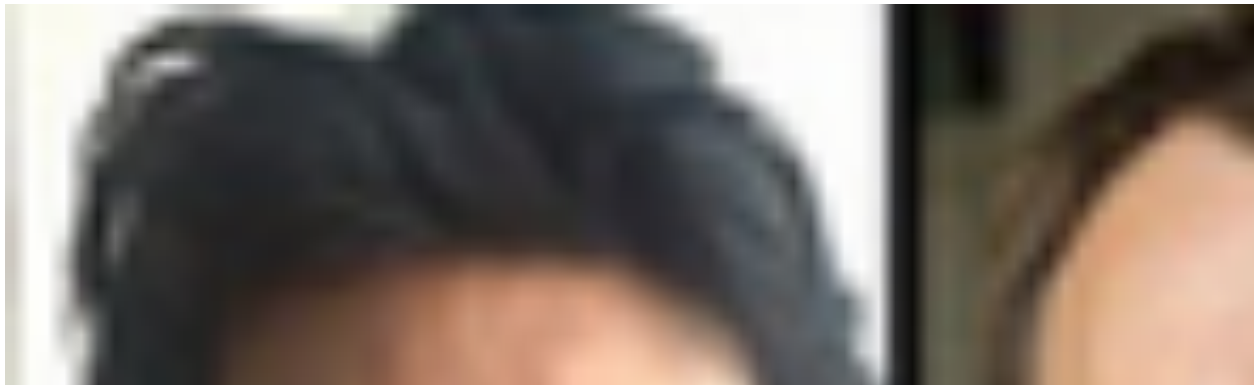
Vary the times of workshops, seminars, and lectures so that the same people are not perpetually excluded

Accommodate faculty with family responsibilities by creating opportunities for workday interactions (e.g., coffees, lunches) with visiting scholars. In particular, make sure that junior faculty with family responsibilities do not miss the professional development or networking opportunities essential for tenure.

Enfranchise faculty by making sure that departmental governance and other essential activities take place during the workday.

Advocate for family-friendly policies, including efforts to reconfigure the scheduling grid with new semirigid times.

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