

Parent Resource Session 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

childcare, postdocs, postdoc, parents, year, paid, university, people, fund, faculty, conversations, questions, resource, terms, policy, child, daycare, scholar, support, students

SPEAKERS

Moderator: Nicole Green (UIPDA President)

Panelists: Joel Berger (Assistant Research Scientist, CCOM), Todd Rent (Director, UI HR Services), Phil Gander (Associate Research Scientist, CCOM), Diana Kremzar (Director, UI Family Services), Rachel Marek (Assistant Research Scientist, College of Engineering)

Additional Speakers: Andrew Jezewski, Banu Gumusoglu

Nicole Green 00:50

Hi everyone. Sorry, my Zoom was not working. I'm pinning all of your panels here so we should be able to see you primarily. We're still waiting on a couple panelists hopefully to join us. Andrew, good to see you! Surviving parenthood

Andrew Jezewski 01:44

Good to see you too.

Nicole Green 02:17

See, looks Phillip maybe just joined...there we go.

Nicole Green 02:27

We've just got one more person joining us and then we'll get started. All right, I think we have the whole panel here now. Can people who are viewing--are we pinned preferentially now to the top of the video, hopefully. Try to keep the chat open.

Nicole Green 03:11

Right, since we're after time, we'll go ahead and get started. I'll just say welcome to everybody that's here. Welcome to our parents that are here and our panelists, and we'll get to introducing you in just a minute. My name is Nicole Green, I'm the president of the Postdoc Association, I am not a parent, that is my upfront disclaimer. So I did my best for all of you to read about what I could about the experience of being a postdoc parent and then we have a lot of experts here to fill in the gaps. And I want to encourage you all as we're going through, if you have questions, you can either put them in the chat, or you can raise your hand and I'll let you ask that question. So we have sort of a script of just some ideas and some topics that I know that I've heard a lot of you talk about before, so we can move through those. But this is meant to be somewhat informal. And you know, I want it to be useful to all of you that

are on the call. So please ask your questions. You should have received a notice when you got on here that we're recording today's session. So we're going to hopefully post this as a resource after this. I'll also mention and I'll drop this in the chat now, as I put together a [Postdoc Parenting Guide](#), which is a growing Google document. So that will live on our website and can be updated and it's meant to be continuously updated. So I'm hoping that we'll have some information here that's not on this document and that we can add to it. Yeah, so I guess I'll just have the panelists introduce themselves then. But before I do, before I do that, I do want to say thank you to Dr. Jen Teitle at the Graduate College who helped assemble this panel. I don't think she's here today, but she was key and making introductions. So I really appreciate that from her. So yeah, I think we'll start with our two university support personnel. And then we'll go to our former postdoc parents. So I'll start with you, Diana.

Diana Kremzar 05:15

All right. Thank you for having me. And good afternoon. I'm Diana Kremzar and I'm the Director for [Family Services](#) within University HR and my role is to provide support and resources for faculty, staff and students with their family related priorities.

Nicole Green 05:39

Great, thanks. Todd--do you want to introduce yourself?

Todd Rent 05:42

Yes. Hello, I'm Todd Rent and I work with [University Employee and Labor Relations](#) and with [University Faculty, Staff and Disability Services \(FSDS\)](#) and as part of that role, I work with FSDS to administer leave and disability questions and services for our employees.

Nicole Green 06:06

Right, perfect. And then we have several former postdoc parents who I hope are going to have lots of good advice about their experiences as being a parent as a postdoc. So we'll start with Dr. Marek.

Rachel Marek 06:22

Hi, I'm Rachel Marek. I'm an assistant research scientist in the College of Engineering. I had my first child when I was a postdoc, I think the postdoc was almost three years, and she's now seven and I also have a three year old. I think that's most of the relevant information for an introduction.

Nicole Green 06:53

Sorry, my mute button froze up. Dr. Berger, you want to go next? Yeah, hi there.

Joel Berger 06:57

I'm Joel Berger. I'm a research scientist in the Department of Neurosurgery and up until the start of this year, I was a postdoc for two years here and before that I did a postdoc for five years in the UK. And yeah, I have a four going on five year old son, just one.

Nicole Green 07:23

Great. And then Dr. Gander.

Phil Gander 07:26

I'm Phil Gander. I'm an associate research scientist in the Department of Neurosurgery. And I met Joel in Nottingham, in England during a postdoc there through your postdoc, and then have first son, and then came over here, with a seven week old, don't ever try and design that issue. And then have a second child as a postdoc, as well, here. Yeah. So two kids and postdocs. Sounds good.

Nicole Green 08:09

Great. So I thought we'd start with the hardest topic, I think, to understand policy wise, which is parental leave, because I know there's a lot of questions about that. So I guess, a couple of the questions just to sort of frame the issue maybe, and then we can talk about it is, as most of you probably know that there are two postdoc statuses. So there's some inequality between what leave is granted to whether you're an FP01 scholar and FP02 scholar. The FP02 scholars are the NRSA grant grantees. So they have a [paid leave of eight weeks](#) built into their, into their grant and into their postdoc experience. Whereas the FP01 experience seems to be a little bit more unclear and of the unpaid nature. So I definitely want to touch on the difference between those two and clarify what the official university policy is. We had some people write in questions about that so maybe we'll also just go through what those unpaid leave options are for people, or in addition to maybe some of the paid opportunities. And something I definitely want to get our former postdoc parents' opinions on is, you know, 'how do you navigate this process of starting to ask for leave and talking to your PI?' and what if there's some sort of tension around that or uncertainty? How did you deal with that? So maybe we'll start with with the policy, and that's probably something that our university personnel can help us out with.

Todd Rent 09:41

Right, so maybe I'll start with that. So the UI Operations Manual, it's part of the [Policy 22.8 \(III-22.8\)](#) and the parental leave policy essentially authorizes six weeks of sick leave usage for the recovery from childbirth. Now obviously, that's different, and it's based upon how much you have available. But if there's a birth mother who's recovering from childbirth, then it provides six weeks, otherwise, where you have an individual who may be a spouse, or an adoptive parent, then it would provide essentially five days of the usage of sick leave. Now, one of the constraining features of our policy, that policy is derived from state law and from the Iowa Administrative Code, which basically lays out and I'll maybe not be as technical here, but it basically lays out that the only way to use sick leave is if an individual is sick or incapacitated, those are the circumstances under which sick leave can be used. It does indicate that pregnancy or childbirth is one of those that that would count towards incapacitation and I think it uses this this specific phrase, 'recovery from childbirth, pregnancy and recovery from childbirth'. So in that we're able to provide an additional amount of time. However, in terms of those situations that are not involving childbirth, it's difficult to expand the usage of sick leave there from the university's perspective, because the state law doesn't necessarily authorize us to do so. And I should say, the state, neither the state law, nor the Iowa Administrative Code would permit us to do so. And so where you find a difference between, for instance, the FP02s and the FP01s, basically, the FP02s, because they're under a different--they're subjected to a different set of standards, that those federal standards supersede what we're finding in the state law. And so we're able to, we're able to do it in that particular context, what we cannot necessarily do outside of that context. And this is something that's also

common to graduate students and other classes of employees also, and I can tell you, there's quite a bit of conversation going on about whether or not it's possible to make adjustments or modifications, and if so, what that would entail. But I think generally the thought is, if we are able, if we're trying to do it for one group of employees, we want to be internally equitable, to make sure that we can do it for all of the other correlative groups of employees.

Nicole Green 12:43

So I just want to clarify for the for this special case of sick leave, do we still get our normal? What is it 15 days of...I can't remember if it's 15, or 18? Because postdocs we don't have tracking? So maybe that's a follow up question to is, how do we go about doing that? I mean, there's, I mean, maybe some departments have an internal tracking system. But we don't have that, which is part of what makes us vulnerable, I guess, in that, in that sense. There's a lot of freedom, and that you could guess, like, you know, negotiate for more time with your advisor. But there's also no protections that gets built into there. So I don't know if you have any follow up on that.

Todd Rent 13:19

And maybe I can tell you, there have been some discussions, not just in the postdoc world, but also in the Graduate Assistant world to try and create a central tracking system. That's just not been something, and I've been here since December 2019, so I believe that maybe I was introduced to those discussions. I would say maybe the mid, mid-year in 2020. And I know that we had so many other priorities from a payroll perspective and dealing with different pay codes with COVID and it's just not something that we've been able to tackle at this time. It's certainly not something that is off of the table. But at least at this point, we've just not been able to create a priority and to get the resources that are required to make those types of changes that would permit us to centrally track that usage. But yes, to answer your first question, particularly for the individual who is the birth mother, that individual should have access to that entire sick leave bank for the purposes of recovery. Or at least that's my understanding.

Nicole Green 14:34

Okay, and I guess I'll ask is the six week period is that you're referring to is that FMLA specifically or is that..

Todd Rent 14:41

Okay? That's great, too.

Nicole Green 14:42

...so maybe maybe if you could frame the the different kind of like, maybe just you know, what each kind of leave is called like its its name because I think we've got FMLA and then there's some institutions I know especially that they talked about where you might have to get into Title IX or like temporary disability--what is the other one? Title VII, maybe? Yeah, so maybe you just comment on what what other options are there.

Todd Rent 15:07

So, yeah, maybe it would help to sort of specify with FMLA. [FMLA](#) essentially provides job protection. It is not, it doesn't necessarily impact pay, necessarily. It doesn't say how the leave is paid, it just says that for the period of time that's covered by FMLA, there can be no adverse employment action that's taken against the individual for using that time. And so with the birth of a child, well, first of all, even before the birth of a child at the point at which there is a pregnancy, then there is FMLA coverage for prenatal visits. And again, it doesn't speak to how it's paid for, but it basically says that if prenatal visits are needed, which they will be, then that time can be taken intermittently, without any type of adverse employment action being taken against the individual. So that's prenatal care, and then subsequent to the birth, then the remaining time can be taken essentially up to 12 weeks, which would be bonding time for the individual. And again, that doesn't speak to how it's paid for it speaks to the protections that are, so the balance of the time can be taken. And then that time, the balance of that time is protected. All right. So that's that. And now secondarily, there's the way that you pay for it. And I think I started in in on that, and I probably should have explained the connection to FMLA first, so how that's paid for that time is paid for is certainly for the birth mother, they have the option to take, again, up to six weeks of sick leave. Now for postdoctoral students, it would be different because you have a maximum of I believe it's an 18 working days for sick leave. Is that correct? (Nicole: Yes.) So you would essentially exhaust that time and the thought is, is I believe after that, you would continue to work with your department to work through how to essentially manage the process going forward. But you would have access to that bonding period, as long as you and I should say, as long as you qualified for the FMLA, essentially working 1250 hours in the previous year, and a total of 12 months within the preceding seven years, I should have said that also. But once you've made those requirements and met those requirements, then for the birth mother, there would be 6 weeks of paid sick leave, which again, would be different for postdoc students. But then for the others involved, let's just say the other partner, the spouse, then that individual would have access to, I believe, five sick days. And then they could certainly use and work to use the remaining time and paid leave or take unpaid leave subsequent to that.

Nicole Green 18:27

I see your hand's up Andrew.

Andrew Jezewski 18:33

Yeah, I have a couple of clarification questions about FMLA. Um, I know FMLA is worded such that each business can make employees that are married utilize the 12 weeks available to them together, so like each individual, but it's up to the institution or business to decide if they handle it that way, or if both parents would actually get 12 weeks. Do know, or how does Iowa handle that? And then the other question that I have is FMLA, I think the way it's worded an online for Iowa. is that it's per calendar year. Do you know if it is actually per calendar year? Or does it like so if if you have a child in December, does does it get split between the two calendar years? Or is it per event?

Todd Rent 19:32

Yeah, that those are good questions. I believe and I can double check on these and I'll send you official answers in writing, but in terms of the 12 weeks of bonding time, I believe it's a total of 12 weeks for both individuals. Is that your understanding? Diana, I see you're here. Yeah. And then in terms of the

calendar year, I know that we have a set calendar year so it resets at the beginning of that calendar year but again, I will I confirm that also with my staff.

Diana Kremzar 20:01

So just to echo. So it's the 12 weeks of bonding time that's split to that, doesn't it? Yes, thank you have medical recovery. So, in essence, it'd be a total of 18 weeks. Does that make sense? Okay.

Nicole Green 20:26

Great, I think, in reading, I just want to clarify, because I know a lot of our postdocs are internal hires. So for that, that 1250 hours or whatever it is, though, like 12 months, so you have to work to qualify for FMLA. Does a previous position, is that like, if you've worked under an employer in any position or do you have to specifically be in the postdoc position for a year? Because I know that there are some people on the call and some of my friends, you know, who they are in their first year of postdoc, and they're uncertain about whether they're going to have access to or be eligible for FMLA?

Todd Rent 20:59

I believe it is any position. (Nicole: Okay, great.) So it's just the total for that employer.

Nicole Green 21:04

Okay perfect. That was my understanding, as well, but I just wanted to clarify. I guess, do any of our postdoc parents have any comments they want to make on how you went about navigating that process of talking to your advisers? I actually know there's a lot of data around how the non-birth parent [edit] in these situations have a lot of problems in certain institutions getting the same amount of leaves. So if you have any experiences you want to share, please feel free.

Phil Gander 21:41

Joel, you had a kid more recently?

Joel Berger 21:46

Well, yes, but I didn't have a kid here. That's one thing to say. That's right. I haven't. Exactly I haven't taken any parental leave at all. And I can, I can only imagine. So I'd be I'd be making up in terms of experience. But I mean, in terms of, in terms of how the isn't any standardization, I can't imagine, the problem I can see is that it would vary completely across departments and how your relationship is with your supervisor and things. And I have a great, really great working relationship, my supervisor, but he's very busy right off his feet. And so I, it would be it would feel a weird thing for me to go and discuss with him, 'Oh, can I have this time of parental leave'? And it would feel quite a daunting thing to do. And I say that on my own basis and this reflects myself, but I can see that being a case for some other people, and other people would feel more comfortable. And I think, for me, that's where I see that being a bit of a problem when it comes to postdocs in general is that there's too much heterogeneity across departments. I mean, I'm not I'm not criticizing here, I think it's great that they support parental leave. Absolutely. But it's just that that'd be my concern in that respect. But obviously, I don't actually speak from experience of having to actually implement that.

Andrew Jezewski 23:01

I will say, so I just had a child three weeks ago and my case is actually been handled really well, probably in part to the fact that I work in the Department of Pediatrics. So they're very kid friendly, and hyper aware of how a lot of this stuff is handled. But it's gone very smoothly for me so far.

Todd Rent 23:24

Can I ask a question? If it were not to go smoothly would you feel comfortable speaking? And would you know, first of all, who your HR representative would be and would you feel comfortable reaching out to them?

Nicole Green 23:41

I can tackle that, because that's something I'm currently working on with some administrators. So one thing I'll say is that we asked about this a while back. I personally know who my HR person is. I know that's not the case for everyone. So our main HR person for everyone on the call is officially the Grad College HR team. So it'd be Tanesha Herman (tanisha-herman@uiowa.edu) and also Shelly Campo (shelly-campo@uiowa.edu). As for our department HR admins, I think that can get more complicated, but I will say, and I'll maybe try to drop this in the chat, because I know it's in the resource guide. Katie, our postdoc point person, now the Grad College assembled a list of [key contacts](#) for us in each college, which is a really great resource. So yeah, that's something that we asked for and I'll also say that if you go on your HR Self Service, you can find that there's an HR Workflow, which I discovered and was really excited about. So people get hyped over HR things in the postdoc world. And so yeah, you can also find that information there. So there are multiple avenues I think at our at our, you know, at our disposal, but I guess maybe I'll ask is, you know, if, if you don't feel comfortable, right away going into your advisor, if your advisors like, I don't know, like 'cool with whatever you want to do just follow the policies', who who is the next person to reach out to? Does anybody have any recommendations? Is that your department HR person? Is that Main HR Services, you know, is that Family Services, you know, where were alternate places that people can reach out to?

Todd Rent 25:23

I think for my part, I would encourage you to reach out to, certainly you can reach out to the Graduate College HR representatives, they're very, very knowledgeable there, and they, they have a very good understanding of the postdoc world. And so I think that that's a very good option. It's also a very good option if you'd like to start and if you're more comfortable doing so, you could certainly start with your departmental HR representative. But either of them should be able to work with you, hear your specific concerns and point you to good resources. Whether or not that's FSDS whether or not that's Family Services. Diane, I saw you.

Diana Kremzar 26:07

Yeah. Just gonna. Yeah, that is exactly right. So Family Services can't necessarily, we don't really handle leave, per se. But one thing we have done many times is just kind of serve as that kind of middle man trying to get people to where they need to be to have those conversations. Or you know, if the conversation isn't necessarily going the way you would expect or prefer. Just kind of having a little bit of what else is, what other options are there and who else can I talk to? Is this the final word on

things? So definitely always encourage people to reach out and if we can't answer the question, we can hopefully get you to the right person.

Nicole Green 27:03

I think just for time, I want to get through some of these other things. I think there's a lot more questions you can see in the chat about the potential for paid leave options and advocating around that. So I just want to acknowledge that but I want to move on to talk about childcare, because I'm hoping to get some advice for maybe our current parents on the panel of services that they use, and talk about some of the Family Services resources that exist. So with that, maybe we'll say up front is everybody who's on T32s and F32s, again, you FP02 scholars are lucky because they just [expanded childcare support](#). So hopefully your T32 program officers or program administrators are reaching out to you about that. I don't know that that's been implemented yet, but it should be coming. And if not keep pushing and asking about it, I guess. And I also found this great this Academic Caretaking Fund, so maybe this is something that you can talk about Diana, which I wasn't aware of, but obviously, wasn't looking for? But I think it's something I want to make sure all the postdocs are using.

Diana Kremzar 28:08

Yeah, absolutely. We can start with the [Academic Caretaking Fund](#), and that is brand new, just launched this month. And so it's a memorial fund for J.J. Neiman-Brown who's the son of a faculty member, a faculty member in the College, Department of Biology. Maureen Neiman, and this fund with--thank you so much, Nicole for putting that in the chat--so this fund is to help faculty and postdocs help pursue professional and academic endeavors while caring for children or aging parents. So the fund, you can submit applications for up to \$500 to cover costs, again, associated with that caretaking piece when you are traveling to attend a conference, working on research things like child care, reimbursement for a spouse or partner to come with so you could have help taking care of your child, home nursing costs there that that piece of it's very flexible. And like I said, we're we've just launched this, but that the intent is really to help support faculty and postdocs in their professional endeavors recognizing that it's very challenging to have an academic career while also having a family. So yes, this is a very good program.

Rachel Marek 29:46

...and it's too bad since you got two research staff participating here. You know, we like to go to conferences, too. It's really too bad. This doesn't apply to staff. I know that this is a postdoc forum, but I just wanted to point that out. That's definitely something that research staff and also be interested in.

Phil Gander 30:02

Hello, just to pick up a bit, you did say faculty? Yes. I find that mildly laughable based on what Rachel just said, too. But that's not an argument for today.

Joel Berger 30:16

Yes, just to confirm that, I guess just to clarify. Do you mean, you mean, in general staff, though, as well or not? You mean, just full time faculty?

Diana Kremzar 30:24

It's, so it was the intent of the JJs parents that this goes to faculty and postdocs. Yes. So staff are not eligible for it. And students are not eligible for it either.

Joel Berger 30:39

Yeah. So I mean, I so I understand given it is a fund from them, I completely understand that. I just think it would be good for the university to look at this and say, Actually, we should create something like this, as well, for staff. And I completely agree with what Rachel's saying that. So I completely understand where it's coming from, because it's those parents being very generous and kind in terms of that but I think also, it makes sense for the university to look at that and say, 'let's support that and match it'.

Diana Kremzar 31:10

I definitely hear that it's a yes, the family work dynamic has—definitely the way I talk about it always, it's always been an issue, it's always been a challenge. And the pandemic has really kind of raised a curtain onto how challenging it is all around. And whether that's faculty, staff, students, it's not easy for anyone. So we're continuously looking for additional ways we can support parents and caregivers in their personal responsibilities while they continue to work and I agree, promoting professional opportunities, if there was a way we could support that that would be, that would be great.

Nicole Green 32:03

Maybe this is a good time to talk, for our parents on here, I know that and we can talk about this more especially people in the chat are interested about the on campus childcare, I think it's pretty inaccessible, from what I hear for postdocs. But I'm wondering if you guys have any recommendations for services used in the community, especially, you know, maybe like alternate, more immediate, backup services. I know, there's a great list of these kinds of things on Family Services. So anybody that wants to talk about maybe some specific Iowa City, North Liberty, kind of childcare services you've utilized, that would be great.

Joel Berger 32:43

I mean we personally send my son to school called Willowend which takes kids from three onwards and I'm biased because my wife's teacher there and so we also get a discount. So that does make a difference. But equally, it's quite comparable to other places. You commented on there in terms of the inaccessibility of childcare here and I think that's very true in terms of just being over subscribed realistically. Certainly in the community in general the childcare has been excellent. One thing that might not relate to anyone here, but equally, it's probably quite an important thing is the FSA ([Flex Spending Account](#)) that you can pay into where and sorry, I'm jumping ahead here where you can pay up to 2.5k, and it's tax free. The one thing to say on that is, despite my situation is I came over as a J1 scholar—and this will be true for others as well—and I paid into it for the first two years, but also for the second year, the first year, I think I didn't have costs, you're not actually eligible for that. So in other words, when it comes to tax time, they'll just take all that money back. And so it was quite problematic because I looked into it and worked out my calculation spent a long time with that. I don't need to then have to pay everything back anyway. So it'd be better if there was some sort of like concordance between, say, ISSS and sort of the Benefits Office to be able to say, 'oh, well, look, there's no point

giving you that benefit, because you're not eligible for it'. And I mean that they can't do anything about that so, you know, federal tax requirements, but it's just it was quite frustrating to have to go through working out all my benefits, and then just to find out that's just one kind of normal, but otherwise, yeah, I always said he has a lot of beneficial childcare options.

Nicole Green 34:32

Can you talk more this is FSA, that's the flexible spending account, is that what that is? You want to say some more more about that? I'm trying to think is this off of our insurance. Again, this is not a resource that I've looked...

Joel Berger 34:44

That's okay. So it's basically you can pay up to I think, actually the amount has increased for this year, but generally, before it's been you can pay up to \$2,500 into a fund which you then you claim back each month. And this is why I say it's problematic for me, you do that and you, you pay in and you claim back the money, and it takes a little bit of hassle, but then that's tax free. So you don't get taxed on this \$2,500. But the point is, if you're a non resident, then which you are, I am for the first two years, and I'm not sure even if I'll be eligible for this year or not, but we've paid in, because I'm never allowed to claim my son's dependent not being a permanent resident here. So if, if you're not, then you can't actually, you can't claim that money back. It's considered a dependent. And I know this from getting very good, and the other thing says, there's very good tax help here as an international scholar, so that's really good. But they very much confirmed that yeah, I wouldn't be eligible for that. And so for anyone that's a permanent resident here, then it's a really good resource, pay \$2,500, you claim back your child care amount. And it's tax free. So as I say, that's \$2,500 per parent or \$5000 if you file jointly, and obviously don't quote me in terms of the amounts nowadays, but I think I think that's maybe increased a marginal bit.

Nicole Green 36:11

That's a great tip. And I think, what is it, there's like, 60% of us almost are international scholars. I'm not sure all their residency statuses and everything and how that breaks down. But yeah, it's a great comment. I'm sure there are extra challenges to deal with, right being a parent and also an international scholar. Can I maybe ask? I know, we had a question come in about the subsidy program. Right. So there's a [subsidy program for childcare for grad students](#). Postdocs, at least, we're outside of that range, right? I'm wondering if there's been conversations around subsidizing postdoc childcare. As I mentioned, there's a T32, sort of subsidy kind of like stipend program that they're starting. So maybe my first question is, how is that paid out for grad students? Like, where does that money come from? And is that also a potential resource that could be expanded to postdocs?

Diana Kremzar 37:10

Sure, yes. And that is a conversation that has been had. And we actually continue to look at how can we support more, more being really including the postdoc group. That funding is the way that funding works it's really earmarked from financial aid, and General Education funds for student parents. So we don't have a subsidy program for faculty or staff. It really is just students at this point.

Nicole Green 37:47

I guess Have there been any sort of surveys of childcare costs amongst different groups to think about, you know, what percentage of our salary like, I guess, to add some extra information? Or is that something maybe that would be useful that UIPDA could help us collect information around average childcare costs, that would maybe help drive home that point that these subsidies are really important.

Diana Kremzar 38:09

I can tell you Family Services does keep a close eye on community childcare, just the community childcare landscape. And that includes costs and looking at, you know, like you said, like, what percentage of salaries are going to childcare? And the truth of the matter is, it's a problem nationwide, but the costs of childcare are absolutely tremendous. And that's, I'm sure some of us are familiar with the the new tax refunds that come for childcare, people paying for childcare. And Governor Reynolds just put forth some recommendations from the childcare taskforce to kind of work on this area. So this is definitely, I can promise this is something we continuously talk about, because we know we know it's an issue and it's affecting our faculty, staff, students, postdocs, everyone really. It's a, it's a big, big concern. What family services can do and as far as just, you know, guidance or support, is we work with a couple local organizations in the childcare area to do resource and referral. So, you know, when we think of childcare, oftentimes we think of the the larger childcare centers, and those would be by far the most expensive unless you had, you know, a nanny come to your house. That would probably be more expensive, but the childcare centers are traditionally more expensive. So for parents, where that's really just not feasible financially there are other types of very quality childcare in the community that are registered through DHS and they're just alternative types. So things like registered in home childcare providers, there's a site on the just in time families or childcare website where we link to a few different sites that the Pomerantz Career Center encourages UI students that are looking for childcare positions to advertise through. So it's just more of a, it is still a formal network. But there are different options. And that's kind of what we we do try to communicate and provide to, again, faculty, staff, students, postdocs, anyone that's interested because, again, there also isn't an easy way to navigate the childcare community, there's so many different options, and every family's needs are different. And so organizations like [Childcare Resource and Referral](#), which I can put that information in the chat, they're fantastic, and can really help navigate with openings, cost, kind of what your unique family needs are. Then while I'm, while I'm talking, we also have a partnership with Handicare Childcare Center in Coralville. And that, the way that program works is they do backup childcare for UI. Everyone, faculty, staff, students, postdocs, and you can register for free just for being affiliated with the university. And then in the case that your regularly scheduled childcare provider is not available, you can do back up childcare through them. So you would call them and just reserve a spot, whether it be for a day, a week, a month. And we actually do have a lot of students that take take advantage of that, because they may be having, you know, different types of childcare organized for their children. And so this is just a nice option, because a lot of centers don't, well pretty much all centers don't do drop in childcare. So this is just another option that the university provides.

Nicole Green 42:29

Great, yeah, I'll definitely will take that information and add it because I'm not sure we have the, specifically I think I have your backup resources listed. But that specific registration would be nice to

call out. Maybe I'll ask our parents who have just made it through some really difficult years of being scientists and researchers. Do you have any advice for postdocs on the call of things you figured out how to balance or is it like, 'I'm just dragging myself through here and I'm surviving', which is also fine. Like, you know, so I guess any advice you have ways that you've figured out how to balance things, especially maybe if you have your spouse or your partner is here at the university--would love would love the advice for them.

Rachel Marek 43:15

I still feel like it's going from one fire to the next, now that I'm staff and I have paid leave, I still just because it's paid doesn't mean those emails stop coming in. So I guess, as far as work life balance, I think it's a lot easier to go to work knowing that your child is being well cared for. So choosing a good daycare is really, really important and...I guess not good--I think it's more just what the best field is for your family. So for us, it was a combination of cost, That's always a big one, but also proximity to campus so I could go feed my kids during lunch. And then just feel--it was almost like a college visit you know, where you step step in the building and you you talk to teachers and not academic rigor, not considering any of that, but just sort of the feel different daycares had more like teachers were dressed up. The director wore suit. You know, that type of feel. Other daycares, the teachers wear jeans and a t-shirt, like the uniform is a t-shirt or a homemade design t-shirt and there's just different fields and it's whatever feels best for you. One tip I have is in here, Nicole, I just want to offer a correction. It's not mom and dad. I think it's really birth parent and non birth parent. So for my first child, I carried her and I chose a daycare close to campus. This is on the campus connected childcare center list really close. And it was a really good, feel good fit. And I would go and breastfeed my babies and didn't have to pump three times a day. But also just to have that time with her for 30 minutes or whatever, during the day. And my wife carried our second, totally different experience, but I would still go over lunch and bottle feed. And so there's this mix at this daycare is really nice, they encourage it, whether you're breastfeeding and bottle feeding, you know, mom or dad didn't matter, they encourage you to come, didn't have to be over lunch could be any other time during the day, you didn't have to pre-arrange it, you just showed up. And I highly recommend all parents taking advantage of that time, because it's amazing what you will see happening in a daycare room when you're feeding your baby and hopefully bonding to your baby and enjoying that time with your baby. But, you know, it's like, 'okay, which of these teachers do I want to ask to babysit, when I need to do something in the weekend or evening', you get a really good feel for personalities. Some things I had questions I had asked the director about, 'why is this happening? Because I don't know if I like that very much'. So I used that time to really get to know the daycare, the teachers in the room to see how they're interacting with the kids. And, and that's really, really important. So I highly recommend, if you postdocs can take the time to do that during the day, whether your birth parent or not doesn't matter. Is there anything else I wanted to say about that? Oh, for the [backup care](#), I guess. I'm curious, any of the other parents here if any of you have used the care. I guess I decided I wasn't comfortable sending any of my, either my kids to to a place where I didn't have a regular interaction with the providers. And if I didn't know them that well. And I was just wondering if anyone here could speak to, to that experience at all. Or if we need to move on to a different topic that's fine, too. But it seems like a really nice option. I just could never bring myself to do it.

Joel Berger 47:17

Yeah, I fully agree. It's not something that we've done. And I think it's a very admirable option and a good one to take. I think it's just what you get used to doing comfortably as a family. And it's not something I've done. And I think expanding upon kind of what you've mentioned there he really is that yeah, just sort of realizing it's okay to prioritize, being a family being a mother being a father. And like, that's not detrimental to work that doesn't have to suddenly give you imposter syndrome, because that's the most important thing in your life it's okay for that to be the most important thing in your life. And for that, to, I think, to ease some of that pressure off. The problem is academics is we're often told, you know, this is like you see all the time, like oh, if you're not working 80 hours, you're not doing that you're not you know, you're not an academic and all that sort of thing, I think just number one, just not correct, and to just an unhealthy view that's perpetuated, but then when you want to prioritize, raising a family, and you know, being a parent, isn't a good thing to focus on. And I think just remind yourself, well, that isn't a good view to have, I can succeed in my job, I can do really well in my work. But ultimately, if I want to care for my child, and just enjoy time with my child, and that's the most important thing, then that's an okay thing. No one should in any way take that from you.

Phil Gander 48:38

I don't want to add too much, because I agree with everything that Rachel and Joel just mentioned. I was lucky enough to be able to get our kids into Alice's Rainbow, which is just across the street. So that was nice and it was a very enlightened childcare center, which is good. I imagine that's probably mostly true in Iowa City. But yeah, I think if you have the luxury of choosing some different options, then yeah, definitely getting a feel for what each place is like is a good idea. And I do think the backup thing does sound wonderful, but again, I'm unsure about whether or not we would go ahead and use it. And we did exactly that, which was to take one of the teachers at the daycare center to be a babysitter, one of the ones that we liked, and then we managed to luck out and just get her sister. So it's a total fluke, which is obviously not something that you really want to hear the rest of the people that are listening in here. But I think there are things you can do. I mean, one one thing to say that we did when you had childcare and I was cities is awful, the availabilities are pretty bad and so when we started for kindergarten, there was literally nothing available. And so then us and some neighbors down the street and some other neighbors a little bit farther down the street, we all just decided to band together, and we watched the kids, you know, one of the parents would take the each day off, you know, we would watch the kids for, that went on for about six months or so actually. So quite a while before some availability popped up in Iowa City. That can work too I guess, and or if there are other postdocs even. One thing that popped into my head put my former president hat on, has anyone or Nicole do you know if basically, what other universities are like in terms of leave? And or anyone else on the call? Because there's always the using leverage as a comparator. And then you it would be wise perhaps to have a national level survey, maybe help through the National Postdoc Association, really to push this issue? It's clearly it's clearly not very equitable. And maybe, maybe there's something to be gained there.

Nicole Green 51:37

Yeah, I think those are great points. I can tell you, I did a quick [comparison to Iowa State](#). And so I think one, based on some comments in the chat, this is an important, like parental leave and access to family services is definitely something that people have commented on was important. And thinking about

recruitment and retention, not only at postdoc levels, but I'm sure you know, staff and faculty levels, those are things that are important. Yeah, so Iowa State for postdocs does have a paid parental leave policy across the board, which I saw recently, it's probably something that we'll be bringing up following this, this meeting with administrators. Yeah, and thinking about working on like a Big 10 comparison or something, you know, as our peer institutions. There are definitely some really good reports that I think I linked in the parent guide about yeah, sort of national trends, and it's pretty bleak. I'm not gonna lie, like looking, looking through here, you know, as a whole, but I think Iowa, you know, this is a potential area of opportunity to stand out and use as a recruitment tool. So yeah, I think definitely something that people are thinking about. It's hard with this inequity between the FP01 and the FP02 status, right. I mean, there's a lot of other reasons why it's, it's hard to be an FP02 scholar around taxes, and a, you know, loss of retirement matching and such. But in terms of parental benefits, matching the federal standards, they actually get quite a bit more. Yeah, if anybody wants to comment more on that that's in the chat. Please, please do, I guess for you all that are on the call thinking about, you know, advocating for next steps, like if we want to try to get a paid parental policy, if that's something we want to talk about--you guys have mentioned that that's something that's being talked about--I guess, what are the barriers to that happening it at University of Iowa, because clearly, it's something that can be instituted at Iowa State? So I don't know if you have any thoughts as to why that's the case.

Todd Rent 53:46

So maybe I'll speak up here in terms of Iowa State, my understanding is that's not technically a parental leave policy, so much as it is the opportunity to get [bridge funding](#) for time missed as a result of, of childbirth. And so I can double check on that. But so it's, it's not, at least my understanding is it's not necessarily an expansion, technically of the benefit. It's just permitting funding to bridge it's basically offsetting what you otherwise would have earned. So it's a slightly different approach. I think one of our underlying concerns here is that to the extent that we're able to do it for any group, and not for others that are in similar circumstances, based upon the state law, then that would create some system inequities and some internal inequities between employee groups.

Phil Gander 54:51

Just to pick up on that point, though, I would hate to see that that would be a reason not to move forward with anything in terms of positive direction. That instead the answer would be to help no one, because you can't help everyone. That's a dangerous argument.

Diana Kremzar 55:15

I serve on the [family issues charter committee](#), and this is an area that is being looked at. This is something that the group is very passionate and working on this year. So that would be an opportunity, if anyone on this call is interested in possibly getting involved in this conversation. You can reach out to me and I can connect you with the president or the chair of the family issues charter committee. But I mean, that's that's definitely, right, as well have people working together on a similar topic?

Nicole Green 55:53

Yeah, I know, even this issue, I'm on one of the strategic planning groups, and this has come up in terms of research support, you know, how big of an impact being a parent can have on research

productivity and how there clearly needs to be better support for parents, and in any class of, you know, whether it's faculty staff, or postdocs or students.

Banu Gumusoglu 56:12

Can I ask a question? (Nicole: Go for it.) Oh, um, or it's more of a comment. I, I think something too, that's missing from the conversation is the idea that these policies, they don't just affect parents, but they affect anybody of reproductive age, and in particular, women of reproductive age. I have heard and been privy to conversations, hiring conversations, where the fact that somebody just got married, and as a young woman is definitely mentioned, because that's I mean, leave is essentially something PIs just eat. There's no, there's no funding from the university to sort of help PI's accommodate leave for for postdocs, you know, who aren't on NRSAs. And so that's obviously something that PIs think about when they're hiring. And, you know, I, I wonder if it's being discussed as a, you know, a, an issue having to do with, having to do with hiring discrimination? Because in my experience, it certainly does have to do with hiring discrimination.

Nicole Green 57:31

I think that's a good point. And it and would you say that this is the purpose of the bridge funding, then that like Iowa State as it gets, that's its purpose?

Banu Gumusoglu 57:40

That seems like a great mechanism. I mean, to help PIs sort of deal with the loss, especially if you're a new PI, and you're setting up a lab, the idea of hiring somebody who's going to take 6-12 weeks off. And you just have to, like eat that, I think is can be really daunting. So I'm not trying to villainize them at all, but I think that's like a reality of what they're doing. But it's it's a huge problem.

Todd Rent 58:11

And I will say, at least from the conversations that I've been a part of, there are concerns with equity. And there are just general concerns about the impact of the current offerings on recruitment and retention and those concerns are taken very, very seriously. But again, I will say that, also the thought of as we're thinking about equity, we want to be able to move forward in a meaningful way. For employees, generally speaking,

Banu Gumusoglu 58:40

It sort of feels like the enemy of, you know, perfect being the good here. Like we're not able to make any progress because we can't be perfect in the progress that we make. And I I've been here for seven years, and I've heard this exact same argument for seven years with no change. So it does, it starts to get I mean, just phenomenally frustrating.

Nicole Green 59:02

Can I ask is there isn't consistently a group that can't that we can't expand these kinds of benefits to? Like, is it the postdoc group? That's the difficult group is, you know, what's, is there a consistent roadblock that's common to all these conversations? Or is it truly like different groups all over the map?

Because if it's different, like I agree, it seems like at some point like that's never going to happen, potentially that everything lines up to always move forward as good of an ideal is that is.

Todd Rent 59:35

Well, Diana, Diana, you have more experience on these conversations.

Diana Kremzar 59:40

I can speak to a few years ago and we did get pretty far in terms of recommendations for the expansion of parental leave and it ended up getting not going through at the state level or Board of Regents to bring it to the state. This is where I'm not as, this is not my area. But we had it brought to that level Board of Regents and it was not going to go further than that.

Andrew Jezewski 1:00:12

I have a question about whether or not it's been pursued to lobby the NIH a little bit further, because there's been a lot of movement from NIH on parental leave. And I'm wondering, given that a large portion of the university is funded through NIH funding mechanisms, whether or not the university has tried to partner with the NIH to lobby for expansion of those grant funds to be used for parent leave purposes, much like at the FP02 postdocs have had that expansion in recent years.

Todd Rent 1:00:47

Not to my knowledge.

Diana Kremzar 1:00:50

Yeah, not to my knowledge. That's very, very interesting.

Andrew Jezewski 1:00:53

So that might be a good thing to bring up in any future conversations you guys are a part of as a mechanism to get these sorts of things funded.

Nicole Green 1:01:05

Maybe I know we are at the hour, I just want to draw attention, there was a good comment in the chat about facilities. And maybe Diana, you have some quick comments on this, but just availability and making, I guess, you know, more areas, equitable to any birth or any parent, you know, for whatever purpose that might be, like they mentioned, like [lactation facilities](#), which I know there's a there's a great [map](#) of those and a list of those. I'm, I don't know the quality of all the rooms in each location that I'm sure that there are better ones than than others. But are there any other facilities related things you may be like to say before we wrap up about places where parents can go and utilize space if they need to?

Diana Kremzar 1:01:50

Sure, sure. The lactation rooms--yes, Nicole, they definitely vary in in, I guess, just how nice the spaces. I don't know, roughly 10 years ago, we did have it put into the facilities design standards that every new building or major renovation has to include a dedicated lactation room. So that's why if you

would notice, the newer buildings, or the newly renovated buildings have the very nice lactation spaces. And so that was definitely a huge win. What I am seeing in this, this comment is kind of one step further than that. And, and that's a really good, a really good piece of feedback and thought because we--it is true. While many are separate from the restrooms, especially kind of the older buildings, they are included in the women's restrooms, and that would make them inaccessible for fathers. So I'm going to, I'm going to write that piece of feedback down. And yeah, thank you.

Rachel Marek 1:03:01

I wanted to offer a suggestion to those parents who are looking for additional facilities. I think what's available, was a great start in College of Engineering, we have really in Seaman Center, we have a really nice room. But a lot of the extra sort of perks of that room was from the college and especially the women faculty in the college, but some staff wrote small proposals to our college's diversity, equity and inclusion--I don't know if it's called a committee or working group--that had small funding to give to specific projects, just to ask for funds to buy extra supplies in case people were pumping, forgot their supplies. Some of them were proposal for like a, a really nice recliner with a table, you know, fold out table or whatever. So I know it really shouldn't be on you to do this. But if you're really looking for a specific thing that you need in your lactation room, it can't be provided by the University by Family Services, see if your college as the group that you can apply to for funds. I don't know how it works other colleges. I just wanted to offer that suggestion. It could be just like a really nice little stop gap. You know, for for the year or two that you'd be using a lactation room or, you know, a men's restroom if you want to add a changing station to it or something. Have that get installed. Just an idea.

Nicole Green 1:04:44

Yeah, no, we're postdocs. So we're, we're, we're excited about any small pots of monies that can potentially be seized to to help. So yeah, that's a great suggestion. I want to wrap up because I know we're a little over and I want to say thank you to everybody on the panel for your time. I might be following up with some of you on some of the things we talked about to again, update this resource guide. And that will be going on our website, which I learned how to update recently. So I just want to say thank you. And thank you for sharing your experiences and your expertise in a lot of this, like specific university policy and state law and code. So yeah, thank you to everybody in the chat and on the call.

Andrew Jezewski 1:05:31

And thank you, Nicole, for helping putting this together. I think it's been helpful for all of us on the call.

Nicole Green 1:05:35

I apologize I don't have more knowledge of being a parent. I did what I could! But yes, I think this is an ongoing conversation. Postdoc parents are our population that we're highlighting this year. So I anticipate that we'll keep keep having these conversations and keep trying to build up these resources and update them. So thank you. I'm going to save the chat before I forget. But yeah, I'll see you all soon, hopefully.