

# Faculty Work-Life Survey Data Report

## Work-Life Issues



Balancing work and family issues has captured a great deal of attention in higher education over the last several years. Both *Academe* (November-December 2004), the journal of the American Association of University Professors, and *Change* magazine (November-December 2005) have devoted entire issues to these topics. The American Council on Education, with the support of the Sloan Foundation, has also published an influential report (*Agenda for Excellence: Creating Flexibility in Tenure-Track Faculty Careers*), created panels at most major higher education association meetings, and held invitational conferences to encourage universities to adopt more flexible policies related to faculty careers. For all research universities, the critical connection is to be able to recruit and retain the best faculty talent from a doctoral pool that is far more diverse than it was a generation ago. And there is a growing body of research that tells us that work-life issues have an important impact on faculty productivity, satisfaction, and retention. For women scientists and engineers, balancing work and family emerged as the most significant issue they faced in a study by Sue Rosser, an influential figure in gender and science (Rosser, 2004).

Virginia Tech has been a participant in many of these national discussions. The *AdvanceVT* survey distributed to all teaching and research faculty in January 2005, and focus group discussions conducted in April 2005, provide a great deal of information about how Virginia Tech faculty members experience work-life balance issues. This report summarizes key findings from tenured and tenure track faculty at Virginia Tech about a range of work-life factors, including perceptions about the departmental and university climate, dual career issues, and balancing personal and family responsibilities. The report highlights implications of these issues for job satisfaction and intention to remain at Virginia Tech and attitudes about a number of new work-life initiatives, including policies to delay the tenure clock and dual-career hiring.

## Survey Demographics

1,209 responses were received to the *AdvanceVT* Faculty Work-Life Survey from both instructional and special research faculty, a 60% response rate. Among the 816 tenured and tenure track faculty respondents on which this report focuses:

- 217 were female (26.6% compared to 22.9% in the population);  
599 were male (73.4% compared to 77.1% in the population)
- 718 were Caucasian (88% compared to 82.9% in the population);  
98 were Non-Caucasian (12% compared to 17.1% in the population)

Respondents were also representative by college:

- Agriculture and Life Sciences (143, 17.5% compared to 16%)
- Architecture and Urban Studies (51, 6.3% compared to 7.4%)
- Business (56, 6.9% compared to 7.4%)
- Engineering (154, 18.9% compared to 22.1%)
- Liberal Arts & Human Sciences (199, 24.4% compared to 21.6%)
- Natural Resources (42, 5.1% compared to 4.3%)
- Science (119, 14.6% compared to 14.6%)
- Veterinary Medicine (46, 5.6% compared to 5.6%)
- Non-College Units (6, 0.7%)

## Institutional Climate about Work-Life Issues

A number of questions in the 2005 *AdvanceVT* survey addressed perceptions of the university and departmental climate in relation to balancing personal and family responsibilities with job demands. Responses to these items indicate that work-life issues are a concern for both male and female faculty. As with other sections of the survey, faculty respondents are more positive about life at the departmental level than the university level. Only about 40% of women and 50% of men agreed with the statement “Virginia Tech cares about the family/home life of its faculty.” Differences are not significant by gender or ethnicity. In comparison, when asked to assess perceptions about attitudes in their home unit, respondents are more positive.

- 72% of faculty respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that faculty in their department respect the roles and responsibilities they have outside of work, with male respondents being significantly more likely to agree than female respondents.
- Only 14% of faculty respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that in their department, faculty who have children are considered less committed to their careers, with women being significantly more likely to agree than men.
- Only 13% of faculty respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that meetings in their department are often scheduled at times that conflict with family responsibilities, with significantly more women than men agreeing.

“One question asked of me (by students) was how do I manage to balance my career and family. I tell them it is not easy and you may not always find a lot of understanding, but you can't feel accomplished if you don't do both in my opinion. It might be difficult at times, but when you see the results, both in terms of your career and in terms of growing a family, you'll feel fulfilled and satisfied, and that is rewarding.”

*New Faculty Interviews  
Fall 2003*

Responses to a number of questions on the survey underscore that both male and female faculty members experience considerable conflict in juggling personal and work demands. Tensions emerging from the spillover between work and personal responsibilities are evident in the percentage of tenured and tenure track faculty who somewhat or strongly agreed with statements related to work-life balance:

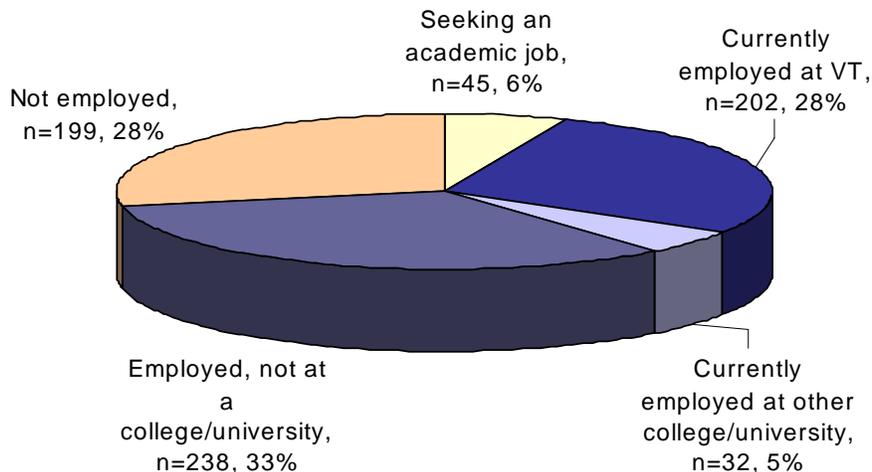
- 61% of faculty respondents agreed that it is difficult to have a personal life and earn tenure and be promoted, with female respondents significantly more likely to agree than men.
- 47% of faculty respondents agreed that personal or family responsibilities have slowed their advancement at Virginia Tech, with significantly more women than men agreeing.
- 47% of faculty respondents agreed that professional demands have forced them to make unreasonable compromises about personal or family responsibilities, with women being significantly more likely than men to agree.
- 59% of faculty respondents strongly agree or somewhat agree that they have modified their career aspirations in order to accommodate the interests and needs of their spouse/partner or family

Several policy initiatives under consideration are designed to provide greater flexibility in meeting work obligations, allowing family or personal needs to be better managed during critical periods.

## Marital and Family Status of Faculty Respondents

There are substantial differences among male and female faculty in terms of their marital and family characteristics. The profile at Virginia Tech reflects the national profile in that male faculty members are significantly more likely than female faculty to be married (80% of women, 91% of men), although both male and female faculty at Virginia Tech are more likely to be married or partnered than their counterparts at four-year universities nationwide. Male faculty members at Virginia Tech are also more than twice as likely to have a spouse who is not employed: 15% of women and 33% of men have spouses or partners who are not employed. Three-quarters of female respondents (76%) and slightly over half of male respondents (54%) have children under the age of 18 living with them. These differences probably reflect that, on average, male faculty members are older than female faculty members at Virginia Tech.

Figure 1: Employment status of spouse/partner



## Dual Career Issues

Dual career issues affect not only the initial decision to accept a position, but they are also a factor in retention. When compared to national data, faculty members at Virginia Tech seem to be less satisfied with the employment opportunities available for a spouse or partner. While 73% of faculty nationwide report they are somewhat or very satisfied with the employment opportunities available for the spouse or partner (Finkelstein, Seal, & Schuster, 1998), only 61% of male faculty and 57% of female faculty members responding to the *AdvanceVT* survey indicated that they were very or somewhat satisfied with the employment opportunities available to their spouse/partner in their geographic area.

“It’s beneficial to me as a faculty member to have my husband in the position that he is. I often run ideas by him and I often seek his advice on issues that are big picture issues, like being a faculty member, being a member of the university community and juggling responsibilities and dealing with interpersonal conflicts. Having him actually here at the university, immersed in the same culture I am, means that he understands exactly what I’m dealing with most of the time.” *Dual Career Hire Interviews Summer 2005*

Given this finding, it is not surprising that there was fairly strong support from faculty members responding to the survey for an office at Virginia Tech to assist with spousal/partner hiring. 76% of the respondents agreed that hiring of faculty spouses/partners strengthens the success of the university’s recruiting efforts.

## Work-Life Issues and Retention

For married faculty, there appears to be a relatively strong link between satisfaction of a spouse/partner with employment opportunities and the intention to remain at Virginia Tech. Forty-six percent (46%) of women respondents compared to 32% of male respondents somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement: “I have seriously considered leaving Virginia Tech in order to improve the employment opportunities of my spouse/partner” (see Figure 2). Recent surveys of faculty members who have left Virginia Tech indicate that the issue of spouse satisfaction with employment opportunities is a moderate or significant influence on the decision to seek a position elsewhere for a number of women faculty members.

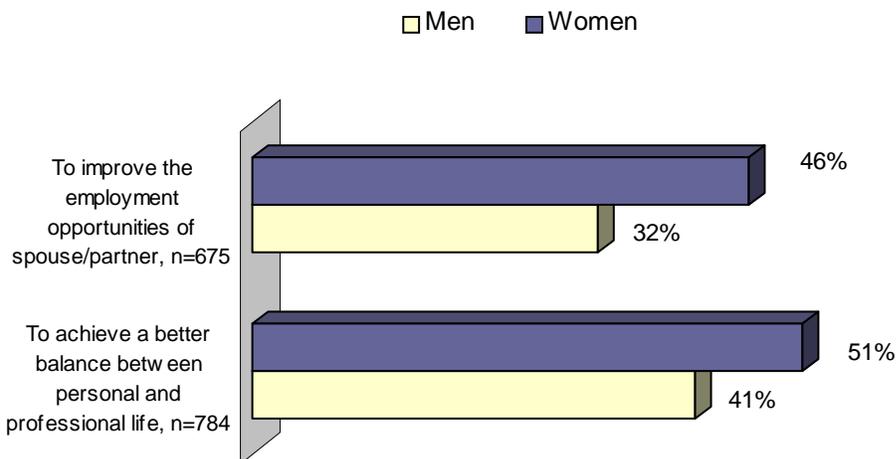
“We’re much less likely to look for other jobs based on the fact that Virginia Tech gave us two positions. I think if you hire two people and they’re both happy, they’re less likely to leave.”

*Dual Career Hire Interviews  
Fall 2004*

Tensions emerging from the spillover of professional obligations into personal life are evident in the second set of bars in

Figure 2. Fifty-one percent of women and 41% of men strongly or somewhat agreed that “I have seriously considered leaving Virginia Tech in order to achieve a better balance between my personal and professional life.” Responses to this question may reflect perceptions about the all-consuming nature of faculty work rather than a phenomenon unique to Virginia Tech.

**Figure 2: Percentage of faculty members by gender who somewhat or strongly agreed that they seriously considered leaving Virginia Tech in order to address marital or work-life balance concerns**



## Delaying the Tenure Clock

Under certain circumstances, tenure-track faculty members may request an extension of their six year probationary period before consideration for tenure. Over the last nine academic years, 44 women and 27 men have received tenure clock extensions for a variety of reasons, including childbirth, dependent care, personal health, and extenuating personal and professional circumstances (data from the Provost’s office).

Fifty (35 women, 15 men) respondents to the *AdvanceVT* survey indicated that they had extended the tenure clock while at Virginia Tech. The majority of women (25 of 31 responding) and all of the men (10 of 10 responding) agree that faculty members in their department were either supportive or very supportive of faculty who extend the tenure clock.

A number of universities funded through NSF's Advance program have reported that creating policies that allow automatic extensions for childbirth and adoption is one way to overcome the hesitation some faculty members feel about using the stop-the-clock-policy. A few institutions, including Virginia Tech, are considering such an automatic extension for both new mothers and fathers. Stop-the-clock policies are one way the university can clearly communicate a commitment to faculty members with families.

## Time Allocations by Married and Unmarried Faculty

Studies of doctoral recipients in science and engineering have documented what has become known as a "marriage penalty" for women at key career transitions from obtaining a tenure track position to earning tenure and being promoted. The American Institute of Physics (Bulletin number 142, October 28, 2004), noted, for example, that women in tenure-track positions eight or nine years after earning their doctorate are about 6% less likely than men to be tenured. Having children early in their career was negatively related to women's chances of earning tenure.

A widespread misperception is that differences in promotion rates of married women and women with children, when compared to men's, are related to personal time commitments that conflict with professional responsibilities. A survey of faculty on nine campuses of the University of California system with more than 4,400 responses from ladder-rank faculty revealed relatively small differences by gender in the hours faculty members with children devoted to professional activities (Mason et al., 2005). Women with children reported devoting 51 hours per week to professional activities, compared to men with children who reported 56 hours per week. However competing demands of work and family were especially acute for women faculty members, aged 30 to 50, with children, who reported spending over 100 hours a week total on professional, domestic and caregiving activities. In contrast men with children spent 85 hours per week on these activities, and faculty members without children spent 80 hours per week.

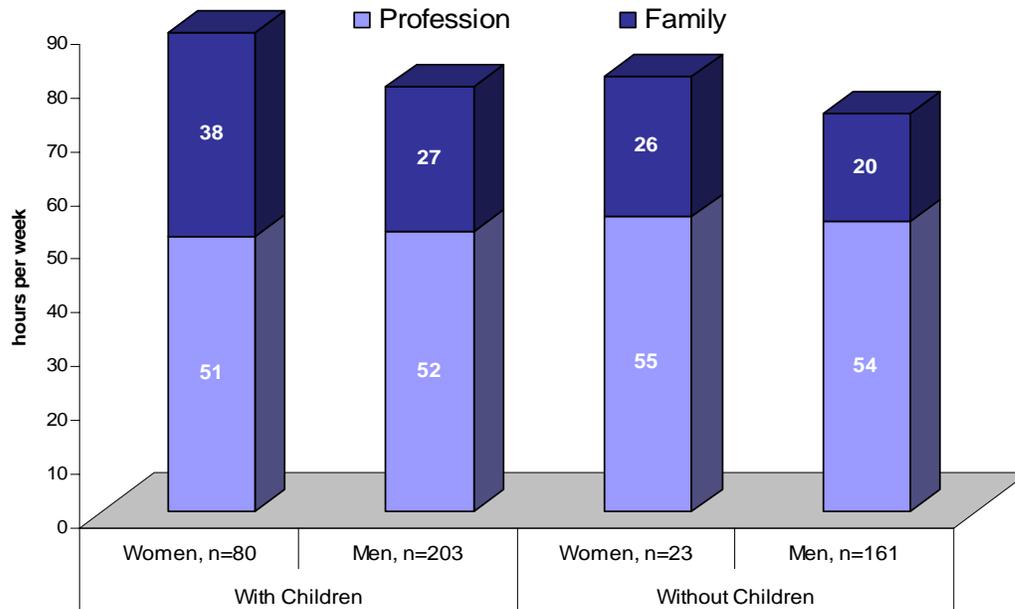
Respondents to the Virginia Tech survey had similar patterns. Both male and female faculty members with children reported spending a similar number of hours on professional activities (over 50 hours per week), however women with children spent an additional 38 hours compared to 27 hours by men on family-related responsibilities (see Figure 3).

Time demands vary by rank. Full professors reported less time spent on research (18 hours per week) than associate and assistant professors (25 hours per week). Full professors also reported spending less time on personal and family responsibilities (23 hours per week) compared to associate and assistant professors (25 hours per week).

**"I anticipate my most difficult challenges as a faculty member will be just managing time and the balance between teaching and research."**

*New Faculty Interviews  
Fall 2003*

**Figure 3: Average number of hours reported by faculty members on activities related to their profession and family responsibilities, by gender**



## Job Satisfaction

On a national level, full-time faculty members are generally satisfied with their jobs. For example, 77.9% of the full-time faculty members responding to the 2004-2005 national survey of postsecondary faculty conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, reported their overall job satisfaction to be “satisfactory” or “very satisfactory” (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 16, 2005). Women faculty generally report that they are slightly less satisfied than men on all dimensions of job satisfaction (Finkelstein, Seal, & Schuster, 1998).

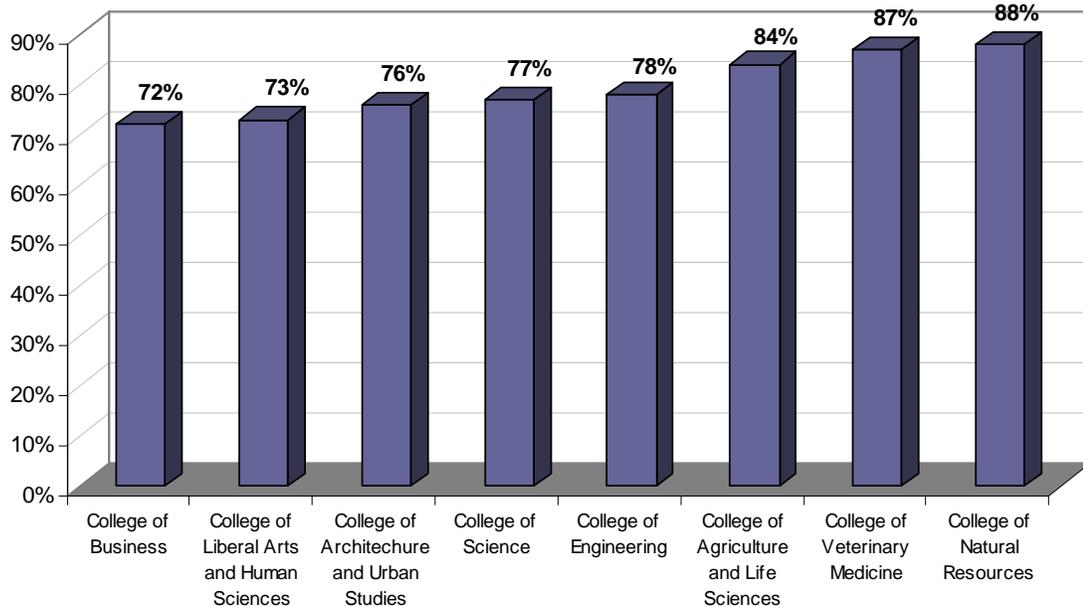
Responses to the *AdvanceVT* Work-Life Survey are even more positive than national data. More than 80% of the tenured and tenure track faculty respondents at Virginia Tech reported that they are either “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their job overall. Differences are significant by ethnicity but not gender. A significantly smaller percentage of minority faculty than majority faculty agreed that they were very or somewhat satisfied with their job at Virginia Tech overall.

“It was very important for both of us (female respondent and her husband) to be at the same institution. It was really important for me to be on a regular full-time faculty position. He could have been in a tenured position in another institution but with me being on a visiting position or on something else and neither one of us wanted to do that.”

*New Faculty Interviews  
Fall 2003*

Figure 4 reflects respondents job satisfaction overall by college.

**Figure 4: Percentage of tenured and tenure track faculty members who strongly or somewhat agreed that they are satisfied with their job at Virginia Tech overall, by college**



Although there were not significant differences by gender in overall level of job satisfaction, there were significant gender differences on other questionnaire items related to specific aspects of job satisfaction.

Women were significantly less likely than men to agree that they are satisfied with their work load, job security, and opportunities for advancement.

- 58.3% of female respondents somewhat or strongly agreed they were satisfied with their workload, compared to 69.1% of male respondents
- 79.3% of female respondents somewhat or strongly agreed they were satisfied with their job security, compared to 88.8% of male respondents
- 62.4% of female respondents somewhat or strongly agreed they were satisfied with opportunities for advancement, compared to 75.6% of male respondents

“It’s made me rethink it in that I know the expectations of tenure and don’t know if I’m ever going to make that and if I don’t, what do I do? I thought that I could go to a teaching place. I seem to be doing well with that, or altogether leave faculty and find something totally different. Those kinds of thoughts come fairly regularly. I haven’t thought about going out and looking for a non-faculty job, but I have thought about what if I don’t make tenure.”

*New Faculty Interviews  
Fall 2004*

## Summary and Implications

Responses to the *AdvanceVT 2005 Work-Life Survey* provide a strong indication that faculty members find work-life issues to be particularly challenging. Some of the most pressing issues identified in the survey results appear to be: more than half of respondents believe that the university does not care about the family and home life of its faculty; there are inadequate or unsatisfying employment opportunities in the area for a significant portion of faculty spouses and partners; and competing demands for their time leave faculty members feeling as if they have compromised both their professional productivity and obligations to their families. While these issues affected more women respondents than men, many male faculty members reported that work-life balance issues were highly important to them also. Addressing these issues more effectively will serve both men and women.

Efforts to increase the availability of childcare on campus and the creation in 2005 of a dual career assistance office are steps underway to address two critical needs that have been identified. New and revised policies that address work-life balance issues are also under consideration. For example, “modified duties” would provide a course release for one semester to allow faculty to deal with critical family or personal health issues. Temporary part-time employment for tenured and tenure-track faculty would permit greater time for family commitments. And creating an automatic tenure extension for new parents – both men and women -- also communicates the university’s recognition of faculty members’ family circumstances and their impact on faculty success. Implementation of these and other work-life policies are likely to fuel changes in attitudes and practices that are required to achieve institutional transformation.

## Work-Life Resources at Virginia Tech

Dual Career Resources	<a href="http://www.provost.vt.edu/Resources.html">http://www.provost.vt.edu/Resources.html</a>
Stopping the Tenure Clock Information and Policies	<a href="http://www.provost.vt.edu/Stopping_Clock.html">http://www.provost.vt.edu/Stopping_Clock.html</a>
Family and Work/Life Resources	<a href="http://www.worklife.vt.edu/">http://www.worklife.vt.edu/</a>

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