

Planning Academic Parenthood: Negotiating a Family-Friendly Contract  
and Navigating Work-Life Balance

From “opting out” to “leaning in” to questions about whether “having it all” is even possible, the past decade has seen an explosion of public interest in the topic of work-life balance.<sup>1</sup> While many of the issues raised may be applicable to academia, the peculiarities of the academic job market, the idiosyncratic nature of institutional structures and hiring practices, and the multi-faceted nature of academic work, require conversations that address the specifics of the academic environment. It is an inconvenient reality that the early stages of childrearing often coincide with the beginning phases of scholars’ careers. Additionally, many academics must also navigate what has been called “the two-body problem.” There is a great need for open and honest conversations about the challenges of balancing work and family, as well as the concomitant need for an ongoing search for solutions to those challenges.

Drawing on personal experience, this paper will explore some strategies for going on the job market and negotiating a family-friendly contract, including spousal hiring. It will also provide some reflections on sharing a joint position and balancing academic work with caring for small children. Finally, it will offer some suggestions for how institutions might establish family-friendly policies that better support tenure-track and contingent faculty in their roles as scholars, teachers, and parents. Academic work does not occur in a vacuum. Although this paper specifically addresses the issue of balancing academic work and parenting, many of these issues will be of relevance for anyone who is, or may soon be, responsible for the care of others (e.g.

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Belkin “The Opt-Out Revolution” *New York Times Magazine*. Oct. 26, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/26/magazine/26WOMEN.html>. Accessed August 22, 2014; Sandberg, Sheryl (2013) *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. Knopf; Slaughter, Anne-Marie “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All” *The Atlantic*. June 13, 2012. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>. Accessed August 22, 2014.

parents, siblings), or who may have special needs of their own. The quality of one's teaching, research, and service is bound to be affected by the quality of one's life, and vice versa. Faculty who are supported by their institutions and academic peers will be better able to contribute in meaningful ways to the institutions themselves and the scholarly community at large.