



## ORGANIZING FOR PARENTAL LEAVE



# Leave IN

In 2013, when University of Central Florida (UCF) associate professor Yovanna Pineda learned she was pregnant, she did what comes naturally to her: lots of research. At UCF, she learned, there was no such thing as paid family leave for faculty members. “I talked to a lot of people and realized, we had a terrible situation,” she recalls. Depending on a faculty member’s relationship to her chair, a new mother might get a semester off, or “the same chair might turn to somebody she didn’t like and say, ‘you have to come back in two weeks.’” Other parents returned to work and found out that, in their absence, they had been demoted. Meanwhile, the needs of dads or same-sex parents were completely ignored. The more Pineda learned, the angrier she got, she says. Eventually it got to the point where she was like, “Hey union! Are you talking about this?”

**I**n 2015, the United Faculty of Florida-UCF (UFF-UCF) did more than talk about family leave. They sat down at the bargaining table, armed with Pineda’s research on gender equity, on how UCF’s policies stacked up against other public universities, and on the effects of paid family leave on employees and employers.

What Pineda had found was disturbing. Compared to similar institutions, UCF was living in the 1950s. Almost every public university was offering faculty a paid, no-teaching semester, and an automatic stop on the tenure clock. University of Oregon included an option for teaching online, plus on-campus breastfeeding facilities, while University of Wyoming offered on-campus child care. Closer to home, University of South Florida recently had passed paid parental leave, plus modified instructional duties (i.e., faculty could still work on grants and research, just not teach, and get paid.)

UCF faculty wanted this, too—and not just for birth mothers, but for adoptive parents and those in same-sex relationships. They pointed out that while UCF strives for diversity and inclusivity, “it should practice what it preaches,” says Pineda. The implications for women faculty, in particular, were troubling. By forcing mothers to take unpaid leaves to care for their infants, the university was effectively prohibiting them from qualifying for UCF’s salary raises, which require five years of continuous service to qualify, and derailing their retirement contributions.

“Women should be able to have careers—and children!” says Pineda. But they couldn’t. For every woman who was a full professor at UCF, there were three men, she found. For every woman who was an associate professor, there were two men. This matches the findings of *Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower*, a 2013 book that found women faculty often choose contingent work, or “time outs,” when family-friendly policies are not available at their institutions.

While Pineda assembled her findings and presented them to the union, assistant professor Beatriz Reyes-Foster put together a community of UCF staff and faculty parents on social media. Eventually, many of those parents formed a UFF-UCF group, the Family Life Caucus, dedicated to taking actions to advocate for family-friendly policies at UCF.

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“We saw the union as a place where there was already a group of engaged faculty members who cared about their colleagues,” says Reyes-Foster, a caucus leader. “Obviously there are structural problems in society, but you start the conversation locally—and the union was the obvious place to begin that conversation.”

## Family leave in the U.S.

Only about one in 10 private-sector workers in the U.S. has access to paid family leave through their employers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, leaving millions of American parents unable to take off from work after the birth or adoption of a child.

Nationally, we’re suffering from “a *Leave it to Beaver* family policy stuck in the last century,” wrote U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez last year. In fact, it has been 23 years since President Bill Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which requires many employers to provide 12 weeks of unpaid leave to new parents. “The basic promise of that law is that no one should have to choose between the job you need and the family you love,” said Perez. “For the millions of Americans who cannot afford to take leave without pay, the promise remains unfulfilled.”

Perez isn’t alone: a growing chorus of voices is saying FMLA is no longer enough, not in this global economy, where the U.S. is the only developed nation in the world without mandatory, paid family leave. (In fact, Pineda found that only three countries offer absolutely no legal guarantee of paid maternity leave. The other two are Papua New Guinea and Swaziland.) “Too many moms have to go back to work just days after babies are born...and too many dads and

parents of adoptive children don't get any leave at all...none of this is fair to families," said presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, who has proposed a nationwide minimum of 12 weeks of paid family leave to care for new children or sick family members.

Parental leave reduces the likelihood of infant mortality, increases the chances of post-natal healthcare, including infant vaccinations, and facilitates breastfeeding. Meanwhile, new mothers who take longer than 12 weeks of maternity leave also have been found to have fewer symptoms of depression and stress.

But it's the economic benefits that may be swaying policymakers and employers. As Pineda pointed out to UCF negotiators, paid leave is an effective employee recruitment and retention tool. One study found that 94 percent of leave-takers who received full pay returned to their employers, compared to 76 who received unpaid leaves. (That's a lot of costly faculty and staff searches that can be avoided.) Another found worker productivity after paid leaves was significantly higher than after unpaid leaves.

In 2015, federal workers finally got paid parenting leave (six weeks) through an executive order by President Obama. Also last year, New York enacted a 12-week paid family leave program, which will launch in 2018. Twenty other states have coalitions pushing the issue.

In the meantime, some corporations, especially in the ultra-competitive tech industry, have moved forward on their own. In November, Facebook extended its parental leave policy to four months, no matter the parents' gender, and Amazon announced it would offer four weeks of pre-partum leave to pregnant mothers, followed by 10 weeks of maternity leave and six weeks of parental leave. At the same time, Twitter doubled its leave time from 10 to 20 weeks, and Netflix, Adobe, and Microsoft all expanded their leave, too.



## UFF-UCF Families

Previous page, clockwise from top: Beatriz Reyes-Roster and family; UFF-UCF President Scott Launier and family; and Latarsha Chisholm, the first UCF faculty member to use the new parenting leave, with her family.

Above from left: UFF-UCF bargaining chair John Fauth, taking home his new baby five years ago; and Yovanna Pineda with her daughter, Vivi, born in 2013.

"When you have that kind of leave, you come back relaxed and ready for work, and not so resentful! You actually come back more productive," says Pineda.

## At the bargaining table

When UFF-UCF bargaining chair John Fauth sat down on the table in 2015, he never felt alone. Reyes-Foster mobilized dozens of parents to attend every bargaining session, filling rows of seats. "It was very clear to trustees the depth of our support," says Fauth, who adds, "What they did—Yovanna and Beatriz and the caucus members—made a huge difference in sharpening our bargain. We just sort of funneled their passion and energy."

The original proposal from UFF-UCF was for a more comprehensive family leave, one that would enable faculty to also take care of aging parents. That was a difficult sell. (It'll be back on the table again!) What they won was tremendous: Nine-month employees now get an entire

paid semester (moms and dads, inclusive of adoption and other events), while 12-month employees get 19 weeks.

"It's a huge step in the right direction," says UFF-UCF President Scott Launier. Not just for faculty, but for their students, too. Healthy, happy faculty members with healthy, happy families are productive, effective faculty members, he points out.

Ironically, neither Pineda nor Reyes-Foster will use the leave that they helped win—both have older children. "My kids are 7 and 2 and a half," says Reyes-Foster. "I unfortunately did not get to benefit from this leave. But I've been advocating and in this fight for a long time so that others don't have to struggle the way I did, and I struggled less than others!"

"I am just so glad others will be able to enjoy it," says Pineda.

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