

*AdvanceVT*  
**Impact of Work-Life Policies on New Faculty Hires**  
**2007 - 2008**

The assessment team conducted interviews with recently hired faculty members at Virginia Tech to assess the impact of new work-life policies initiated by *AdvanceVT*, in particular the impact of the dual-career assistance program, family friendly polices (e.g., stop-the-clock and modified duties), and child care options. Faculty members hired within the last two years were questioned to determine whether they were aware of these programs and policies, had utilized these policies, or had concerns about the impact of these polices in recruiting or retaining them or future faculty members to Virginia Tech.

This report discusses findings from the study. The first section outlines demographics of study respondents. The second section discusses findings related to the impact of the dual-career assistance program. The third section discusses findings related to family friendly policies and the last section discusses findings related to child care.

*Demographics of Participants*

Twenty-five faculty members (N=25) from various departments participated in this study. Faculty participants were recruited from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (e.g., agricultural and extension education, biochemistry, dairy science, food science and technology, horticulture, and nutrition, foods, and exercise), Architecture and Urban Studies (e.g., landscape architecture), the College of Business (e.g., accounting and information systems, finance, insurance, and business law), the College of Engineering (e.g., aerospace and ocean engineering, biomedical engineering, computer science, engineering education, materials science and engineering, mechanical), the College of Science (e.g., biological sciences, economics, mathematics, statistics), the College of Veterinary Medicine (e.g., biomedical science, large animal clinical sciences, small animal clinical sciences), the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences (e.g., apparel, housing, and resource management, communication, foreign languages, human development, philosophy, political science, school of education, theater arts), and the College of Natural Resources (e.g., fisheries and wildlife science, geography, and wood science and forest products).

Three respondents (n=3) were appointed fall 2006, six (n=6) were appointed spring 2007, and 16 were appointed fall 2007. Three participants (n=3) were appointed at the associate professor level and 22 at the assistant professor level. The sample was almost evenly split between men and women, with 13 men and 12 women participating. Only two (n=2) participants had previously worked at Virginia Tech before their current appointments. Five (n=5) respondents heard about the *AdvanceVT* program during their interview process or in some other way prior to their appointment. The majority (n=20) had not heard of the *AdvanceVT* program before accepting the position at Virginia Tech. Table 1 displays detailed demographics of sample participants.

Table 1: Demographics of Study Participants

<i>Gender</i>	
Male	13
Female	12
<i>Rank</i>	
Professor	0
Associate Professor	3
Assistant Professor	22
<i>Tenure Status</i>	
Tenured	3
Tenure-track	22
<i>Date of Employment</i>	
Fall 2006	3
Spring 2007	6
Fall 2007	16
<i>Worked at VT Previously</i>	
Yes	2
No	23
<i>Heard About <i>AdvanceVT</i> program*</i>	
Yes	5
No	20

Note. Fall 2006 includes October-December 2006, Spring 2007 includes January-July 2007, Fall 2007 includes August 2007.

\*Indicates participants who heard about the *AdvanceVT* program during the campus interview process or in some other way (e.g., reviewed website and/or brochure)

### *Dual Career Issues*

Questions about dual-career asked respondents whether they had a spouse or partner seeking employment at Virginia Tech or in the Blacksburg area at the time of their interview. Participants were also asked if they explored the Virginia Tech website or if they spoke to anyone in the Dual-Career office about opportunities for employment for their spouse or partner. If respondents indicated that they did speak to someone in the Dual Career office about employment opportunities for their spouse or partner, they were asked to indicate who they spoke to, how knowledgeable this person was about available services, and how supportive, overall, did the person they spoke with seem to be about the partner hire. Participants were finally given the opportunity to add any comments or suggestions they wished about the impact of dual-career hiring programs on the recruitment and retention of faculty.

Approximately half of respondents (n=13) indicated having a spouse or partner also seeking employment at Virginia Tech or the Blacksburg area during their interview process. Fourteen (n=14) explored the Virginia Tech website for opportunities for their spouse or partner and ten (n=10) spoke to a representative in the Dual Career office or saw the Dual Career office brochure. Most newly hired faculty members (n=12) indicated speaking to their department chair or faculty colleagues about employment opportunities for their spouse or partner, with most (n=9) indicating that their department chairs were very supportive about the partner hire process. For those participants who had been in touch with the dual-career office, most indicated that the person they spoke with was less helpful in their search for employment for their spouse or partner.

Overall, respondents indicated that dual career hiring policies are important in the recruitment of new hires. Four (n=4) mentioned that this service did influence their decision to accept a position at Virginia Tech. Many indicated not being aware that dual career services were available to them. Consider the following selected quotes about the transparency of dual career policies, the importance of such policies, and participants' satisfaction with the policies.

*“They should put more information out—who should you contact if you are looking for job, etc.”*

*“I think that letting people know the way it works might make things easier. I have noticed among other junior faculty that—it seems like making the process more transparent might help people understand what’s going on. I have heard of a couple of cases where somebody was not able to be retained by VT because a dual career hire did not happen. I know that there were very good reasons why that did not happen, but the perception was very negative on the part of the person who felt that no attempt had been made, when in reality there had been very serious attempts made to make things work out and it was just impossible to work out.”*

*“It’s really critical. The problem is, is that a lot of people I have met, including myself, when it comes down to really facilitating/finding something for your husband, after you are hired, you are kind of on your own. Unless you force it, or you won’t come, I don’t think there is much mediational support after you are here.”*

*“My expectation would be that they would help her find a position. I was a little bit disappointed. I have not really looked into the roles and responsibilities of the office, so I don’t know if that is something they are supposed to do. I felt they would be a little more proactive in helping her identify positions.”*

Table 2 lists detailed information about participants' responses for dual-career policy items.

Table 2: Dual-Career Issues

<i>Spouse/Partner Also Seeking Employment at VT</i>	
Yes	13
No	12
<i>Explored VT websites for Job Opportunities</i>	
Yes	14
No	11
<i>Spoke to Representative in Dual Career Office/Saw Brochure</i>	
Yes	10
No	12
<i>Individual New Hire Spoke To</i>	
Dual Career Office (Beverlyn Samuels)	3
Department Chair/Faculty	12
HR in county	2
<i>How Knowledgeable Were Individuals About Services/Programs</i>	
Not knowledgeable	3
Somewhat knowledgeable	1
Knowledgeable	3
Very knowledgeable	4
<i>How supportive Were Individuals About Partner Hire</i>	
Unsupportive	2
Somewhat supportive	2
Supportive	1
Very supportive	9
<i>Availability of Dual Career Services Influenced Decision to Accept Position at VT</i>	
Yes	4
No	5
Somewhat	1

Note: Dual career questions did not apply to all participants

#### *Other Family Friendly Policies*

The next set of questions related to participants' awareness of and satisfaction with two particular family friendly policies—stop-the-clock and modified duties. Both policies are available to men and women and provide flexibility in the case of illness, childbirth, or family emergencies. Stop-the-clock policies are automatic in the case of childbirth or adoption. Modified duties policies are available in the event of unexpected personal or family circumstances.

A majority of participants (n=20) were aware these policies existed. Eight found out about the policies during the interview process and five (n=5) indicated finding out about them some other way. Most (n=9) indicated that these types of policies were also available at other institutions where they interviewed. The availability of these policies influenced some of the participants' (n=8) decision to accept a position at Virginia Tech. Table 3 lists specific responses for family friendly policy items, and the following quotes describe participants' impression of the policies and the transparency of the policies.

**Table 3: Other Family Friendly Policies**

<i>Aware of stop-the-clock and modified duties policies</i>	
Yes	20
No	5
<i>Policies Discussed During Campus Visit or Found Out Some Other Way</i>	
Yes	8
No	12
Some other way	5
<i>Policies Available at Other Institutions Where Interviewed</i>	
Yes	9
No	9
N/A	8
<i>Availability of Policy Influenced Decision to Accept Position at VT</i>	
Yes	8
No	17

*“That was one of the reasons I chose VT because eventually I would like to start a family and knowing that I had the flexibility to do that made me feel that work-life was actually valued here.”*

*“They are especially important to me in terms of retention. The job that my husband found is about an hour away from Blacksburg. So, I commute. So, policies that will add flexibility to both my stop the clock and modified duties, if we are going to have a family are going to be even more important because there was not work for him at the time we came to Blacksburg. This will certainly contribute to my retention.”*

*“I thought it was really good and I was really glad the dean shared it with me. I also thought it would be better known by everyone. When I interviewed I got the perception that everybody knew about this and it was very clear and obvious, and then once I accepted the position here, it turned out that not everybody knew about it. That was a little puzzling for me. You know what I mean. You have a picture and then when you get here, people are like, “oh, really?”*

*“I think they are really good. I think there should be a way to advertise them a little bit more. Maybe if I was a female those things would have been talked about a little bit more. The answer is kind of tricky. You don’t want to cross certain boundaries during the interview. Maybe, if they were given in a brochure.”*

*“I think that it’s something that could be made more visible. I’ve heard about it, but I don’t really understand and I’ve gone to the website—but it’s kind of hard to find the information.”*

*“These policies are crucial to recruit younger people who value both their professional careers and their family lives and people who value flexibility. I am on the older edge of generation X, but the things you hear about younger people is, the more flexible the better and sometimes in a higher ed institution we kind of cling on to old ways because that’s the way we did them.”*

### *Child Care*

Study items related to child care asked respondents whether child care was an issue for them before accepting their positions. If child care was an issue for participants, they were then asked to identify whether they explored child care options, how child care options compared to options they explored elsewhere, and if the availability of child care options influenced their decision to accept a position at Virginia Tech.

Six (n=6) participants indicated that child care was an issue for them before accepting their positions. Of those, five (n=5) participants investigated child care options in Blacksburg and the surrounding communities for child care. All respondents reported being dissatisfied with the options available to faculty and their frustration with finding appropriate childcare. Three reported that the availability of child care was an important factor in their decision to accept a position at Virginia Tech. Items in the child care section were the most variable in terms of being applicable to participants. Even though the child care items did not apply to all participants in this study, some were able to comment on their impressions of child care availability and policies. Table 4 lists specific responses about child care items, and selected quotes from participants are included to describe their experiences with child care options and their impression of child care policies.

*“We looked around—we spent two months finding a day care. Both me and my wife are working, so it affects us.”*

*“VT has a daycare also, but there is a waiting list. They should make some priority for new hires. That could help recruit new people here.”*

*“No, but it did change how long of a maternity leave I had to take—I was forced to take. I was forced to take a 4 month maternity leave, which was fine for me as a Mom, but it was not ideal for the working world.”*

Table 4: Child-Care Policies

<i>Was Child-care an Issue</i>	
Yes	6
No	19
<i>Investigated Child-care options Before Accepting Position</i>	
Yes	5
No	7
N/A	13
<i>Child-care Options Compared to Options Elsewhere</i>	
Comparable	0
Not comparable	2
Poor	5
<i>Availability of Child-care Options Influenced Decision to Accept Position at VT</i>	
Yes	3
No	2

Note. Child-care questions did not apply to all participants

*“Poor at best. The other institutions had a much greater availability.”*

*“Equally bad and worse than some other places. There is a scarcity here that I don’t understand. I was lucky to get my son in the lab school, which I think is really wonderful. But my baby daughter is not even in Blacksburg, she’s in Christiansburg.”*

*“Terrible—If we knew this, we might have not come.”*

*“I accepted it not knowing what’s going on. In general, childcare is available, but here it is not an option—it’s just not available. That would have influenced me in getting a job. I had to bring my mom to take of my daughter. She’s temporarily here.”*

*“It’s going to become an issue. I know numerous parents that take their children to several different day cares because they can’t get their children into the same daycare. Not to mention, the day care that is available is poor at best. There are very few, in my mind, and I am very picky, quality day cares in Blacksburg or in surrounding area. It is certainly going to impact the recruitment and retention of faculty. I could almost guarantee that. Rainbow Riders is considered the premiere day care and they have told me that he (my son) will definitely not get in the subsequent year (he has been on the waiting list for two years). So we are talking about a three to four year waiting list for the premiere day care and that to me is unacceptable. If VT wants to retain faculty members, they are going to have to do something about it because, right now, the only daycare that Evan got into is in the complete opposite direction to where we live. We live in Riner—it’s a fifteen*

*minute drive here, but I drive 15 minutes past Blacksburg to drop him off and pick him up, so it takes me an hour—which is very wearing. To think that if we have another one, we would have, may have to put the second child in another day care. Well, that adds another stop at another location to my commute. You now just spent two to three hours on the road everyday.”*

*“The university should make an attempt to indicate to new faculty that they will provide some funds for that. The childcare in Blacksburg is cheap as compared to other places in the US, but if you are forced to hire a private sitter, you have to pay more than what others are paying, so to compensate for that, the university should have some type of system established for that. In general, if you have to hire somebody, it will cost you \$300 more than sending your child to child care. There are no other options, I cannot take my kid to work, someone has to take care of your kid.”*

*“If I had a need for it, it would make a huge difference. It would make a difference as to whether I could keep my job. It’s not just retention in the sense of people wouldn’t be unhappy, but it also, if you are a tenure track faculty, you have to do a significant amount of research. So, having child care available would be a necessity.”*

*“It’s really important. It just surprises me that there is so much interest in women, but when they recruit they fail to tell them at all—“hey get here, but for two weeks before school starts, there is no child care. Everybody closes and goes on vacation, so you are stuck.” It was awful. I got here and no one told me that there was a hiatus for childcare. I had no where to take my child. I was starting as a new faculty member. There was little connection with anyone about what I should do, what I can do. It was pretty much my own problem. I actually spoke to the provost about the issues of enabling women/advancing women—to try to develop a more constituency within the university. There is just no recognition for the single most important thing to women when they start working and that’s what to do with their children, and what’s going to happen when they come. That issue that all of the childcare facilities are closed for the first two weeks before school starts is not even discussed or noted. Your department chair gives no information. There is no procedure. It’s all individual, it’s up to you. For real change to occur, for real support and real facilitation to occur with women—it has to be an institutional process, not a personal decision of whether someone is interested in the program and chooses to share it and whether or not they even think it’s important. What that means, is the faculty member’s experience will be divergent from individual to individual.”*

*“There were a couple of different schools that I interviewed. Some of the schools were really knowledgeable about childcare, they were aware that childcare would be important. I can only do a good job at work if I feel comfortable about where I leave my kid during the day. So, during the interview, some school brought me to their childcare centers and I was able to talk to some of the people there. There*

*were some schools that basically guaranteed a spot for your child if you came in as a new faculty member. Those are very, very important considerations, especially for me. I did not find that here, at all. My department head and the people that I interviewed here did not have children in their way; they couldn't help me with the childcare questions at all. I contacted the childcare office here and they basically just gave me a list of daycares, but they were really not very informative. I then tried to contact day care centers here, and even the day care center at the university was basically like, there's a waiting list—a couple of years. I felt like I should have signed up my kid when I wasn't even sure if I was going to work here. It's really, really a big issue.”*

### *Summary*

In summary, participants expressed the importance of all of these policies and programs in terms of recruiting new hires to Virginia Tech. The policies seemed to be particularly critical in retaining new faculty. Respondents expressed a concern about finding information about the availability of these policies and whether their department chairs and deans are knowledgeable about the policies. Some suggested that a uniform process should be in place to make new hires aware of these policies.

Of all of the issues discussed, child care seemed to be the issue that concerned participants the most. Some noted that child care was not a concern at the time of their hire, but will become a concern if they decide to have children. Those who currently have children expressed having to find child care outside the Blacksburg area and this factor impacting their commute to work daily. Overall, participants wanted more attention to be given to the issue of child care for faculty members.

In light of participants' responses and concerns, several immediate practical recommendations are suggested. While some participants acknowledged being made aware of certain faculty policies during the interview process, all were not. This suggests that policies are not being openly discussed as a routine part of the hiring process. Hiring teams and department heads can provide literature and direct new hires to websites especially designed for highlighting such policies so that new hires can easily access information about these policies.

Not only should policies be highly visible during the interview process, but information should be provided again at the appointment process. Such policies could be a part of a “check list” of information that new hires sign off on during the appointment process indicating that they have been made aware of these policies and understand them.

More resources could be made available to increase the availability of child care services for new hires who have children. This would show new hires (as well as current faculty members with children) that the university is concerned about these issues and is interested in retaining faculty. Clearly, the child care services provided by the university did not seem to be enough and the services in the Blacksburg area did not seem to be adequate. Channeling more resources to child care services would remedy this concern.