

Caregiving Task Force Progress Report, Fall 2020

Compiled by an independent task force composed of UW System faculty, staff, and instructors



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Throughout the fall semester, a [systemwide task force dedicated to caregiving and COVID-19](#) has worked closely with many campuses across the UW System to develop communications, implement guidelines, and coordinate resources to support caregivers at all student and employee classification levels. [Local news outlets](#), [student newspapers](#), [Inside Higher Ed](#), the National Women's Studies Association, and other nationwide networks have recognized this UW System network for its dual focus on immediate, actionable steps and long-term sustainability initiatives.

The task force consists of [faculty, instructors, academic staff, and university staff](#) from all campuses. In addition to defining caregiving as a [gender equity issue](#), we've joined a [broader national conversation](#) underscoring how caregiving is an [intersectional issue](#) with [varying impacts](#) for people of all identity positions and employee classification levels within [higher ed](#). Our work also defines caregiving to include a range of scenarios including eldercare, virtual schooling for children of all ages, support for family members and children with disabilities, and mental health concerns. You can read a summary of our goals [here](#).

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Throughout the semester, task force members worked directly with campus leadership, human resources, faculty senate, academic staff councils, and other groups to implement the following task force recommendations:

1. The development and distribution of clear, campus-wide communication from campus leadership dedicated specifically to the hardships faced by caregivers and detailed guidelines for how to extend flexibility and support employees at all classification levels.

Why is this important? Many supervisors and department chairs reported they did not know how to handle the need for employee flexibility due to daycare closures, virtual schooling, and other caregiving demands. Many employees also reported feeling uncomfortable broaching this topic with their supervisor. A clear directive from human resources or campus leadership reduced this confusion, underscored the importance of flexibility, and sent a clear signal that the campus supported caregivers. Clear communication (opposed to tacit guidance) also protects against implicit bias.

Where can I find examples of this work? UW-Madison, UW-Stevens Point, UW-Green Bay, and UW-LaCrosse all released communications dedicated specifically to caregiving which circulated to all members of the campus community. Other campuses, such as UW-Oshkosh, released communications at the college or department level.

2. The consolidation of policies, guidelines, and resources dedicated to caregiving in one central location on campus websites.

Why is this important? Most campus COVID response pages did not have clear language pertaining to caregiving and only provided guidance for emergency leave situations. In instances where this language did exist, it was often scattered in several places and difficult to locate. By consolidating information in one central location, human resource teams assisted efforts to outline clear guidelines and best practices to support a range of scenarios effecting caregivers.

Where can I find examples of this work? UW-Madison developed an [outstanding resource page](#) which includes guidance for both [supervisors and employees](#). We also like this example from the [University of Washington](#).

3. The creation of training modules and campus education surrounding caregiving.

Task force members have hosted forums, pedagogical workshops, and STEM-related talks delving into caregiving on several campuses. Other task force members have [published on this topic](#). Task force members also received invitations to present our recommendations to campus leadership teams and the Chancellor's cabinet on six campuses.

Why is this important? Despite the local impacts of school closures and a broad and [extremely visible national conversation surrounding caregiving within academia](#), [the full range of challenges](#) facing caregivers, including [long-term career impacts](#), is a topic that needs broader and more sustained conversations on all of our campuses. We will continue to host these events and invite campus leaders throughout the spring as we work to merge the resources of the task force with sustained institutional support. We also regularly update our resource page to highlight research, [news reporting](#), and [other caregiving campaigns](#).

Where can I find examples of this work? In addition to workshops led by task force members, UW-Madison's Human Resource team developed this [training module](#) on flexibility for caregivers. We recommend that each campus develop training on this topic for all department chairs and supervisors. Many campuses have also adopted this [syllabi statement](#) for student caregivers and offered statements on caregiving in large meetings.

4. A Realignment of Work Priorities and Evaluations. Many campuses took steps to extend timelines for tenure, make course evaluations optional, and develop flexible work arrangements for faculty, instructors, and academic staff. The task force also released these guidelines for employees of all classification levels, offering options for [guidelines for tenure and evaluation](#) which account for caregiving demands.

Why is this important? As [AAUW](#), and [local](#) and [national](#) news outlets report, caregivers (particularly women and faculty of color) are leaving the work force at unprecedented levels. If campuses do not work to actively support and retain caregivers, we are concerned about future [gaps in publications, research](#), pedagogical initiatives, and leadership positions which do not reflect diverse campus communities.

Where can I find examples of this work? Chancellor Alexander and Provost Burns at UW-Green Bay distributed the [task force guidelines on tenure and evaluation](#), along with an instructional memo, to all faculty and staff. These rubrics are also in the process of receiving endorsement from other campus groups and leadership teams. Many other campuses, including UW-Superior, UW-Stevens Point, UW-Platteville, and UW-Parkside extensively surveyed faculty and staff to accommodate remote work and teaching options. UW-Madison adapted its sick leave policy to include virtual schooling, and UW-Milwaukee has offered tutoring support for the children of employees.

NEXT STEPS

The Caregiving Task Force is eager to continue partnering with all campuses in the spring. You can support this collaboration in the following ways:

1. **The task force will release a survey** to assess the challenges and impacts of caregiving on all UW-System campuses in the spring. This data will support critical efforts to identify career impacts and solutions for supporting caregivers immediately and determining next steps to address issues of inequity and retention. The task force will need participation and assistance with distribution from all campuses in this effort.
2. **Attend a workshop, forum, or talk hosted by a task force member** on your campus or hosted by the caregiving task force. We will send invitations in the spring, and these

events are a great way to learn more about the situations facing caregivers, their career challenges, and short and long-term solutions.

3. This is a complicated issue which will require a variety of short and long-term solutions to fully assess and address the impacts experienced by faculty, staff, and [students](#) who have delayed research, professional development opportunities, publication, and career advancement opportunities due to caregiving responsibilities. **The systemwide task force offers many resources and guidelines to support campuses, but strong institutional support on each campus is needed to comprehensively address this issue. UW-La Crosse, UW-Stout, and UW-Green Bay have their own campus task forces or caregiving committees dedicated to addressing this issue.**

4. **Finally, reach out to instructors, staff, students, and faculty to assess additional areas of support.** The task force will also share the results of our systemwide survey, and we're eager to find ways to support this initiative on each campus.

Sincerely,

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