Parenting While in the Academy
March 4, 2015, 5-6:30PM
Houston Hall

Speakers:
- Rob Lieberthal – Assistant Professor Jefferson School of Population Health (Wharton PhD Alum)
- Jill Shashaty – Assistant Professor Community College of Philadelphia (Penn PhD Alum)
- Jim Gee – Associate Professor Radiologic Science Perelman School of Medicine
- Lubna Mian – Director of Faculty Development & Equity Programs, Faculty Affairs Office

Career Services Host and Moderator: Fatimah Williams Castro – Associate Director, Career Services, University of Pennsylvania.

Presentation Notes:
- Jill
  - Brought her newborn, who is 3 months today.
  - She was a 3rd year in graduate school and 30 years of age, and had been for married 5 years – had her first child
  - Delayed coursework.
  - Two children during dissertation writing
    - 1st child just before dissertation writing
    - 2nd child during dissertation writing
  - Job interviews
    - When an offer was made, she negotiated start in spring, rather than the fall. During the negotiation she was certain to stress her commitment to the college and to teaching and research.
  - Took a year’s leave of absence for 4th child – on leave now.
  - Short term changes after each child
    - Post-partum & healing - took 6 weeks to get back to normal.
    - Nursing happens 8-12 times per day so it becomes the rhythm of the day. Some women have problems with nursing, which can further complicate things.
    - Profound sleep deprivation - affected concentration my mood, work was slower.
    - New outlook in career, what I was doing/studying.
  - Long term
    - Child care is needed and it costs.
    - Children affect both parents’ work lives. Husband also had to manage childcare, fitting it in, and sharing responsibilities.
    - When you have children, it may be more difficult to deal with emergencies. For example, like today, when it’s raining it takes more time to get ready and arrive at events. Things can take twice as long.
    - Career plans did not change. She wanted a faculty career and community college teaching.
  - Positive
• Less anxiety about my academic work & dissertation. I didn’t have time or energy to worry.
  o Naps and a child’s sleep schedule dictates the whole family’s schedule
  o Speaking as a Professor (strategies)
    ▪ Must have protected work time—off the hook from parenting for 4-5 hour blocks—This goes for both parents, if they have an academic career or not.
    ▪ Grad school was flexible, but child care can eat into that.
    ▪ Difficult to find time for “extras”
      • Reading groups, lectures, and happy hours all happen when babysitter is gone & child care isn’t open.
      • It was hard to budget time for the extras.
    ▪ Be okay with being a little alienated as a PhD student who is expecting a child or has a child. I was the only pregnant grad student in my department at the time.
  o Job search
    ▪ Research and learn about your rights and responsibilities as a new hire. Then practice what you’re going to say during job interviews and negotiations because it’s awkward and you might get odd or illegal questions.
    ▪ Project confidence, poise, and that you have a plan, even if things feel uncertain or unsure about how things are going to work.
  o Navigating
    ▪ Develop excellent time management and efficiency skills.
    ▪ Children don’t exempt you from secondary responsibilities (i.e. subbing for other faculty, attending dept. meetings).
    ▪ Get the best child care you can afford for peace of mind.
    ▪ Seek a support network of other academic families.
    ▪ Tensions between being a professional & parent will continue.
    ▪ Good to know when to say when.
• Rob
  o Wharton PhD 2011
  o Now has 3 children. He welcomed his 1st child in 2010 who was born while working on dissertation and doing fly outs.
  o Next 2 children both while an assistant professor
  o He accelerated that year though it may have been better if he’d waited. Wife was a teacher in Philly public school. She wanted to be at home with her children. Even though it sounds outdated, he felt pressure like “I need to get a job & feed my family.”
  o One university asked for a fly out on his wife’s due date. He asked for two weeks earlier. He knew someone at the school who helped him ask. “It would have been different if I were a woman. They assumed that I would be available the day after.”
  o I didn’t tell my advisor. Didn’t choose to have that relationship with my advisor. I took care of my son in the mornings while wife was working.
I screwed up with my second child. I was 2nd year faculty member, teaching 2 classes. Went back to work a week later. Wife felt unsupported and rightfully so.

- 3rd child, took paternity leave. Couldn’t find anyone at his institution who’d taken paternity leave. His friend (a lawyer) helped him. He just so happened to be writing an FMLA article at the time.
- Didn’t check institutional email during his leave.
- Was PI on one grant. Hired a data analyst so he didn’t have to do the analysis while he was away. Usually analyzes his own data. His chair suggested he hire the data analyst.
- Got as many papers out before he went on leave (3 papers).

Parenting puts work in perspective

- People can love me, institutions cannot love me. Where does my job fit in that scheme?
- It’s not uncommon to have work meetings at 8 am or even 7 am because I’m at a clinical institution. (It’s a choice) I generally don’t make those meetings.

Teaching online

- Jefferson is 100% online now except for public health students. This helps because I can work from home more often.
- Most students are adults – 30s, 40s, 50s – professionals

Some people said “academics isn’t a 9-5 job” and traditional family leave does not apply in the academy, though no one deterred me from taking the leave.

Wanted to talk to someone who had taken paternity leave before. Wanted to know if I was doing it right or not, but I just had to do it. Nothing bad happened.

- Jim
  - Had kids later in his career. He and his wife were two busy professionals, doing very well in their professional lives, then maternal imperative struck.
  - If you wait longer, additional complexity (and anxiety) of getting pregnant. 1st child IVF process. 2nd child was spontaneous.
  - Wife works in industry; he’s in academia.
  - Parenting challenges are pervasive, but there’s much more flexibility to parent in academia. You’re your own boss as a research scientist. If you work in industry, you hope you get paid much more so you can make up for the lack of flexibility (at least compared with academia) as well as cover the costs of quality childcare.

- Lubna
  - Lawyer by training
  - Her work focuses on Workforce issues, Gender equity issues
  - Academics often ask, When is the best time to have children?” There really is no best time. Depends on where you are in your relationship, socioeconomic status (can you afford children, how many), and other factors.
  - Penn policies are very good. The University has spent a lot of time and energy in training and policy development in this area. The policies differ for graduate students, postdocs and faculty. Some of the policies for PhD students are
    - Gender neutral policies
      - Penn PhD students receive 8 weeks off for birth/adoption
      - A PhD student may take unpaid “family leave of absence” for one or two semesters
• [http://provost.upenn.edu/pennbook/2013/02/13/family-friendly-policies-for-phd-students](http://provost.upenn.edu/pennbook/2013/02/13/family-friendly-policies-for-phd-students)
  • Grants for childcare $500-$4000
  • Access to care.com (to locate caregivers, subsidized for 5 days)
  • Emergency childcare program
  • Some of these benefits are offered on a sliding scale.

  o Graduate students should visit the Family Resource Center located within the Graduate Student Center
  o During an interview, when do you ask about policies and how? Generally, ask about support for families, and see how people respond.

Questions from audience:

• Question from biomed science student: seeking a postdoc and interviewing primarily with labs. Would I talk to the lab director or someone else about having a child and implications of this for my training?
  o Be transparent. You do not need to disclose early or seem to be asking permission. At our institution, we are focused on career long and lifelong development for our employees. However, that model does not fit the explicitly limited time postdocs and fellows are hired for. We are struggling with that tension between focusing on the long term employee benefits and retention with the short term nature of postdoctoral employees. (Rob)
  o Your lab PI runs your life so you want to share at some point, as it will have implications on the work. Also, I treat my postdocs as family. I’ve gone to their weddings and I know about their families. Not everyone may have this relationship, though. (Jim)

• Postdoc: My PI has never had a postdoc or student with children. When to bring up having kids? Not sure what chemicals are harmful? We’ll be navigating this together.
  o Think about how you might work with the lab and your PI. Show that you have a plan. Even if you do not intend to disclose to PI, make sure to have a plan both for your own sake and as a professional obligation to PI – imagine yourself in your PI’s shoes or yourself as PI some day, and consider how you would like your own trainees to act in the same situation. (Jim)
  o It’s common that pregnancies are unsuccessful. You may not want to disclose early and then have to tell someone who’s not close to you that it was unsuccessful. (Lubna)
  o At Rob’s institution, the university Environmental Health Officer fields questions about chemicals in labs and lab based classes, as this issue may affect pregnant students and faculty. You should also consult your doctor. (Rob)

• How to manage interviews and campus visits while pregnant?
  o The literature clearly shows the widespread stereotyping of pregnant women as unreliable and less committed. (Lubna)
  o Compensate – dress a bit more professionally & conservatively; show that you are happy with your childcare and are supported. Project a much more professional image than you might normally. Practice the interview so you can present yourself the best possible way. (Lubna and Jill)
• When you have kids do you really lose time for “extras”?
  o Rob
    ▪ Made a plan – yoga 1x/week, meet with friends 1x/week
    ▪ Carves time in his workday because that’s the time he can use for things he wants to do.
  o Jill
    ▪ There was no self-care and leisure time. That’s what motivated her to ask for time off this year. You must decide to make time for yourself
      • Meets husband for lunch instead of for dinner
      • Makes time to do things like read a book
  o Jim
    ▪ A benefit to having kids at an older age, you’ve already had your fun. You’re already settling down into your activities.
  o Lubna
    ▪ The tough stages won’t last forever.