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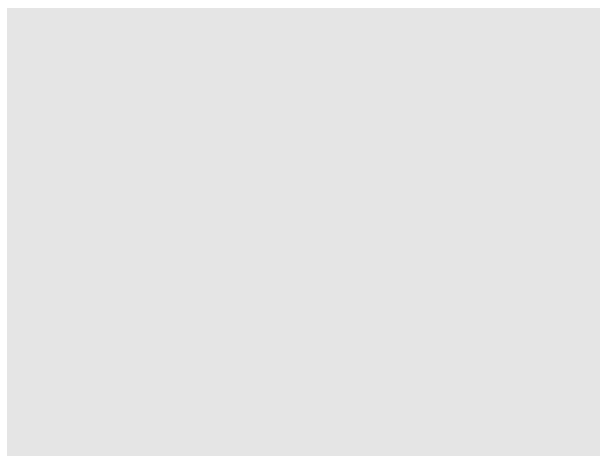
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WKU faculty clear way for new paid leave policy

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Lauren McClain

Submitted

Western Kentucky University's Faculty Senate approved a paid parental leave policy for the second time Thursday, clearing the way for WKU to become the first public university in Kentucky to offer its faculty members one semester off work when they welcome newborns or adopted children into their families.

Lauren McClain, a sociology professor and the policy's chief supporter, welcomed the vote of confidence, which represented the second time the universitywide policy won a unanimous endorsement from the group.

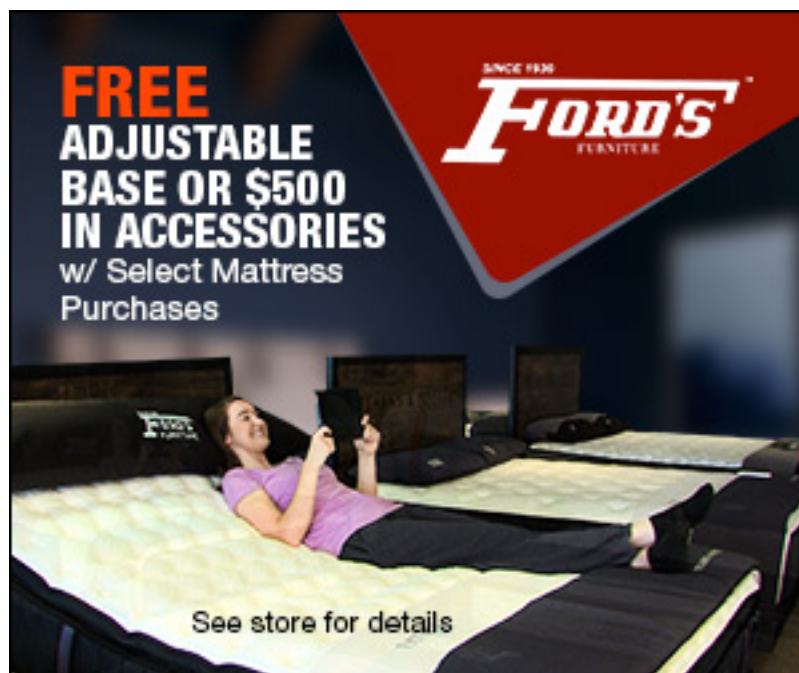
"I am really excited about the positive effects that this is going to have on my colleagues' lives," she told the Daily News after the senate's regular monthly meeting.

McClain said she was inspired to develop an official paid parental leave policy after her own pregnancy and experience navigating WKU's patchwork of ad-hoc parental leave agreements. It was developed with support from the senate's Faculty Welfare and Professional Responsibilities Committee and with help from Tony Glisson, WKU's human resources director.

The policy would allow faculty members to take off up to one full semester or 16 consecutive semester weeks that cross terms (for example, if the birth or adoption happens in the middle of one semester). Leave requests under the policy would have to be made at least 30 days in advance.

Last semester, after it won the Faculty Senate’s approval, the policy was forwarded to WKU’s Council of Academic Deans for review. That group works with WKU Provost Cheryl Stevens.

After reviewing the policy, the council requested that the 16-week leave be shared between married faculty members, rather than each individual getting 16 semester weeks off work.



That request brought it back before the Faculty Senate on Thursday for another round of approval, which the senate granted after some discussion.

The revised policy will now go to Stevens for review, but she signaled the administration’s support in an interview with the Daily News.

“We’re very excited about the implementation of this benefit,” Stevens said, calling the policy “very supportive of our young families” at the university.

McClain, who researches paid family leave in her work as a sociology professor, has said WKU would be the first public university in Kentucky to have such a policy if implemented. It also would provide for work arrangements that permit affected faculty members to be reassigned to a relevant job – such as research or administrative duties – if necessary.

Full-time faculty members would be automatically eligible for this benefit, while part-time faculty would have to be employed for one full semester (either spring or fall) to be eligible.

For McClain, it's a benefit she hopes will boost faculty morale and entice talented faculty to stay at WKU.

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Aaron Mudd

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