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*The Faculty*

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<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v49/i25/25a01001.htm>**Baby, Baby, Baby****Pregnancies test a department's ability to cope**

By ROBIN WILSON

Ithaca, N.Y.

In August, Marie Garland began calling her colleagues at Ithaca College with exciting news. She was pregnant.

The baby, due this month, would be a rarity in the college's department of organizational communication, learning, and design. No one there had had a baby in 17 years.

Although Ms. Garland's baby was expected to arrive during the winter semester, the department's chairman, Gordon Rowland, wasn't too concerned. The department's eight other tenured and tenure-track faculty members could cover Ms. Garland's two courses during the six or seven weeks she planned to be gone.

Then, at the first faculty meeting of the year, Noelle Wall Sweany -- who had just started in the department as an assistant professor -- announced that she, too, was pregnant. And her baby was due a day after Ms. Garland's.

In late September, as Mr. Rowland was trying to piece together teaching schedules for the winter term, Rama K. Hart, the department's third female assistant professor, stopped by his corner office in the Roy H. Park School of Communications here.

The chairman told her he would be asking others to fill in for the two pregnant women. "I'm hoping you can be flexible," Ms. Hart, who is in her second year here, recalls him telling her. She smiled before commenting: "You know how good things come in three's?" (Actually, it's bad things that happen in three's, she later realized.) Her due date was seven weeks after the other two.

"When the first person told you, you said, 'Great. This is terrific,'" recalls Mr. Rowland. "Then the second person said she was also pregnant, and I said, 'Good.' And then with the third, I must admit, I said, 'Oh, no.'"

Even so, administrators at Ithaca were much more sympathetic than the pregnant women had expected, and more supportive than officials at other colleges have been known to be. Having a baby before tenure is always risky -- especially at a major research university. But at this teaching-oriented college the women believe their department is behind them, and they don't expect having a baby to have a negative impact on their careers.

Thomas W. Bohn, dean of the Park school, was so overwhelmed when Ms. Hart stopped by to tell him her news that he threw off his glasses and hurried around his desk to give her a hug. But he knew that these pregnancies posed a problem. "It was, bam!" he says to describe the announcements. "We knew we had to come up with something different."

The usual academic solution to a maternity leave -- asking other professors to cover courses -- simply wouldn't work with a third of the department's faculty out. (The pregnant women were to teach nine courses in all this winter.) But in looking for an alternative, the department found itself in uncharted territory. Ithaca has a family-leave policy for faculty members, but it has no plans for guiding departments in coping with a new mother's absence. Mr. Rowland faced the predicament times three.

### **Unusual Situation**

While the situation in Mr. Rowland's department is unusual, Ithaca's lack of guidelines is not. Most colleges and universities handle these circumstances on an ad hoc basis, says Lotte Bailyn, a professor of management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who led the university's efforts to rewrite its family-leave policies last year.

Sometimes a department decides not to offer a faculty member's courses during the time she is gone. If the courses must be taught and a department can't cover them on its own, the chairman may ask the university to make a temporary hire. But few universities have formal policies to guide departments, says Ms. Bailyn.

The University of California at Davis is an exception. Just last month, it agreed to establish a central pot of money to be used for hiring replacements, and to name one administrator to handle all of the requests for them. Until now, individual departments have had to make decisions about temporary hires -- and find the money -- on their own.

Professors at Ithaca have been frustrated by the lack of guidance there. "It's not appropriate to give a faculty member maternity leave and do nothing for the department," says Sandra L. Herndon, a senior member of the organizational communication department. "The gap in the policy just puts pressure on the woman," who feels compelled to help the college deal with her absence, she says.

Chief among the concerns at Ithaca are undergraduates, who pay \$21,102 a year to attend the private college. "How were we going to explain this to students and not have them bolting from our class enrollments?" Mr. Rowland says.

The department eventually came up with a unique arrangement that took hours of planning, extra money, and the blessing of the college's provost. But, as Mr. Rowland is still finding out, even the best-prepared department must still face the unexpected.

### **'Not the Right Time'**

Like many academic women who decide to have children, Ms. Garland had hoped to have her baby in the summer. That would have allowed her to avoid foisting her classes and advisees off on her colleagues. She was nervous when she realized she had missed her target date of late spring or early summer. "How are people going to respond to this?" she remembers thinking. "I'm going to have a baby in February, and that's not the right time."

Ms. Garland even picked up a copy of *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), but she couldn't find any guidance about having a baby before earning tenure or

about breaking the news to her department. If it wasn't mentioned in the book, Ms. Garland thought it must be wrong to even contemplate it, she says.

A diligent teacher with a relaxed classroom manner that makes her seem not much older than her students, Ms. Garland figured the best approach was to find a way to make her forthcoming leave as easy as possible on her department. The 32-year-old professor came to Mr. Rowland last summer with a detailed plan: Her colleagues and outside guest speakers could cover her courses, and she would return after just three weeks to teach once a week. She would be available by computer during her leave to help lead class discussions.

"I came in with a plan, and said: 'Here's what I'm doing and it's not going to affect you at all,'" recalls Ms. Garland, who has been at Ithaca four years. Mr. Rowland was pleased with her initiative. He has been chairman since 1991, but had never been through this before. While the department has employed female faculty members in the past, no one had given birth since Diane Gayeski, a tenured professor, had her son in 1986. He was born in the summer.

Faculty members have pitched in to cover courses when their colleagues were sick or going through a divorce, for example. But that never lasted for more than a couple of weeks at a time.

Ms. Sweany, 30, who married her high-school sweetheart eight years ago, hadn't planned to embark on a new job and her first pregnancy at the same time. Moving to Ithaca this past fall following two years on the tenure track at the University of the Incarnate Word, in San Antonio, she couldn't help thinking that Ms. Garland "had earned the right to take that time off, and I was just coming in and asking for something extra."

As the first two women announced their news, Ms. Hart grew apprehensive about her secret. But she was also thrilled to learn she wouldn't be alone.

All three women go to the same obstetrics practice in town and have shopped for maternity clothes together. They frequently crowd into Ms. Sweany's small office, joking about "the six of us getting together," to trade stories about their bodies and their husbands' reactions to their pregnancies. On a bulletin board in Ms. Sweany's office is a Christmas card she made with a sonogram picture of her baby wearing a Santa's hat. Inside it says: "Fetus Navidad."

Ms. Gayeski, who leads the department's personnel committee, telephoned her fiancé soon after Ms. Hart announced her news last fall. "I said, 'You're not going to believe this, but another one is pregnant,'" recalls Ms. Gayeski. It was her fiancé, also a professor, who suggested that the department hire people rather than try to cover on its own.

### **A Tricky Situation**

With budgets tight, there was no way the college would go for hiring a person to fill in for each of the three women. So Mr. Rowland began to consider hiring two people to help cover the women's courses. And instead of hiring part-timers for only the seven or eight weeks each woman planned to be out, Mr. Rowland wanted the replacements there for the entire 15-week semester.

Everyone knew that, in a relatively small town like Ithaca, finding two new full-time professors to work for just one semester would not be easy -- especially in a department that covers theoretical topics such as organizational behavior and hands-on material like instructional design. "It's a difficult area to find qualified faculty in," says Peter W. Bardaglio, the provost. "People who are good at this stuff often get picked off by the private sector."

In late October, Mr. Rowland sent a memo to the dean, proposing that the college hire two full-timers for the semester. The plan would cost about \$50,000 plus health benefits, a sizable sum considering that the college would not save any money from the family leaves because the pregnant women planned to take off only the amount of time they would be paid. "Quite honestly, I didn't think it was going to fly," Mr. Rowland admits now.

Under the department's plan, one of the two new hires would be assigned to teach each of the courses the pregnant women were scheduled to teach. The new hires and the professors would team teach until the babies were born, at which time the new teachers would take over while the professors were on leave. Making that work would be tricky.

"Each class for a faculty member becomes a personal laboratory, an extension of the faculty member's personality," says Mr. Bohn. "You can't say [to a replacement]: 'Here's the desk. Here's what you do. You process these forms and type these reports.'"

Even before there was a clear plan to cope with the women's absence, the department wanted to announce its stunning news. But Mr. Rowland quickly learned that the pregnant women had very different ideas about that. The women, after all, are scholars of organizational culture and communication, so the subject is not only personal, it's professional.

Ms. Garland announced her pregnancy to her students on the first day of classes last fall by telling them: "You're going to see my belly grow." She explains in an interview: "I'm a female and a professional. Organizations are not going to change unless people accept that those two things can't be separated."

But Ms. Hart, who is 38, wanted to await the results of an amniocentesis test. She also had a different perspective, having worked for 12 years as a marketing manager and an organizational consultant in the corporate world before entering academe.

"I met very powerful women who had multiple roles and managed effectively but really didn't mix work and family much," says Ms. Hart, sitting on the couch in her home while stroking her belly. In the business world, "You are not defined by your reproductive status, and you don't have any obligation whatsoever to share what's going on with you physically."

Ms. Hart has a strong sense of what's best for her career and wanted to keep her news to herself for as long as possible. After graduating from college and moving from her childhood home in Jackson, Miss. -- where her father was a professor of mathematics and computer science at Jackson State University -- Ms. Hart worked to lose her Southern accent, convinced that people would take her more seriously without it.

In late October, she and the other two women agreed to sending a short note to students. "As you can imagine, this is a very unusual situation for a small department," said the e-mail message from Mr. Rowland. "I can assure you that we will do whatever is necessary to maintain the high quality of your learning experiences."

### **Continuing Challenges**

By early December, much to Mr. Rowland's surprise, both the dean and the provost had agreed that the department's plan was the best approach, and Mr. Bardaglio found money in a discretionary fund. "To have this kind of hole open up in the curriculum on such short notice is daunting," he acknowledges.

The department had to move quickly, though, if it was going to hire people in time for the new semester, which started January 20. Tammy L. Shapiro submitted her CV in December and heard back from Mr.

Rowland within 24 hours. She is a perfect fit for Ms. Garland's undergraduate course, "Communication in Culturally Diverse Organizations," and for a graduate course called "Organizational Culture and Diversity." Ms. Shapiro, who held a tenure-track job at George Mason University but quit in 1998 and moved to Ithaca - where she has family -- to raise her own small daughter, could also teach Ms. Hart's two sections of "Corporate Communication: Strategy and Design."

Ironically, says Ms. Shapiro, she has had to do some juggling of her own at home. "I couldn't take this position to support Marie and Rama if I hadn't had in place a support network to take care of my daughter" after school, says Ms. Shapiro. During her first two weeks on the campus, her 9-year-old was sick and stayed out of school for three days. "These women are dealing with the beginning, but these challenges continue and become more complicated," she says.

The department also hired Kimberly Kenyon, a business consultant in instructional design, to teach three courses with Ms. Sweany -- including "Interactive Media" and "Instructional Design" -- and two sections of Ms. Hart's "The Digital Workplace."

But Mr. Rowland's plan hit some snags along the way. At first the college told him he could offer health benefits to the temporary teachers, but then it told him he couldn't. The college finally gave the women benefits, but it did not have contracts ready for Ms. Kenyon and Ms. Shapiro until more than a week after they had started work.

After his experience, Mr. Rowland believes the college should have a standard policy to help departments cope with maternity leaves. "Are we just going to have to make this up all the time?" he asks. "We don't know where to turn for what part of the issue."

Just after the winter semester began and it seemed that Mr. Rowland had pulled off the impossible, he received more unexpected news: Ms. Hart, who had originally said she would return to teaching this fall, after her maternity leave, said she had decided to resign after giving birth in late March. She wants to be a full-time mother for a while.

It would be understandable if Mr. Rowland were a bit upset, particularly because he worked so hard to accommodate the women. Now, the department must start a search for Ms. Hart's replacement for next academic year, and Mr. Rowland must rework the fall's course schedule. "Tenured faculty do an awful lot of work trying to help younger faculty members become acclimated and it is disappointing when they leave," he says diplomatically.

Ms. Hart is confident that she'll make her way back into academe soon. Her optimism is well-grounded, given that the academic job market in organizational communication is much healthier than in fields like English or history. "I don't feel my career is in jeopardy from having a kid," she says. "I will get tenure someday, somewhere."

In a department of only 130 student majors, the three pregnancies are big news. Janet N. Williams, a sophomore, has classes with all three of the pregnant professors this term. "You take classes because you like the style a professor has," she says. Learning that her professors would be replaced halfway through the semester with another teacher "is exciting, but disappointing," she adds.

### 'Any Babies Yet?'

One afternoon shortly before her due date, Ms. Garland devotes an undergraduate class to a discussion of how the department is handling the situation. The topic is appropriate, she says, because later in the semester,

students will examine how organizations create policies to accommodate changes in their employees' life circumstances.

Tammy Shapiro, the replacement teacher, sits nearby while Ms. Garland fields questions and comments from students. "In high school, my teacher was pregnant, and the replacement was horrendous," says Gregg M. Goldstein, a senior. "When I first saw Tammy here, I got nervous." But another student, Jennifer E. Schildt, tells Ms. Shapiro not to worry. "I want you to know we're a nice group of kids," she says, and then whispers: "Don't be nervous."

Some of Ms. Garland's students want to get down to specifics -- perhaps because at this point, the professor's midsection is humongous. "Do you have a plan if you go into labor at school?" asks Anne E. Cutshall, a senior. Ms. Garland tries to put her at ease. "The worst that could happen is if my water broke in class, but I don't think I'm going to give birth in Room 277."

At that, Ms. Garland closes for the day: "See you all on Tuesday -- I hope."

A week later, the dean, Mr. Bohn, pops his head into Ms. Gayeski's office. "Any babies yet?" he asks.

In fact, Ms. Sweany and her husband are headed to the hospital. She is in labor a week early.

The next morning at 2:33, Madeline Lane Sweany is born. A week and a half later, Maia Garland Kubick arrives.

Mr. Rowland sends out e-mail messages announcing the births: Both girls weigh 8 pounds 9 ounces.

Then he sends another message: An assistant professor in the Park school has just announced she is pregnant. This time, Mr. Rowland isn't concerned.

"Thankfully, it's not in my department."

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