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Newly Hired and Pregnant

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By [JEANNE S. ZAINO](#)

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I wouldn't have believed it three months ago, but there are a few unexpected benefits to [being pregnant during your first semester](#) on the tenure track. For one thing, if you are one of those people who prefer that the nine months go by quickly (and I am), it is one way to ensure that that happens.

In between figuring out where to park and how to make copies, I've had to get an ID, memorize countless computer passwords, find my way around campus, meet new students and colleagues, attend meetings, teach four courses, run an honors seminar, and occasionally dream of the time when I might get back to my own research and writing. Consequently, I had little time to think about my burgeoning belly.

Throughout the fall semester I would occasionally catch a glimpse of myself reflected in a door or window, and think, "Who's that?" before reality dawned. The weeks have slipped by so quickly I was stunned when my doctor, during a routine visit, announced, "It's all downhill from here, only six or seven weeks to go now."

Almost none of the things I worried about during those first anxious weeks after I found out that I was unexpectedly pregnant have come to pass -- not yet anyway. I lost so much sleep, for instance, worrying about how to tell the chairman of my department, the dean, and the provost that I was pregnant. I am not quite sure how I expected them to react, but what I didn't anticipate was the amount of support and good wishes they expressed and continue to convey.

I decided early on not to take a maternity leave once the baby was born, because I couldn't fathom the idea of missing up to 12 weeks in my first year on the job. My decision was made that much easier when I learned I was due over winter break. During the heat of the summer, three weeks at home before returning to work in January seemed like more than enough time.

Despite my decision, the dean insisted on giving me information about the college's policy, should I change my mind, and he assured me that we would make it work. A few weeks later, the associate dean, whom I had met only briefly, invited me for coffee, offered her support, and assured me that I was not alone. She told me that in her years at Iona, she and other faculty members had managed to successfully balance teaching, pregnancy, maternity leave, and motherhood and had gone on to earn tenure. I found this type of support typical of both the administration and my colleagues on the faculty.

This is not to say that I would recommend getting pregnant in your first year on the job, but I have learned that it is not necessarily a career killer. However, I have encountered a few unexpected challenges, some small and relatively insignificant, others more profound. For instance:

- As a teaching assistant and adjunct, I lugged around campus one, and in some cases, two heavy bags full of books, notes, disks, pens, chalk, and other essentials. It was never a problem until this semester, when I realized it wasn't safe to carry such heavy bags around anymore. So I invested in a large black briefcase on wheels, which I began pulling around campus. It's worked fairly well, even though it makes me look like I'm getting ready to board a plane.
- I have always stood when I lectured or led a class discussion. The idea of sitting never even crossed my mind until students began approaching to let me know that if I got tired, I should consider using the stool by the lectern. One industrious student even went to another classroom to locate a more comfortable chair for me while I proctored an exam.
- Students are not only caring and concerned, but more interested and excited than I ever imagined they would be. I struggled early in the semester with whether I should say anything about my pregnancy in front of the class, perhaps just to reassure the students that their semester would not be interrupted. I am not sure if I ever really decided against it or if I just kept mulling it over in my mind until the opportunity passed, and my "circumstance" became so obvious no formal statement was needed. Nevertheless, students have taken it upon themselves to ask questions and express their best wishes.
- After I found out I was pregnant, I asked around for names of other people who had found themselves expecting shortly after starting a new faculty job. Even the most supportive people couldn't seem to think of anyone. The semi-logical part of me knew I could not be alone, but I was not certain until shortly after [my first piece](#) appeared and I received notes of support from a large number of people who have been in the exact same situation.

My son, Logan Pierce, was born on December 30, during winter break, as expected. What I didn't expect was how emotional I would be at the thought of leaving him at three weeks old, even with immediate family, for just a few hours at a time, three days a week. During the summer I had no qualms about returning to work so quickly; now I am not so sure.

As the spring semester gets under way, I can't help but wonder how I will make it through the next 13 weeks. Am I doing the right thing?

Jeanne S. Zaino, an assistant professor of political science at Iona College, is writing a diary of her experiences as a new mother in her first year on the tenure track.

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