



GSWS Care Work Recommendations for University of Pennsylvania

August 11, 2020

The following message was sent to President Gutmann and Provost Pritchett on August 11, 2020

Dear President Gutmann and Provost Pritchett,

We, faculty, staff, and students of the University of Pennsylvania, are writing today to call attention to the extreme circumstances of our work lives since the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Many of us have been engaged in synchronous work as parents, teachers of our own children, child care providers, and full-time employees and/or students of Penn, without pause, since March. In most cases our workloads have actually increased from our home “offices”, as faculty struggle to meet the demands of transferring courses and advising to online formats, and staff learn new technological skills to move programming online, while also dealing with new reporting requests to document the numbers of attendees and students supported each week. We have been laboring at home, using our own computers and other office supplies, with our children, elderly parents, and other dependents present, in the ultimate entanglement of work and home life. Many of us do not feel that our material conditions have been sufficiently acknowledged, nor has our plight been addressed in any meaningful way, by the University. To date, those of us who have reached out for support have been informed that there is nothing that the University can do to address our situation as caregivers, suggesting instead that we find individual solutions to what is a well-documented structural issue (<https://gsws.sas.upenn.edu/news/2020/05/13/apc/gsws-statement-covid-19-closure-care-work-and-health-disparities>); one that pre-dates the pandemic, and one that, if no immediate action is taken, will surely deepen. Below, we have outlined ten recommendations that, if taken seriously by the University, will help to alleviate some of the pressure many Penn employees and students have felt keenly over the past several months during the “work from home” period, while also supporting local educational facilities. As we prepare for the fall, it is critical that Penn take a leadership role amongst its peers by addressing these issues in a structural, comprehensive, and timely way.

We recognize that Penn employees and students are not alone in their plight. The caregiving crisis exposed by the global pandemic has been the topic of discussion in national forums for months. But we also recognize that the University of Pennsylvania enjoys resources and a privileged location in the community that could enable us not only to meet the demands of this current moment, but to be forward-looking about how we address the care work needs of our employees, students, and the surrounding Philadelphia community in the future.

We recommend the following:

1. The University should create a fund available to graduate students/faculty/staff who are facing increases in child care as a result of COVID procedures/increases in fees, or who need additional dependent care support because of school/day program/other closures. This should be a blanket fund given to all care takers with the possibility for well-remunerated caregivers to opt out.
2. The University should restructure the arrangement with the Care.com program “BackUpCare” to be by the hour not by the day. Currently, it is specified at 10 days for the year for faculty and staff (7 days for postdocs and students) and up to 10 hours in one day, but it is based on daily not hourly use. The arrangement needs to

be restructured by the hour in order to maximize on the needed time throughout the year and it should be substantially increased in response to the austere work conditions of the pandemic.

3. The University should make targeted and substantial donations to quality child care centers (<https://www.education.pa.gov/Early%20Learning/Keystone%20Stars/Pages/default.aspx>) (starting with those in zip code 19104), offsetting the costs of implementing COVID prevention recommendations and contributing to the local community.
4. The University should pay PILOTS in support of the Philadelphia Public School system, a chronically underfunded school system. This will help the district to provide instruction safely to students during the COVID period and beyond.
5. The University should immediately pause all performance appraisals for staff, allowing staff members to opt in if they choose.
6. For Academic Departments: all tenure clocks should be extended by at least one year. This should not be an opt-in extension, but a blanket extension that people can choose to decline. (Our current understanding is that this has varied by School. It should be universal and blanket.)
7. For Academic Departments: service obligations that do not have teaching releases should be re-allocated or more evenly distributed.
8. For Academic Departments: when deciding which classes to cancel because of low student enrollment or the instructor's inability to teach in person, instructors with care burdens should be prioritized.
9. For Academic Departments: prioritize co-teaching so that faculty members can share the burden of course development and teaching, and enjoy the security of backup instruction should one faculty member fall ill and/or experience a loss of caretaking support.
10. For Academic Departments: departments should adopt a 'sliding scale' of what is required to secure any given grade in any given class proportionate to how much work time was lost as a result of covid-19/unexpected care work and other acute challenges (such as those posed to Black and international students dealing with the effects of racism and a hostile political situation on top of COVID-19). This would help equalize outcomes and support students through this unprecedented time.

We urge you to give these recommendations your fullest consideration. Thank you for your attention.

Signed,

1. Alexander Adames, PhD Student, Sociology
2. Shoshana Adler, Graduate Instructor, English/SAS
3. Julia Alekseyeva, Assistant Professor of English/Cinema and Media Studies
4. Nikhil Anand, Associate Professor, Anthropology
5. Rachel Appel, Penn Libraries, Digital Preservation Librarian
6. David S Azzolina, Penn Librarians, GSWS
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