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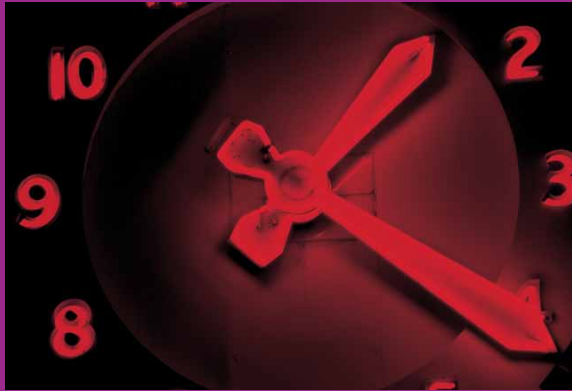
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# CLIMATE, CLOCKS, AND KIDS!

**CSW WORKSHOP GIVES TIPS  
ON TIME MANAGEMENT,  
CLIMATE ISSUES, AND WORK/  
LIFE BALANCE FOR  
FEMALE ACADEMICS**

*by Daniella Perry*

When I received a notice from CSW about an upcoming workshop on time management, climate issues for female academics, and work/life balance, I was eager to attend. Though single, at 30 years old I find that the biological clock is ticking loudly. After receiving a BS in Department of Physiological Science (now Department of Integrative Biology and Physiology) at UCLA, I decided to pursue a PhD in the Department of History instead of going to medical school because I thought I would have more flexibility and stability. After spending two and a half years in graduate school, seeing two relationships come and go, teetering on the tightrope of

the poverty line, and periodically phoning my sister for help getting through panic attacks, I certainly need tips! From what I understand, I am not alone. Anxiety among graduate students is endemic. Yet women have an added pressure. What do we do, should we do, or can we do when and if we become pregnant during graduate school or as junior faculty? My friends in the private sector feel similarly, though, and tell me that whatever I do, do not quit because the corporate world is no more forgiving. Is it, though? PhD programs have the added pressure of financial instability and often intense lonely hours. Graduate students do not have support—financial or

otherwise—for raising children, and junior faculty face additional challenges, namely, the pursuit of tenure.

CSW Director Kathleen McHugh introduced the workshop, which is part of CSW’s new mentoring initiative, noting that the issue of women and family planning is a topic in academia that is not necessarily explored in the professional context. The question she asked of the speakers was: “How can one be an academic and have a life and family?” Together, the speakers answered this question with caution and hope. They suggested that women graduate students need to be proactive in researching institutional support and to become very clear about their wants for their future, and they argued that the more conversations that occur on these issues, the faster institutions will provide assistance for families and family planning.

Laura Foster, a human rights attorney and PhD candidate in the Department of Women’s Studies at UCLA, discussed her experiences being pregnant as a graduate

## **“HOW CAN ONE BE AN ACADEMIC AND HAVE A LIFE AND FAMILY?” TOGETHER, THE SPEAKERS ANSWERED THIS QUESTION WITH CAUTION AND HOPE.**

student and pointed to the importance of finding “mommy networks,” committing to a schedule, and negotiating the politics of academia. There is no real “good time” to have a child, Foster said. We cannot control institutional structures already in place, and so we should feel confident about having a child when we are *ready*. Having her first child in her fourth year of graduate school made sense to Foster because she wanted her children to know their grandparents. Furthermore, she felt she had established an academic reputation and had more flexibility as a graduate student than she would have if she were a new faculty member. It was not easy—she defended her

dissertation two weeks before giving birth and was scheduled to do field research in southern Africa nine months later! Her first years in graduate school, however, had allowed Foster to take the time to find mentors and a committee that would be friendly and supportive of her having children while in the program. The importance of seeking out such support was a point highlighted by each of the panelists.

Financial support is a glaring concern. When worried about where the next round of funding comes from, it is difficult to imagine providing for a child whether or not you have a partner. Foster benefitted both from

## [LOPEZ] DISCUSSED HER EXPERIENCE LOOKING FOR AN ACADEMIC POSITION WHILE PREGNANT.

California's paid family leave for domestic partners legislation and insurance benefits at UCLA. Graduates and those fresh on the job market should be sure to find out the policies that are in place in their state and institution.

Once you have a child, planning a schedule is equally important. Foster shared hers. A standard 8 to 5 workday, with a lunchtime workout, allows her to spend her evenings and weekends with her family. She and her husband are vigilant about this schedule, incorporating some weekends alone as well. The added benefit for her was that she became more efficient and productive with her time on the job. Foster concluded with

tips on dealing with academic politics: We can and should be selective about where we choose to go for graduate school, post-doctoral programs and faculty positions. We must go to locations where policies work for us, she recommended, and where and when discrimination is encountered, we must make it known.

According to Marissa Lopez, Assistant Professor in the Department of English at UCLA, the only way to widen the options for women is to start and continue a dialogue. She stressed this point as she discussed her experience looking for an academic position *while* pregnant. Hers was a precarious

situation because women on the job market have been made to feel they need to hide their desire or plans to have children. Lopez could not hide the fact that she was pregnant, nor did she want to. Her experience, however, proved to be positive, and she received five job offers and numerous invitations to lecture. Her motto during her job search was "confidence is competence," adding that this is true "even if you have to fake the confidence." Lopez also found support in a book, *Mama PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life* (Rutgers, 2008), edited by Elnora Evans and Caroline Grant (see <http://www.mamaphd.com/>). This volume, which was also recommended by others in the workshop, contains essays by mothers who hold PhDs or are pursuing them. Lopez ultimately chose UCLA because the UC system is one of the most family-friendly, offering spousal hires. (Lopez's husband was offered a lecturer position at UCLA.) By making women's needs known, more institutions may be more likely to adopt similar policies.

Despite landing a position for both herself and her husband, Lopez wants to wait until she is closer to having tenure to have her second child because the emotional stress can be overwhelming. She was candid in noting that it took her a while to “get her brain back” after her first child was born. Once she did, she found parenting conducive to being productive. Like Foster, she said wanting to spend time with your new family is great incentive to get your work done! Lopez tries to finish by 4 pm every day and plans her meetings accordingly. A small, yet important tip she gave was that it is okay to say *no* to talks and colloquia. In this, as academics, we do have a luxury that those in the private/corporate world often do not have. Being selective about how much time you give to extracurriculars in your department is something graduate students often struggle with. Flexibility in this respect is a rare commodity. We should learn, she suggested, to take time for ourselves as well as our families.

## **MOORE CONCLUDED BY SAYING: “DON’T ALLOW THEM TO DEFINE YOUR WORLD.”**

Lopez concluded by saying that your choice of partner is the most important decision; that you should research institutional policies; that you can never be too organized; that you should not feel bad for feeling brain dead sometimes or wanting to be a stay-at-home mom; and, lastly, that once you give birth, life will revolve around the baby. It is possible to balance work and family, but to make it happen you have to believe that it can.

Mignon Moore, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at UCLA, spoke from a somewhat different position. Moore does not have children. As a gay woman, she noted that it is not so easy to “just start trying” to

have a child—it takes *work*. While Moore feels some social pressure to become a mother, she has not yet made a decision on whether to pursue this course in life. What Moore has been contending with as an academic is her gay identity, but she says she has experienced only encouragement and support from her UCLA colleagues. She believes this is because she has been open and straightforward about her sexuality. Having strong women in the department in which you choose to work, she added, is an asset.

It is important, she advises, for graduate students on the job market to understand the culture of the department/institution in which

## **THE ANSWER, SAYS WATFORD, IS TO BREAK THE SILENCE. WOMEN MUST LEARN TO FEEL CONFIDENT IN ASKING FACULTY ABOUT THEIR OWN FAMILIES AND EXPERIENCES.**

they hope to get a job and their expectations for how work gets done. Moore's own dissertation was based in quantitative research, and she took a chance accepting a position in a department that generally favors qualitative/ethnographic methods. She says that this kind of difference can be an asset; the department also benefits from the unique abilities of each member of their faculty. She also notes that applicants can negotiate for a higher salary, which is often a source of anxiety for women. Know your academic assets, she advised, and be prepared to use them as leverage. (For more interview strategies, please see "Interview Success" by Jaimie Baron in the

January 10 issue.) Sharing your successful strategies with others is essential to expanding opportunities for women. Moore concluded by saying: "Don't allow them to define your world."

Tara Watford, Director of Research at UC/ACCORD in the Department of Education at UCLA, concluded the workshop by elaborating on the issue of starting and continuing a dialogue about the scarcity of support and information that is available for women in academia—also the subject of her dissertation. Watford found it curious that the majority of PhDs granted in the last twenty years in sociology, education, and

psychology were given to women, but the majority of faculty positions were taken by men. She conducted ethnographic research on women doctoral students, asking them about their experiences as women in academia and their knowledge of support for women and children in their programs. What she found most prominent is a general attitude among graduates that in order to be a scholar, you must be productive all the time with no time off. Since taking care of a family is likewise a full-time job, one cannot do both. If you choose to have a family, your career possibilities will be severely limited. One woman reported that her advisor said explicitly that she would not be able to "jump back into tenure" if she took time off to have a child.

In wrapping up the workshop with suggestions about what should be done, Watford said that there is a loud silence in graduate programs about family and relationships. Many graduate students she interviewed did not even know whether or

not their advisors had children of their own. Women read into this that they are not supposed to talk about family, or worse, not supposed to *have* one. The women interviewed often reported that their faculty and advisors assumed that they were too young to be thinking about these issues. Because they were not married or pregnant, it was not the time to discuss options. The answer, says Watford, is to break the silence. Women must learn to feel confident in asking faculty about their own families and experiences. Women must be proactive in finding out about institutional policies for support and discussing family planning not only with a partner but also openly within the academic setting. As graduate students, women can form student groups to share resources, experiences, and child-care options. According to Watford, there is a disconnect between what is available

and what job applicants know. Moore also underscored how important it is to voice your concerns to hiring institutions. Faculty should, in return, be equipped to discuss these concerns during searches as well as when advising graduate students.

The panelists addressed many of my concerns with respect to timing but gave me new concerns with respect to time management and institutional support. I want to work in a university that will foster a healthy family environment. It is unfortunate, but currently the onus is on women to ask questions about family planning and ask our advisors about their own experiences with having children. Discussions like this should be open to all students, faculty, and administrators, and they should include men. The state of affairs for women in academia is not yet ideal, but this workshop is an example of what sort of dialogue needs to happen between students and faculty on all campuses.

*Daniella Perry is a doctoral student in the Department of History at UCLA. Her research addresses the development of genetic and psychological counseling; evolving theories of race, gender and intelligence; and the social and legal changes on reproductive rights with respect to infant screening.*