

Amy Morris

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After Amy found out she was pregnant she went to the Faculty Administrator to resign. Fortunately for all involved, the Administrator, working compressed hours herself at that time, encouraged Amy to pursue other possibilities. Amy's family situation is quite unique: her husband has an academic position in the USA and together they have 4 children. Since the birth of her first child in 2005, she has taken a total of 5 years of leave, which includes 12 months of maternity leave per child and a career break with a 10% workload. In September 2008, she returned on a very flexible, part-time basis. Most of her teaching commitments, like lectures and grading exams, were during Lent and Easter Term. While she would work full-time from January to August, the whole family would move to Cambridge and her husband would be the primary parent. For the remainder of the year, the family relocated to the USA. At those times, she would keep in touch by email, do administrative work and focus more on her research, while being the lead parent.

When she originally changed her working pattern, Amy was very worried about the reactions from her colleagues – “an unfounded worry”, she now says. Those colleagues that she interacted with regularly were very sympathetic and supporting, while others were simply unaware. The re-adjustments that were necessary after each maternity leave were difficult. However, it became easier with each time as she realized “that she can get back into it” and that “skills were not lost”. Amy intentionally spent much time teaching to get out of the house and to become involved again. She says, that at the beginning she was “trying to put more in than you can actually do, because you don't want to show any weakness or suggest that your arrangement is not working”. Hence she tended to cut out on professional advancement, such as personal development and applying for grants, simply to get her basic workload done. Yet, the all-over positive conclusion of her experiences is that for all the difficulties, she could keep her position and did not have to resign.

There were some benefits and some disadvantages from the faculty's perspective. On the one hand, they were lucky to find a College Teaching Officer who covered for the other 20-30% and who had a slightly different expertise. This resulted in enrichment to the teaching experience for students and to the projects offered by the faculty. Since this officer was also working part-time all year around, it meant that there was an extra pair of hands during very busy times, such as the examination periods. On the other hand, her absences during Michaelmas Term put strain onto colleagues covering some of her tasks. In 2013, Amy returned to help and relieve some of that pressure. She also tried to reciprocate during the terms she was present by easing some of their administrative workloads.

Amy is very grateful to her colleagues, the Faculty, administration and HR for supporting her throughout, with her rather unusual working schedule. Spending more time with her family has given her an entirely new set of skills, becoming a more understanding person and being able to adapt to difficult situations. She has gained different perspectives on her research and some of it was even motivated by her children's interests, like her research article “Geomythology on the Colonial Frontier: Edward Taylor, Cotton Mather, and the Claverack Giant”!

In September 2014 she returned to full-time. This has complicated the transatlantic living and working arrangements and currently still involves a lot of commuting. However, Amy and her family are motivated to find a permanent solution that can work for everybody. She is now investigating whether the Returning Carers Scheme could help alleviate some of the persisting issues. She has also recently been encouraged to apply for a promotion to Senior Lecturer.