

# Why two scientist-mums made a database of parental-leave policies <sup>[1]</sup>

By scouring websites and pestering university human-resources departments, Amanda Gorton and Tess Grainger are tracking the vast differences in leave entitlements across North America.

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**Source:** Nature

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## AVAILABILITY

[Access article online](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

[Access parental leave database](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

## Excerpts

As is the case for many parents in academia, parental leave has played a major part in the trajectories of our lives and scientific careers. We both had children while completing graduate school and postdoctoral positions, and our decisions about when to have children and where to pursue our next academic positions were influenced heavily by the availability of paid parental leave.

Unfortunately, the details of leave policies for new parents can be difficult to uncover. We found one database of these policies for tenure-track faculty members across academic institutions in the United States and Canada. However, we wanted to break down the differences between available paid leave across career stages, from graduate students and postdoctoral fellows to staff and faculty. To address this, in 2020, we decided to create a database of parental-leave policies at institutions across the United States and Canada. We wanted to make this database to assist others in navigating an already-challenging life event. We also wanted to share first-hand some of the difficulties of securing paid time off as an academic with a growing family.

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Once we started looking at the policies, the first major determinant of the amount of paid leave at universities that jumped out was, unsurprisingly, country. Canada has federally mandated paid parental leave\* that provides 55% salary for up to 50 weeks for the parent giving birth and for up to 35 weeks for the other parent. These rates are flexible; parents can reduce their salary further to acquire more weeks' leave. A couple can take a maximum of 40 weeks paid at 55% or 69 weeks paid at 33%. These rates are often topped up by the employer, usually for only a portion of the leave period.

But people in certain academic stages, such as undergraduate and graduate students, usually do not qualify for this federal leave, because they are not able to accrue enough eligible work hours. It is then up to the individual university to have a policy in place that allows these groups to take paid leave.

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In Canada, graduate students are not considered employees; as a consequence, they receive, on average, only 10–12 weeks of paid parental leave, a rate that is one-third of what faculty members receive and 20% of the federally mandated leave.

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We have only scratched the surface of analysing these data, so we are looking for collaborators interested in conducting more in-depth analyses, expanding the database beyond North America, and publishing findings.

Although our degrees are in the same field, we never met nor collaborated until this idea came to fruition. It was pursuing this passion project (and bonding over the chaos of having children under five years of age) that brought us together. Our hope is that these data can help prospective parents to chart their career paths in academia while building their families. We also hope that it will spur universities to thoroughly examine their own parental-leave policies in comparison to those of other institutions. Only by exposing the discrepancies in leave across institutions, career stages and parent type, can we begin to enact policy changes.

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\*Note: Canada has two parental leave and benefit regimes: one specific to Quebec and the second for the remaining 12 provinces/territories and workers under the *Canada Labour Code*. Quebec has had its own parental leave system since 2006. The **Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP)** is also a contributory insurance program. It includes both benefit provisions and provisions for job-protected leave from work. For more details, read the *Parental leaves and benefits* <sup>[4]</sup> chapter in CRRU's *Early childhood education and care in*

Canada 2021<sup>[5]</sup> report.

**Region:** International<sup>[6]</sup>

**Tags:** parental leave<sup>[7]</sup>

data<sup>[8]</sup>

work-family balance<sup>[9]</sup>

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**Source URL (modified on 22 Aug 2023):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/23/08/why-two-scientist-mums-made-database-parental-leave>

#### Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/23/08/why-two-scientist-mums-made-database-parental-leave> [2] <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02544-2> [3] <https://sites.google.com/view/parental-leave-in-academia/home?authuser=0> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/ECEC-2021-Parental-leaves-benefits.pdf> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/publications/ecec-canada/23/04/early-childhood-education-and-care-canada-2021> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/international> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/parental-leave> [8] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/data> [9] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9301>