

New NUS plan to support female faculty

They can soon halve workload for a semester on return from maternity leave

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Education Correspondent

Female faculty members at the National University of Singapore (NUS) will soon be able to reduce their teaching workload by about half for a semester after returning from maternity leave.

The measure, which starts next month, will also allow them to transfer the “teaching relief” to their husbands if they too are NUS academics.

At the same time, since 2008, NUS has allowed faculty members – both men and women – to extend their tenure clock if they have been unable to fully carry out academic activities for an extended period. This could be due to reasons like childbirth, family or health issues.

This means that while NUS faculty have a six-year runway to earn tenure, women can ask for a year-long extension for every child born during that period.

About seven women a year have been granted this extension for pregnancy and childbirth over the past five years.

NUS will relax the policy from April 1 and remove its cap of two children per female academic.

Provost Ho Teck Hua said: “We want everybody to realise their full potential. The more willing you are to adjust your human resource policy to suit individual needs, the more people feel empowered and well-taken care of.”

Professor Tulika Mitra, the vice-provost of academic affairs, said NUS has seen equal success rates in terms of men and women earning tenure.

More women are joining the uni-



Professor Liu Bin, NUS’ head of chemical and biomolecular engineering and vice-president of research and technology, and Professor Tulika Mitra, NUS vice-provost of academic affairs. More women are joining the university – almost 32 per cent of its 2,600 faculty now are female, up from 28 per cent in 2017. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

versity – almost 32 per cent of its 2,600 faculty now are female, up from 28 per cent in 2017.

And more of them – 30 per cent – are teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem) courses compared with 25 per cent in 2017.

Healthcare-related fields like medicine and dentistry have even more female faculty, at about 40 per cent or more. But the proportion of female faculty in non-Stem courses has stayed at about 34 per cent over the past five years.

Still, Prof Ho said, NUS will continue trying to draw women into

academia. Faculties like engineering, business and medicine have created mentoring and leadership opportunities for women.

NUS is one of the institutions that started The Rising Stars Women in Engineering Workshop in 2018 to bring together young women from around the world to explore academic careers. One female mechanical engineering professor was hired by NUS through this initiative.

Prof Ho noted: “When you take away constraints like what is the right role for you to play, it’s very liberating as a mindset. You can do

anything you want. Your gender should not be an issue.”

Getting women to share their stories is helpful, said Prof Tulika, as borne out by a session she attended with female professors and pre-tenure colleagues last year.

“One of my colleagues was sharing how she managed to balance administration (work), research and having a child,” she added.

“It resonated with all these young women colleagues because some of them felt like, ‘How am I going to do it if I become a mother?’ And just listening to that, being able to see that somebody

has gone through that experience and was still able to achieve, that’s a very powerful message.”

Similarly, the female engineering faculty have met over tea to discuss matters and talk about the challenges they face at work or at home, said Professor Liu Bin, NUS’ head of chemical and biomolecular engineering and vice-president of research and technology.

Academia offers flexibility, said Prof Tulika, who joined NUS in 2001 and has a 17-year-old son. “You don’t have a nine-to-five job, you can actually do things at your own pace. That really goes well

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MESSAGE FOR WOMEN

We want to get this message across: You all do belong and just because we are small in numbers, doesn’t mean that we are any different.



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