



## FEATURED SCHOLAR

Each month the Work and Family Researchers Network spotlights the contributions of a scholar who is making significant advances in understanding work-family concerns. We are delighted to present the following interview with Sabrina Speights.



**Sabrina L. Speights, Ph.D.**

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Experts Panel Link:

<https://wfrn.org/expert/sabrina-l-speights-ph-d/>

**WFRN - *How did you first get introduced to work-family issues and become a researcher in this field?***

**Sabrina** - I was first introduced to work-family issues early on in graduate school. Like many, my interests evolved throughout my time as a graduate student as I worked with different faculty members. My PhD program - Organizational Science at UNC Charlotte - is an interdisciplinary program and over the course of my time in the program, both my advisors addressed work-family issues from different disciplinary perspectives. My initial introduction to work-family issues came via exploring literature on time use, gender division of labor, and the sociology of work. Over time, I worked with other faculty to examine the emotional experience of work-family conflict. The cumulation of these interests evolved into my dissertation, which examined the consequences of schedule instability on work-life boundary management.

**WFRN - *How did you first get involved with the WFRN? What do you value most about the organization?***

**Sabrina** - I have been involved with the WFRN since 2016 when I was a graduate student. Given my research interests, another student in my program suggested that I participate in the conference. She applauded the WFRN as a welcoming community and its support for the development of early scholars. I submitted my paper to the WFRN's conference in Washington DC, it was accepted, I signed up for a networking dinner, and have consistently attended ever since. I love this smaller professional organization because I can engage with other scholars with similar interests. I'm also energized by the interdisciplinary connections that are fostered between scholars and policy advocates. What I value most is my time on the executive board, where I have seen firsthand an organization whose leadership is guided by a core set of unwavering values even through the many challenges during and after the pandemic. I am lucky to be able to see the administrative and executive leadership of this organization so early in my career because it certainly has provided me with excellent examples to model.

**WFRN - *Tell us about your current research, what are you studying?***

**Sabrina** - I have always been interested in the nuanced, complex nature of work-life experiences and am currently working on projects that use both quantitative and qualitative methods. Each of these projects attempts to open new understandings and conceptualizations of the work-life interface. One initiative is to develop a measure of work-life beliefs, which has the potential to illuminate cognitive elements that drive work-family preferences and attitudes. Another initiative examines boundary management strategies that remote workers use, which will expand understandings of the integration-

segmentation continuum (how people connect and separate family and work responsibilities in their lives). Finally, I am examining relative income within couples and perceptions of work-family conflict, which I hope provides a new way of thinking about inequalities as related to couples, gender, and work-family commitments.

**WFRN - *Does your research inform workplace practice? How?***

**Sabrina** - Given that I am in a department of business and management, it is critical that my work is geared towards workplace implications. I would say my research consistently points to the complexity of family and home. As many WFRN members recognize, historically workplaces have turned a blind eye to employees' home lives, but this is changing. My research reveals the importance and benefits that can be achieved by acknowledging employees' home lives. It also reveals the incredibly wide array of potential home situations and structures, an understanding that is critical to enhancing productivity within the workplace. Likewise, I argue that we need to consider issues of job, class and health diversities. My projects highlight the different experiences of remote workers, warehouse workers, and workers managing chronic illness. I think that organizational leaders who openly recognize complexity and test creative innovative solutions will see the return on those investments.

**WFRN - *Can you tell me about how your research might help individuals or families develop effective personal strategies?***

**Sabrina** - As many know, workplaces of today are not the workplaces of the past. The nature of work appears to be more precarious and uncertain but there are also opportunities for flexibility and alternatives that did not exist before. My current project examines relative couple income and work-family conflict, which makes me think a lot about how individuals (and couples) may need to take time to intentionally consider, plan, and craft their work-home interactions so that they are not simply guided by unspoken assumptions. Instead, it may be necessary for more explicit conversations about how to manage goals and expectations in both domains. Creating room for creative solutions such as trading off who commits more to work or family or reinvesting in skills and education at later life stages for second and third careers could bring a kind of "balance" that may be missed if individuals are not explicit and intentional.

**WFRN - *What advice would you give to graduate students or those early in their professional careers?***

**Sabrina** - As someone who is also early in her career, I will speak more to an observation than give advice. If you are early in your academic career and you feel that

things seem unsettled or simply different than you expected them to be in higher education - they are. Whether it be the job market, funding opportunities, expectations on the tenure track, etc., your experience today might be different than your professors or other mentors who have been in academia for a while. An academic career is a great one, but it is not immune from broader economic, technological, and other changes and uncertainties. Perhaps, as early career academics (like workers in other occupations and industries), we need to be more creative and explicit in crafting our careers, work, and home.

## ABOUT THE WFRN

The Work and Family Researchers Network's mission is to facilitate virtual and face-to-face interaction among academic work and family researchers from a broad range of fields as well as engage the next generation of work and family scholars. The WFRN welcomes the participation of policy makers and workplace practitioners as it seeks to promote knowledge and understanding of work and family issues among the community of global stakeholders.

To learn more about the WFRN, please visit our website [WFRN.ORG](https://wfrn.org). To become a member, please click on this link <https://wfrn.org/become-a-member/>.