

2006 Margaret Brent Awards

Joan C. Williams



Professor Joan C. Williams, prize-winning author and Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, is the founding director of the Center for WorkLife Law and co-director of the Project on Attorney Retention (PAR). She combines groundbreaking scholarly contributions in the field of work/life studies with activism in applying theory to solve real-world problems facing women lawyers. Professor Williams popularized the term “maternal wall” to refer to barriers that caregivers commonly confront in the workplace.

Following a J.D. degree from Harvard Law School/Master’s Degree in City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1980, she embarked on a career that has made her one of the nation’s leaders in facilitating the implementation and success of reduced-hours programs in law firms and corporate law departments. She is pragmatic rather than starry-eyed and, with PAR co-director Cynthia Thomas Calvert, has built a powerful and persuasive business case for balanced hours programs based upon meticulous and even-handed research.

Her 1989 article, *Deconstructing Gender*, has been listed as one of the most-cited law review articles ever written. It established her as one of the early influential figures in feminist jurisprudence. Her book *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It*, published in 2000 by Oxford University Press, is already a classic and helped shape the debate over work/family issues in the fields of law, psychology, and sociology. *Unbending Gender* won the 2000 Gustavus Myers Outstanding Book Award.

Professor Williams has authored or co-authored four books and 55 law review articles. Her work is reprinted in casebooks on six different subjects. She lectures widely and has given over 250 speeches and presentations in North and Latin America and at virtually every leading U.S. university. She will be the Massey Lecturer in American Civilization in 2008.

In 2000, she co-founded the Project on Attorney Retention, one of the most influential voices in the country on work/life issues in the legal profession. Williams and Calvert have written a series of highly influential works. The initial PAR report—*Balanced Hours: Effective Part-Time Policies for Washington Law Firms*—and PAR webpage (www.pardc.org) have been widely used by law firms to revamp their policies, as well as by individual lawyers seeking to negotiate part-time schedules or to critique their firm’s policies. *Balanced Hours* inspired similar reports by others in other cities. Building on that success, PAR followed with *Better on Balance?: The Corporate Counsel Work/Life Report*. The first full report ever written on work/life issues for in-house lawyers, it was downloaded nearly 13,000 times in just the first month after its publication. Calvert and Williams’ *Solving the Part-Time Puzzle*, published by the National Association of Law Placement in 2004, already has inspired one major national firm to adopt PAR’s balanced hours model nationwide.

PAR is part of the Center for WorkLife Law, which also convenes interdisciplinary working groups to document the stereotyping and workplace bias experienced by mothers and other caregivers. WorkLife Law (WLL) works with both management and plaintiff-side lawyers to develop trainings on maternal wall bias and the potential liability that results. *Beyond the Maternal Wall: Relief for Family Caregivers Who Are Discriminated Against on the Job*, co-written by Professor Williams in 2003, was cited the following year in the landmark decision *Back v. Hastings on Hudson Union Free School Dist.*, a Second Circuit case that held that a plaintiff could prove maternal wall discrimination through stereotyping evidence even in the absence of a comparator.

Joan Williams’ achievements in applying her research to improve career opportunities through work/life balance for real-life women are the very definition of a Margaret Brent Award honoree.