

# MARKETPLACE



## WORK & FAMILY

BY SUE SHELLNBARGER

### Work-Family Issues Top Business Classes

**W**ORK-FAMILY issues, long pigeonholed by academia in the sociology or women's studies departments, are starting to surface at business schools.

Academics and business leaders will gather for the first time on Feb. 18 at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School to talk about how to add material on work-family role conflicts to the business-school curriculum. Professors from nine universities, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Michigan and the University of Virginia, as well as managers from Xerox, Merck and several consulting firms, are expected to attend. Stewart D. Friedman, a Wharton management professor who organized the meeting, says participants will discuss how to make work-family issues "fit in a systematic way into the cultural mainstream of MBA life."

Wharton is one of the first MBA schools to include work-family issues in its required coursework. Students examine case studies on issues faced by dual-career couples juggling multiple roles. They also break up into groups based on sex, marital and family roles and "talk to each other" about the tensions that can arise among those groups, Dr. Friedman says.

"It can get pretty hot," he says. "The men might say, 'Yeah, I want my wife at home having babies.

What's it to you?' And women might say they resent stereotypes [around family roles], or 'I'm not planning to have kids and don't castigate me for that,'" he says.

One manager who plans to attend the meeting, Perry Christensen, Merck's director of human resource strategy and planning, says companies would benefit if business-school students were "sensitized" to differing viewpoints on work-family issues. Sharon Lobel, a management professor at Seattle University who also will attend, adds: "I think we'll see more and more of this kind of material in the curriculum" at MBA schools in the future.