

## **Graduate Student Parental Accommodation Guidelines**

**Purpose:** Consistent with the University's efforts to strive to be inclusive and to support academic-personal life balance, the University believes it is important to provide accommodation for graduate students who become new parents, whether by childbirth or adoption, so that they may contribute to their family responsibilities while continuing to make progress towards their degree. This practice will help develop students who can successfully integrate their academic and personal pursuits. In recognition of the challenges of balancing the demands of graduate study and parenting a new child, these guidelines aim to improve the academic environment for student parents. The Graduate Student Parental Accommodation Guidelines assists graduate students immediately following the birth or adoption of a young child. The purpose of these guidelines is to make it possible for a student to maintain registered full-time student status, along with all the benefits of such status, while facilitating the return to full participation in courses, research and teaching.

**Eligibility:** The Parental Accommodation Guidelines apply only to full-time students enrolled in graduate programs who are in good academic standing and who are making satisfactory progress toward completion of a graduate degree. These guidelines do not cover students in professional programs. Students must have completed at least one full-time semester of their degree program to become eligible for coverage under these guidelines. The guidelines cover the situation of students who experience a child birth, who adopt a child who is unable to be enrolled in full-day public school due to age or other developmental reasons, or who is a partner of someone who has experienced a child birth or an adoption for whom the student has parental responsibilities. These eligibility requirements cover all provisions of the guidelines.

### **I. Parental Accommodation Period**

All eligible students will be granted a Parental Accommodation Period six weeks immediately following the birth of a child or the adoption of a child for whom the student has parental responsibilities. During this period of accommodation, the student will continue to be enrolled as a full-time student. Because the student remains enrolled as a full-time student and continues to pay tuition, this is not a formal leave of absence. It is instead a modification of deadlines and academic expectations to accommodate the student's new parental responsibilities. The student will be able to postpone completion of course assignments, examinations, academic milestones and other academic requirements for the six week Accommodation Period. However, the Accommodation Period does not extend the University's academic Statute of Limitations.

Because the Accommodation Period needs to be tailored to the student's individual circumstances and the timing of the student's academic responsibilities, the student should consult in advance with the program advisor, research advisor or office of student services about how the student will meet academic goals and requirements. The student is responsible for ensuring that this consultation takes place as far in advance of the Accommodation Period as possible. Students enrolled in programs characterized by sequential courses must anticipate potential consequences associated with accommodation, and in consultation with

the advisor, should plan how best to complete their program following the Accommodation Period.

The student must complete the accommodation period within six weeks of the birth or adoption. The student may not divide the time period of parental accommodation for use past this time limit. If both parents are eligible graduate students, both may take the six week accommodation period. The total accommodation period for each birth or adoption is limited to six weeks; in the event of a multiple birth or adoption, the length of the accommodation period is limited to six weeks.

After the end of the Parental Accommodation Period, students are expected to return to graduate study and resume progress toward completing their degrees. Faculty are encouraged to remain flexible in their expectations of students who become new parents, so that students can meet the demands of graduate study at the same time that they face new demands in their parental roles. Nothing in these guidelines can or should replace communication and cooperation between student and advisor, and the good-faith efforts of both to accommodate the birth or adoption of a child. It is the intent of these guidelines to reinforce the importance of that cooperation and to provide support to make that accommodation possible.

Special Notice to International Students: Students who are attending the University of Pittsburgh with a F-1 student visa or J-1 Exchange Visitor visa are strongly encouraged to consult in advance with the Office of International Studies about their plans during the period of Parental Accommodation.

## **II. Student Funding During the Parental Accommodation Period**

### **A. Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, Graduate Student Assistants, or Graduate Student Researchers**

With advance planning, TA, TF, GSA and GSR assignments can be adapted for modifications of schedule that new student parents need during a Parental Accommodation Period. Faculty advisors and students with TA, TF, GSA and GSR appointments are encouraged to work out the necessary adjustments preferably one semester before the anticipated birth.

Eligible Students Faculty members who supervise TAs, TFs, GSAs and GSRs who assume new roles as parents (see below for accommodations for birth mothers) should offer flexibility to allow students to take advantage of the Parental Accommodation Period. During this period the students will continue to receive their stipend, benefits, and associated tuition support.

Birth Mothers The situation is more difficult for mothers who give birth, and must cope with the health consequences of childbirth and recovery in addition to new parental roles. Eligible graduate students with TA, TF, GSA and GSR appointments who experience the health consequences of pregnancy will be excused from their regular duties for a period of time to be determined by a health care provider not to exceed the student's appointment period. During this period, they will continue to receive their stipend, benefits, and associated tuition

support. In most cases, students who have been funded by external grants will receive their parental accommodation stipend and benefits through their specific grant, provided that the granting agency permits such action. If the funding agency has terms and conditions which do not permit funding pursuant to this guideline, the department or school will fund the parental accommodation period.

### **B. Fellowship Recipients**

Eligible students who are supported by University of Pittsburgh fellowships will experience no change in their funding arrangements during the Parental Accommodation Period; they will continue to receive their fellowship support and benefits during the Parental Accommodation period. Eligible students who are supported by fellowships external to the University must adhere to the rules of the granting agency with respect to absences from academic and research work.

### **III. Approval**

An eligible student must submit a Request for Graduate Student Parental Accommodation, after appropriate consultation with her/his advisor, principal investigator, and graduate chair. The request, with appropriate documentation of the anticipated birth or adoption (a letter from the student's medical provider with an estimate of delivery date or from the adoption agency with an estimate of adoption date), will be submitted to the student's graduate program office for approval.

Any student who believes that he or she has been treated unfairly or has been denied eligibility according to these guidelines should first discuss the situation with their program advisor, research advisor or office of student services. If a resolution cannot be reached at the departmental level, the student should present the grievance to the dean for informal evaluation, adjudication, and, if necessary, advice on additional, formal grievance procedures.