

Pregnant and Parenting Students' Rights: FAQs for College and Graduate Students

If you are a pregnant or parenting student, you should know that under Title IX, you have a right to stay in school so you can meet your education and career goals. Below are answers to frequently asked questions from students.

How Does Title IX Apply to Pregnant or Parenting Students?

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex – including pregnancy, parenting and all related conditions, such as abortion – in educational programs and activities receiving federal funding. This means students who might be, are, or have been pregnant must have the same access to programs and educational opportunities that other students have.

Are my absences due to pregnancy, childbirth or abortion excused?

Yes, absences due to pregnancy or any related conditions are excused. However, depending on the length of the absence and the area of instruction (e.g. courses with lab requirements, clinical rotations, etc.), it may be academically necessary to take a leave of absence. When the student returns to OU, she must be reinstated to the status she held before the leave.

My professor adjusts grades based on class attendance. Can he/she lower my grade because of the classes I miss?

You cannot be penalized for pregnancy or related conditions. If a professor provides specific “points” or other advantages to students based on class attendance, you must be given the opportunity to earn back the credit from classes you miss due to pregnancy, so that you can be reinstated to the status you held before you took leave.

Does OU have to let me make up the work I missed while I was absent?

Yes, professors must let students make up the work missed while out due to pregnancy or any related conditions, including recovery from childbirth. For example, if a doctor’s note excuses the student from class for several weeks because of “bed rest” before giving birth, professors must provide the student with the appropriate assignments and information to make up all of the work required to be completed while absent. Again, depending on the nature of the academic instruction, e.g. clinical rotations, this may not be feasible and other forms of accommodations may need to be made.

What about internships, career rotations, and other off-campus elements of my program – do I have a right to participate in those?

Yes, OU must allow you to continue participating in off-campus programs. For example, if your program provides opportunities to “work in the field” OU cannot deny you participation based on your pregnancy. Your professor cannot require a doctor’s note for continued participation, unless it is required for all students who have a medical condition that requires treatment by a doctor.

Classmates and even professors have made offensive comments to me about my pregnancy. Should I complain to the school about it?

Title IX requires schools to prevent and address sex-based harassment, including harassment based on pregnancy. If you experience this sort of treatment at OU, you should seek help immediately. The law prohibits retaliation against you for making a complaint or raising a concern.

I have a scholarship – can OU take it back when they find out I am pregnant?

No, OU does not terminate or reduce athletic, merit or need-based scholarships based on pregnancy. If you stay in school, you can keep your scholarship.

I want to take a semester off. Can I keep my student status, scholarships, etc?

Not necessarily – it depends on the leave policy at your college. If you want to take off more time than your doctor says is medically necessary, you will need to consult your college’s non-medical leave policy.

What if I work for OU as a graduate assistant, in addition to being a student? Do I still have the same rights? Do I qualify for maternity leave?

Your rights as an employee are different from your rights as a student. If you work for OU, you may be eligible for family or medical leave, or may qualify for maternity leave under your particular college’s policy, but that may not include leave from your classes, beyond what is medically necessary.

What if I believe I have been discriminated against based on pregnancy related issues?

You may file a complaint with the University’s Title IX Coordinator, Bobby Mason (405-325-3546), and/or file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights:

**Kansas City Office
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Education
One Petticoat Lane
1010 Walnut Street, 3rd floor, Suite 320
Kansas City, MO 64106**

**Telephone: 816-268-0550
FAX: 816-268-0599; TDD: 800-877-8339
Email: OCR.KansasCity@ed.gov**