

University of Mississippi Parental Leave Policy for Graduate Students

At the University of Mississippi, we are committed to a diverse graduate student body, which includes graduate students with children. We believe that a graduate student who is a parent has a better chance of successfully completing their degree when the student and their department are realistic about the challenges of pursuing an advanced degree and parenthood simultaneously.

Graduate students, who are parents or anticipate becoming parents, need to work closely with their advisors, graduate program coordinators and departmental chairs in planning for their progress in graduate studies. Students should communicate early, frequently, and clearly with their advisors about their progress and engagement in courses and research.

Summary of Provisions

The University of Mississippi Graduate Student Parental Leave Policy is designed to assist a full-time graduate student who is the primary child-care provider, immediately following the birth or adoption of a child. It is designed to make it possible to maintain the student's full-time status as a registered student, and to facilitate return to full participation in class work, and, where applicable, research and teaching in a seamless manner. Medical complications are not covered by this policy.

The Parental Leave Policy has three components and applies to all full-time, matriculated graduate students anticipating a birth or adoption as described below:

- Under the Parental Leave Policy, a full-time graduate student with a quarter- or half-time graduate assistantship is eligible for **six weeks** of leave from his/her graduate program. In the event that both parents are eligible graduate students at the University of Mississippi, only one may take Parental Leave.
- During this period of leave, the graduate student will continue to be enrolled with appropriate tuition waivers and insurance subsidy and will receive his/her full level of stipend support. In addition, the student will receive a four-month extension of any graduate school and programmatic time limits. This policy only provides for an additional six weeks of support for students who take parental leave.
- Full-time graduate students who do not hold quarter- and half-time graduate assistantships may request parental leave without tuition or stipend support.

Eligibility

The Parental Leave Policy applies to matriculated, full-time graduate students anticipating the birth or adoption of a child. Eligible graduate students are those with a current quarter or half-assistantship who have been full-time graduate students for at least one academic year (two academic semesters) at the time parental leave is taken.

Planning and Approval

The student should initiate discussions with his/her advisor(s) and departmental or college/school administrators **at least eight weeks** prior to the anticipated birth or adoption. This notice will provide the lead time necessary to rearrange teaching duties for those students supported by teaching assistantships (TAs), or to adjust laboratory or other research schedules. This planning period should also be used to reach agreement on a timeline for academic issues (e.g., Ph.D. qualifying examinations and other academic milestones, field work, time-sensitive research reports on sponsored projects) that will be affected by the birth or adoption of a child. It is essential that the student consult with her/his research advisor well in advance of the birth or adoption if the nature of her/his funding or the research grant conditions require that specific tasks be completed by specified dates, or if the Principal Investigator (PI) will need to hire additional help to meet those conditions during a period of reduced activity by the graduate student.

It is the **student's responsibility** to make arrangements with faculty and with departmental administrators for course completion and for continuation of teaching and research activities before and following the leave period. Students must have approval from the instructor of record to continue in a course during the period of parental leave and should expect that in most cases they will have to register in courses with flexible requirements such as thesis, dissertation or independent study.

Students who will be temporarily leaving TA assignments should notify the appropriate department chair as soon as practicable, but no later than eight weeks prior to the anticipated start date of the leave to allow sufficient time to find an appropriate replacement. It is the department's responsibility to arrange for a substitute TA for the period of the leave. The student on parental leave will be expected to return to his/her teaching assignment at the conclusion of the leave, barring unforeseen circumstances. If the student is not able to return, he/she must pursue a Leave of Absence or Medical Leave. For an international student, this policy is intended to allow him/her to maintain full-time student status and not otherwise affect his/her current visa status. However, an international student should discuss the intended leave period with the Office of International Programs at the beginning of the planning period in order to identify and address proactively any individual or unique visa issues and/or to consider the latest applicable regulations.

The Dean of the Graduate School grants approval of parental leave after appropriate consultation with the student's department. The leave will be granted to eligible graduate students who have submitted a complete approved leave application. The student's request for leave under this policy must be submitted no later than **eight weeks** prior to the anticipated beginning of parental leave.

Notification

Upon approval of Parental Leave, the Graduate School will notify the relevant department and central administrative offices that a Parental Leave has been approved

and the dates for which the leave has been granted. It is the student's responsibility to communicate with the department while on leave and to work with the faculty and the department administrators towards arrangements for course completion and for continuation of research and teaching activities before and following the period of the leave as indicated above.

Funding

In addition to being eligible for academic accommodation, those graduate students supported by fellowships, TAs, and/or research assistantships (RAs) will be excused from their regular TA or RA duties for a period of six weeks during which they will continue to receive financial support. Most graduate students who receive a Teaching Assistantship as part of the support package should be able to arrange the timing of teaching assignments to accommodate childbirth or adoption. During the six-week leave period, students supported by teaching assistantships may choose to continue in some limited capacity (e.g., grading, preparing course materials, or other non-intensive duties), but cannot be required to do so. With advance planning, most graduate students who receive Research Assistantships as part of the support package can adjust research activities to accommodate childbirth or adoption.

One third of the funding for the leave will come from the office of the Provost, one third will come from the Graduate School and the remaining third will come from the College or School housing the program.

Addendum

The Parental Leave Policy establishes *minimum* standards for accommodation for a leave associated with childbirth or adoption. Advisors and departmental or school administrators are encouraged to work with sensitivity to provide more than this minimum (as feasible), according to the particular circumstances of the student. Accommodations are expected to be made, for example, where toxic chemicals or extensive travel to remote archives or field areas may be involved. New mothers and fathers, for their part, need to keep the lines of communication with their departments open, and demonstrate to their advisors that they are academically engaged and making progress on coursework and research. In other words, the Parental Leave Policy is intended to support - not replace - the open communication and good will that should characterize the relationship between student and advisors and administrators at The University of Mississippi.