

Childbirth Accommodation, Parental Accommodation and Family Leave Policy For Graduate Students

The policy addresses family and child-related circumstances that a graduate student may encounter and provides appropriate accommodations in accordance with individual circumstance, eligibility, and need. An effort has been made to match the type and extent of accommodation to the individualized needs of graduate students whose circumstances require a leave from their programs for any one of the reasons covered by the policy.

This policy is not intended to replace communication between the student and the advisor but rather to serve as a framework and provide support for family situations. At all times, the student should work proactively with the advisor and the Office of Graduate Education to ensure progress towards academic goals. In the case of pregnancy, the student should also be sure to work with Environmental Health and Safety so that possible health risks can be addressed.

Childbirth Accommodation Policy

Allows full-time student status to continue for a specific timeframe that may be during and/or after the pregnancy and to facilitate the return to full participation in class work and, where applicable, research, teaching and clinical training in a seamless manner.

Eligibility:

This policy applies to full-time matriculated and enrolled women graduate students who are anticipating childbirth and have been enrolled at Rensselaer for at least two consecutive semesters of full-time study at the time of delivery.

Provisions:

A student anticipating childbirth is eligible for a maximum of one semester of childbirth accommodation during which the student may postpone course assignments, examinations, and other academic requirements. The accommodation period begins on the first date of classes in the applicable semester as agreed upon and approved by the Office of Graduate Education during the formal request process.

Students utilizing this policy are eligible for a full-time, zero credit continuous registration for the approved time period that carries no tuition cost and will allow the student to retain access to on campus facilities as well as maintaining electronic access. Standard Rensselaer health and activity fees will be applicable and charged as normal during the childbirth accommodation period. Normally, students residing on campus can remain in their respective housing, as appropriate for the specific housing assignment, or they may contact Residence Life for a change in housing if it is available.

During the childbirth accommodation period, students who have been funded for the previous twelve (12) months through TA/RA/Fellowship and who have received an award letter indicating continuing support will be eligible for salary continuation to be paid from a fund

established by the Provost and managed by the Office of Graduate Education. This fund will be known as the Childbirth Accommodation Fund. During this timeframe, duties typically performed by TAs and RAs will be suspended and the student will not be expected to work.

Some students may want to continue working during the accommodation period. The standard disability-related maternity leave for normal delivery is 6 weeks in length and the standard disability-related maternity leave for caesarean section delivery is 8 weeks in length. A student on maternity leave may not return to work until deemed medically able to return by a physician. Any student who would like to continue working during the accommodation period, except during maternity leave, should discuss this with their advisor and department. During the discussion, the advisor and department should identify an alternate source of stipend funding (from the advisor or department) that will provide a stipend to pay the student for the work they perform during the accommodation period.

The time to degree limits for students under the childbirth policy will be extended by the approved period of the accommodation (one semester) with the possibility of three additional semesters of Family Leave, upon approval of the Office of Graduate Education.

Health Issues:

It is recognized that in a laboratory environment there may be certain processes, chemicals or equipment that represent a hazard to the healthy development of an unborn child. The following procedure is intended to minimize these risks.

On learning of a pregnancy the student may elect to inform Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). EHS, in collaboration with the student, their advisor and other students in common laboratory areas, will make an assessment of the student's work environment at the request of the student. If the assessment reveals potential hazards to the unborn child the student may choose to request their advisor reassign them to another area or reassign them to projects that do not pose a potential hazard to the unborn child, for at least the first trimester of the pregnancy. If this request is made, and the student provides medical documentation from the attending physician, the advisor must make every effort to comply. If the advisor is unable to comply due to specific project agreements or deliverables, the Office of Graduate Education should be notified immediately to assist with an agreeable solution.

Process:

The Office of Graduate Education will administer the policy through a formal request process that does not require departmental approval but is reviewed and approved by the Associate Dean of Graduate Education.

Students who are expecting a child should inform the Office of Graduate Education (OGE) by completing the "Request for Childbirth or Parental Accommodation" form. This should be completed and forwarded to OGE by the add deadline in the term for which the accommodation is being requested. Supporting evidence as outlined on the form will be required.

Closure:

The Childbirth Policy is intended to establish standards for accommodating women graduate students before, during and after childbirth so that the student can focus on their familial responsibilities as well as continue to work towards their academic goals in an atmosphere supportive of both objectives.

Parental Accommodation Policy

It is recognized that the birth of a child affects not only the birth mother but also the spouse or domestic partner* and that students may also choose to adopt or bring a foster child into their family. The proposed Parental Accommodation policy is intended to provide support for these types of situations.

*Includes same-sex domestic partner and opposite-sex domestic partner.

Eligibility:

This policy applies to full-time matriculated and enrolled graduate students who are in support of a spouse or domestic partner that has given birth, have adopted a child or taken a child into foster care.

Provisions:

A student requesting parental accommodation is eligible for a maximum of one semester of accommodation during which the student may postpone course assignments, examinations, and other academic requirements. The accommodation period begins on the first date of classes in the applicable semester as agreed upon and approved by the Office of Graduate Education during the formal request process.

Students utilizing this policy are eligible for a full-time, zero credit continuous registration for the approved time period that carries no tuition cost and will allow the student to retain access to on campus facilities as well as maintaining electronic access. Standard Rensselaer health and activity fees will be applicable and charged as normal during the parental accommodation period. Normally, students residing on campus can remain in their respective housing, as appropriate for the specific housing assignment or they may contact Residence Life for a change in housing if it is available. If a student is supported by a TA/RA/Fellow, the tuition award will be postponed for the period of the parental accommodation. The student may elect to continue with their assigned stipend duties and receive compensation or postpone the duties and stipend along with the tuition award.

The time to degree limits for students under the parental accommodation policy will be extended by the approved period of the accommodation (one semester) with the possibility of three additional semesters of Family Leave, upon approval of the Office of Graduate Education.

Process:

Students who wish to apply for this type of accommodation should inform the Office of Graduate Education (OGE) by completing the "Request for Childbirth or Parental Accommodation" form. This should be completed and forwarded to OGE by the add deadline in the term for which the accommodation is being requested. Supporting evidence as outlined on the form will be required.

Family Leave Policy

Eligibility:

This policy applies to all matriculated and enrolled graduate students who need to take an extended leave for the birth or adoption of a child or for the care of a child, spouse or parent who has a serious health condition.

Provisions:

Students on family leave are not considered registered students and do not have access to campus facilities during the leave. The initial leave is normally approved for one semester and can be extended for a maximum of four semesters during which the time to degree limits will be extended by the approved leave period. In the case of a student who has already received an approved Childbirth or Parental Accommodation period, a maximum of three semesters of family leave can be utilized with no penalty to the degree time limit.

Process:

A student wishing to request this type of leave must make a formal written request to the Office of Graduate Education (OGE). Returning from the leave will require written notification and completion of the "Graduate Change of Status Form" and the applicable departmental approval.