

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Graduate Student Parental Leave Policy

Summary of Provisions

The UNC-Chapel Hill 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, registered student status, 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. Such situations are more appropriately covered with the University's existing Medical Leave 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 stipend-supported graduate student is eligible for six weeks of leave from his/her graduate program. In the event that both parents are full-time graduate students at UNC-Chapel Hill, only one may take Parental Leave.
- During this period of leave, the graduate student will continue to be enrolled (i.e. tuition will be paid) and will receive his/her full level of stipend support and health benefits. In addition, the student will receive a one-academic semester extension for all academic responsibilities.
- Full-time graduate students who are not stipend-supported may request parental leave without tuition or stipend support. Such leave will include the one-academic semester extension.

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 full-time appointment 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 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 and by the one-semester extension of academic requirements. It is essential that the student consult with their research advisor well in advance of the birth or adoption if the nature of his/her 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 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 Student and Scholar Services 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 written request and appropriate documentation of anticipated childbirth or adoption. This process must include written certification from a health care provider and written permission by the graduate student stating that an official of the University may contact the certifying health care provider, if needed. In the case of adoption, the request for leave must be accompanied by certification of child adoption, as well as written permission by the graduate student stating that an official of the University may contact the certifying individual, if needed. 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. Under most circumstances, a combination of sources (e.g., the Office of the Provost, the Graduate School) will provide the necessary funding for the leave. With advance planning, most graduate students who receive a Research Assistantship as part of the support package can similarly adjust research activities to accommodate childbirth or adoption. Most granting agencies provide for a short period of reduced activity due to health or personal issues.

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, even if it is at a somewhat slower pace than prior to the birth or adoption. 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 UNC-Chapel Hill.