Parental Accommodation Policy for Graduate Students - College of Education

Policy updated October 28, 2020

The College of Education (COE) supports graduate students who start or expand families during their graduate studies. COE offers three accommodations for graduate students with children: 1) academic accommodation, 2) TA/AI accommodation, and 3) GRA accommodation. These accommodations are available to full-time students (enrolled for at least nine credit hours each long semester and three hours in summer). It is the responsibility of a graduate student anticipating a birth or adoption to inform any of the following: their department chair, departmental Graduate Advisor and/or program/research advisor (who will be in communication about the accommodation) as early as possible.

The contact for accommodations to assist graduate students anticipating childbirth or adoption is the Graduate Advisor in academic units, or the HR Partner in non-academic units, who will submit the accommodation documentation (Parental Accommodation Form) to the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies and/or Equity, Community Engagement, and Outreach in the COE Dean's Office.

Academic Accommodations

In the event of a childbirth or adoption, graduate students in the College of Education are allowed a one-semester extension, which can be used within 12 months from the birth date or adoption date of a child for the completion of their academic responsibilities required for the degree. These academic responsibilities include:

- Coursework
- Qualifying/Comprehensive Exams
- Committee Meetings
- Presentations/Publications, or
- Any Other Required Academic Milestones

These responsibilities can be postponed either during or immediately following the semester in which the student's child is born or adopted. After the accommodation period, students are expected to resume progress toward degree completion. Faculty are encouraged to remain flexible in their expectations as students meet the demands of graduate study as they adjust to new demands in their parental roles.

Teaching Assistant (TA) and Assistant Instructor (AI) Accommodations

During the semester when a student expects a birth or adoption, we encourage departments to utilize appointments that are flexible and may not require in-person or campus-based responsibilities, such as graduate research assistant positions. If this is not possible, new parents may request TA appointments with duties that can be done in flexible environments and on flexible schedules, e.g. generating or proofreading exams, homework sets, or exam review materials; preparing detailed solution keys to problems; grading or grade-book maintenance; and assisting students with course content through email correspondence. Students should check with their departmental Graduate Advisor and program advisor regarding TA positions appropriate for their particular situations. The College of Education strongly encourages flexibility to supervisors of TAs in regard to specific duties within the semester that the student anticipates the birth or adoption of a child. The student and Graduate Advisor (or other supervisor) should agree to review these TA duties on a periodic schedule to ensure that work is being completed in a timely and satisfactory manner. If a TA’s accommodations include performing duties away from campus, the TA and supervising professor should review University guidelines regarding Flexible Work Arrangements, and if necessary, will be asked to complete a Flexible Work Arrangement Request Proposal.

Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) Accommodations

With modifications and a plan agreed upon with the supervising faculty member/researcher, graduate students may be able to execute research duties following the birth or adoption of a child. These students can progress towards the goals of their research, meet the requirements of external funding agencies, and remain in compliance for reporting effort on federal grants, if appropriate. Modified duties should be agreed upon by the supervising faculty member/research and student, and may include the following: scholarly research and literature compilations, data processing and analysis, scientific writing, or preparation of other scientific communication materials. If a GRA’s accommodations include performing duties away from campus, the GRA and supervising faculty member/researcher should review University guidelines regarding Flexible Work Arrangements, and if necessary, will be asked to complete a Flexible Work Arrangement Request Proposal.

Parental Leave
In some cases, a complete break from all employment may be most appropriate for new graduate student parents. Benefits-eligible graduate student employees who continue to meet eligibility requirements for employment are entitled to Parental Leave of up to twelve weeks following the birth of a child or an adoption or foster-care placement of a child under age three (this leave is unpaid). Unless the student qualifies for the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), employee health insurance premium sharing is unavailable for any full month of leave (see the Human Resources Parental Leave webpage). Students may also direct questions about Parental Leave and FMLA leave to the Human Resources Service Center at hrsc@austin.utexas.edu or 512-471-HRSC (4772).

Notes

As with all academic employee appointments, future financial support is contingent upon satisfactory academic progress evaluated by the departmental GSC and supervising faculty member/researcher, and satisfactory job performance as evaluated by the employing unit.

International students may have to satisfy additional obligations, and should contact the Texas Global for further information.

In the event that a student’s request for accommodation is not agreed upon, the student may appeal to the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies and/or Equity, Community Engagement, and Outreach. The Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies will investigate the appeal in coordination with the COE Human Resources staff and the Graduate Advisor or HR Partner in the student’s supervising department.

If a student's medical condition indicates that additional accommodations may be necessary, they should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) and the Office for Inclusion and Equity (OIE) to determine what additional accommodations are reasonable:

- Services for Students With Disabilities (SSD)
- Disability Resources
- Office for Inclusion and Equity (OIE)

Leaves of absence from employment are distinct from an academic leave of absence requested from the Graduate School. See Graduate School: Leaves of Absence for more information.

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