

Graduate Student Parental Accommodation

Academic Regulations

November 9, 2023

Purpose: Consistent with the University of Vermont's efforts to be inclusive and support all graduate students as they balance their academic and personal life, the University provides accommodations for graduate students who become new parents, whether by childbirth or adoption, so that they may contribute to their family responsibilities while continuing to make progress towards their degree. Recognizing the challenges of balancing the demands of both graduate study and parenting a new child, these guidelines aim to improve the academic environment for graduate student parents. The guidelines assist graduate students following the birth or placement for adoption of a child. The purpose of these guidelines is to make it possible for a student to maintain their registration as a full-time student status, along with all the benefits of such status, while facilitating the return to full participation in courses, research, and/or teaching.

Eligibility: The Graduate Student Parental Accommodation guidelines apply only to full- and part-time students enrolled in graduate programs who are in good academic standing and who are making satisfactory progress toward the completion of a graduate degree. To become eligible for coverage under these guidelines, students must have completed at least (the equivalent of) one full-time term (i.e. fall or spring) of their degree program. The guidelines cover the situation of students who experience a childbirth, who adopt a child, or who are the partner of someone who has experienced a childbirth or an adoption for whom the student has parental responsibilities. These eligibility requirements cover all provisions of the guidelines.

I. Parental Accommodation Period

Eligible students may invoke a Parental Accommodation Period for eight weeks in the six months following the birth of a child or the placement for adoption of a child for whom the student has parental responsibilities. During this period of accommodation, the student will continue to be enrolled as a student. Because the student remains enrolled as a student and continues to pay tuition, this is not a formal leave of absence. It is instead a modification of deadlines and academic expectations to accommodate the student's new parental responsibilities. The student may be able to postpone completion of course assignments, examinations, academic milestones and other academic requirements for the eight-week Parental Accommodation Period.

Advisors and program leaders are expected to work sensitively and creatively to accommodate particular circumstances. For example, students whose research involves working with toxic materials or requires extensive travel to remote field areas may need additional forms of accommodation during the entire term of their pregnancy and/or during lactation. Advisors should have realistic expectations about rates of progress on research for students with new additions to their families.

Eligible students are entitled to an extension of one year per childbirth or adoption to the maximum time limits to degree. Requests for extension of time limits in relation to a Parental Accommodation must be submitted by the graduate student and their program to the Graduate College. An extension of time limits does not guarantee that a student will have university funding in those additional terms. Students should consult with their advisor regarding funding options for extension periods prior to requesting the Parental Accommodation.

Because the Accommodation Period needs to be tailored to the student's individual circumstances and the timing of the student's academic responsibilities, the student should consult in advance with the program director, their research advisor, and/or the office of student services in their college/school about how the student will meet academic goals and requirements. The student is responsible for ensuring that this consultation takes place one semester before the anticipated birth or placement for adoption, or as far in advance as possible.

Students enrolled in programs characterized by sequential courses or clinicals should consult with their advisor on how to complete their degree program. Programs that require lockstep coursework or clinical duties may not have sufficient curricular flexibility to allow a student to take an eight-week Parental Accommodation Period. In these cases, the program should be as flexible as possible even if accommodations are more limited and/or must be enacted for less than eight weeks.

Students may be approved to have "full time status" equivalency with a reduced credit load of 5 or more credits. For the semester of birth or adoption and for the following semester, reduced credit load is permitted. Incomplete grades may be used as needed to span the eight-week hiatus from academic work. GRAD 901 or 902 may be used to maintain a minimum enrollment of 5 credits.

If both parents are eligible graduate students under these guidelines, each is separately entitled to an eight-week Parental Accommodation Period; in such cases, those periods may be taken simultaneously or separately within the six months following the qualifying event. In the event of a multiple birth or adoption, the length of the accommodation period is eight weeks.

After the end of the Parental Accommodation Period, students are expected to return to graduate study and resume progress toward completing their degrees. Faculty are encouraged to remain flexible in their expectations of students who become new parents, so that they can meet the demands of graduate study at the same time that they face new demands in their parental roles.

These guidelines cannot and should not replace communication and cooperation between student and advisor as both commit to good-faith efforts to accommodate the birth or adoption of a child. It is the intent of these guidelines to reinforce the importance of that cooperation and to provide structured support to make that accommodation possible.

Special Notice to International Students: Students who are attending the University of Vermont on a F-1 student visa or J-1 Exchange Visitor visa are strongly encouraged to consult in advance with the [Office of International Education](#) about their plans during the period of Parental Accommodation.

II. Students With Graduate Academic Appointments

Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Administrative Assistants (GTA, GRA, GAA)

Students with stipended GTA, GRA, or GAA appointments and their faculty advisors are encouraged to collaboratively work out anticipated accommodations one semester before the anticipated birth or placement for adoption, or as soon as possible.

Faculty members who serve as faculty advisors to and/or oversee the assistantships of students who assume new roles as parents should offer flexibility to enable students to take advantage of the Parental Accommodation Period. During this period the students will continue to receive their stipend, benefits, and tuition scholarship. With 5-credit enrollment, students will maintain eligibility to utilize the [Center for Health & Well Being](#).

The Dean's Office of the College or School housing the student's graduate program will be responsible for appointing and paying replacement effort as needed to meet teaching or other needs entailed in the student parent's Academic Appointment.

In most cases, students on Academic Appointment funded by external grants will receive their stipend and benefits during their Parental Accommodation Period through their specific grant, provided that the granting agency permits such action. If the funding agency has terms and conditions which do not permit funding pursuant to these guidelines, the College/School will financially support the student during the Parental Accommodation Period at least at the University minimum stipend level. If less than eight weeks is allowed by the external source, the College/School will supplement external funding.

Predoctoral Fellows and Trainees

Eligible students who are supported by internal University of Vermont Fellowships will continue to receive their fellowship support and benefits during the Parental Accommodation Period.

Eligible students who are supported by Fellowships or Traineeships external to the University must adhere to the rules of the fellowship/traineeship-granting body with respect to absences from activities of the Fellowship or Traineeship. If the funding body requires that Fellowship or Traineeship benefits are suspended or deferred during this period, and the appropriate documentation is submitted, the student parent's College/School will assume funding responsibility at least at the University's minimum stipend level for Academic Appointments.

III. Process

An eligible student must submit to the Graduate College a written Request for Graduate Student Parental Accommodation after appropriate consultation with the program director and research advisor (if applicable). The request must be accompanied by appropriate documentation of the anticipated birth or placement for adoption (for example, a letter from the student's medical provider with an estimate of delivery date or from the adoption agency with a date of the placement for adoption).

Student Services Specialists in the Graduate College will provide consultative support for students and faculty to determine the best academic approach and to guide students in preparing formal requests, including any request to extend a limit for maximum time to degree.

IV. Concerns and Reporting

The University of Vermont strives to build and maintain a positive and healthy learning and training environment. Any graduate student who believes that they have been treated unfairly according to these guidelines is encouraged, but not required, to first discuss the situation further with their program director, research advisor, or office of student services in their college or school and/or with the independent [Ombudsperson for Graduate Students](#). Students are also encouraged to report any unfair treatment, bias or discrimination via the University's [Bias, Discrimination, & Harassment Reporting Form](#). Any graduate student may appeal to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs in the Graduate College for support in resolving program-level disputes over appropriate academic accommodations.