

## **Childbirth Accommodation Guidelines for Female Graduate Students in the College of Science**

### **Rationale**

The College of Science is committed to achieving a diverse graduate student body, and facilitating the participation of under-represented groups in all areas of research and graduate studies. The fundamental principle behind these guidelines is that the College of Science is committed to maintaining the student's viability as a contributing member to the research and educational mission of the College. Of foremost importance is the health of the mother and newborn as well as continued progress toward degree of the graduate student. It is hoped that these procedures will assure a secure environment, which will enable the continued success of the student. No set of guidelines will cover all exigencies. In all cases, communication between student, research mentor, instructors, and Department officials will be necessary for flexible responses to unique situations.

### **Summary of Provisions of the Childbirth Accommodation Guidelines**

The Childbirth Accommodation Guidelines are intended to provide an accommodation for the demands placed on a woman by pregnancy, childbirth, and the care of a newborn. It is designed to make it possible to maintain the mother's full-time, registered student status, and to facilitate her return to full participation in classwork, and, where applicable, research and/or teaching, in a seamless manner.

The Childbirth Accommodation Guidelines have three components. All women graduate students anticipating or experiencing a birth who are registered, matriculated students (1) are eligible for an Academic Accommodation Period of up to one semester before and/or after the birth, during which the student may postpone course assignments, examinations, and other academic requirements; (2) will be granted an automatic one-semester extension of departmental requirements and academic milestones, with the possibility of up to one year by petition under unusual circumstances. In addition, (3) women graduate students supported by fellowships, teaching assistantships, and/or research assistantships will be assigned modified TA or RA duties for a period of six weeks during which they will continue to receive support. (Students will not receive a stipend or salary if none was received previously, but are eligible for the Academic Accommodation Period and the one-semester extension of academic milestones.)

### **Eligibility**

The Childbirth Accommodation Guidelines apply to matriculated and enrolled women graduate students anticipating or experiencing a birth. Depending on the stage in her academic career, the timing of the birth, her funding source, and the level of assistance she will receive from others in caring for the newborn, a woman may find it more advantageous or feasible to take one or more semesters of leave of absence rather than remaining enrolled and utilizing the Childbirth Accommodation.

## **Planning for the Academic Accommodation Period**

The student should initiate discussions with her advisor(s) and departmental or school administrators at least four months prior to the anticipated birth in order to make arrangements for an Academic Accommodation Period. This will provide the lead time necessary to rearrange teaching duties for those students supported by teaching assistantships, 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., class attendance, Ph.D. qualifying exam and other academic milestones, field work, time-sensitive research reports on sponsored projects) that will be affected by the birth of a child and by the automatic one-quarter extension of academic requirements. It is essential that the student consult with the research advisor well in advance of the birth if the nature of her funding or the research grant conditions require that specific tasks be completed by specified dates, or if the P.I. will need to hire additional help to meet those conditions during a period of reduced activity by the woman 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/or research activities before and following the Academic Accommodation Period.

## **Applying for a Childbirth Academic Accommodation Period and an Extension of Academic Requirements**

Women graduate students anticipating or experiencing the birth of a child may request a one-semester extension of departmental academic requirements and a childbirth Academic Accommodation Period by submitting such a request in writing to the department head. Such a period is intended to recognize the student's need for special consideration before and after the birth of a child. This Academic Accommodation Period is *not* a leave of absence from University responsibilities. The expectation is that the woman will be in residence, and, assuming good health of the pregnant woman or new mother and the infant, will remain engaged in classwork and research, and, if applicable and feasible, teaching activities, even if at a reduced level.

## **During and After the Academic Accommodation Period**

### Funding

In addition to being eligible for up to one semester of academic accommodation, those women graduate students supported by fellowships, teaching assistantships, and/or research assistantships will be assigned modified TA or RA duties for a period of six weeks.

For most Ph.D. students for whom a Teaching Assistantship is part of her support package, it should be possible to arrange the timing of teaching assignments to accommodate childbirth. During the six-week period, students supported by teaching assistantships may continue in some limited capacity (e.g., grading, preparing course materials, or other nonintensive duties.) With advance planning, most Research Assistantship assignments can similarly be adjusted to accommodate childbirth. Most granting agencies provide for a short period of reduced activity due to health or personal issues. The student cannot be removed from research support for this accommodation period unless the granting agency requires such removal during such a period.

Students who are supported by fellowships internal to TAMU will see no change in their fellowship support.

Students who are supported by fellowships external to TAMU must adhere to the rules of the granting agency with respect to absences from academic and research work.

Students who do not have an ongoing commitment of financial support in the form of fellowships, teaching assistantships, or research assistantships may petition for an Academic Accommodation Period and an automatic one-semester extension of academic requirements, but are not entitled to tuition or other funding.

### Coursework and Research Activities

Approval of an Academic Accommodation Period will stop the academic and research clocks with regard to assignments due, reports anticipated, or other class- and research-related requirements. Students are expected to attend class and participate in seminars to the extent that the health of mother and newborn and the demands of caring for an infant allow. Faculty or relevant staff are expected to work with the student to make arrangements for submitting work for completion of requirements when the student returns, and to grade it promptly so as to remove any “Incomplete” notations as rapidly as possible. Faculty members are encouraged to assign “I” grades, where appropriate. Faculty are expected and encouraged to make individual arrangements with students for completion of requirements, and the removal of any grades of “I” when the student returns.

### **Coda**

The Childbirth Accommodation Guidelines establish *minimum* standards for accommodation for a woman graduate student giving birth. It is expected that advisors, academic staff, and departmental leaders will work with sensitivity and imagination to provide more than this minimum (as some are already doing), according to the particular circumstances of the woman student. For example, women whose research involves working with toxic chemicals or requires extensive travel to remote archives or field areas may need some form of accommodation during the entire pregnancy and during lactation. Taking care of an infant is time-consuming and sleep-depriving, so advisors need to have realistic expectations about rates of progress on research. For their part, new mothers 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 giving birth. In other words, the Childbirth Policy is intended to support—not replace—the open communication and good will that should characterize the relationship between student and advisor in the College of Science.