PARENTAL ACCOMMODATION

The parental accommodation policy aims to support active graduate students of all gender identities and gender expressions in The Graduate School who become new parents (whether by childbirth or adoption) by providing:

- a period of parental accommodation, roughly equivalent to the length of a quarter (12 weeks), during which funding may continue for funded students and
- TGS milestone deadlines will be extended by one year (for all parents, funded or unfunded)

This policy is separate from any student absences that are medically necessary due to pregnancy or childbirth — such absences are accommodated through the medical leave of absence process (https://www.northwestern.edu/studentaffairs/dos/programs-services/medical-leave-of-absence).

Eligibility

The Graduate Student Parental Accommodation applies to active students of all gender identities and gender expressions in The Graduate School who experience the birth or adoption of a child for whom they have parental responsibilities.

- Those adopting children over the age of 18 or a spouse’s or partner's child are not covered by this policy.
- Those residing in localities where legal adoption is not an option but who are assuming parental responsibilities and otherwise meet the eligibility criteria are covered by this policy.

Students are eligible who have not utilized a parental accommodation during the previous 12 months before the requested accommodation start date.

Accommodation Options

Accommodation options vary with the student’s funding status and funding source:

- Funded graduate students (graduate assistants, research assistants, teaching assistants, trainees, fellows) who would receive tuition and stipend from the University as of the start of the accommodation period, as well as graduate students who are funded from an external source, may request paid leave from their duties for a 12 week accommodation period.
  - Funding will be provided by The Graduate School for the 12 week accommodation period. Funding will be applied in the months closest to the dates of the accommodation.
  - If a student is not receiving funding as of the start date of the parental accommodation, none will be provided by this accommodation.
  - Graduate students who are funded from an external source supported on external fellowships or awards are obliged to inform their funding agency and should consult TGS Student Funding (tgs-fa@northwestern.edu).
- Unfunded graduate students (those who are not receiving funding as of the start date of the parental accommodation) may request unpaid leave from their studies for up to a 12 week accommodation period.

Either option will result in the extension of future TGS milestone deadlines (qualifying exam, prospectus, and degree deadline) by one year (four quarters). Programs must extend future, program-specific deadlines by the same length. Students, Directors of Graduate Studies (DGSes) and advisers are expected to discuss a timeline for meeting requirements well in advance of the start of the accommodation period.

To ensure that programs have ample time to arrange coverage during the accommodation, students must request the accommodation at least 60 days in advance of the accommodation start date. In unforeseen circumstances, students must provide as much notice as possible.

Stipulations

- Individual students may request one accommodation per childbirth or adoption event.
- Students who have had a prior parental accommodation within the past 12 months may not request another accommodation, but may request a medical or family leave of absence.
- Students must begin the accommodation period within the first 90 days of the birth or adoption, or prior to the birth/adoption if medically necessary.
- The period of accommodation applies to calendar weeks. If a Parental Accommodation overlaps with an academic break, the break period will still count toward the 12-week period of accommodation.
- Whichever accommodation option students choose, students will be eligible to maintain their student health insurance. Depending on a student’s funding status, the health insurance subsidy may or may not be applied. If the health insurance subsidy is not applied, a student will have the option to purchase coverage in fall quarter and may be eligible for a prorated subsidy depending on timing of return and funding status at the time of return. The Graduate School’s Student Services (https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/about/contact) representatives will be able to assist in this process.
- Students may wish to utilize a Leave of Absence in addition to (either before or after) a Parental Accommodation. Students who require medically necessary time away due to pregnancy or childbirth may request a Medical Leave of Absence. Students who wish to have additional time for the care of a child may request a Family Leave of Absence. See the Leave of Absence policy (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/academic-policies-procedures/leaves-absence) for additional information.
- Students who are enrolled in classes at the time of an accommodation must work with their instructors to determine whether incomplete grades are possible and to arrange a timeline for completion of coursework upon return from the accommodation period. If a student anticipates taking parental accommodation for a partial quarter, it is recommended that the student not enroll in coursework. Students should consult TGS Student Services (gradservices@northwestern.edu) to determine how to register for the quarters surrounding a parental accommodation.
- Students who are utilizing a parental accommodation may not fulfill degree requirements or make significant progress toward degree during the accommodation period. Programs (including instructors and advisers) may not require fulfillment of requirements or progress toward degree completion during the accommodation period.

Procedures

- Eligible students will request a Parental Accommodation by submitting the “Petition for Absence” form via TGS Forms in GSTS (https://gsts.northwestern.edu) and selecting the parental accommodation option at least 60 days prior to the accommodation start date (or as soon as possible in unforeseen circumstances).
Parental Accommodation

- The program's Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) or DGS designate will review the form, after which The Graduate School will review.
- When approved, The Graduate School will update the student’s record to reflect the extension of milestones and make any other necessary changes to the record.
- At the end of the 12 week period, students will resume their studies. If additional time away is needed, students must file for the appropriate leave of absence.
  - If students wish to return prior to the end of the 12 week period, they must first consult with The Graduate School Student Services (gradservices@northwestern.edu).