

Stony Brook Childbirth Accommodation Policy

Preamble

In the Spring of 2006, the Dean of the Graduate School empanelled a working group to draft a Childbirth Accommodation Policy for women who bear a child during graduate training at our university. The charge to this group was to develop a policy statement that would enable pregnant and childbearing Graduate School students to maintain full-time, registered student status, and facilitate their return to full participation in classwork, research, teaching, and clinical training.

The draft policy below is our response to the charge; in it, we have attempted to address major issues that arise with pregnancy and childbirth, including academic obligations and deadlines, financial support, and coordination of planning. However, in our discussions, it became apparent that the policy does not address several broader and related issues. These issues include accommodations for male graduate students providing care for infants; accommodations for graduate students adopting infants or children; accommodations for graduate students serving as foster parents; and accommodations for graduate students providing care for aged or incapacitated family members. In addition, the working group discussed the situation of post-doctoral scholars at our university who face many of the same challenges during pregnancy and childbirth while trying to establish their academic and research careers. We are respectfully submitting this draft policy in response to our charge, but we urge the Graduate School, the Research Foundation (as employer of many post-doctoral scholars), and other pertinent entities of Stony Brook University to address these issues of concern to our next generations of academics.

Rationale

A woman's prime childbearing years often coincide with the time that she is in graduate school. Pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care pose significant demands and therefore have the potential to slow women's progress in graduate training. Aspects of graduate training can also threaten the health or well-being of childbearing women and their offspring, such as when women's research involves exposure to potentially harmful substances or arduous physical activity or travel. Stony Brook University has established a Childbirth Accommodation Policy for women who bear a child during graduate training at our university. The purpose of the Stony Brook Childbirth Accommodation Policy (SB-CAP) is to enable childbearing women to complete graduate training in a timely manner and to alleviate potential conflicts of their health or their child's health with graduate training requirements. Paramount in the planning for childbirth are communication and cooperation among graduate students, advisors, and graduate programs. SB-CAP reinforces the importance of that cooperation, and offers a formal mechanism to enable appropriate accommodations.

Provisions

SB-CAP enables childbearing women to maintain full-time, registered student status, and facilitates their return to full participation in classwork, research, teaching, or clinical training. SB-CAP has four components that apply to all registered and

matriculated female students in the Graduate School of Stony Brook University anticipating or undergoing childbirth:

(1) Eligible students are accorded an **automatic one-semester extension** of graduate program and Graduate School requirements and time limits on all academic work including academic milestones such as Qualifying Exams and Dissertation Proposals. The date on which this extension period begins will be determined by the student in consultation with her advisor(s) and her Graduate Program Director (GPD).

Faculty and relevant staff are expected to coordinate with the student to make arrangements for work to be submitted to complete requirements, and to grade work promptly to remove Incomplete grades as rapidly as possible.

(2) Students eligible for SB-CAP **maintain full-time enrollment** during the entire period covered by accommodation and thus retain access to all Stony Brook University facilities and privileges, including, but not limited to, health insurance, student housing, library, email, and parking. Students will continue to be full-time students for all university matters involving financial aid (e.g. loan eligibility and deferment) and immigration (e.g. visa requirements).

(3) Women graduate students will be **excused from their regular teaching, research, clinical, or other training duties for twelve weeks. During this twelve-week period, students supported by University Fellowships, or as Research Assistants or Graduate Assistants will receive financial support from the Graduate School at the level they would have received otherwise. Students scheduled to receive support as Teaching Assistants will receive the equivalent of one semester of financial support as a Teaching Assistant from the Graduate School.** This period of funding will not count toward any graduate program or Graduate School limit on the number of years (or semesters) of support previously committed to the student. The particular twelve-week period of excused work will be determined by the student after consultation with her advisor(s) and GPD. Students excused from Teaching Assistantship obligations will be excused for one semester, which should be chosen after careful consideration of both the biological and academic calendars. Students who are not supported by fellowships, teaching assistantships, or research assistantships will not receive funding from the Graduate School, but they are excused from their training duties for twelve weeks and are eligible for all other components of SB-CAP including the one-semester extension of requirements.

With assistance from the GPD, it is the student's responsibility to make arrangements with faculty for course completion and for continuation of teaching, research, and/or clinical activities affected by the one-semester extension period and twelve-week excuse from work. The student should also discuss with her advisor(s) how the SB-CAP extension and excusal periods might affect time-sensitive research, teaching, or clinical projects, and the feasibility of her continued participation in these same projects. The student, her advisor, and her graduate program should also recognize that it might not be feasible to return to a regular TA, RA, or clinical assignment immediately after the twelve-week period. In that case, arrangements should be made such as moving a teaching or clinical assignment to another semester,

assigning limited on-site duties to a research assistant, or securing an alternative form of support. These issues should be negotiated sensitively with the student's needs in mind. For her part, the student should work proactively with her graduate program to make arrangements for ongoing support beyond the twelve-week period if she cannot return to her normal duties.

(4) The student should initiate discussions with her advisor(s) and Graduate Program Director and **apply for the provisions of SB-CAP as early as possible but no later than the 24th week of pregnancy**. This will provide time necessary to reassign teaching duties for those students supported by teaching assistantships, or to adjust clinical assignments, or laboratory and other research schedules. The planning period should also be used to reach agreement on a timeline for academic work (e.g. class work, qualifying exam and other academic milestones, field work, time-sensitive research reports on sponsored projects) that may be affected by the one-semester extension of requirements or twelve-week excuse from responsibilities. It is essential that the student consult with her advisor(s) well in advance if the nature of her funding or research grant conditions require that specific tasks be completed by specified dates, or if a Principal Investigator (PI) will need to hire additional help to meet those conditions during a period of reduced activity by the graduate student.

Students interested in arranging child care through our on-campus child care center, which offers a sliding fee scale and subsidies for qualified students, are encouraged to contact Stony Brook Child Care Services early in pregnancy at (63)2-6930.

Application Process

SB-CAP is administered by the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School through a formal application process. In the application, the woman student specifies the semester in which the automatic one-semester extension of requirements begins, and the twelve weeks for which she requests excusal from duties. Signatures indicating endorsement by the student's advisor(s) and Graduate Program Director are required on the application, as well as signatures by any additional supervisor of clinical work, research, or teaching, as appropriate. A signed letter from the student's health care provider stating the anticipated delivery date must accompany the application.

The Office of the Dean of the Graduate School will notify the student, the student's graduate program, and the relevant University administrative offices that the one-semester extension of academic requirements and the twelve-week excusal from duties have been approved, along with the start date for the extension and excusal periods. Also, if the student is determined to be eligible for SB-CAP funding by the Graduate School, the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School will provide the student's graduate program with account information for charging the student's salary and/or stipend and associated tuition during the twelve-week excusal period.

Special Circumstances

International students must consult with the staff of the International Services Office at the beginning of the planning period to address visa, immigration, and other pertinent issues.

Students who are supported by fellowships or grants external to Stony Brook University must adhere to the rules of the fellowship or grant source with respect to absences from academic and research work. Once a student files an application for SB-CAP, the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School will determine the regulations of a fellowship or funding source. Support for the student will be paid by the Graduate School under the provisions of SB-CAP for the twelve-week period unless specific regulations or funding circumstances prevent this.

While it is usually better for a student to remain enrolled full-time, in some cases, depending on her coursework, research, and her stage of an academic program, a student may decide that **part-time enrollment** is preferable. Students considering this should seek advance consultation to ensure that implications for academic progress, visa status, loan eligibility and deferment, health insurance, etc. are thoroughly understood.

Further Considerations

Students, advisors, graduate programs, and others affected by the provisions of SB-CAP must be flexible in implementing these accommodations, particularly with respect to their timing. Childbirth may occur earlier or later than expected, pregnant women or their infants may develop medical conditions that necessitate modifications to the excusal or extension period, and other unexpected events may influence a student's needs for accommodation. If valid reasons exist, such as health problems, the excusal or extension period may be extended, although SB-CAP funding from the Graduate School is intended to provide for a maximum of twelve weeks per pregnancy. Students requiring an extension of the excusal or extension period should contact the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School after consultation with the advisor(s) and GPD.

Students should also be assured that sensitive or personal information they share with their advisor(s), GPD, and the Graduate School, such as medical information, will be treated with utmost discretion and communicated only to pertinent individuals. Students must feel free to share information in an environment where their privacy is respected.

If questions or problems arise regarding SB-CAP or its implementation, students are encouraged to contact the Dean of the Graduate School and/or the Graduate Student Advocate in the Graduate School.

SB-CAP establishes *minimum* standards of accommodation for a graduate student giving birth. Advisors, academic staff, and graduate programs should work to provide more than this minimum as befits the particular circumstances of the student. For example, women whose research involves work with toxic chemicals or extensive travel to remote archives or field areas may need additional accommodation during the entire pregnancy and during lactation. Breastfeeding mothers should be accorded time, access to a private room, and use of a refrigerator, as needed.

Stony Brook Childbirth Accommodation Policy (SB-CAP)

While SB-CAP is intended to accommodate the needs of female graduate students bearing children, we encourage graduate programs to provide accommodations, where possible and appropriate, to others caring for newborn infants, including male and female adoptive and foster parents.

Pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care are physically and psychologically taxing. Advisors need to have realistic expectations about their student's rate of progress on research. For their part, pregnant students and those caring for an infant need to communicate with their graduate programs, 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. In other words, SB-CAP is intended to support — not replace — the open communication and good will that should characterize the relationship among graduate students, advisors, and graduate programs at Stony Brook University.

NOTE: The Stony Brook Childbirth Accommodation Policy will be evaluated two years following implementation.