A COMPARISON OF CHILDBIRTH/PARENTAL LEAVE POLICIES AT SELECTED U.S. UNIVERSITIES

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Universities reviewed (N=24)

Arizona (Univ of), Brown, California (Univ of), Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, Illinois, Maryland (Univ of), Michigan Tech, Michigan (Univ of), Minnesota (Univ of), MIT, UNC, Northwestern, Ohio State, Penn State, Princeton, Rice, Stanford, Stony Brook, Texas (Univ of), USC, Yale

Note: no policies relating to childbirth/parental leave or accommodation for graduate students were found for: Johns Hopkins, New Mexico (Univ of), Virginia (Univ of), Virginia Tech, Washington (Univ of), Wisconsin (Univ of)...(and several more).

Policies are variously named—e.g., Childbirth Accommodation; Childbirth & Adoption Accommodation; Graduate Student Parental Accommodation Policy; Parental Leave; Parental Leave for Graduate Assistants; Suspension of Responsibilities for Childbirth; Parental Support & Relief; Pregnancy, Childbirth, Adoption Accommodation Policy; Long-term Family Leave-Childbearing.

Length of leave: There is wide variation, 2 weeks to 12 weeks (or 1 semester)

Limitations according to Doctoral/Master’s status?

PhD students only: four specify this; the others usually specify that both master’s and doctoral students (provided they are regularly registered) are eligible. Often there is a requirement that one must have been a student for certain amount of time before being eligible—e.g., a semester or academic year.

Gender Restrictions? Variable. For example, Princeton gives 12 weeks for females only; USC gives 1 semester for both sexes; Yale gives 8 weeks for both sexes; Ohio State gives 6 paid weeks for mother, 3 paid weeks for father; etc. (there are other specific variations).

A requirement of eligibility to hold an academic title (typically TA or RA [GSR]): this seems to be the default case. Some universities also specify that students who are not employed or who are on fellowship are also eligible. If on fellowship, depending on its source, the student may be paid for the leave. If not employed (and not on fellowship), unpaid leave may be specified (but some universities leave this unspecified—i.e., it’s not clear whether or not such students may take unpaid leave).

For those students in academic titles, they continue to receive their salary/stipend, though this is often limited to only a few weeks (typically up to 6) even if the overall allowed leave time is greater. For students on external fellowships, it is often stated that the payment decision is at the discretion of the granting agency.
How are students in academic titles funded?

This is not always specified, but when it is, there is a range of answers. Some specify unambiguously that the Graduate School provides the funding (Illinois, Michigan, Stony Brook, Yale, UCSD; Graduate School for Humanities & Social Sciences at Princeton). USC says the Grad School will pay if a stipend is warranted (i.e., there is nothing automatic about payment, a justification must be provided).

Some cite the Graduate School as a funding source with another unit, such as the graduate program (Brown), the Office of the Provost (UNC), the Graduate School of Medical Sciences (Cornell).

Northwestern says the student’s funding source will pay, broadly specifying “university, foundation, government.”

Michigan Tech cites the “Childbirth Accommodation Fund” as the source of payments, but does not state from which office that fund emanates.

Among the UCs, Berkeley, Irvine, Los Angeles and San Diego note that the program is funded by a more or less centralized¹ “Childbirth Accommodation Fund.”

The UC Situation in General:

All the UCs have recently renewed a three-year contract (2010-2013) with the UAW for ASEs (Academic Student Employees, i.e., graduate students with teaching titles)². Thus all TAs (and related titles) are eligible for up to four weeks of paid leave for childbirth. This perforce applies only to female graduate students; however, new birth fathers may take up to two weeks of paid leave; and ASEs of either sex may take up to two weeks of paid leave for a newly adopted child.

In addition to these provisions for ASEs, two campuses—UCB and UCSD—offer a special “Childbirth Accommodation Policy for Doctoral Students,” which provides six weeks of paid leave for female students; UCSD says it will also consider female MFA students to be eligible, and GSRs may be considered under unusual circumstances.

The new UAW-ASE contract also provides for Childcare Reimbursement for ASEs: up to $600/quarter for expenses incurred during the ASE’s appointment period in the regular academic year. Beginning Summer Session 2011, an eligible ASE may also receive up to a total of $600 per summer session. If both parents are eligible ASEs, both may receive childcare reimbursement.

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¹ This may be the Office of Graduate Studies or the Provost’s Office.
² These include: Teaching Assistant, Reader, Associate In, Community Teaching Fellow, Tutor, Remedial Tutor.