

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

GUIDELINE: NEW PARENT ACCOMMODATION FOR GRADUATE ASSISTANTS AND POSTDOCTORAL TRAINEES

This document serves as a recommended guideline and is not considered a formal policy. Colleges and departments are encouraged to use these guidelines as a model for effectively meeting the related needs of graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees, in the spirit that such matters should be handled in the most supportive manner possible.

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PURPOSE

Consistent with Penn State's continuous effort to support the personal and professional development of all members of our community, this guideline on new parent accommodation seeks to reduce the professional and personal stresses that can develop when graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees become parents. New parenthood, whether by childbirth or adoption, can put the careers of some graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees at risk because of the added and intensive care-giving responsibilities. This guideline is designed to provide graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees with an opportunity to integrate parenthood with their academic scholarship and research. In addition to providing assistance to families, it seeks to accomplish three particular institutional goals:

1. to reduce attrition for graduate assistants who become parents during their graduate careers at Penn State;
2. to standardize the treatment of graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees who become parents during their time at Penn State;
3. to establish an institutional accommodation guideline that is recognized by external agencies and other funding sources for graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees.

NEW PARENT ACCOMMODATION DEFINED

Penn State will reasonably accommodate the needs of its graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees when they become parents. "Parent" is defined as a man who fathers a child, a mother who gives birth to a child, or any person who adopts a child. "Accommodation" is defined as the reasonable allowances as outlined in this document.

ACCOMMODATIONS

The University wishes to foster cooperation between graduate assistants or postdoctoral trainees and their respective mentors and departments during any period of new parenthood. While accommodations offered by faculty mentors and professional colleagues beyond those listed here are encouraged, they are not required.

Graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees who meet the requirements for parental accommodation will be excused from their regular activities for a period of up to six weeks immediately following the birth or adoption of a child. During this time, assistants and trainees will continue to receive the same income and benefits as provided previously by the University. Health care benefits, including health insurance, as had previously applied to assistants and trainees and their dependents, will remain unchanged. Full-time enrollment or trainee status as well as access to all appropriate housing, programs, facilities, and services will remain unaffected during the accommodation period. In the event the accommodation period includes an academic break, such as occurs between semesters, the accommodation period includes the academic break and cannot be extended by the length of the break.

Graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees should alert their mentors and programs as soon as they recognize the need for an impending accommodation period so that any necessary work adjustments might be made. During the accommodation, individuals may wish to maintain a certain amount of involvement with their mentors and other professional activities at the University to best facilitate a smooth transition upon their return. Unless otherwise mutually agreed, graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees will not be required to perform any duties for the duration of their accommodation.

Approval of accommodation will automatically extend deadlines--for work assignments, proposals or related work, and other responsibilities--for the duration of the accommodation period. Faculty and other mentors are expected to work with graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees to make fair and appropriate alternative arrangements during the accommodation period. Accommodations with respect to courses (e.g. deferral of course grades) are addressed elsewhere for all graduate students (see <http://www.registrar.psu.edu/grades/deferred.cfm>). All graduate students should be permitted to defer deadlines for academic milestones, including candidacy, comprehensive examinations, and final defense for one semester in the case of a request for new parent accommodation. Graduate assistants in programs characterized by sequential courses must anticipate the potential consequences associated with accommodation and, in consultation with the program officer, should plan how best to complete their programs following the

accommodation period. Extension of milestones does not guarantee an extension of the funding period beyond that specified in the original letter of offer.

Note that this guideline does not address occasions for which medical care is required prior to the birth of a child, or situations that necessitate extended medical treatment due to complications that may arise during or following the birth of a child. Such occasions, which require extended leave due to illness or disability, are to be handled in the collegial manner that currently prevails, by discussion and arrangement with the graduate assistant's department or the postdoctoral trainee's mentor.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

An individual is eligible for parental accommodation under this guideline if she or he is the primary caregiver for a newly born or newly adopted child and currently is enrolled at Penn State as a full-time graduate student on an assistantship or is appointed by the University as a 48-week postdoctoral trainee. In the event both parents of a newborn or newly adopted child are full-time graduate assistants, postdoctoral trainees, or a combination of both, only one parent may receive accommodation.

This guideline is applicable for the length of the assistantship or appointment. International graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees will retain their full-time status throughout the parental accommodation period. However, for graduate assistants the timing of their degree achievement may be altered. International graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees should consult with the Directorate of International Student Advising during the application process to ensure their visa status will remain unchanged throughout their time at Penn State.

ACQUIRING NEW PARENT ACCOMMODATION

Graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees desiring accommodations under this guideline must submit a written request, and the request must be made as soon as possible after the date of the anticipated birth or adoption is known. The assistant or associate dean in charge of graduate education for the graduate assistant's graduate program grants accommodation after appropriate consultation with the unit in which the graduate assistant's appointment is held. The assistant or associate dean will notify the graduate assistant, the work unit, the academic program, and the Graduate School regarding the outcome of the request.

Postdoctoral trainees must submit their written requests with their college human resources representative who will consult with the trainee's mentor. The human resources representative will notify the trainee regarding the outcome of the request, as well as the mentor and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. Approval for parental accommodation must be granted before individuals can be excused from their regular activities.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND ADMINISTRATION

In most cases, graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees who have been funded by their advisor's/mentor's external grant (or by an external grant from another unit if they are not funded by their advisor/mentor) will receive their parental accommodation pay 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 this guideline, the advisor/mentor (or unit supervisor if they are not funded by an advisor/mentor) should fund the parental accommodation period. Graduate assistants whose appointments are funded by their departments, colleges, or other administrative units of the university, and postdoctoral trainees who work in positions funded by colleges or other administrative units of the University, should receive their parental accommodation pay from unit resources.

The assistant or associate dean of the relevant college, in conjunction with the Graduate School, will ensure compliance and proper administration of this guideline for graduate assistants. The human resources representative for the relevant unit, in conjunction with the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, will ensure compliance and proper administration of this guideline for postdoctoral trainees. Appeals and outstanding circumstances also will be reviewed by these respective entities.

STATEMENT OF MINIMUM

This guideline sets the minimum parental accommodations recommended for graduate assistants and postdoctoral trainees. Individual parties are encouraged to work collaboratively to ensure these minimum accommodations, but should feel free to negotiate additional accommodations as mutually agreeable. Indeed, additional accommodations may be necessary, especially in medically critical situations.