

TITLE

Policy on Medical Student Parental Accommodation

I. PURPOSE

Consistent with efforts to strive to be inclusive and to support academic-personal life balance, the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine believes it is important to provide accommodation for medical students who become new parents, whether by childbirth, adoption, or fostering, so that they may contribute to their family responsibilities while continuing to make progress towards their degree. This practice will help develop students who can successfully integrate their academic and personal pursuits. In recognition of the challenges of balancing the demands of medical study and parenting a new child, these guidelines aim to improve the academic environment for student parents.

II. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- Medical students

III. POLICY

All medical students may take up to six weeks (42 calendar days) of parental accommodation time during the curriculum, immediately following the birth of a child or the adoption of a child for whom the student has parental responsibilities.

Accommodation days can be taken consecutively or intermittently up to the six-week maximum but must be taken in the six months following birth or adoption. These days must be requested for at least one week at a time, unless there are special circumstances (which would require approval from the Associate Dean of Student Affairs).

During this period of accommodation, the student will continue to be enrolled as a full-time student. Therefore, parental accommodation is not a formal leave of absence. It is instead a modification of deadlines and academic expectations to accommodate the student's new parental responsibilities. During this accommodation period, students would not be expected to participate in any in-person or remote curricular activities. The student will be able to postpone completion of course assignments, examinations, academic milestones and other academic requirements for the accommodation period. However, academic standards will not be altered because of parental accommodation. If course work, in any part of the curriculum, is missed, students must make up the deficiency to the satisfaction of the faculty.

Students who require more accommodation time because of unusual circumstances can request additional time; this would require a recommendation by a treating physician, as well as special approval from the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. This could be granted as a personal or medical leave of absence.

Accommodation periods for parental leave do not alter expected milestones for graduation or promotion.

If both parents are eligible medical students, each may take their own parental accommodation period.

The six-week maximum will not be extended in the event of a multiple birth or multiple adoption. However, if a student uses an accommodation period in one academic year, and then in another academic year has another birth or adoption, they can request another accommodation period (one per year).

IV. POLICY AUTHOR(S)

- Office of Student Affairs
- Office of Medical Education

V. RELATED POLICIES

Policy on Absence and Attendance

Policy on Leave of Absence

VI. REFERENCES

LCME Element 12.3: Personal Counseling/Well-Being Programs. A medical school has in place an effective system of personal counseling for its medical students that includes programs to promote their well-being and to facilitate their adjustment to the physical and emotional demands of medical education.

LCME Element 12.4: Student Access to Health Care Services. A medical school provides its medical students with timely access to needed diagnostic, preventive, and therapeutic health services at sites in reasonable proximity to the locations of their required educational experiences and has policies and procedures in place that permit students to be excused from these experiences to seek needed care.

VII. APPROVALS

Dean, School of Medicine: Originally approved, November 6, 2020.

Revisions:

Curriculum Committee, approved 3/6/23.

Education Policy Council, approved 3/21/23.

Executive Committee, approved 7/10/23.

Dean, School of Medicine, approved 7/28/23.

PROCEDURES

UPSOM recognizes the importance of balancing the family and academic needs of new parents and provides support for medical students who are anticipating the birth or adoption of a child. UPSOM extends this support to parents expecting a baby, to parents who are adopting a child, and to parents through surrogacy.

To facilitate the school's ability to provide assistance, medical students who are pregnant or have an adoption date are urged to notify their Advisory Deans and the Assistant or Associate Dean for Student Affairs as soon as they are able so that accommodations to their schedule can be made. The student will be expected to provide appropriate documentation of the anticipated birth or adoption (e.g., a letter from the student's medical provider with an estimated delivery date, or from the adoption agency with an estimated adoption date).

The school is available to assist with schedule modifications (if needed) and to facilitate referrals to health or other services (e.g., University Health Service). Students are excused from required curricular activities in order to pursue health care or legal activities necessary to become parents (e.g., for obstetrical appointments). As per our Absence and Attendance Policy, if a student misses time for health-related activities, there may be make-up activities required, but these should be proportionate to and appropriate for time missed, and not punitive or excessive. Any student who believes that a make-up activity is not proportionate can seek redress through the Associate Dean for Medical Education. Such make-up activity should be discussed in advance, to allow students choice in determining the nature and length of their accommodation period.

The students should notify the Office of Student Affairs of their expected date of return following a parental accommodation period. If this is more than six (6) weeks after the beginning of the accommodation period, approval of the physician should be provided. If a medical student has health problems related to pregnancy, or their physician recommends more than six weeks off after delivery, alteration of the academic program will be individualized by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, based on the physician recommendations. If health or personal issues require it, this could require a student's taking a formal leave of absence. Responsibility for initiating these discussions lies with the student.

In the case of students in the 3rd and 4th years, these accommodation periods usually can be achieved through vacation months or other experiences that may not require time in the hospital. For 1st and 2nd year students, work can be made up later in the academic year. These arrangements will be made individually.

After the end of the parental accommodation period, students are expected to return to medical school and resume progress toward completing their degrees. Faculty are encouraged to remain flexible in their expectations of students who become new parents, so that students can meet the demands of medical school at the same time that they face new demands in their parental roles. Nothing in this policy can or should replace communication and cooperation between student and advisor, and the good-faith efforts of both to accommodate the birth or adoption of a child. It is the intent of this policy to reinforce the importance of that cooperation and to provide support to make that accommodation possible.

Part of parental accommodation after delivery would be allowing break time and space for students who wish to express milk for breastfeeding (i.e., pumping). This would typically take about an hour daily; clerkships will be flexible about this time, with students trying to avoid missing required activities when they choose to pump. This will be granted for students for however long they desire (not just during the six-week parental accommodation period). Students will ask course/clerkship directors to identify an appropriate functional space for them that is not a bathroom; all sites should provide such spaces.

Eligible students who are supported by University of Pittsburgh fellowships or financial aid will experience no change in their funding arrangements during the parental accommodation period; they will continue to receive their support and benefits. Eligible students who are supported by fellowships external to the University must adhere to the rules of the granting agency with respect to absences from academic and research work.

Medical students with a F-1 student visa or J-1 Exchange Visitor visa are strongly encouraged to consult in advance with the Office of International Studies about their plans during the period of parental accommodation.

Any student who believes that he or she has been treated unfairly or has been denied eligibility according to these guidelines should first discuss the situation with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. If a resolution cannot be reached, the student should present the grievance to the Vice Dean for evaluation, adjudication, and, if necessary, advice on additional, formal grievance procedures.