

Family Leave Policy Proposal for Engineering and Public Policy

Author: Rebecca Balebako

Introduction

Currently, Engineering and Public Policy (EPP) graduate students have no guidelines or policy for taking leave when a new child is added to a family. Neither the EPP department nor Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) provides any policy or guidelines on family leave. Often the amount of parental leave is a decision made by individual advisors.

While we recognize that previous and current graduate student parents in EPP have completed the program successfully, we do think the program would benefit from a well-considered policy.

A clear policy on family leave would have three benefits for EPP.

1. The existence of a policy serves to emphasize that EPP embraces diversities of gender, age, and family situation among its students. A policy could make EPP more competitive when recruiting diverse students, and set a tone of welcome for such students.
2. It is only clear and fair that both existing and incoming students can be pointed to an unambiguous policy regarding this matter.
3. Advisors and faculty would be relieved of the burden of coming up with rules or policies on an ad hoc basis.

This document discusses areas of consideration for family leave, a draft proposal for an EPP policy, and information about competitive schools' family leave policies.

Issues to Consider

The following questions should be considered when designing the ideal family policy. This list includes considerations that may be appropriate at the school or university level, but not at the department level.

- Does the school offer detailed guidelines about who is eligible for parental or maternity leave, and for how long?
- What does family leave entail?
 - o Eligibility: in some schools, maternity leave is called "childbirth accommodation." Only women giving birth are eligible. Other schools have separate policies for women giving birth and other parents expecting children.
 - o Length of leave: in general, maternity leave is between four and twelve weeks.

- Under what circumstances do students receive grant or stipend support during the leave? Continued grant support may depend on the nature of the grant, or whether the university has a separate fund to cover grad students (e.g. MIT).
- Access to library, health insurance, and other resources while on leave: if the student gets leave but no support, would they at least still have access to CMU resources?
- Does the academic and research clock stop when a student goes on leave?
 - Are academic and research requirements, such as qualifiers, thesis proposal, thesis defense, and teaching duties, capable of accommodating students on leave, perhaps through postponement?
- International students: Does family leave impact full-time student status and visa status?

Overview of competitive schools

In order to support consideration of such a policy, I have gathered information about the maternity and family leave offered by schools of CMU's stature. The following table gives an overview of maternity/childbirth leave only. For more information about family leave and each school's policy, see Appendix B.

School	Is maternity leave offered to grad students	Length of Maternity Leave	Continued grant support	Stop academic clock	Child care subsidy
Berkeley	Yes	6 weeks	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brown	Yes	8 weeks	Yes	Yes	None found
Carnegie Mellon	No			For dissertation	
Cal. Inst. Tech.	Yes	6-12 weeks	6 weeks	Unclear	Yes
Cornell	Yes	6 weeks	Yes	Yes	Yes
Duke	Yes	7 weeks	Yes	Flexible	Yes
Emory	No				None found
Georgia Tech	No				none found
MIT	Yes	4-8 weeks	Yes	Yes	Yes
Northwestern	Yes	6 weeks	Yes	6 weeks	found
Princeton	Yes	12 weeks	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rice	Yes	6 weeks	Yes	Unclear	No
RPI	Yes	semester	Yes	Yes	found
Stanford	Yes	6 weeks	Yes	Yes	No
U of Michigan	Yes	6 weeks	Yes	Unclear	Yes

UPenn	Yes	8 weeks	Yes	Yes	none found
Washington U St Louis	Yes	34 work days	Yes	No	Yes

In some cases, the policies were unclear or lacked specific guidelines about some areas. These have been marked as “unclear.” In other cases (Georgia Tech and Emory), I was not able to find evidence that a policy exists, but I did not contact the schools outside of a web search to verify.

EPP Strawman Proposal

In this section, I propose a policy specific to Engineering and Public Policy, and covers issues that are directly pertinent to EPP members. This policy is intended to set minimum protections for students and mothers¹, and is not intended to inhibit flexible evaluation of needs on individual basis. The accommodation is intended to enable a new child and childbirth and subsequent return to classes and research in as seamless a manner as possible.

Some of the above considerations cannot be addressed by EPP alone (such as access to the library while on family leave), and hence are not addressed.

Funded leave may already be available under certain fellowships (e.g. NSF GRFP). It is recommended that the department (not the faculty) pay for any leave not covered under fellowships or grants. This is to avoid discrimination against potential students who indicate an interest in having a family.

We recommend funded leave as the student would remain enrolled, would not lose visa status, and would be able to return to the program quickly without needing to request one semester of academic leave.

Leave:

Many schools offer two types of family leave; one for any new parent, and another childbirth accommodation for women giving birth. The childbirth accommodation recognizes the physical impact and recovery time of childbirth.

Family Leave: Any new parent (father/mother/adoptive) may request 4 weeks of funded leave.

¹ For more information about why women may be uncomfortable negotiating for their own benefit, please see Babcock, Linda, and Sara Laschever. *Women don't ask: Negotiation and the gender divide*. Princeton University Press, 2008.

Childbirth Leave: Women giving birth to a child are offered 8 weeks of funded leave. Women may request additional leave and will be able to negotiate the time of leave and funding with their advisor.

Academic and research clock:

Time To Degree: CMU's Doctoral Student Status Policy currently covers students who may need more than 10 years to complete their PhD due to family leave. See Appendix A for text and link.

Qualifiers: Any new parent (those qualifying for family leave) with a new child born up to 6 months before their qualifiers may request to have the qualifiers postponed for one year.

Teaching or project management duties: Any student who qualifies for family leave may request a postponement of teaching duties for a semester, typically before the semester begins. It may be the case that new child's arrival date is not known in advance (adoption or early birth), and could occur during the semester in which the student is already committed to teaching. In these cases the student may request family leave as described above, or emergency leave as described in Appendix A.

Coursework: EPP faculty are expected and encouraged to make arrangements with the student to submit work for completion of requirements when the student returns from leave. Grades of incomplete, or the ability to re-take the class, may be appropriate.

Requesting Leave or Postponement

Timing: Students wishing to take parental or childbirth leave or postponement of qualifiers or teaching, should first discuss it with their advisor approximately 4 months before the child's arrival (when possible). They may then make a written request to the EPP department.

Appendix A: Leave at Carnegie Mellon

Carnegie Mellon University faculty members are entitled to one semester of paid leave of absence for a new child.

Source: <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/FacParLeave.htm>

Eligible staff are entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid leave; the minimum required by federal law. "The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides eligible employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for certain family and medical reasons."

Source: http://www.cmu.edu/hr/benefits/benefit_programs/time_off/leave.html

The Family and Medical Leave Act recommends twelve weeks of leave for employees. At CMU, graduate students are classified as “students,” not “employees,” and hence are not protected under this act.

CMU’s Doctoral Student Status Policy currently covers students who may need more than 10 years to complete their PhD. “Under extraordinary circumstances, such as ... family or parental leave, ... a school or college may, upon the relevant department's recommendation and with the written approval of the dean, defer the lapse of All But Dissertation status for a period commensurate with the duration of that interruption.” <http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/ABD.html>

CIT has slightly different wording regarding the dissertation time table: “Completion of Written Dissertation- not more than six years after being admitted to candidacy” (http://www.cit.cmu.edu/current_students/graduates/phd_policies.html) but the family leave exception mentioned above would still apply.

Students who need to take leave for reasons besides a new child can refer to the leave policy here: <http://www.cmu.edu/hub/registration/leave.html>

Appendix B: Policies at competitive schools.

The following section includes excerpts from the policies at competitive schools. I have specifically included all the schools considered CMU’s peer institutions (<http://www.cmu.edu/ira/infox/external/peer.html>) as well as 5 additional schools (Stanford, UC Berkeley, Stanford, UMich, Brown).

MIT

A student anticipating childbirth is eligible for Childbirth Accommodation, and may choose a period of one month, one and a half months, or two months... For the period of accommodation, stipend payments for supported students will be made from the Childbirth Accommodation Fund, at an approved rate to be set annually by the Institute.

Source: <http://odg.mit.edu/gpp/registration/changes/childbirth-accommodation-maternity-leave/>

Berkeley:

Women research doctoral students supported by university fellowships will experience no change in their funding arrangements during the six-week childbearing leave.

Source: <http://grad.berkeley.edu/policies/guides/memo-doctoral-parent/>

Princeton

A twelve-week suspension of academic work for birth mothers to acknowledge the demands on and accommodate the needs of female Ph.D. and master's graduate

students who give birth... Students holding any type of University financial support will continue to receive support for twelve weeks.

Source: <http://www.princeton.edu/gradschool/studentlife/childcare/childbirth/>

Stanford

In addition, female graduate students supported by fellowships, teaching assistantships, and/or research assistantships will be excused from their regular teaching or research duties for a period of six weeks during which they will continue to receive support.

Source: <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2006/february1/mom-020106.html>

UMich

Eligible students supported by U-M fellowships will continue to receive their fellowship support and benefits, according to the policy.

Source: http://www.ur.umich.edu/0708/Feb04_08/25.shtml

Brown

A student in a graduate program at Brown who anticipates giving birth or adopting an infant during the academic semester, or during the period covered by stipend support, is eligible for an academic accommodation period, normally eight weeks. Student parents on full-time status who receive stipends from Graduate School or program funds are entitled to draw support while on leave for eight weeks during the academic year.

Source: <http://www.brown.edu/academics/gradschool/childbirth-accommodation-and-family-leave>

Washington State University

A full-time graduate student **on an assistantship appointment** is eligible for four consecutive weeks of **paid** Parental Leave from his/her graduate program.

Source:

<http://www.gradschool.wsu.edu/CurrentStudents/PoliciesAndProcedures/Chapter5/OfficialLeavesOfAbsence.aspx>

California Institute of Technology

Graduate students who become pregnant during their studies must be provided a minimum of six weeks of paid leave with full benefits and another six weeks of family bonding leave without pay. Family bonding leave without pay is also available to the father, if the father is a graduate student at Caltech. The paid and unpaid leaves are intended to cover normal pregnancy and childbirth. If a longer leave is required due to medical complications, a six-month extension of leave beyond the 12 weeks may be taken as a medical leave with approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Reduced duty status continues registration for a student who cannot carry a full load due to medical disability, including pregnancy.

Source: <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~teknique/health/pregnancy.htm>

Source: http://cit.hr.caltech.edu/parenting/grad_maternity_leave.pdf

Cornell University

Accommodation options vary with the student's funding and degree program. Graduate assistants, fellows, and trainees who receive full tuition, stipend, and health insurance from or through Cornell may select either of the following options (but not both): (1) a six-week paid accommodation, or (2) up to one year of reduced-load registered-student status to be taken in full-semester increments not counting toward time-to-degree limits.

Source:

http://www.dfa.cornell.edu/cms/treasurer/policyoffice/policies/volumes/academic/upload/vol1_6.pdf

Duke

The designated primary caregiver will be relieved of full-time graduate studies and duties for up to seven weeks after the birth or adoption of a child. If need be, up to two of those weeks may be situated before the projected birth or adoption date. The non-primary care giving parent may be relieved of one week of full-time graduate studies and duties in order to provide additional support to the primary caregiver.

Source: <http://today.duke.edu/2009/01/gradpolicy.html>

Source:

http://gradschool.duke.edu/documents/financial_support/parental_accommodation_policy.pdf

Emory

I did not find a graduate student policy for family leave. If graduate students are classified as employees, they may be eligible for 12 weeks of unpaid leave.

Source: <http://policies.emory.edu/4.73>

Georgia Tech

I did not find a graduate student policy for family leave. If graduate students are classified as employees, they may be eligible for 12 weeks of unpaid leave.

Northwestern University

Eligible women graduate students supported by fellowships, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and/or receiving a tuition scholarship at the time of childbirth will be excused from regular teaching or research duties for a period of six weeks during which they will continue to receive support.

A graduate student will, on request, be given a one-quarter leave of absence to give birth, to care for the newborn or mother, or to or adopt a child.

Source: <http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/academics/academic-services/leave/childbirth/index.html>

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

A student anticipating childbirth is eligible for a maximum of one semester of childbirth accommodation during which the student may postpone course assignments, examinations, and other academic requirements.

During the childbirth accommodation period, students who have been funded for the previous twelve (12) months through TA/RA/Fellowship and who have received an award letter indicating continuing support will be eligible for salary continuation to be paid from a fund established by the Provost and managed by the Office of Graduate Education. ... During this timeframe, duties typically performed by TAs and RAs will be suspended and the student will not be expected to work.
Source: http://www.rpi.edu/dept/grad/docs/Childbirth_Family_Parental_Leave.pdf

Rice University

A short term parental leave is a leave of six weeks. If a graduate student cannot fulfill the duties of his or her appointment due to the adoption or birth of a child, enrollment should be continued for six weeks. For students who receive funding, stipend should be continued, irrespective of source, for six weeks
Source: <http://graduate.rice.edu/stmlguidelines/>

UPenn

A student in a Ph.D. program at Penn is eligible for time off of eight weeks for the birth or adoption of a child.
Source: http://www.upenn.edu/provost/academic_rules

UWashington – St Louis

Full-time graduate students in Arts & Sciences may take a New Child Leave under the following conditions. They should maintain full-time student status, either by registering for at least nine credit hours (such as Independent Study) or as Continuing Students. Students on New Child Leave are eligible to receive their normal stipend payments for 34 working days. Additional time off without pay for up to eight weeks will ordinarily be granted by the Graduate School with permission of the student's Department.
Source: <http://graduateschool.wustl.edu/files/graduate/Graduate-Student-Handbook.pdf>

APPENDIX C: Funding Support for Family Leave

This section will be used to provide pointers to the policies of grants and funding options that already support family, medical, or childbirth leave. Since the author is not fully aware of the scope or diversity of funding EPP students receive, this section is incomplete.

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow Program

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2011/nsf11050/nsf11050.jsp#a116>

“Is there a paid Medical Deferral option?”

For Fellows on Tenure with an NSF-approved Medical Deferral, there is a limited paid leave option: (1) If the GRFP Institution's graduate student leave policies allow for paid leave, those leave policies apply; or (2) In the absence of paid graduate student leave policies at the GRFP Institution, Fellows may continue to receive stipend payments for a period not to exceed three months total during the three Tenure Years. The three months may be broken up into shorter, monthly time frames across multiple Tenure Years (e.g., use of two months of Stipend under Medical Deferral in Tenure Year 1 and one month in Tenure Year 3).”