The USC Graduate School’s
Pregnancy, Birth of a Child and Adoption
Accommodation Program for Ph.D. Students
December 2006

Introduction
This accommodation program, for Ph.D. students at the University of Southern California, is designed to address the academic progression issues associated with the birth and care of an infant. It is widely acknowledged that the prime childbearing years are likely to coincide with the pursuit of a Ph.D. degree and/or the pursuit of tenure in an academic career. Upon the recommendation of the Provost’s Graduate Student Advisory Committee, comprised of USC students, faculty and staff, Provost C.L. Max Nikias has approved accommodations which are intended to make provision for students who become parents while pursuing their Ph.D. without detriment to their success as either scholar or parent. With the implementation of this program, USC is not only addressing one of the factors that contributes to Ph.D. program attrition, it is also making a statement about the value of families.

The Childbirth and Adoption Accommodation Program will be implemented during academic year 2006-2007 for the eligible Ph.D. student who becomes pregnant, becomes a parent, or who will be the primary caregiver of their newborn child, or an adopted child. Key elements of the accommodation include a formal application process, possible replacement of current stipend during the semester of birth or adoption, continuation of health benefits and tuition remission, and the firm expectation of full-time student status, including the continuation of academic progress. Maintaining full time status through the accommodation will satisfy the continuous enrollment requirement for the Ph.D. and retain use of the university libraries and other services provided to enrolled students. It may also permit international students to retain their visa status*.

Eligibility
Full time Ph.D. students in residence at USC who become pregnant, become a parent, or adopt a child, are eligible to apply for the academic accommodations. Only students who hold a multi-year 50%-time graduate assistantship are eligible to apply for possible stipend replacement. Students may apply for stipend replacement through the Graduate School for one semester or the equivalent number of weeks if they can not perform the duties required by their assistantships. The student’s department is expected to continue to remit tuition, provide any monies supplemental to the minimum stipend levels, and to continue health benefits during that time. The applicant should also demonstrate in the justification that the financial support is critical to successful completion of the Ph.D. degree.

Accommodation Application Process
The applicant must detail specific academic goals agreed upon in advance between the student and the faculty advisor, and include a signed statement of agreement from the faculty advisor/dissertation chair. Specifics of the application process include:

- As early as possible, potential applicants should discuss with their faculty advisor and department chair, the upcoming birth or adoption and their intent to apply for the accommodation.
- Applications for the accommodation should be filed with the Graduate School at least three months prior to the anticipated start date. They should include specific academic goals agreed upon in advance between the student and the faculty advisor. These will become part of the record retained by the Graduate School and the student’s academic department.
- A statement of pregnancy signed by a U.S. doctor, a birth certificate, or a statement of adoption from the adoption agency must also be included with the application for the accommodation.

- Once approved, the accommodation will begin on a specified date or at the time of birth or adoption.

- During the accommodation period, students must maintain full-time student status and are expected to be making successful progress toward their degree (as specified in the previously agreed upon academic goals).

- There will be a provision for a pause in the completion of regular coursework and examination requirements, with the option to complete the requirements within one year.

- If needed, there will also be a provision for a pause in the timeline of markers of academic progress (e.g. qualifying examination, dissertation defense, and time to degree completion) for one semester if needed.

- Approved students who hold multi-year 50%-time assistantships, may be relieved from their assistantship duties for up to one semester (or equivalent) while retaining a current stipend, tuition remission and health benefits.

- Accommodation support greater than one semester will not be provided by the Graduate School. If such is necessary, the student will be expected to request an approved Leave of Absence (without stipend) from their department.

Decisions regarding funding for stipend replacement support are dependent on the availability of resources.

*Special considerations*

Special considerations that require an extended accommodation will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Examples of such circumstances could include:

- Complications of pregnancy, with birth, or post-natal complications;

- Serious issues related to infant health or adoption;

- Potential risks posed by, for example, lab work with exposure to harmful chemicals or certain types of hazardous field work. These risks could occur well before birth and continue through lactation and may involve the negotiation of modified duties between the student and faculty. It should be noted that the Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE) program has a program to accommodate this population of students likely to be involved in lab related research.

* International students should discuss their proposed accommodation with the Office of International Students to ensure compliance with immigration policy.
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Guidelines for Application

Applications for the accommodation should be filed with the Graduate School at least three months prior to the anticipated start date. The official “Request for Childbirth and Adoption Accommodation” form can be found at: http://www.usc.edu/schools/GraduateSchool/grad_advisor_childbirth.html

The following documents must be included in the application:

• A personal statement that includes the following points:
  
  o Statement of why applicant is not able to perform the duties required by the assistantship.
  
  o Statement of why the financial support is critical to the successful completion of the Ph.D. degree.
  
  o An indication that the applicant has discussed, as early as possible, with their faculty advisor and department chair, the upcoming birth or adoption, and their intent to apply for this accommodation.
  
  o A statement of intention to maintain full-time student status during the Accommodation period.

• A statement of specific academic goals necessary for making successful progress toward the degree. This must be signed and dated by both faculty advisor and student, and will become part of the record retained by the Graduate School and the student’s academic department.

• A statement of pregnancy signed by a U.S. doctor, a birth certificate, or a statement of adoption from the adoption agency must also be included with the application for the accommodation.

• Copy of offer letter verifying a multi-year 50%-time graduate assistantship.

Updated November 2007