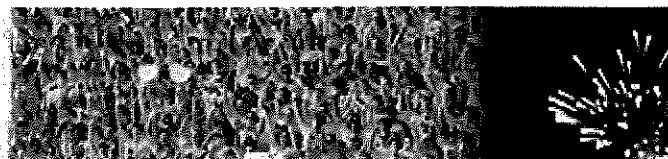


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Graduate school backs students' parenting efforts with new policy

November 30 01:11
2011

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By Anna Flagg
Reporter

The stress of being a graduate student and the stress of being a new parent have one thing in common: sleepless nights. One new policy is trying to reduce the stress of being both by offering students who are starting families time off and flexibility in coursework.

The Childbirth and Adoption Accommodation policy applies to full-time graduate students participating in assistantships who need time off in order to care for their new child.

The new parent has a choice of taking eight weeks off at full pay or 16 weeks at half pay from their usual required graduate assistant work. Though students must still keep up with their coursework, communicating with faculty and staff prior to the arrival of the child could result in flexibility in completing assignments and taking exams.

Dr. Laine Scales, associate dean of graduate and professional studies, said this policy is Baylor's way of supporting its students during these important events.

"We don't want our students to have to worry about rushing back to classes after childbirth, but be able to take adequate time to recover," Scales said. "Baylor is making a statement that we want our students to be family people and that you can be both a parent and a serious student at the same time."

The policy began to take shape during the 2010-2011 academic year.



Courtney Lyons, a graduate student and member of the Graduate Assistant Association, suggested the policy based on its potential benefit to students. Other universities have adopted similar policies. Baylor's new policy is modeled after one implemented by Brown University.

After research by Scales and the policies committee of the Graduate School Association, the committee created a proposal that was approved by the graduate council. The policy was implemented June 1.

Scales said she hopes the new policy will keep students from dropping out of school when they have a child.

Baylor is in the forefront of childbirth and adoption leave, she said.

"When people are trying to decide whether to come to Baylor, we hope they will see that this is a place that supports families," Scales said. "We hope when they are at Baylor they will appreciate that Baylor isn't making them choose between family and their career. Everyone that has taken the leave has expressed appreciation for the time off."

So far, four men and six women have applied for the accommodation or taken their leave.

Students anticipating childbirth or adoption must apply at least three months in advance and consult with the graduate program director in order to make reasonable adjustments for this time.

If both parents are graduate students, only one student may use the accommodation and it is expected that each student will only take the leave once during their graduate study.

Shanna Attai, who is working towards a doctorate in educational psychology, began her leave following the birth of her son on Nov. 11.

Attai said she discovered the policy last spring and applied in August. Due to its newness, specific department details on the policy are vague, but Attai said communicating with those in charge of accepting applications was easy.

Though Attai said she is still busy with coursework, she is grateful for the time off from her assistantship, which has allowed her to rest and enjoy her new baby. But the program isn't for everyone, she cautioned.

"This is a personal decision for people to make," Attai said. "We were trying to get pregnant and decided this could work for us, but it may not be the right fit for everyone."

Rachel Whitenton, assistant to the associate dean of graduate and professional studies, said she is not at all surprised at how many people have taken advantage of the program.

"I am elated that Baylor is offering this program," Whitenton said. "My husband is a student, and knowing that he would be able to take paid time off from his assistantship if we have a child is fantastic news."

Tags **Baylor Graduate School** **Courtney Lyons** **Graduate Assistant Association** **Graduate School Association**
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