Childbirth, Parental Accommodation and Family Leave for Graduate Students

**Childbirth Policy**

The proposed Childbirth Policy is designed to improve the quality of life, both personally and academically, for pregnant graduate students by allowing full-time student status to continue for a specific time frame that may be during and/or after the pregnancy and to facilitate the return to full participation in class work and, where applicable, research, teaching and clinical training in a seamless manner.

**Eligibility:**

This policy applies to full-time matriculated and enrolled women graduate students who are anticipating childbirth and have been enrolled at Rensselaer for at least two semesters of full-time study at the time of delivery. This does not apply to adoption or to those in support of their wives or partners during childbirth (please see below, the Parental Accommodation and the Family Leave policies for these additional categories).

The Office of Graduate Education will administer the policy through a formal request process that does not require departmental approval but is reviewed and approved by the Associate Dean of Graduate Education.

**Provisions:**

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. The accommodation period begins on the date agreed upon and approved by the Office of Graduate Education during the formal request process or in cases wherein childbirth occurs prior to the formal request, on the actual date of childbirth.

Students utilizing this policy are eligible for full-time continuous non-credit bearing registration so as to maintain student status for the approved time period that carries no tuition cost and will allow the student to retain access to on campus facilities as well as maintaining electronic access. Standard Rensselaer health and activity fees will be applicable during the childbirth accommodation period. Students residing on campus can remain in their respective housing, if appropriate for families otherwise they will be reassigned.

During the childbirth accommodation period, students who are normally supported through TA/RA/Fellowship will receive salary continuation for six weeks from a fund established by the Provost. Duties normally performed as a part of their stipend compensation will be suspended during that time frame. After the six weeks of salary continuation the student may elect to return to work or not to return to work (unpaid) for the remainder of the approved accommodation semester.
The time to degree limits for students under the childbirth policy will be extended by the approved period of the accommodation with the possibility of an additional three semesters of Family Leave, upon approval of the Office of Graduate Education.

**Source of Payment:**
If the terms of the Assistantship or Fellowship held by the student permit this type of accommodation, the student shall continue to be funded from that same source. In all other instances, the student shall be paid at the Institute minimum stipend level from the Rensselaer Childbirth Accommodation Fund.

**Health Issues:**
It is recognized that in a laboratory environment there may be certain processes, chemicals or equipment that represent a hazard to the healthy development of an unborn child. The following procedure is intended to minimize these risks.

On learning of a pregnancy the student may elect to inform Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). EHS, in collaboration with the student, their advisor and other students in common laboratory areas, will make an assessment of the student's work environment at the request of the student. If the assessment reveals potential hazards to the unborn child the student may choose to request their advisor reassign them to another area or reassign them to projects that do not pose a potential hazard to the unborn child, for at least the first trimester of the pregnancy or to continue working. If this request is made, the advisor must comply.

**Process:**
Students who are expecting a child should inform the Office of Graduate Education (OGE) and complete the “Request for Childbirth or Parental Accommodation” form for submission and approval. Supporting evidence as outlined on the form will be required.

**Closure:**
The Childbirth Policy is intended to establish standards for accommodating women graduate students before, during and after childbirth so that the student can focus on their familial responsibilities as well as continue to work towards their academic goals in an atmosphere conducive to both objectives.

**Parental Accommodation Policy**
This policy applies to full-time matriculated and enrolled graduate students who are in support of a spouse or domestic partner that has given birth, have adopted a child or taken a child into foster care.

A student requesting parental accommodation is eligible for one semester of accommodation during which the student may postpone course assignments, examinations and other academic requirements. The accommodation period begins on the
date agreed upon and approved by the Office of Graduate Education during the formal request process.

Students utilizing this policy are eligible for full-time continuous non-credit bearing registration for the approved time period that carries no tuition cost and will allow the student to retain access to on campus facilities as well as maintaining electronic access. Standard Rensselaer health and activity fees will be applicable during this accommodation period. Students residing on campus can remain in their respective housing, if appropriate for families, otherwise they will be reassigned. If a student is supported by a TA/RA/Fellow, the tuition award will be postponed for the period of the parental accommodation (one semester). The student may elect to be on unpaid leave for the semester, or may elect to continue to receive their stipend and perform the duties associated with it.

The time to degree limits for students under the parental accommodation policy will be extended by the approved period of the accommodation with the possibility of an additional semester of Family Leave, upon approval of the Office of Graduate Education.

Students who wish to apply for this type of accommodation must inform the Office of Graduate Education (OGE) and complete the “Request for Childbirth or Parental Accommodation” form for submission and approval. Supporting evidence as outlined on the form will be required.

**Family Leave Policy**

This policy applies to all matriculated and enrolled graduate students who need to take an extended leave for the birth or adoption of a child or for the care of a child, spouse or parent who has a serious health condition.

Students on family leave are not considered registered students and do not have access to campus facilities during the leave. The initial leave is normally approved for one semester and can be extended for a maximum of two semesters during which the time to degree limits will be extended by the approved leave period. In the case of a student who has already received an approved childbirth accommodation period, a maximum of three semesters of family leave can be utilized and with parental accommodation, a maximum of one semester of family leave is applicable with no penalty to the degree time limit.

A student wishing to request this type of leave must make a formal written request to the Office of Graduate Education (OGE). Returning from the leave will require written notification and completion of the “Graduate Change of Status Form” and the applicable departmental approval.