

Guidelines for Department Heads on Faculty Parental Leaves of Absence, August 2011

Philosophy

Mississippi State University is committed to a work environment for its faculty that is healthy in its balance of competing work and family demands. As part of this commitment, the institution assumes the responsibility of providing appropriate support and resources to faculty members who become parents, a responsibility that is defined, in large part, by federal and state law.

For purposes of these guidelines, this commitment is associated with the birth or adoption of a child. The concept of faculty parental leave is broadly defined as leave (paid or unpaid) associated with the birth or adoption of a child but may, because of federal or state law apply to one or both circumstances under which a faculty member would seek parental leave, i.e., the birth or adoption of a child.

Faculty members who anticipate becoming parents should consult with their department head, dean, and human resources personnel as far in advance as possible to ensure that all available parental leave options can be considered. An adequate consultation period also ensures that provisions can be made by the department for the period of time during which the faculty member will be absent from the workplace or present in a modified sense.

In addition to federal and state law, several university policies exist that may have an effect on faculty-related parental leave. These policies will be utilized by departments and colleges to support faculty members requesting assistance in arranging parental leave and/or modified assignment.

A faculty member has the option of choosing to avail him/herself of the existing parental leave options and/or modified assignment. In other words, a faculty member cannot be required to stop the tenure clock, reduce his/her workload to less than the previously assigned effort, or take parental leave.

Parental Leave – Paid

For female faculty on nine-month appointments, use of major medical leave following the birth of a child is allowed for the period of medical disability as certified by the faculty member's physician or the child's physician. This period is normally six to eight weeks. At this time, major medical leave is not available for adoptive mothers.

Any female faculty member on a twelve-month appointment may also use personal leave to supplement major medical leave, as approved by the department head.

Parental Leave – Unpaid

Under the provisions of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 and in accordance with university policy, a faculty member may apply to take an unpaid leave of absence following the birth or adoption of a child. This leave is unpaid only to the extent accumulated major medical leave is not available to the faculty member.

Promotion and Tenure

The University Promotion and Tenure document permits a faculty member to request a stoppage of the tenure clock. If granted, the clock will generally stop for one year and the faculty member may utilize up to two one-year stoppages for birth or adoption.

Stopping the tenure clock only delays the year in which the faculty member must apply for tenure. In all other aspects, the faculty member shall have all rights and privileges as other members of the MSU faculty.

The decision whether to grant tenure to a faculty member should be based upon the applicant's performance in teaching, research, and service during the probationary period. Stopping the tenure clock for parental leave purposes (or other approved purposes) shall have no impact upon that decision.

Work Load Policy

The university work load policy permits all faculty members to have a certain amount of flexibility in their specific assignments for a given semester. Rearranging a faculty member's teaching, research, and service workload, i.e., a modified work load, to accommodate the birth or adoption of a child is an option that should be considered when addressing parental leave issues.

Examples of a modified workload include:

- All or part of a faculty member's load may be shifted to summer school and the Maymester. A faculty member could teach a normal load in the fall, have a modified assignment for the spring semester, and teach a full load during the Maymester/summer school. In this example, the summer load would not result in additional pay unless the faculty member taught in excess of 100 percent.
- Faculty members could teach additional classes in one semester to allow a modified assignment in subsequent semesters.
- Some or all classes could be shifted to an eight-week period rather than the traditional 16-week format assuming all contact hour requirements are satisfied and students are notified of the change in format before registration.

Department heads and faculty members may explore and develop other alternatives for restructuring the work load to accommodate the parental requirements of the faculty member.

Please see other relevant Mississippi State University policies:

Major Medical Leave
Leaves of Absence
Promotion and Tenure

This document was revised by the Work and Life Balance Committee for the Provost Office, 8-10-11.