

The Department of Radio-Television-Film
Moody College of Communication
University of Texas at Austin

Best Practices for Working
with Graduate Students with Dependents at Home

The Moody College of Communication has adopted a parental leave policy for graduate students who are soon to give birth to or adopt a young child. It pertains to the semester in which a child is born or adopted. The college at this time does not provide accommodations or specific support for graduate students with children or dependent adults at home and, instead, recommends that accommodations be made by departments or schools. The Department of Radio-Television-Film is committed to providing as much flexibility as possible, within the constraints of our educational programs, to PhD, MA, and MFA students with dependents at home who work as teaching or research assistants. In this document, we outline the Best Practices that we expect of the faculty who supervise graduate student caregivers who are teaching assistants (TAs) or graduate research assistants (GRAs). 'Graduate student caregivers' include individuals of all genders, and biological, fostering, and adoptive parents. It also includes circumstances where the student is a primary caregiver to a parent or spouse incapable of self-care and residing in the same household.

We expect RTF faculty who supervise TAs or GRAs who are caregivers to inquire into their child/dependent care schedules and attempt to provide as optimal a work schedule as possible. Working as a TA or GRA will often still require some evening hours, however. The student should indicate in their TA form any special accommodations that they need. The pre-semester meeting about TA duties is the optimal time for the faculty member to work through the details of the work assignment with the graduate student. Informal accommodations and flexibility when possible should be offered to student caregivers as needed and appropriate. If questions are raised during this discussion, Stacy Brodie and Anita Vangelisti are the point people to consult with within the department and the dean's office, respectively.

For a TA assigned to a large course with discussion sections, the faculty member would need to coordinate the discussion section assignments rather than the teaching assistants themselves. It also is strongly encouraged that an alternating screening facilitation schedule be established so that teaching assistants alternate attendance at evening screenings. Options for telecommuting to evening events, if possible, or for occasionally bringing a child to a campus event in the case of an unusual circumstance, could be discussed during the meeting on TA duties as well.

If an optimal schedule cannot be arranged to work with a particular course assignment, the graduate student caregiver has the right to request a more optimal position for the semester.