

RSMAS Graduate Student Family Leave

RSMAS recognizes that life events such as illness, becoming a parent, or caring for an ill family member, can interrupt a student's academic career. To accommodate such events, RSMAS provides Graduate Student Family Leave, which provides paid leave for a period of up to twelve weeks and 'stops the clock' on academic milestones. Students who wish to take a Family Leave should use GSO's standard [leave of absence form](#) and indicate that a paid leave is requested.

Eligibility: Full time students with documented medical need for giving birth, adopting or fostering children, or dealing with family emergencies. This leave applies to students who receive stipends from an advisor's external funding, RSMAS, or major external fellowships not providing an equivalent leave.

Length of Leave: Up to 12 weeks, duration to be finalized in consultation with the advisor and Associate Dean of Graduate Students.

Financial Terms: Graduate student stipend continues but is funded by GSO. Regardless of whether the student is supported by the advisor's external funding, RSMAS or an external fellowship, the graduate student stipend is provided by RSMAS during the family leave. Even for students on RSMAS support, this means up to an additional 12 weeks of support from the school.

Approval: The application required for a Family Leave must be completed with the GSO and approved by the Associate Dean of Graduate Students.

Initial Application (filed prior to beginning leave, when possible):

1. [Leave of absence form](#)
2. Documentation of medical need (certification of health care provider) provided by either an external doctor or the University Health Services, when the reason for leave is out of medical need for the student or family member

Return to Full Time Studies Documents (filed in preparation for the end of leave):

1. Intent to return to work letter.
2. Documentation from doctor of ability to resume full time work, when applicable. RSMAS has the right to contact the doctor to confirm the ability to return to work. Permission for this contact is granted on the certification of health care provider.

Details

- For an anticipated family leave, the student should initiate discussions with the advisor(s) and Associate Dean of Graduate Students at least four months (or as soon thereafter as possible) prior to the anticipated leave. This will provide the time necessary to rearrange teaching duties for those students supported by teaching assistantships, or to adjust laboratory or other research schedules.
- Students supported on external fellowships or awards are obliged to inform their funding agency and discuss the implications of not maintaining a full-time academic commitment. While many funding agencies defer to institutional policies, some have well-defined guidelines of their own. In those cases, the rules of the granting agency prevail. If granting agency policies fall short of providing equal benefits to the RSMAS Family Leave Policy, RSMAS may assume financial responsibility for any difference in order to provide the student with equivalent benefits. The Associate Dean of Graduate Students will be available to assist in these discussions.
- While on Family Leave, the student is not required or expected to make progress in his/her academic research or other academic responsibilities. “Stopping the clock” for a Family Leave allows the expected milestones and progression to be adjusted accordingly. Additionally, given the often time consuming nature of new family circumstances, sensitivity should be accorded in the following semester’s workload choice, such as when considering the extent of field work and travel.
- For Family Leave involving new child care, the student must take leave within one year of the birth or placement (e.g., adoption or fostering) of the child/ren.
- If both caregivers are students at RSMAS, the primary caregiver is eligible for up to 12 weeks of paid leave, and the secondary caregiver is eligible for up to six weeks of paid leave. Leaves of absence for the primary and secondary caregivers may overlap or occur at separate times within one year of the birth, placement of the child/ren, or family emergency.
- Return to Full-Time Studies: Before the end of the leave period, the student must declare his/her intent to resume full-time studies and provide written certification (when applicable) from the attending physician that he/she is physically able to resume full-time academic work. If unable to resume full time studies, the student should apply for an unpaid Leave of Absence (see [Graduate Student Handbook](#)) in consultation with the students’ advisor or committee.

Students “stopping the clock” for a Family Leave should keep the lines of communication with their advisors and divisions open. Nothing in the Family Leave policy replaces the communication and cooperation between students and their programs, and the good-faith efforts of both to accommodate family needs. It is the intention of these policies to reinforce the importance of that cooperation, and to provide support where needed. These policies are subject to review on an annual basis.