

Frequently Asked Questions: FAS Parental Policies for Professors of all Ranks

The information provided in these Frequently Asked Questions applies to faculty members holding the rank of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, professor in residence, or professor of the practice.

Parental Teaching Relief

Question: How did the parental teaching relief (“PTR”) policy change?

Answer: In February 2019, the FAS transitioned from an “opt-in” to an “opt-out” PTR policy model. Now, instead of applying for PTR, eligible new parents automatically are provided with PTR. In addition:

1. New parents no longer are required to submit a form that states that they will adhere to the hour requirements of a primary caregiver.
2. New parents who do not wish to take PTR must inform their assistant dean in writing.
3. Parents of twins or other multiples may be entitled to additional PTR, depending on the timing of their children’s birth or adoption, in order to ensure that these parents have two terms without teaching responsibilities.

Question: Why did FAS institute an “opt-out” PTR policy model?

Answer: The FAS is committed to supporting faculty in balancing the joys and demands of caring for newly born or adopted children with professional growth and responsibilities. Due to workplace and cultural pressures, parents often feel that they cannot spend as much time with their young children as they would like. We hope that an opt-out PTR policy encourages more faculty to take advantage of this benefit.

The new policy is consistent with international standards on parental leave, which have long recognized the benefits to children and families when all parents spend time with their young children: parent-child bonding, improved outcomes for children, and increased gender equity at home and work.¹

¹ Huerta, M. et al. (2013). “Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development: Are They Related? Evidence from Four OECD Countries”, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 140, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5k4dlw9w6czq-en.pdf?expires=1539106036&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=7D8D3FB32116F690F0FCD4AF3689E553>.

Gault, B., Hartmann, H., Hegewisch, A., Milli, J., & Reichlin, L. (2014). “Paid parental leave in the United States: What the data tell us about access, usage, and economic and health benefits.” Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research.

https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2608&context=key_workplace.
Johansson, E-A., 2010. “The effect of own and spousal parental leave on earnings.” Working Paper 2010:4. Uppsala, Sweden: Institute of Labour Market Policy Evaluation.
<https://www.ifau.se/globalassets/pdf/se/2010/wp10-4-The-effect-of-own-and-spousal-parental-leave-on-earnings.pdf>.

Question: How can the FAS ensure that the PTR policy does not unfairly benefit faculty who use this time to advance their research instead of caring for their child?

Answer: The FAS trusts our faculty to use the PTR policy within the intent and principles of the policy. When using PTR, the FAS expects faculty to adhere to the high ethical standards required in all areas of academic endeavors and leadership. Although faculty are expected to devote substantial time to caregiving and bonding with their child, the extent to which he or she wishes to spend time on research is up to the faculty member.

Question: Will the FAS monitor faculty who use PTR to ensure that they spend substantial time caring for and bonding with their child?

Answer: No. Again, the FAS trusts our faculty to use the PTR policy within the intent and principles of the policy. While we have removed the primary caregiving clause of the former PTR policy, we expect that you spend substantial time during the workweek caring for and bonding with your child.

Question: Why aren't birth mothers provided more PTR than parents who are not birth mothers, given the burden of recovering from childbirth and nursing?

Answer: In addition to PTR and paid parental leave, birth mothers may ordinarily take eight weeks of paid medical leave in connection with childbirth and recovery; additional paid medical leave is available when medically indicated.

Question: Am I eligible for PTR if my child turns one during the term that I'd like to take PTR?

Answer: Yes, as long as you begin your PTR term prior to your child's first birthday or date of adoption, you are eligible for PTR.

Question: Am I permitted to conduct research while taking PTR?

Answer: Yes. You are expected to spend substantial time during the workweek caring for and bonding with your new child, but you are not prohibited from conducting research.

Question: Must I take PTR immediately following my child's birth or adoption?

Answer: No. PTR can be taken any time just prior to or during the first year following your child's birth or adoption. You should speak to your divisional Assistant Dean to determine how best to structure paid parental leave, PTR, and if applicable, paid medical leave. Keep in mind that ordinarily, faculty members should not be out of the Harvard classroom for more than two terms at a time.

Question: Are there any circumstances in which two full terms of PTR will be available?

Answer: Parents of twins (or other multiples) whose children are born or adopted over the summer may be entitled to two terms of PTR, if needed (because of timing) to ensure that they have two terms of teaching relief. For example, parents of twins born or adopted on June 1 could take off the following fall and spring terms because they would not benefit from paid medical leave or paid parental leave. This policy reflects our understanding of the unique demands of caring for two (or more) infants.

Question: I understand the expectation that faculty should not be out of the classroom for more than two terms at a time. Are there exceptions to that policy?

Answer: Under the ordinary application of the policies governing research leaves, family (including parental) leave, and parental teaching relief, faculty members should not be out of the Harvard classroom for more than one year (i.e., two terms) at a time. This one-year limit for new or expecting parents is inclusive of any combination of unpaid FMLA leave, unpaid MPLA leave, paid medical leave in connection with childbirth and recovery, paid parental leave, and parental teaching relief. Exceptions to this policy may be made for tenure-track faculty whose child is born or adopted during a yearlong research leave; tenure-track faculty whose child is expected to be born or adopted in a term following a yearlong research leave; or when medically indicated.

Question: Will colleagues or mentors view me as less committed to my work if I take a term of PTR?

Answer: In February 2019, the FAS changed our PTR policy from “opt-in” to “opt-out” to demonstrate our commitment to creating an environment that supports faculty with new children. Instead of applying for PTR, FAS faculty automatically receive PTR when they have a child. The FAS continues to strive to assist faculty in balancing their careers and personal lives.

Question: What should I do if I am unsure if I am eligible for PTR?

Answer: Please speak to your divisional Assistant Dean if you have questions regarding your eligibility.

Paid Medical Leave

Question: Is medical documentation required when I apply for paid medical leave in connection with childbirth and recovery?

Answer: Medical certification (such as a doctor’s note) is NOT required for the eight-week paid medical leave for birth mothers. If, however, you are unable to work during your pregnancy, or cannot work after the eight-week postpartum period, you will be required to submit medical documentation to your divisional assistant dean to determine your eligibility for paid medical leave.

Question: What should I do if I experience pregnancy complications which may require a leave?

Answer: Please bring any medically-related concerns to your divisional Assistant Dean. It can be very difficult to discuss such sensitive matters with a colleague, but it is important to inform your divisional Assistant Dean of complications to ensure you are able to take advantage of your benefits to their fullest extent.

Question: Do pregnancy-related medical complications like miscarriage, high blood pressure, diabetes, back pain and the like qualify me for paid medical leave?

Answer: They may. Please speak to your divisional Assistant Dean for further information about sick leave and medical leave benefits.

Question: Are parents who are not a birth mother eligible for eight weeks of paid medical leave following the birth or adoption of their child?

Answer: No. Paid medical leave immediately following the birth of a child is provided to birth mothers for purposes of recovery from childbirth. All parents, however, are eligible for four weeks of paid parental leave (to be taken anytime between a month before the expected date of their child's birth or adoption and three months after their child's birth or adoption) and PTR. Faculty may choose to supplement these benefits with unpaid leave under the FMLA and MPLA.

Question: Can I use paid medical leave prior to my due date to prepare for the birth of my child?

Answer: Paid medical leave is not available to prepare for the birth of your child unless medically indicated. You may choose to take some (or all) of your paid parental leave to prepare for the birth of your child.

Paid Parental Leave

Question: When can I use paid parental leave?

Answer: Paid parental leave can be used anytime between a month before your baby's due date or anticipated date of adoption and the three months following your child's birth or adoption.

Question: I am expecting twins (or other multiples). Am I entitled to eight (or more) weeks of paid parental leave?

Answer: No, although you are entitled to paid medical leave if you are a birth mother, and PTR, FMLA, and MPLA.

Question: Do I need to mentor, perform service, or conduct research during paid parental leave?

Answer: No. Paid parental leave is provided to encourage faculty to prepare for, care for, and bond with their new child. We expect that you will not be performing any work during your leave.

Notice

Question: Must I inform anyone at the FAS that I am expecting a child, either through birth or adoption?

Answer: When a person decides to disclose their or their partner's pregnancy, or intention to adopt, can be a personal and at times complicated decision. In order to ensure that you understand the benefits and responsibilities provided under FAS policies, please notify the divisional Assistant Dean about the due date (in the case of a birth), or expected adoption date, as soon as you are comfortable, but at least 90 days in advance of the due date or adoption date, where practicable.

Question: Who should I speak to for advice regarding my options for leave?

Answer: Your divisional Assistant Dean is always available to help you choose the best leave for your family.

Hypotheticals

Question: Am I required to begin teaching during a term that I am due to give birth?

Answer: Whether you'll be asked to begin teaching a class, co-teach a class, or provide extra service in lieu of teaching during a term in which you are due to give birth will depend upon your due date, whether you experience medical complications, when you elect to use your paid parental leave, whether a co-teacher is available, the business needs of your department, and student needs. In no circumstance will birth mothers be asked to teach, advise, perform service, or conduct research during the eight weeks that follow their child's birth.

Question: Am I required to return to the classroom during a term in which I give birth?

Answer: Following your child's birth, you are entitled to eight weeks of paid medical leave. If you elect to use your four weeks of paid parental leave immediately after the expiration of your paid medical leave, you will not be required to return to the classroom during the term you gave birth.

Question: I am not a birth mother. Am I required to begin teaching during a term that my child will be born or adopted?

Answer: Whether you'll be asked to begin teaching a class, co-teach a class, or provide extra service in lieu of teaching during a term in which you expect to welcome your child by birth or adoption will depend upon the anticipated date of your child's birth or adoption, when you elect to use paid parental leave, whether a co-teacher is available, the business needs of your department, and student needs. You may also consider taking PTR during the term of your child's birth or adoption.

Question: I am not a birth mother. Am I required to return to the classroom during a term in which my child was born or adopted?

Answer: Whether you'll be asked to resume teaching a class, co-teach a class, or provide extra service in lieu of teaching during a term in which you welcomed your child by birth or adoption will depend upon the anticipated date of your child's birth or adoption, when you elect to use paid parental leave, whether a co-teacher is available, the business needs of your department, and student needs. You may also consider taking PTR during the term of your child's birth or adoption.

Question: If I give birth over the summer or when I am on sabbatical/research leave, can I take eight weeks of paid medical leave during the next term?

Answer: Paid medical leave must be taken during the eight weeks that immediately follow your child's birth. Depending when you give birth during the summer, you may be eligible for paid medical leave the following term. For example, if you give birth on June 1, none of your eight weeks of medical leave will fall during an academic term. If you give birth on August 1, you will be eligible for paid medical leave during most of September. Paid medical leave in excess of eight weeks is available when medically indicated.

Question: If I give birth over the summer, must I teach during the next term?

Answer: Whether you'll be asked to teach a class, co-teach a class, or provide extra service in lieu of teaching during the fall term will depend upon the date of your child's

birth or adoption, whether you are eligible for paid medical leave or paid parental leave during any part of the term, when you elect to use PTR, whether a co-teacher is available, the business needs of your department, and student needs.

Question: If my child is born or adopted over the summer or during a school break, am I eligible to take four weeks of paid parental leave?

Answer: You must take paid parental leave anytime between a month before the expected date of your child's birth or adoption and three months after your child's birth or adoption. If your child is born or adopted at the beginning of June, you will not be eligible for paid parental leave. If your child is born in late June or July, you will be eligible for partial (or full) paid parental leave at the beginning of the fall term. Faculty whose children are born or adopted in June or July will be excused from performing service during their PTR term, and will be eligible to co-teach the other term.

Question: Can you provide some examples of scenarios in which I would or wouldn't be eligible for PTR if my child is born or adopted before my FAS appointment?

Answer: You are eligible for PTR if your child was born or adopted within a year of the beginning of the PTR term.

Example 1: If your child was born or adopted on February 1, 2020 and your start date is July 1, 2020, you may take PTR during the Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 term.

Example 2: If your child was born or adopted on April 1, 2020 and your start date is January 1, 2021, you may take PTR during the Spring 2021 term.

Example 3: If your child was born or adopted on January 1, 2019 and your start date is July 1, 2020, you are not eligible for PTR.