

NAVIGATING PARENTHOOD & YOUR PA JOURNEY

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Physician Assistant Online Program

Session Objectives

- Review recent trends in parenting and pregnancy related policies.
- Discuss the parenting experiences of PA students.
- Discuss possible pathways for collaboration, mentorship, and peer support through PA training and transition to practice.

Agenda

- 20 minutes: introductions, background data, and current trends
- 10 minutes: open Q&A
- 20 minutes: small group discussions
- 10 minutes: wrap-up, takeaways

Background

Why did we become interested in advocating for parents?

1. Personal experiences
2. Student experiences
3. Sector-driven changes

The average matriculating PA student is 25.6 years old, 74.8% female, and 11.2% have at least one legal dependent.

Preliminary AAPA data shows that family planning impacted the decision of 44.2% students (249/563) to pursue PA training over another profession.

Who we are!



So why don't applicants and students just ask programs for support?

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Student Experience

- Prior research has shown us:

- “It came up that I have a child and the interviewer like made me cry and was telling me that being a mom, I would not be able to handle being in class all day.”

- We have had students reach out to University Title IX coordinators because they are unsure of their options and don't want to ask the program

This caused us to reflect on our own program – we knew we were accommodating...
but prospective and current students didn't!

What Could Accommodations Look Like?

- Need clear policies for absences (kids will get sick), travel for rotations, and pregnancy/parenting-related leaves
- Schedule flexibility, space, and accommodations for pumping
- Flexibility in scheduling on school closure days
- Possibility to have recorded lectures
- Rotations near home for parents
 - This one can be very challenging for programs but worth discussing and advocating for!

Students have concerns that accommodations could look like asking for special treatment or a lack of commitment to training.

Prior Data: Student Parents

- **To our knowledge, no published data exists on the parenting experience of PA students**
- Parenting during residency has been shown to positively affect both workplace and patient interactions
- Preliminary qualitative study including 11 female PAs graduating 2019-2022:
 - Parents felt skills developed through parenting were a strength through training
 - High degree of discipline: prioritization, scheduling, self-control
 - Rely heavily on strong support networks
 - Parents must advocate for their needs

Preliminary Data: Parenting Perceptions

Student parents and prospective parents are looking for:

- Clinical rotation accommodations after leave
- Clear policies on parenting related leave
- Departmental/University policies on scheduling personal medical leave
- Lactation support and accommodations after leave

47.2% of students (282/598) were unsure if their program was supportive of taking time off for parental leave

Diversity

- Women's education and careers are disproportionately negatively affected by parenting when compared to male counterparts
- Medical trainees are concerned about negative impact of parenting and leave on professional reputation and career
- **Current policies reinforce heteronormative parenting**
 - There are many ways to become a parents and parenting does not only affect females

What language is used in existing policies at your University?

Current Efforts: Parental Leave

MD education:

- 2022: American Medical Association (AMA) modified policy to encourage parental and family leave for students.

Resident and fellow training

- Effective July 1, 2021: American Board of Medical Specialties requires all Member Boards with training programs of 2 or more years to provide policies on reasonable parental leave
- 2022 Institutional Requirements by ACGME require programs to offer 6 weeks of paid leave for residents/fellows...with no extension of training

PA Education: Parental Leave

- Purpose:
 - Examine the availability and transparency of PA program parental leave policies to applicants at accredited US programs
- Methods:
 - Identified 282 PA programs
 - November 2021– January 2022 program websites and available handbooks were searched for the terms “pregnant” OR “pregnancy” OR “maternity” OR “parent” OR “family” OR “child” OR “birth”

Research Overview: Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Location of Parental Leave Policies and Presence of Gendered Language

	Policy Present n (%)	
	Yes	No
Program Website (n=282)	9 (3.2%)	273 (96.8%)
Program Handbook (n=62)	29 (46.8%)	33 (53.2%)
	Gendered Language	
	Yes	No
Policy present (n=38)	23 (60.5%)	15 (39.5%)

HOD Resolution

2023-B-24-PAWE

AAPA encourages PA programs to define, make public, and consistently apply when appropriate, a pregnancy-related and parental leave policy for prospective and current students. This policy should be inclusive regardless of gender identity of family composition, and considers adoption, surrogacy, and pregnancy-related complications.

What can you do?

Short term: Planning and Support

- Who can you connect with in your program? Outside your program?
 - Form a parenting group on campus (interdisciplinary?)
 - PA Moms facebook group with multiple spin off groups
- Evaluate where you need help and be specific when asking for help
- Create clear separation between study time and family time
- Implement a shared calendar with input from the family
 - *What days do you know you will be studying or working late?*
- Involve your kids in planning when possible
 - *What game is most important to you that I attend this week?*
- Double dip on family time and required activities when possible
 - *Involve the kids in fun meal planning and prep activities*

What can you do?

Long term: **ADVOCATE!**

- Discuss with your program leadership
 - Clearly define your ask
 - Approach from a position of inquiry – what does the program currently do for these different parenting and pregnancy related considerations?
 - What possible barriers are in place to creating change?
 - If there is a current policy available, come prepared with suggested edits
 - Support your discussion with data

Q&A

- What questions do you have?
- What experiences would you like to share?
- What success or challenges have you had?

Group Discussions

20 minutes

Wrap Up

- What is one resource you plan to use?
- What one quick change you can make to improve your current experience?
- What is one thing thing you feel would really improve your current experience?

Key References

- Kraus MB, Talbott JMV, Melikian R, et al. Current parental leave policies for medical students at U.S. medical schools: a comparative study. *Acad Med*. 2021;96:1315-1318. doi:10.1097/ACAM.0000000000004074
- Wekullo CS, Isna N. Experiences of students who are single mothers on university campuses: a systematic review from 1997 to 2019. *International Journal of Higher Education and Research*. 2020;10(2).
- Neary S, Kamauf R, Ruggeri M. 2022. Transparency of Parental Leave Policies to Prospective Students in US Physician Assistant Programs. *Journal of Physician Assistant Education*. 2023;34(1)72-75.
- Kin, C., Yang, R., Desai, P. *et al*. Female trainees believe that having children will negatively impact their careers: results of a quantitative survey of trainees at an academic medical center. *BMC Med Educ* **18**, 260 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-018-1373-1>

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Cover if asked for examples or if time permits at the end

Parental Leave Example: Vague

Withdrawal

A withdrawal may be requested by the student in writing with or without the recommendation of the Academic Progress Committee (APC). Any refund will be made in accordance with both the University's and federal government's refund policies. The appropriate paperwork for withdrawal from courses is provided by the University Registrar. Incurred expenses prior to withdrawal (including, but not limited to memberships, fees, equipment, and books) are not refundable. The student who withdraws while passing all coursework to-date may re-apply through the admissions process with the exceptions of extenuating circumstances, as determined by the Academic Progress Committee (APC). These may include, but are not limited to:

1. Family emergency
2. Prolonged illness
3. Military activation
4. Pregnancy
5. Others (as validated by the APC)

Students who withdraw while failing coursework are not eligible for re-admission to the program.

Parental Leave Example: Better

Parental Leave Policy

The GWU Department of PA Studies recognizes that all aspects of pregnancy are unique, even more so for the PA student. Therefore, the program is committed to supporting the student during all aspects of their education. The department will support and accommodate the birth or adoption of a child while providing realistic options for the student to complete the program.

Didactic Phase

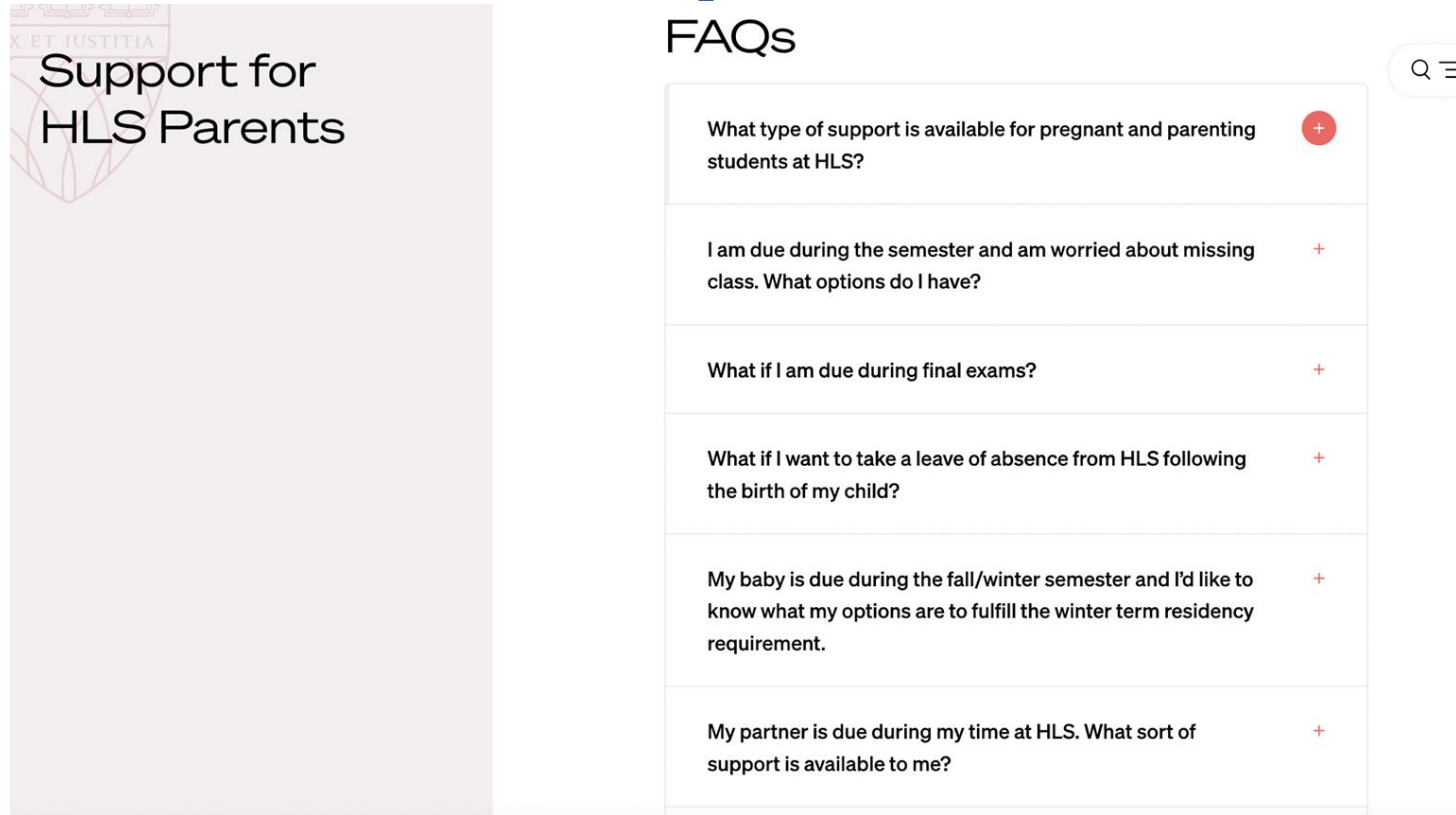
A student who is due to deliver or expecting a child during the didactic phase may discuss parental leave of absence with the Director of Didactic Education and Department Director, who will work to negotiate a detailed plan of return.

Clinical Phase

If a student becomes pregnant during the clinical phase, the program encourages notification of the student's academic advisor, the clinical team, and the director or associate director to optimize the time available for planning an altered clinical phase. Additionally, it is strongly recommended that the student consults with an obstetrician to prevent potentially harmful exposures in clinical training environments.

Considering the complex decision-making surrounding having a baby while completing graduate medical education, no written policy can cover all contingencies and unique circumstances. Therefore, the student must maintain open communication with the program to advocate and plan for the best outcomes for the student and the student's baby.

Resource Example



The screenshot shows a webpage with a light beige background. On the left, there is a vertical banner with the text "Support for HLS Parents" and a faint crest logo. To the right, there is a white box titled "FAQs" containing a list of six questions, each with a red plus sign icon to its right. In the top right corner of the white box, there is a search icon and a hamburger menu icon.

Support for
HLS Parents

FAQs

- What type of support is available for pregnant and parenting students at HLS? +
- I am due during the semester and am worried about missing class. What options do I have? +
- What if I am due during final exams? +
- What if I want to take a leave of absence from HLS following the birth of my child? +
- My baby is due during the fall/winter semester and I'd like to know what my options are to fulfill the winter term residency requirement. +
- My partner is due during my time at HLS. What sort of support is available to me? +

<https://hls.harvard.edu/dean-of-students/student-support/support-for-hls-parents/>