Accommodating Parents: Current Practices and Outstanding Needs in GSAS

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Joint Student Committee on Parental Accommodation
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Executive Summary

In order to develop a formal parental accommodation policy, the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences needs information on the current practices and outstanding needs of student parents. This report analyzes surveys of student parents and departments in order to determine what a comprehensive parental accommodation policy should include. In addition, it reviews the policies of peer institutions. Based upon these analyses, the report concludes with general recommendations for a GSAS parental accommodation policy.

Survey Demographics and Findings (Sections 1-4)

Representing the single most comprehensive study of GSAS student parents to date, we surveyed over 100 graduate students, representing roughly 40% of all parents in GSAS. Student parents are more likely to be advanced in their graduate studies, with an average “G-year” of 4.7. Fifty-one graduate student mothers and fifty fathers reported information on time-off, stipend support, continuation of health insurance, G-clock extension, childcare arrangements and perceptions of their parenthood by the academic community.

Mothers varied widely in the amount of time taken off after the birth or adoption of a child, but only those mothers who took the longest leaves were satisfied. Reasons for returning before they were ready included financial concerns, worries over healthcare and insurance, and research responsibilities. Only 60% of mothers maintained their health insurance while on leave, and only 50% received a stipend. Lack of stipend support was strongly correlated with academic division and places an unfair burden on mothers in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, the current policy of G-clock extension is largely neither known nor followed. These discrepancies arise from the lack of a central policy or consistent management of parental accommodation.

Fathers do not take off much time after the birth of a child. Nearly half of them have partners who work outside the home and 40% have stay-at-home spouses. The large number fathers with stay-at-home partners or partners with comprehensive leave policies from an employer may help explain how 86% of fathers surveyed took less than one month off after their child’s birth.

Nineteen departmental administrators replied concerning the current state of parental accommodation in their departments. In general, these departments only received two to five requests for accommodation per year. Only ~10% of departments had any official policy; most
handled requests on a case-by-case basis. Very few departments automatically extended G-year, showing that the current policy is not sufficient. Most departments accommodate time off for mothers after the arrival of a new child; however, most departments confirmed that fathers do not take time off. Departments diverged considerably on the degree of flexibility given to new parents for course work, teaching, and degree requirements, with some offering creative solutions for flexible teaching positions.

Stipend support for mothers while on maternity leave is dichotomous: only 50% of mothers surveyed received stipend support while on leave. This correlates strongly with the divisional affiliation of the student. Significantly different funding structures across the three divisions of GSAS translate directly into a pronounced discrepancy in the financial support offered to graduate student parents. This disparity argues strongly for the establishment of a paid parental leave that applies equally to all GSAS students.

In addition to the financial and institutional pressures that hinder having children while in graduate school, student parents sometimes face negative responses from their advisors, supervisors and peers. On the whole, students responded that their decision to take time of was received “generally well.” However, there are a troubling number of responses, especially from mothers, that indicate negative reactions from advisors and teaching supervisors. A successful accommodation policy must address negative perceptions and responses as well as more concrete barriers to parental leave.

**Parental Accommodation Analysis (Sections 5-10)**

The problems encountered by graduate students in GSAS are not unique to Harvard. Many of Harvard’s peer institutions, the so-called “Ivy Plus,” have developed policies attempting to accommodate the needs of their graduate student populations. These policies range from minimal policies that allow for unpaid university “leave” to paid time off for as many as twelve weeks for any male or female after the arrival of their new child. Harvard and GSAS should use the models put forth by its peer institutions to inform its decisions as it examines how to better meet the needs of its graduate student parents.

In order for Harvard graduate student parents to successfully continue their Ph.D. studies, most must find childcare for their children. Reliable childcare affords the student parent a consistent work schedule necessary for making steady progress towards a dissertation, as well as
the ability to plan meetings, sections, experiments, and other interactions with the academic community. Securing reliable, quality, and affordable childcare is the single biggest stressor for the student parent. Of the respondents to the survey, 60% have found satisfactory childcare, while the remaining are unsatisfied with the level of childcare they are able to afford. Although a pilot program for child care scholarships for PhD students exists, it is not currently meeting the needs of student parents, as the program is under-publicized and has overly restrictive application requirements.

The report also investigates other concerns that impede research for mothers, including laboratory safety during pregnancy and field research in the context of young children. Pregnant women had little or no expert guidance on chemical safety, and many chose to abandon projects entirely because they lacked the infrastructure and controls to enable hazardous research. Similarly, mothers were unable to afford childcare for young children to enable field research, and several abandoned projects because they could not perform the necessary travel.

Finally, graduate student parents bear an exceptionally large financial burden in providing dependent health insurance. The Harvard-offered Family Plan does not meet their medical or their fiscal needs. Raising the specialist visit limit for dependents under 18 years of age will hopefully address some of the concerns of student parents. Harvard GSAS should review the health insurance program and consider additional measures to ease the financial pressure on graduate student parents. Such measures would allow parents to work full-time on their graduate research, as required for timely progress towards a doctoral degree.

**Recommendations (Section 11)**

Given the evolving academic workforce, the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences must adopt a formal parental accommodation policy in order to recruit a substantial and diverse population of individuals to attend graduate school, compete effectively with peer institutions, and fill the academic pipeline.

Based on the student and departmental responses and based upon policies at peer institutions, this report recommends two facets of a parental accommodation policy: parental leave and childcare assistance. First, parental leave should include these five separate articles (a) one year G-clock extension for all parents for each new child, (b) full enrollment with continued health insurance for the duration of leave for all parents, (c) stipend support from a central source for all
new parents, (d) medical rest for birth mothers in addition to any parental accommodation period, and (e) flexible course work, teaching positions, and degree requirements for new parents. Second, this report documents serious disparities in childcare support for graduate student parents. In particular, the Doctoral/PhD Student Child Care Scholarship Pilot Program should be reviewed and extended.

Given an estimate of 100 births per year and demographics based on these survey results, we estimate there are roughly 50 new fathers and 50 new mothers per academic year. Using these numbers, we predict the G-year and academic division of new student parents and then compute a total cost of replacing their tuition, stipend, and health care. For leaves of one month, two months, or three months we estimate the expenses to be ~300k, ~600k, and ~900k, respectively. These are estimates and should be further investigated, though for comparison they are equivalent to admitting ~8, ~16, or ~24 additional GSAS students.

In order to design and execute an effective parental accommodation policy, GSAS should establish a Task Force on Parental Accommodation with representatives from the GSAS administration, departments, students, the Registrar, Faculty Development and Diversity, and the Work Life Office. In addition, the surveys and analysis contained in this report should be disseminated to administrative offices around the University.
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Section 1: Introduction

Given the evolving academic workforce, the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences must adopt a formal parental accommodation policy in order to:

i. Recruit a substantial and diverse population of individuals to attend graduate school,

ii. Compete effectively with peer institutions, and

iii. Fill the academic pipeline.

This report analyzes the current practices and outstanding needs of student parents through surveys of student parents and departments in order to determine what a comprehensive parental accommodation policy should include. In addition, it reviews the policies of peer institutions. Based upon these analyses, the report concludes with general recommendations for a GSAS parental accommodation policy.

Over the last 50 years, the American academic workforce has undergone a profound change in both diversity and family structure. In addition to ever-increasing numbers of women entering the labor force, male students and faculty play an increasingly involved role in family and household duties. The old model of a single employee supporting a household while his spouse handles childcare no longer applies. The academy must adjust its policies to accommodate the added responsibilities born by its workforce.

Central to supporting families is accommodating the birth and adoption of children. The months after the arrival of a new child are critically important to the development of the child as well as physically draining for the parents. Parents should be able to be home with new children during this time. This necessitates time away from other concerns, including employment and education.

Graduate students face a particular crisis over childbirth and adoption because the years most often dedicated to doctoral studies are also the peak childbearing years, particularly for women. Unless graduate school policies grant new parents the time and financial flexibility to take time off, students will be forced to choose between graduate studies and having families (1, page 34).

In addition, in order for student parents to successfully continue their doctoral studies, they must find childcare for their children. Reliable childcare affords the consistent work schedule necessary for making steady progress towards a dissertation, as well as the ability to plan

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meetings, sections, experiments, and other interactions with the academic community. Securing reliable, quality, and affordable childcare is a critical challenge for the student parent.

In attracting and retaining graduate students, Harvard must compete with employers in other fields who do provide parental accommodation policies. Employers outside of academia must comply with the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA), which guarantees new parents at least 12 weeks of unpaid leave with retention of health and other benefits. While FMLA does not apply to graduate students, it benchmarks the minimum support which individuals could expect if they chose not to attend graduate school. The future fitness of the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) will depend upon its ability to attract the best students to its programs, including those individuals who wish to begin families during the graduate years.

In addition to competition for students from the employment sector, GSAS must directly compete with other graduate institutions to attract students. Many of Harvard’s peer institutions, known as the “Ivy Plus,” already offer parental accommodation polices, and the most comprehensive of these policies may give them an advantage in recruitment. The most comprehensive and inclusive of these policies give students paid time off for up to 12 weeks for both men and women after the arrival of their child. In addition, many institutions provide income-based assistance to facilitate the acquisition of reliable quality childcare.

Attracting and retaining graduate students in the context of family obligations has implications for the entire University, beyond the obvious ones for GSAS. Because future faculty will come from among current graduate students, the University has a stake in maintaining a robust and diverse academic pipeline. The lack of policies to support the integration of family with academic careers serves as an impediment to embarking upon academic careers for women and men who wish to have children. These barriers waste a significant amount of talent and training (2, page 15). In order to build a substantial and diverse faculty, universities must recruit and retain women and minorities at all educational levels, including undergraduate and graduate students (2, page 52). In addition, supporting graduate student parents will make it feasible for academicians to start families before they become faculty, easing the burden of junior faculty parental accommodation for the University.

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In 2005, Harvard specifically investigated how its policies affected the academic pipeline. The Task Force gave recommendations on recruiting and retaining students during graduate studies, including:

To encourage more women to pursue academic careers, Harvard should explore ways to make it financially and logistically possible for female doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows to have children. Currently, maternity leave policies are not uniform, [and] funding for childcare scholarships is inadequate…¹

While the Task Force offered these general recommendations, they acknowledged that their investigation had not been sufficiently detailed to encompass all of GSAS and that more extensive research would be necessary before specific policies could be formulated (1, page 35).

In addition to the awareness raised by these recent studies, individuals within the student body have become increasingly vocal about the challenges faced by graduate student parents. In 2004, graduate student parents founded the GSAS Graduate Student Parent Organization. This organization published a report in 2005 detailing the major impediments faced by graduate student parents, including lack of parental accommodation and the prohibitively expensive childcare in the Boston/Cambridge area.

The graduate student body, represented by the Graduate Student Council (GSC) and Harvard Graduate Women in Science and Engineering (HGWISE), created the Joint Student Committee on Parental Accommodation in November 2007. In close collaboration with the GSAS administration, this committee took on the task of researching the current practices across the graduate school and investigating available resources as well as determining the needs of graduate students for an official GSAS parental accommodation policy.

In order to undertake these tasks, the Committee created three surveys: one for departmental administrators and one each for current (or expecting) graduate student mothers and fathers. The GSAS administrative deans gave feedback on the survey questions, which were edited to more clearly address the relevant concerns. The surveys were posted online and available for five weeks during December 2007 and January 2008. Students were notified by email both by the administration and by student groups, including the GSC, HGWISE, and the Harvard Parents Group. Departmental administrators were notified directly by the GSAS administrative deans. Analysis of the responses were performed by the Committee and compiled into this report. In addition, the Committee analyzed the parental accommodation polices of peer institutions.
Based upon the current practices and needs of Harvard graduate students as determined by the surveys and on the policies of peer institutions, the Committee formulated recommendations for a Harvard GSAS Parental Accommodation Policy. These proposals can be found in Section 11.
Section 2: The Demographics of GSAS Parents

Representing the single most comprehensive study of GSAS student parents to date, over 100 graduate student parents responded to a survey during the winter of 2007-2008. In total, the 51 mothers and 50 fathers surveyed answered questions about a variety of issues facing graduate student parents. Registration data from the spring semester of 2008 shows that there are 254 graduate students parents in GSAS (6.7% of all GSAS students). The 101 student parents surveyed represent 40% of all parents in GSAS. The demographic composition of respondents to the survey is statistically indistinguishable from that of the entire GSAS student parent population. Student parents are more likely to be advanced in their graduate studies with an average G-year of 4.8. Survey respondents include fewer science and engineering students and more humanities students than expected based on the breakdown of students in GSAS as a whole. Science students may therefore be underrepresented among the GSAS student parent population.

Harvard’s GSAS student parent population has not been extensively studied. While a small amount of basic demographic information is available, this report provides the first extensive look at a large cross section of the student population within GSAS. Based on information they provided when filling out the survey, student parent survey respondents accurately reflect all GSAS student parents while providing additional insights into the demographic make up of this population.

The two recent student surveys, written and collected by the Joint Student Committee on Parental Accommodation, yielded a large number of respondents. From the time the poll opened on December 12th, 2007 to when it was closed on January 30th, 2008, over 100 current student parents and expectant parents responded to either the survey for mothers or fathers. In total, 51 mothers and 50 fathers completed these surveys.

When asked by the registrar’s office during registration for spring semester 2008, 254 students in GSAS indicated that they were parents (N.B. six of the 3783 spring students declined to indicate whether or not they were parents). Student parents in GSAS, therefore, make up 6.7% of the GSAS student population. The survey sample of 101 parents represents 40% of all GSAS student parents.

The distribution of the G-years of surveyed parents and the G-years of all GSAS student parents are extremely similar. Figure 2-1A shows the number of parents of each G-year for all GSAS student parents while Figure 2-1B shows this information for only the surveyed sample of
parents. While the registrar reports the G-year of students beyond G-7, the survey asked students if they were “G-7 or above.”

Figure 2-1. (A) All GSAS student parent and (B) survey respondents by “G-year.

Based on the comparison the G-years of parents among surveyed parents with the entire student parent population, the sample accurately represents the GSAS student parent population as a whole. The average G-year of all student parents in GSAS is 4.8. This average is very similar and not statistically significantly different from the average G-year of parents who
responded to the survey, 4.67 (Student’s $t$ test: $P > 0.05$). Since the survey asked students if they were a “G-7 or above,” the actual average G-year among respondents to the survey may be slightly higher and therefore closer to the average G-year for all parents. For the purposes of the statistical test above, all student parents G-7 and above in the registrar’s data were given a G-year of seven so that the G-years assigned to all GSAS parents are directly comparable with those assigned to respondents in the survey.

**Figure 2-2.** The number of parents with a given number of children: (A) represents all GSAS student parents while (B) represents parents who responded to the survey.
The distribution of surveyed student parents with a given number of children also strongly indicates that the surveyed parents accurately reflect the GSAS student parent population. In fact, the distribution of surveyed parents is nearly identical to that of all student parents (Figure 2-2). Figure 2-2A shows the number of parents in GSAS with one, two, three or four children. The average number of children that student parents in GSAS have currently is 1.4. More than 70% of GSAS student parents (179 of 254) have only one child. Among surveyed parents, the average number of children is also 1.4 and more than 71% have only one child (Figure 2-2B). These distributions are statistically equivalent (Wilcoxon rank sum test: \( P > 0.5 \))

The degree to which surveyed parents represent the GSAS student parent population can also be tested by comparing the ratio of mothers and fathers surveyed with the gender ratio of student parents. Unfortunately, the gender ratio of GSAS student parents was not available at the time of this report. A naïve approach might assume that GSAS student parents have the same ratio of males to females as all students in GSAS. Among the 3783 enrolled students in GSAS in spring 2008, 2079 are male (55%) and 1704 (45%) are female. Therefore, the expected ratio of males to females responding to the survey is 55.5 to 45.5. While the ratio is slightly different than expectations, the number of male and female responses is not statistically significantly different than these expectations (Chi-square value: 1.21, d.f. = 1, \( P = 0.72 \)).

Figure 2-3 groups surveyed parents by a general classification of their chosen area of study (i.e. Humanities, Social Sciences and Science and Engineering, Figure 2-3A) and compares that with the population of GSAS students as a whole (Figure 2-3B). If students in all three program classifications were equally likely to be parents and surveyed parents are representative of the student parent population as a whole, then the same proportions of humanity, social science and science and engineering students should have responded to the survey as exist in GSAS. In fact, humanity students are relatively overrepresented (21.2 expected but 32 responded) while science and engineering students are underrepresented (49.5 expected but 41 responded). The deviation of the frequencies of students in these various programs significantly differs from the frequencies in the population as a whole (Chi-squared test: 7.12, d.f. = 2, \( P = 0.014 \)).

As only current and expectant parents answered this survey, this deviation from the expectation may represent a fundamentally important aspect of the GSAS student population. Humanists may be over represented among GSAS student parents because their graduate student
experiences are more conducive to having children. Conversely, these results may also indicate that scientists find it more difficult to have children while in graduate school.

![Figure 2-3. (A) Student survey respondents by program classification. (B) All GSAS students by program classification.](image)

It should be pointed out that several other hypotheses could explain the disproportionate numbers of humanists and scientists among surveyed parents including sampling bias. As all previous demographics have shown surveyed parents to be representative of the GSAS student parent population, sampling bias is unlikely to explain the underrepresentation of science students among the parents in the survey.

Breaking down the group of surveyed student parents further, Figure 2-4 separates the respondents by sex and program classification. With the exception of perhaps the social sciences, nearly as many men responded to the survey as women. Using these data and appropriate population level data, it is possible to ask if there are more men or women who identified themselves as parents in the survey in each division than would be expected based on the ratios of men to women in the student population of a given division. This question, however, requires the use of male to female ratios within each division, which were not available at the time of this report. Instead, one might assume that the gender ratios within each division were the same as the gender ratio in GSAS as a whole. This assumption is unlikely given that many disciplines are traditionally more or less dominated by one gender or the other. Still, using this assumption, none of the ratios between men and women in the three departmental groupings statistically
significantly deviated from the gender ratio in GSAS (Chi-square test: \( P > 0.05 \) for all three tests).

![Bar chart showing the number of parents by department]

**Figure 2-4.** Student parent survey respondents and breakdown by departmental classification.

Since respondents to the survey appear to form a representative sample of GSAS student parents, the survey responses are likely to accurately reflect the experiences and opinions of all student parents in GSAS. The subsequent sections of this report represent the first detailed account of parental accommodation environment across GSAS.
Section 3: Student Mothers

Fifty-one graduate student mothers replied concerning their experiences with pregnancy and parental accommodation in GSAS. Most of these mothers were in their later G-years, and most had their children in their fourth year or later. Mothers varied widely in the amount of time taken off after the birth or adoption of a child, but only those mothers who took the longest leaves were satisfied (at least 2 months). Reasons for returning before they were ready included financial concerns, worries over healthcare and insurance, and research responsibilities. Analysis of the specific accommodations received by these mothers shows striking disparities across department and division. Only 60% of mothers maintained their health insurance while on leave, and only 50% received a stipend. Lack of stipend support was strongly correlated with division and places an unfair burden on mothers in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, the current policy of G-clock extension is largely neither known nor followed. These discrepancies arise from the lack of a central policy or consistent management of parental accommodation. Mothers who took time off with a new child missed a variety of commitments, including course work, teaching, and research. Departments should work to set reasonable expectations for new parents and to provide flexible responsibilities, where possible.

3.1 Survey Respondents

Our online survey of current or expecting mothers received 51 total responses, 48 of whom had at least one child while a graduate student at Harvard. These mothers represent all three divisions of the graduate school as discussed in Section 2.

Most graduate student mothers have their children later in graduate school (see Figure 3.1). This data actually over-emphasizes children born early in graduate school (because older students are still here to report early births). Therefore, the graph also shows a normalized number, where the total number for year N was divided by the number of respondents who had been a GN (\[# G_N \]/[total # G\geq N]).
3.2 Time Off for Mothers

As shown in Figure 3-2 below, new mothers vary widely in the amount of time needed before giving birth, based on unforeseeable complications. No interesting correlations exist between time off before birth and division or status. While the percentage of mothers who require medically restricted bed rest is quite small, this population will require significantly more resources and flexibility to accommodate.

![Figure 3-2. Time off by mother before birth. Most mothers did not need time off before birth. A small percentage of mothers required restricted bed rest.](image1)

![Figure 3-3. Time off by mother after birth or adoption. Mothers varied in the amount of time taken.](image2)

New mothers vary widely in the amount of time taken after the birth or adoption of a child, as well. In this case, a significant relationship exists between amount of time taken and the
division to which the mother belongs, as shown in Figure 3-4 below. A majority of mothers in the Humanities took more than three months off, while half of mothers in the Sciences took between 2 and 3 months. Section 6 will explore such divisional differences in more detail.

Figure 3-4. Time off after birth by division. Most mothers in the humanities took > 3 months, most in the social sciences took > 2 months, and most in science took 2-3 months.

Mothers also responded concerning their satisfaction with the amount of time taken, as shown in Figure 3-5. Most mothers would have liked to take off more time but were prevented by a variety of impediments. Only for the longest periods of time off were the majority of mothers satisfied with the length of their parental leave. Mothers from all of these groups cited similar reasons for returning to work before they were ready. These included needing income (6 free responses), needing health insurance (2 responses), and needing to return to research (4 responses). Several mothers also discussed their frustration with the system that forced them to return not only before they were ready, but also before they could be productive, given their health and general exhaustion.

Figure 3-5. Mothers’ satisfaction with amount of time off. Only those mothers who took the longest time off were mostly satisfied.
Specific Parental Accommodations for Mothers

The specific accommodations received by student mothers are shown in Figure 3-6. Despite some mothers taking entire semesters off, almost all mothers remained enrolled. This allowed international students to avoid interruptions of visa status. Those who did not remain enrolled were those who took the longest leaves (of 1 year or more). However, this did not guarantee basic benefits, including health insurance. In addition, there is a great disparity over whether mothers were paid during their leave. Finally, many mothers were unaware of any possibility for extending their G-year.

Figure 3-6. Parental accommodations received. Most mothers remained enrolled as students, while half received a stipend and ~60% health insurance. Only ~20% had a G-clock extension, and many were unaware of this possibility.

Figure 3-7. Parental accommodations in relation to amount of time off. Health insurance was roughly evenly distributed, except for the shortest period, where all mothers maintained health insurance. G-year extensions were primarily only available to those mothers who took the longest time off.

The disparity over healthcare and G-clock is linked to differences in length of parental leave (Figure 3-7). Some of the mothers who took more time off did indeed lose their health...
insurance, indicating that this was a valid fear and serves as a real impediment to taking parental leave. Several of the mothers with the shortest period of time off commented that they would have taken a G-year extension if it had been offered to them. A comprehensive parental accommodation policy must specifically address health insurance and G-clock extension.

The GSAS Handbook states: “An adjustment of one term or one year can be made for childbirth or another major family related disruption of timely progress in a graduate student’s work. This leave should be discussed and documented with the department and the GSAS at the time it occurs” (page 54). Several respondents commented that their department had extended their clock, but that GSAS did not recognize that change. One had lost her guaranteed teaching opportunity because she took a leave during G3/G4. The registrar, when contacted, agreed that the departments were responsible for any changes to G-year, as the registrar’s clock is not currently adjustable. When only those respondents who arranged their time off with either GSAS or their department are considered (those ‘officially’ on leave), many of them still did not receive a G-clock extension. Currently, graduate student parents have inadequate access to G-year extensions after the arrival of a child. Whatever policy is established for G-year extension (as will be discussed further in Section 11 on Recommendations), it must be publicized to students and departments before parents will be able to benefit from it. Oversight will be necessary to ensure fair application of the policy across departments and divisions.

The discrepancy between those mothers who received a stipend during their leave and those who did not is linked to length of leave and also to academic division. As seen in Figure 3-7 above, while over half of mothers who took less than 3 months leave continued to receive their stipend, only 20% of those mothers who took longer than 3 months were paid. As income was the most cited reason for limiting length of parental leave, this disparity certainly serves as an

Figure 3-8. G-clock extension for mothers on ‘official’ leave. Less than 50% of mothers who arranged time off through either their department or the registrar took a G-year extension, and over 25% were unaware of their G-year status.
impediment to mothers taking time off. Many of the mothers who took shorter leaves did not make official arrangements specifically so that their stipend would continue.

The breakdown by division shown in Figure 3-9 demonstrates the serious disparity facing mothers in the Humanities and Social Sciences. While all respondents in Science and Engineering continued to receive their stipends while on leave (albeit often unofficially), a much smaller percentage of Humanities and Social Science students were paid while on leave. Given the role financial concerns play in limiting parental leave, this disparity places an even greater burden on Social Science and particularly Humanities students. This divisional difference will be discussed further in Section 6.

**Figure 3-9.** Mothers receiving stipend while on leave. 100% of mothers in science received stipend support, while almost no students in humanity and less than half those in social sciences did so.

### 3.4 Arrangements for Parental Accommodation

The inconsistencies in stipend support and length of leave stem from the current lack of central management of parental accommodation. Each individual parent has the option of handling arrangements for time off by themselves, consulting their advisor and/or department, or taking an official leave of absence through GSAS. While this may give maximal flexibility, this also results in unacceptable disparities between students who work with supportive administrators and advisors and those who receive no support. Figure 3-10 below illustrates the diverse arrangements used by mothers taking time off after the arrival of a new child, and also shows how length of leave impacts those arrangements.
Those who took the shortest leaves generally did not make official arrangements, and some even timed their leave such that their advisor would remain unaware. Longer leaves generally required more advisor and/or departmental involvement, except in those cases where childbirth happened to fall at the beginning of summer break. The longest leaves generally required either ‘amazingly understanding’ advisors who allowed the student to take a long break without officially taking leave, or they necessitated a leave of absence from the University managed through GSAS.

3.5 Missing Commitments while on Leave

As expected, mothers who took time off after the birth or adoption of a child missed a variety of commitments. As seen in Figure 3-11, those with the shortest periods of time off missed the fewest commitments. Those with the longest leaves were forced to withdraw from the University, so they had no commitments to miss (see *** in Figure 3-11). A successful parental leave policy must acknowledge that students on leave will miss commitments and should provide opportunities for them to integrate flexible teaching positions and course work, where possible. Potential flexible teaching positions will be discussed further in the departmental discussion. A successful policy must also address cultural standards so that advisors set reasonable
expectations for research productivity and continue to support students who take time off. Further discussion of responses to parents on leave is discussed in Section 7.

![Figure 3-11](image)

**Figure 3-11.** Commitments missed by mothers on leave. All mothers missed research commitments, although those who took the least amount of time off did miss less. Those mothers who took the longest amount of time were not allowed to teach (***)

The number of new mothers who missed teaching commitments is low because most mothers did not teach during the semester surrounding the birth or adoption of their child. In addition to losing their teaching position for that semester, some mothers lose the option of teaching in the future. If their G-clock does not extend, they will lose their guaranteed teaching years. Losing their guaranteed teaching entirely puts an extreme financial burden on parents.

### 3.6 Spousal Support

Respondents also gave information on the amount of parental leave taken by their spouses. Most mothers had spouses who worked outside the home, and almost all of the respondents bore the primary responsibility for caring for their new child. While there was not a strong relationship between the amount of leave taken by the mother and the amount taken by her spouse, those mothers who took the shortest period of parental leave had spouses who took generally longer leaves. In addition, 6% of GSAS mothers had no spouse and bore the entirety of the responsibility for their child. These mothers will need special accommodation.
Figure 3-12. Spousal Support. Occupations of respondents’ spouses (left) and the amount of time taken off by spouses after the arrival of the new child (right). Mothers bore the primary childcare responsibilities.
Section 4: Student Fathers

The 50 men who responded to the survey of fathers provide insights into the situation of GSAS student fathers. Like the overall parent population, fathers are more likely to be advanced graduate students, more likely to be students in the humanities, and less likely to be students in the sciences than the GSAS population as a whole. The average G-year of fathers at the time of their child’s birth is four. While nearly half of fathers have partners who work outside the home, 40% have partners who are stay-at-home parents. The large number fathers with stay-at-home partners or partners with comprehensive leave policies from an employer may help explain how 68% of surveyed fathers took less than one month off after their child’s birth. Still, 64% would have liked to take more time off, potentially indicating that fathers may not be able to take unpaid time off as they often provide the primary source of income for their families. Of those who did make arrangements to take time off, fathers almost exclusively went to their advisor and never made arrangements with the graduate school.

The 50 current and expecting student fathers who responded to the survey give a unique insight into a less visible part of the student parent population. Since they do not physically give birth or carry the child to term, fathers do not necessarily need to make official arrangements or take extended periods of time off from their commitments at Harvard. However, men provide an increasingly large part of the care for a new child while their parental contributions are rarely supported outside the home. It therefore remains unclear who among GSAS men become fathers and how they are able to support and care for a child while in graduate school.

4.1. Who are GSAS student fathers?

Figure 4-1 shows the make up of the sample of surveyed student fathers. Science and Engineering students make up 42% (21 fathers) of the student fathers in the survey while Humanities and Social Science students make up 36% and 22% (18 and 11 fathers) respectively. The composition of surveyed fathers by division significantly deviates from the composition expected based upon the divisional breakdown of students in GSAS as a whole (see Figure 2-1B; Chi-square: 6.92, df = 2, $P=0.031$). As explained in Section 2, this indicates that fewer than expected fathers are scientists and social scientists.
Figure 4-1. Father responses by division as a percentage of all fathers who responded.

Figure 4-2A explores the relationship between the number of surveyed fathers and their current G-year, while Figure 4-2B examines during what G-year surveyed fathers had their children. Looking at single G-years, Figure 4-2A shows that the number of student fathers increases as one considers students father along in their graduate career. In fact, the number of fathers significantly correlates with G-year (Pearson’s correlation coefficient: 0.93, \( P = 0.007 \)). G-7 students were excluded from this correlation as many students have already defended their dissertation. The data necessary to normalize these numbers by the number of students in each G-year was not available.

While student fathers are be more likely to be advanced in their graduate careers, the G-year of surveyed student fathers at the time of his child’s birth shows a weaker trend (Figure 4-2B). However, this distribution is misleading as not all fathers in the survey have had the opportunity to have a child in every G-years. Correcting for the number of surveyed fathers who could have had children in a given G-year, Figure 4-2C shows the proportion of fathers who had a child in each G-year as a percentage of the surveyed fathers of that G-year or greater. With this correction, the number of fathers who have children in a given G-year strongly correlates with the G-year of fathers at the time of his child’s birth (Pearson’s correlation coefficient: 0.896, \( P = 0.0064 \)).
Figure 4-2. Distribution of surveyed fathers (A) by current G-year and (B & C) by fathers’ G-year when his child was born. While (B) reports the raw number of fathers who reported having children in each G-year, (C) reports the number of fathers who had a child in each year as a percentage of the fathers in the survey who were that G-year or greater.

By far the most common G-year to have a child among fathers was the G-4 year. In fact, the average G-year among fathers during the birth of their child was also 4.0 (similar to 4.1, the mean for all student parents). While there seems to be no data based explanation as to why so many fathers seem to have children during their 4th year, this spike in births comes roughly a year after many students finish their course work and complete their qualifying exams. Assuming surveyed fathers reflect the population of fathers in GSAS, this data indicates a post-qualifying exam “baby boom.”
Understanding the situation of GSAS student fathers requires an understanding of their partners as well. Figure 4-3 shows the job status of the partners of the fathers in our survey. A plurality (48%, 24 of 50) fathers have partners that work outside the home. Another 40% (20 fathers) have stay-at-home partners. Only 12% (6 of 50) have partners who are also students and only 2 have partners in GSAS.

While it is unknown how many men in GSAS have partners who are also GSAS students, it is unlikely that such a small number of GSAS students would be partnered with each other. Given that many students create personal and social lives with the people that they meet in their GSAS programs, departments, dormitories, etc., the burden of supporting a child while attending Harvard’s GSAS may discourage graduate student couples from having children.

The eighty-eight percent of fathers (44 of 50) who have a partner who works or is a stay-at-home partner potentially may indicate that additional support is needed for graduate students to have children. Partners of GSAS student fathers who work are likely, if not legally required, to be given paid maternity leave and potentially have larger incomes than graduate students. The additional support provided from a partner’s employer may ease the burden of having children while in graduate school. Additionally, a stay-at-home partner is able to provide care for children full time, potentially easing the burden on the graduate student father. Figure 4-3 may indicate that additional resources are necessary in order for men to successfully have children in graduate school.

Figure 4-3. The job status of the partners of student fathers.
4.2. Taking Time Off

The overwhelming majority of fathers in our survey took little time off after the birth of their child. Figure 4-4A shows that 86% of fathers surveyed took less than 1 month off with 18% of these taking no time off at all. This pattern contrasts strikingly with the time their partners took off. When fathers were asked how much time their partner took off after the birth of their child, Fifty percent indicated that their partner took at least three months off while only one respondent indicated that his partner took less than four weeks off.

While fathers may take little time off, they would like to be able to spend more time with their new family after the birth of their child. Figure 4-5 shows that 64% of fathers would like to have taken more time off. However, 28% (14 of 49) of fathers in our survey indicated that they would not have wanted to take more time off.

*Figure 4-4. Fathers’ time (A) and their partners’ time (B) off after the birth of their child.*
Of those who indicated they would not have liked more time off, 57% (8 of 14) of these were science and engineering students, 35% (5 of 14) and only one was a social scientist. While not significantly different from the overall make up of our sample, fathers wanting no additional time off were more likely to be science and humanities students, while those desiring more time off were more likely to be social scientists.

While taking time off after their child’s birth, fathers were most likely to miss research commitments. Figure 4-6 shows the number of fathers who answered that they missed class, teaching or research commitments. Given that fathers and GSAS student parents are more likely to be G4 and beyond in their career, it is perhaps not surprising that most fathers do not miss class obligations but miss research obligations. Perhaps surprising is that only one father reported missing teaching commitments. While this may indicate that few fathers in our sample were teaching at the time of the birth of their child, it may also indicate that fathers were better able to keep teaching commitments shortly after the birth of a child. The support of their partners, who took far more time off on average, may give fathers the ability to keep teaching despite the birth of their child.
To understand how fathers approach taking time off for the birth of their children, fathers were asked whether they made any “official arrangements” and with whom. The overwhelming majority of fathers made no “official arrangements” to take time off after the birth of their child. Figure 4-7A shows that 87% (35 of 40) fathers made no “official arrangements” while only 13% (5 of 40) made such arrangements. While some fathers who made no official arrangements made some type of arrangements, only 30% fathers in our survey (15 of 50) indicated that they made any arrangements at all.

Figure 4-7. Arrangements for time off. (A) Fathers who made “official arrangements” and (B) with whom they made arrangements.
Figure 4-7B demonstrates that not a single father made arrangements with GSAS. Of those fathers who claimed to have made “official arrangements” in Figure 4-7A, only one father went to anyone besides his advisor, in this case, his department. If only those students who made arrangements with the graduate school are considered to have made “official arrangements,” no fathers in our sample made anything but informal arrangements.

When considering fathers’ time off and their potential desire to take more time off, it is important to realize that a large percentage of fathers provide the predominant source of income for their family. Forty percent of fathers have stay-at-home partners (see Figure 4-3) and many fathers with partners who work also provide a large percent of the household income. The role of most men as primary or significant breadwinner suggests that a large percentage of fathers cannot financially afford to take extended leave from GSAS, especially if such a leave would cost a father his stipend or teaching income. Moving beyond traditional gender roles will require a policy that recognizes the growing role of men in the household while acknowledging the reality of the financial situations in most GSAS households.
Chapter 5: Departments

Nineteen departmental administrators, equally spanning Humanities, Social Sciences, and Science departments, replied concerning the current state of parental accommodation in their departments. In general, these departments only received 2-5 requests for accommodation per year. Only ~10% of departments had any official policy; most handled requests on a case-by-case basis. Very few departments automatically extended G-year, showing that the current policy is not sufficient. Most departments accommodate time off for mothers after the arrival of a new child; however, departments confirmed that fathers do not take time off. As observed in the mothers surveys, the level of stipend support for mothers varies widely, and disparities exist between divisions. Departments diverged considerably on the degree of flexibility given to new parents for course work, teaching, and degree requirements, with some offering creative solutions for flexible teaching positions. Finally, an analysis of sources of logistical and financial support demonstrates the disparities inherent in the current situation.

5.1: Departmental Awareness

The survey of departmental administrators received 19 responses, which is 35% of the total degree granting departments and programs. These spanned all three divisions evenly, with seven Humanities, six Social Science, and six Science and Engineering departments responding. Unfortunately, none of the departments from the Longwood Medical Area or the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences responded. While the responses of other science and engineering departments can be extrapolated, they do not account for the specific needs and structures in place at LMA and SEAS, where more than 20% of GSAS students work.

The single most significant finding is that departments do not have the information that they need to adequately manage parental accommodation for their students. Even beyond resources, without information about their students and about GSAS policies, departments cannot consistently support new parents. In addition, because there are no official policies, each parent is handled on a case-by-case basis. While this may result in maximal flexibility for the student, there are no basic protections or consistent policies, and the student parent is dependent on the goodwill of the administrator or advisor who is helping them.

Departments do not, in general, know which of their students need parental accommodation. Only 10% of respondents ask their students if they are parents. New parents only receive departmental support if they approach the department themselves, and many do not do so (see Sections 3 and 4). Several departments noted that their responses to the survey are biased
because they only reflect the student parents that have approached the administration; they do not include any parents who have managed parental leave on their own or only with their advisor.

The reporting departments do not appear to face an unreasonable number of parental accommodation requests. Figures 5-1 and 5-2 below depict ‘parental load’ (the number of new parents who must be accommodated) by departments based on department self-reporting and based on the parental responses. The majority of responding departments had fewer than five new parents in the last two years. In addition, most departments were associated with two or fewer parental survey responses. Given our estimated ~40% coverage of GSAS parents, we estimate that most departments have fewer than 5 parents. This should be a manageable number of individuals in terms of providing flexible teaching and course requirements and managing G-clock extensions. However, given limited budgets and existing funding structures, some departments cannot provide stipend, tuition, and health insurance to their student parents after the arrival of a new child. This will be discussed further in Section 11.

**Figure 5-1.** New parental load on departments (departmental responses). Most departments have had less than five requests for parental accommodation in the last two years.

**Figure 5-2.** Parental respondents by department. The vast majority of departments have less than five total parents among the respondents.
5.2: **Departmental Policies**

Very few departments have any official parental leave policy. Over 50% had no policy whatsoever. Another 30% resolved each request on a case-by-case basis. As will be shown below, this results in large discrepancies between students and across divisions. The two departments with official policies were both Social Science departments, and both facilitate flexibility on course work and extend the G-clock when requested. No department has an official policy guaranteeing a specific amount of time off, and no department has an official policy guaranteeing paid leave.

Most departments do not automatically extend the G-clock. The majority of Social Science departments do automatically extend G-year, possibly because these students take longer, official, leaves of absence. Several other departments noted that they would extend G-year on a student-specific basis, if it were requested and warranted. However, as discussed in Section 3 on student mothers, many students do not know that G-clock extension is a possibility, and so do not request it.

Departments varied significantly in which leave options they supported for new mothers, as shown in Figure 5-4 below. Many departments did not address this question. Of those who did, the Science departments were significantly more likely to support leave with continued stipend support. The Social Science departments primarily had new mothers take a leave of absence, while the Humanities departments allowed the students to enroll but did not provide stipend support. Many of the departments that stated that they provided stipend support did not address from where the money came.

**Figure 5-3.** Automatic G-clock extension by division. Only departments in the social sciences generally extend G-year for student parents.
Many fewer options were available to new fathers across all divisions. This reflects in part a lack of support for fathers taking parental leave, but it also reflects the general societal norm for fathers to not take time off. If asked, many departments might provide similar parental accommodations to new fathers as to new mothers. Without a formal policy to set expectations, many new fathers do not even request time off.

5.3 Flexible Scheduling

In addition to supporting time off for parental leave, most departments provided flexibility in classes, teaching, or degree requirements to accommodate new parents. While many departments did allow flexibility in course work and degree requirements due to new children, not all did so, particularly for fathers. Officially recognizing parental leave for both genders
should significantly increase the percentage of departments offering flexible scheduling to new fathers.

![Bar chart showing percent of departments offering flexibility to new parents](image)

**Figure 5-6.** Flexibility offered to new parents. Only half of departments offered any flexibility to new mothers, and even fewer extended such support to fathers.

Most departments do not currently provide flexible teaching opportunities. This is particularly significant in the Humanities and Social Sciences, where students depend on teaching for their income. Under the current circumstances, a student who misses part of a semester for parental leave loses their income for the entire semester because they cannot teach part of a course. Flexible teaching opportunities would substantially alleviate the strain on the central administration for stipend support for new parents, because it would allow them to work part time or for part of the semester, as they desired. Examples of flexible teaching positions are thesis and/or major advisors for undergraduates (Romance Languages and Literature, Philosophy) and graders or readers. In addition, several departments do not change the priority hire/guaranteed teaching year to allow parents to teach after they return from parental leave.

5.4 Logistical and Financial Support for Parental Leave

Students who wished to take parental leave received widely divergent support from their departments and advisors. Figure 5-7 below shows the percentage of departments where students receive logistical support from the department or their advisor in arranging parental
leave. In most departments, students must navigate this decision and the accompanying arrangements without support from either department or advisor.

![Bar chart showing logistical support for parental leave](chart.png)

**Figure 5-7.** Logistical support for parental leave. Most departments in the Humanities and Social Sciences supported no or only some of student parents. Many departments in the Sciences provided logistical support in arranging parental leave, but the others provided no support to new parents.

Departments varied widely in the financial support provided to new parents as well. In most cases, students received no support from either department or advisor. However, in some departments, students continue to receive stipends from either the department, their advisor, or both. The level of financial support provided to students while on parental leave is related to which division the department belongs. According to the departments surveyed, some Humanities and Sciences students are financially supported while on leave. However, the majority of students, and particularly those in the Social Sciences, receive no financial support.
The departmental surveys confirm the finding of the parental surveys that large discrepancies occur in the level of support students receive while on leave. This discrepancy is related to the differences between divisions, but each department and, indeed, each student handles the question differently. Without a GSAS policy, there is no consistent level of support guaranteed to new parents.
Section 6: Divisional Disparity

A majority of mothers surveyed (52%) did not receive stipend support while taking time off after childbirth. This apparent inconsistency is found to be closely related to the divisional affiliation of the student. Different funding structures for graduate students across the three divisions of GSAS (Humanities, Social Sciences and Science and Engineering) translate directly into a pronounced discrepancy in the financial support offered to graduate student parents who take time off after childbirth. One hundred percent of graduate student mothers in Science and Engineering received some form of financial support, whereas no Humanities students received any financial support. These results are independent of the student’s G-year and the amount of time taken off. The majority of mothers in the Social Sciences (63%) also did not receive financial support; however, in this case a strong relationship is found with the amount of leave taken. This disparity provides a strong argument for the establishment of a policy for parental accommodation that provides paid time off for new student parents equally across all GSAS divisions.

6.1 Overview

The observed disparity in financial support received based on the student’s divisional affiliation provides a strong argument for the establishment of a policy for parental accommodation that provides paid time off for new student parents equally across all GSAS divisions. The graduate student parent population in the later G-years is roughly equally comprised of students from all 3 GSAS divisions (Humanities, Social Sciences and Science and Engineering). However each of these divisions have very different funding structures for their graduate students, particularly in the later G-years. Science students are generally guaranteed funding until for five years, whereas in the Humanities and most Social Science departments, stipend and tuition support are only offered in G1/G2. Students in G3/G4 in the Humanities and Social Sciences are offered a teaching stipend and there is no financial support for students in G5+. Because graduate students are more likely to have children in later G-years, these funding differences translate directly into a pronounced discrepancy in the financial support offered to graduate student parents while on parental leave. However, as will be illustrated for students in the Humanities and Social Sciences, this disparity is not limited to the older G-years. We note here that the majority of students in Science and Engineering obtained financial support from their advisors while on leave. Indeed, the culture in the Sciences is such that the tuition and
stipends of graduate students are paid at least in part through their advisor’s grants. This is not the same financial arrangement as in the Social Sciences and Humanities, and as such, advisors in these divisions may be less willing/financially unable to support their graduate students when the department refuses to do so.

As shown in Figure 3-6, stipend support received by mothers while taking time off is highly variable, with 52% of the mothers received some form of stipend support while the other half took unpaid leave. This section quantifies the discrepancy in financial support given to new graduate student parents across GSAS divisions in terms of the students G-year and the amount of leave taken. Since most fathers did not take a significant amount of leave after the birth of their child (c.f. section 5), this analysis focuses only on the results of the Mothers Survey.

6.2 Mothers in Science and Engineering

Figure 3-9 shows that all mothers in Science and Engineering received some form of support while taking time off. Since there is roughly the same number of mothers in G5+ across all divisions (Figure 6-1), this cannot be explained away by arguing that there are few students in the older G-years in Science and Engineering.

![Figure 6-1](image)

**Figure 6-1.** The breakdown of the number of mothers in each GSAS division as a function of G-year. Results are for the mothers who had children in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 only. For G5+ there is little difference in the number of mothers per division.

Furthermore, mothers in Science and Engineering took a range of time off after the birth of their child (Figure 3-4), meaning this result is also independent of the extent of leave taken. The
ubiquitous stipend support provided to new parents in Science and Engineering is thus a reflection of the funding structure in the sciences, where student stipends are largely guaranteed.

6.3 Mothers in the Humanities

Figure 3-9 also shows that practically no Humanities students received stipend support while taking time off after the birth of their child. Of the three who reported receiving stipend support, two took no time off at all in order to continue teaching and earn an income, and the one mother, who took 8-10 weeks off, had earned a term award. This result is independent of the amount of time taken off or G-year: Figure 6-1 shows that while there are mothers between G1 and G4 in the Humanities, these students still received no financial support. This conclusion is consistent with section 5, where departments in the Humanities report that stipend support is not provided for students who take time off after the birth of a child.

6.4 Mothers in the Social Sciences

Figure 3-9 indicates that 37% of students in the Social Sciences received stipend support while taking time off; however, most students (63%) did not receive a stipend at all. These data are further considered in terms of the amount time taken off (Figure 6-2) and the student’s G-year at the time of their child’s birth (Figure 6-3).

![Figure 6-2](image)

**Figure 6-2.** Stipend support received by all mothers in the GSAS division of Social Sciences as a function of the amount of leave taken after the birth of their child. 63% of all social scientist mothers did not receive stipend support while taking time off: the majority of those students took more extended leaves.
A strong relationship exists between obtaining financial support and the amount of time taken off – most students who did not receive stipend support took > 12 weeks off – however this is only true for Social Science students. No strong relationships are found between the student’s G-year and the obtaining of financial support while taking time off since there are students in each G-years who do not receive support.

**6.5 Conclusion**

This analysis strongly indicates that students in the Humanities and Social Sciences who have children are at a huge financial disadvantage in comparison to students in Science and Engineering. This is true irrespective of the amount of time taken off after childbirth (except perhaps in the Social Sciences) or the G-year of the student. The disparity in financial support received by students while taking time off after the birth of their child is a strong reflection of the different funding structures across GSAS divisions, both in terms of the length of time over which funding is guaranteed and the extent to which advisors are expected to financially support their students. We thus strongly recommend that any parental leave policy that provides paid time off for student parents ultimately provide students with the same amount of financial support, irrespective of the student’s divisional affiliation.
Section 7: The Culture – What do student parents face?

In addition to the financial and institutional pressures that make having children while in graduate school difficult, parents must face the reactions from their advisors, supervisors, and peers. On the whole students, respond that their decision to take time off was received “generally well.” However, there are a troubling number of responses that indicate that some students’ advisors and teaching supervisors were not understanding, especially of mothers. As mothers must necessarily take more time off than fathers after the birth of a child, they may be more likely to encounter frustration and negativity from their colleagues. Both the qualitative and quantitative data from the surveys give some insight into academic culture faced by student mothers. In quantitative disciplines, mothers were more likely to respond that their advisor had been less than supportive. The funding structure of graduate students in science may be one source of negative feelings in addition to a general skepticism about accommodating parents. A gender-neutral accommodation policy may help to change the academic culture surrounding parental responsibilities.

GSAS students who become parents face a variety of responses from their advisors, departments, teaching supervisors and the graduate school. It is therefore important to examine how various members of the GSAS community perceive the time parents take off to attend to parental responsibilities.

7.1. How time off is received

Figure 7-1 shows the responses of parents asked how their time off from work was perceived by various GSAS groups. On the whole, professors, teaching supervisors, research advisors and peers received parents’ decisions to take time off “generally well.” Between 45% and 83% of respondents said their time of was received “generally well” by a given GSAS group.

However, mothers and fathers respond differently when asked how their time off was perceived. Notice that 25% of mothers (5 of 20) in our survey said that their teaching supervisor received their time off “generally poorly.” Compare this with less than 10% of fathers (1 of 11). Additionally, 30% of mothers’ teaching supervisors received their time off with “mixed reviews.” These figures suggest that a majority of teaching supervisors are less than supportive of mothers’ parental responsibilities.

Surprisingly, even the peers of GSAS student parents seem to perceive the time mothers’ take off more negatively. 36% of surveyed mothers (15 of 41) indicate that peers received their
time off with mixed or poor reviews. This figure is more than twice the percent of fathers in our survey who answered similarly for their peer group (16%, 5 of 30).

![Figure 7-1.](image)

**Figure 7-1.** How (A) mothers’ and (B) fathers’ time off was received by various GSAS groups.

This data is consistent with a hypothesis that women in the academy face a more openly hostile culture when faced with balancing work with family. It should be pointed out that, after the birth of a child, women, on average, take far more time off than their male counterparts (see Sections 3 and 4). The additional time that new mothers must necessarily take may create a
greater opportunity for negative feelings to arise from colleagues and supervisors. Women often indicated that they felt their pregnancy would reflect negatively on their graduate careers. When asked how her advisor received her time off, one science and engineering student wrote that she “did not consult with research advisor.” She writes that she “tried to hide [her] pregnancy,” and ultimately “had [her] baby when advisor was away.” Not only is this comment a black-eye for graduate student advising, but it also suggests a culture that seems so hostile to the needs of student that she would try to hide such visible changes in her body.

Mothers responded in a variety of ways when asked whether advisors and professors were understanding when they needed to miss commitments for childcare related reasons (e.g. illness of the child). Approximately 75% of mothers (20 of 27) across all disciplines indicated that their advisors were understanding. Many answered that their advisors were “very understanding” or “exceedingly supportive.” One mother in the social sciences indicated that her advisors were understanding in spite of her progress “being slowed down tremendously” because “there is very little help in general.” Her advisor, however, “never complained” about the rate of her progress. While women in the humanities may find less formal institutional support (e.g. stipend support), they indicate that their advisors are extremely supportive on the whole. Nine of ten mothers in the humanities who responded to this question wrote that their advisor was nothing but understanding.

However, even when advisors seemed supportive, mothers indicated that their parental responsibilities were not necessarily received entirely positively. One mother in science and engineering mentioned that while her advisors were “somewhat” supportive, she is “not taken as seriously as she used to be.” Another mother mentioned her advisors were supportive but often “surprised – as if they’d never had a student with child rearing responsibilities before.” A social scientist acknowledged that she worked hard to minimize issues regarding her child and that she keeps “as quiet about them as possible,” perhaps because she fears negative perceptions by those with whom she works.

Approximately one quarter of the women who responded indicated that they were not well supported by their advisor. Six of the seven mixed or entirely negative responses came from mothers in social science and science and engineering. One science and engineering student wrote that her advisors “were not happy” when she needed to miss commitments. Another
mother in social science wrote, “it has been suggested multiple times that [she] sleep less to make up for lost work.”

Responses such as these may indicate a less supportive culture regarding starting families from more quantitative disciplines. In the social sciences, this is supported by the responses from mothers regarding how their advisor received their time off. Seven of twelve responses from mothers in social science indicated their time off was received with “mixed” or poor reviews. However, a majority of mothers in science and engineering indicate that their time off was received well.

7.2 Reasons for negative reactions

The less family friendly culture in quantitative disciplines may be explained by how departments fund time off for their graduate students. Data from our departmental survey (see Section 5) as well as informal discussions with students and faculty indicate that several departments do require some financial support to students wishing to take time off after the birth of a child. However, such policies, especially in science departments, are often unfunded mandates where the department requires advisors to fund new parents during their time off despite getting no additional financial support. In these situations, students are required to approach their advisors on their own and ask for some amount of paid time off.

While many advisors may be supportive of a student parent’s needs, it is not necessarily in their immediate interest to fund students while on leave. Advisors in science and other quantitative disciplines often fund their students from federal, peer-reviewed grants. Advisors’ careers depend on their abilities to receive and retain grants. Since the success of future grant applications often hinges on the productivity and publications of previous grants, continuing to pay a student from grant money while they are not working reduces the productivity of the grant and may impair an advisor’s chance of receiving grants in the future.

In fact, paying a graduate student from a grant while on maternity leave may actually be against the policies of federal funding organizations, such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or the National Science Foundation (NSF). For example, the NIH limits the length of time a stipend can be paid to graduate students on maternity leave to 30 days. In principle, student parents on training grants who wish to receive a stipend beyond 30 days must find another source
of funding from the department or their advisor.¹ In practice, students, advisors, and departments often operate under a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy where students do not ask for a specific amount of time off and continue to receive funding beyond limits dictated by official policies. Since these arrangements for time off for parental responsibilities cannot be talked about openly, there is a large opportunity for misunderstandings and hard feelings to arise between advisors and graduate students.

While perhaps not widely encountered at Harvard, negativity towards parents who take time off may sometimes stem from a deeper skepticism about parental accommodation. Some in GSAS may question why parents should receive any accommodation at all. After all, being a parent is a choice, like many others one can make during his or her graduate student career. It may seem perplexing as to why students who make this particular choice should be given special consideration. At least one department who responded to the departmental survey expressed such skepticism about providing parental accommodation to students at all.

However, a graduate school that makes no accommodation for student parents does not provide all its students with the same opportunity to have both a successful career and fulfilling family life. As mentioned in Section 4, the biology of childbirth requires that new mothers take much more time of than their male partners. The data from the surveys (see Section 3 and 4) confirms men take little or no time off while relying upon the childcare provided by their partners who are on extended leaves. Therefore, men have the opportunity to start a family without seriously interrupting their academic progress while women must put their careers on hold for extended periods of time. If a university values producing a diverse group of academics to fill the academic pipeline, it must make accommodations that give all students the same opportunities to be successful, well rounded individuals.

While some universities have created childbirth accommodation policies for mothers in an attempt to recognize the increased role of the women in childrearing (see Section 8), these policies may only serve to reinforce the existing culture that emphasizes traditional gender roles. Whether leave is paid or not, the academic culture still frowns upon taking time away from studies to have a family (see comments from mothers above). Unless all academics, male and

female, generally agree that it is appropriate to take time off for parental responsibilities, women will still face negativity when they decide to start families.

However, traditional gender roles are changing and many men are taking a more active role in the care giving of their children. Many universities have encouraged this cultural shift by developing gender neutral accommodation policies (see Section 8). As men take a more active role in their families and take time away from their responsibilities as students, the accepted practices of the academy are likely to change. By financially supporting both mothers and fathers, universities can begin to change the expectation that students should not take time off for parental responsibilities and create a work environment that allows for a balance between academic and personal life.
Section 8: The Precedent – The “Ivy Plus”

The problems encountered by graduate students in GSAS are not unique to Harvard. Many of Harvard’s peer institutions, the so-called “Ivy Plus,” have developed policies attempting to accommodate the needs of their graduate student populations. These policies range from minimal policies that allow for unpaid university “leave” to paid time off for as many as twelve weeks for any male or female after the arrival of their new child. Harvard and GSAS should use the models put forth by its peer institutions to inform its decisions as it examines how to better meet the needs of its graduate student parents.

The situation facing current and expecting student parents in GSAS is not unique to Harvard. Many university graduate schools have a large number of student parents and struggle with the best way to accommodate them. Policies that accommodate student parents are as diverse as the graduate schools themselves. While we do not seek to provide an exhaustive account of every policy at every graduate school, understanding the precedent set by other universities can inform GSAS and Harvard about how to best accommodate for GSAS’ graduate student parents.

Many arts and sciences graduate programs similar to Harvard’s have instituted some form of parental accommodation policy. Harvard’s Graduate School of Arts and Sciences often considers the graduate schools at universities in the Ivy league as well as Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the University of Chicago and University of California at Berkeley, collectively known as the “Ivy Plus,” to be among its peer institutions. Among them, these institutions demonstrate some of the most minimal and maximal approaches to accommodate the needs of parents at the level of graduate school policy. At least six of these ten universities have some form of paid institutional accommodation for some subset of graduate student parents.

The policies in the arts and sciences graduate schools at Harvard and Chicago demonstrate the most minimal accommodations policies among “Ivy Plus” institutions. Both institutions provide opportunities for parents to take leaves from the university for extended periods of time. This requires that the student go on official “leave” from the university. During this leave, students at Harvard and Chicago no longer receive financial support or health insurance from the university. However, as indicated by the previous sections of this report, many students at Harvard make arrangements with their advisors and departments that allow
them to take time away from their responsibilities while continuing to receive funding. While some departments have general policies that try to accommodate parents, on the whole, Harvard’s graduate student parents are dealt with on an ad hoc basis and receive a range of levels of accommodation as determined by their advisor, department and discipline.

Several “Ivy Plus” institutions provide a greater degree of accommodation to a subset of their student parent population. Recognizing the burden of childbirth on women, these policies focus specifically on birth mothers. Stanford, MIT, and University of Pennsylvania (Penn) provide paid leave for mothers who have given birth. These policies allow women to remain funded and enrolled with access to healthcare while taking some amount of time off after the birth of their child. By definition, they do not cover fathers who wish to take time off and they do not cover mothers who adopt children and wish to take time off after the adoption.

Policies at four different “Ivy Plus” universities provide support for parental accommodation time off in a more comprehensive and gender-neutral way. Princeton and Brown University give support to a male or female “primary caregiver” after a birth or adoption. However, for couples who are both graduate students at these universities, this policy limits paid time off to only one parent. The most comprehensive policies offered by Harvard’s peer institutions have been instituted at Yale and Columbia. Both policies appear to provide parental accommodation to both men and women and do not make stipulations about caregiver status or the number of students within a household who can receive paid time off.

Among universities that provide paid time off to similar groups of students, there is variation in the length of paid leaves. Those universities with only a birth mother accommodation policy provide either six weeks (Stanford) or eight weeks (MIT and Penn). In addition, Brown and Princeton provide eight and twelve weeks of paid leave, while Columbia provides six weeks and Yale guarantees at least eight.

Choices about eligibility and the length of paid leave at each institution most likely reflect decisions about the best way to accommodate students on a finite budget. Notice that the

Penn: http://www.upenn.edu/grad/familyfriendlyp.html.
most inclusive policies do not provide the longest amounts of paid time off. In formulating its own parental accommodation policy, Harvard will need to develop its own priorities about eligibility and leave length in order to provide the most beneficial and cost effective policy.

In creating a policy of parental leave, Harvard should keep in mind that university policies may play an integral role in shaping the culture surrounding graduate student parents (see Section 7). Policies that provide only for paid time off for birth mothers may only serve to augment a traditional culture that views child birth and rearing as a predominantly female duty and a hindrance to progress through graduate school. While working within budgetary constraints, Harvard and GSAS should seek to create a maximally inclusive policy in order to begin to change accepted norms of balancing work and family.

_The committee would like to thank Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Garth McCavana, for providing his office’s research regarding “Ivy Plus” parental accommodation policies._

In this report we investigate the economic feasibility of a parental leave policy in which both graduate student mothers and fathers are entitled to paid time off for a total of either 1, 2 or 3 months regardless of G-year or GSAS divisional affiliation. We base our analysis on the number of births reported for: 2007-2008 (40 births), the average from 2006-2008 (33 births) and an upper limit estimate from UHS (47 births to GSAS mothers in 2006-2007, implying 100 total births/year assuming a 50:50 gender ratio). For the average birth rate, we estimate the annual cost of a policy in which students are provided with 3 months of paid time off (tuition, stipend and health insurance costs for ~ 33 parents) to be on the order of (270-310) thousand dollars per year, where the spread owes to the uncertainties in stipend values. Adopting an upper limit for the birth rate of 100 births/year, we estimate the maximal cost of a 3 month policy to be (830-950) thousand dollars per year. This is equivalent to admitting an additional 25 graduate students per year and represents ~0.7% of the current amount GSAS spends on graduate student salaries (assuming a total of 3783 students in GSAS with equal). However, since most students surveyed were unable to take a full 3 months of leave, the expected increase in costs to GSAS is much lower – we approximate this as the cost of supporting Humanities and Social Science students who have children in G5+ (i.e. those students who would not otherwise be supported by GSAS). As such, the increase in cost is at most (300-380) thousand dollars, representing a ~0.2% increase to the total amount GSAS spends annually on graduate student salaries.

9.1 Parental Leave Policy Details

A parental leave policy that involves paid leave to all new graduate student parents in GSAS for a given number of months is similar to the recent parental leave policy established at Yale University (c.f. section 8). Specifically, the proposed policy would be available to students of both genders. This not only serves to break gender stereotypes which label mothers as the primary care givers, but also recognizes that many graduate student fathers are the main income providers for a household: 36% of fathers have stay-at-home partners, making it impossible for them to afford to take an extended leave. This is aptly illustrated by the fact that only 12.2% of fathers took >4 weeks off. Also, in recognition that most graduate students have children in G4+ (see Figure 9-1) we have estimated the stipend support using the average G1/G2 amounts (Humanities: 15-20K, Social Sciences: 20-25K, Science and Engineering: 25-30K) – i.e. for students in the Humanities this would not be the amount of financial support they would have received had they not had a child. This choice is motivated by the demographics of the current
graduate student parent population, wherein over half of all parents are in the Social Sciences and Humanities (~60%). For these students funding is not guaranteed in the later G-years (in contrast to Science and Engineering students). Specifically, virtually 0% of graduate student parents in the Humanities received stipend support while on leave, while 100% of parents in Science and Engineering did receive some form of support. Any policy that ignores this fact allows for a huge disparity in income amongst students on leave across the divisions of GSAS (see section 6 for more details).

Although the simple cost breakdown outlined in this report is gender blind in terms of the allocated amount of leave, it can easily be generalized to alternative combinations. This is because there is roughly the same number of graduate student mothers as fathers in a given year (Figure 9-1) and, furthermore, on average fathers and mothers populate each GSAS division (Humanities, Social Sciences and Science and Engineering) with roughly the same fractions (Table 9-2), making the stipend estimates a robust quantity. For example, the cost assessment for a parental leave policy in which both mothers and fathers receive 3 months of paid leave would equivalently estimate the costs of a policy in which graduate student mothers were entitled to 4 months leave while fathers received 2 months leave. Such a gender imbalanced leave policy recognizes the fact that mothers require time to recover from the physical stresses of childbirth and that mothers may also need to take leave prior to childbirth for medical reasons (medically restricted bed rest was required for 10% of all GSAS Mothers). For these reasons, flexibility in when leave can be taken is also a crucial component of an equitable parental leave policy. Many of the ideas outlined in this section are explored in detail in a recent article written by Margaret W. Sallee, “A Feminist Perspective on Parental Leave Policies” (Innovative Higher Education, 2008, 32:181-194).

9.2 Birth Rates

We determine the number of births per year as reported by mothers and fathers as a function of G-year, gender and division. This analysis does not account for births prior to the commencement of graduate studies at Harvard. We focus this analysis on the births in the 2007-2008 and 2006-2007 academic years using data from our Survey and the reported number of births in 2006-2007 from UHS.
9.2.1 Birth Rate and Gender Breakdown

In Table 9-1, we have tabulated the number of births in a given academic year in terms of the student’s gender. From the survey data, there were a total of 40 births reported in 2007-2008 and 25 for 2006-2007. Taking the average of these two years we find that the birth rate from 2006-2008 was 33 children/year.

UHS reports that there were 47 births to GSAS students (i.e. mothers) in the 2006-2007 fiscal year,\(^1\) indicating that the reported number of births from the surveys for that year are likely an underestimate – this is not surprising since the birth rate is top-heavy in terms of G-year and many older G-year students likely graduated since 2006. If the gender ratio is 50:50 (which appears to be the case from our data – c.f. Table 9-1), then the total number of births in 2006-2007 was actually on the order of 100. This is more than the 40 reported for 2007-2008, suggesting that the response rate for the survey was closer to 40%. We adopt the value of 100 births/year as an upper limit to our birth rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Number of Mothers</th>
<th>Number of Fathers</th>
<th>Total Births</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2006-2008 average</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Limit**</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{**}\) UHS reports 47 births to GSAS mothers in 2006-2007: we rounded this value up and assume a gender ratio of 50:50

9.2.2 Birth Rate as a Function of G-year

The total number of births in 2007-2008 and 2006-2007 were broken down in terms of the student’s G-year at the time of birth and gender. These results were averaged and the percentage breakdown is plotted in Figure 9-1. Specifically, 50% of students are expected to be in G5+. Furthermore, the expected number of new student parents by G-year for an upper limit of 100 births per year can be estimated from Figure 9-1 by using the percentage breakdown.

\(^1\) This information was compiled by UHS for the Student Health Planning Committee in December 2007.
Figure 9-1. The percentage breakdown of the average number of births from 2006-2008 by G-year for each gender. This distribution by G-year will be used to determine the G-year breakdown of birth rate estimates that are not determined from the Survey data (e.g. the breakdown using the upper limit from the UHS data can be estimated by multiplying the plotted percentages by 100).

9.2.3 Birth Rate as a Function of Division:

In Table 9-2 we look at the number of births per academic year in terms of the student’s GSAS divisional affiliation (Humanities, Social Science and Science and Engineering) to determine a birth rate as a function of division. This analysis is gender blind.

Table 9-2. The Total Birth Rate by GSAS Division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Number of Births by GSAS Division</th>
<th>Total Number of Births</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2008 average*</td>
<td>12 (35%)</td>
<td>7 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Limit**</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The average is also reported in terms of percentage breakdown.  
**Computed using the corresponding total number of births from Table 9.1 and adopting the average percentage breakdown by division (row 3)

9.3 Costs of a 1, 2 or 3 Month Policy for Paid Parental Leave

In this section we estimate the total cost of providing full financial support (tuition, student fees, stipend and health insurance) for all new graduate student parents (i.e. irrespective of
divisional affiliation or G-year) over a period of 1, 2 and 3 months. We do this using the birth rates established in Table 9-1 and Table 9-2. Note that in this analysis we assume that every eligible student takes the full amount of leave available; in practice this is likely an overestimate.

Health insurance (total fees for UHS and BCBS) is accounted for using the rates for 2007-2008 the total fees of $2,788 ($232 per month). Tuition and student fees are also estimated using the 2007-2008 rates: $34,244 for G1/G2 ($2,854 per month), $10,966 for G3/G4 ($913.80 per month) and $4,868 for G5+ ($406 per month).

Stipends are estimated as follows: for the 2007-2008 and 2006-2007 values we used the survey responses: students reported the average graduate student stipend for their department to be within the following categories: <$15 K, $15-20 K, $20-25 K, $25-30 K, >$30 K. The upper and lower limits of each stipend category provide max/min estimates for the cost of stipend support. For the upper limits from the UHS data, we take the associated breakdown of parents by division from Table 9-2 and assume that Humanities have an average stipend in the range of $15-20K, Social Sciences in the range of $20-25 and Science and Engineering in the range of $25-30K. This stipend breakdown is not unreasonable since teaching salaries are estimated to be $18,240 (2007-2008 rates), which is the primary source of income for older Humanities and Social Science students. We have motivated our support for a policy that uniformly supports students regardless of divisional affiliation or G-year in section 6. Note that any associated overhead for graduate student salaries is not accounted for in this analysis.

The total annual cost of a complete stipend + tuition + student fees + health insurance support package for parents while on 1, 2, or 3 months of leave are summarized in Table 9-3.

As discussed in section 9-1, the costs listed for 3 months of leave in Table 9-3 are equivalently the cost of a 4 month paid leave policy for mothers and a 2 month paid leave policy for fathers. The upper limit on such a policy is ~1 million dollars (100 births/year) where as the minimum cost of such a policy is ~200 thousand dollars. However, since most students (particularly fathers) have not taken a full 3 months of leave, the quoted total costs do not represent the increase in the amount GSAS currently pays for graduate student salaries. We naively estimate the true additional costs of a 3 month paid leave policy as the cost of financially

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2 Data was compiled for the Student Health Planning Committee, December 2007
3 Tuition and student fee (2007-2008 rates) are taken from: http://www.gsas.harvard.edu/current_students/financing_graduate_study.php
4 Ibid
supporting Humanities and Social Science students in G5+ for 3 months, since they would not otherwise be funded by GSAS. As such, the total costs are decreased by ~30-40% on average and the results are listed in the final column of Table 9-3. The maximal increase in the amount GSAS would need to allocate to such a policy is estimated to be ~300-370 thousand dollars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Rate (# of births)</th>
<th>Total Annual Cost (thousands of dollars)*</th>
<th>Additional Cost to GSAS for a 3 Month Policy (thousands of dollars)**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008 (40)</td>
<td>110-130  220-250  330-380</td>
<td>100-120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2008 average (33)</td>
<td>90-100  180-210  270-310</td>
<td>90-110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Limit (100)</td>
<td>280-320  550-630  830-950</td>
<td>300-370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Because most students have not taken a full 3 months of leave, these values do not represent the additional costs to GSAS.

** We estimate the upper limit on the additional costs to GSAS as the cost of supporting only students in G5+ in the Humanities and Social Sciences for a period of 3 months.

9.4 Summary and Putting the Costs into Perspective

Over the 2007-2008 academic year there were 40 graduate students in GSAS who had a child. Taking the average of the number of births between 2006-2008, we determined that there are on average 33 new graduate student parents per year. In light of the UHS estimated number of births for 2006-2007 of 47, we estimate the upper limit on the birth rate to be ~100 children/year.

Using these rates, we have assessed the total costs of a parental leave policy in which graduate student parents (mothers and fathers) are supported for a leave period of 1, 2, or 3 months. Although this analysis is gender blind, the results can be generalized to accommodate a longer leave for mothers in recognition of the physical stresses of childbirth by lowering the respective amount of leave given to fathers. The cost breakdown is summarized in Table 9-3.

Using the 2006-2008 average birth demographics the total cost (stipend + tuition+ health insurance + student fees) to GSAS in order to support graduate student parents for a period of 3 months is in the range of (270-310) thousand dollars. Since 3 months is a quarter of the year, support given to 4 graduate student parents is equivalent to admitting 1 new graduate student per year to GSAS. As such, the quoted annual cost is roughly equivalent to admitting 9 new graduate students per year, representing 0.24% of the current amount GSAS spend on graduate
student salaries, assuming there are 3783 graduate students in GSAS. Using the upper estimate of 100 births/year, the maximal cost of a 3 month policy is equivalent to admitting 25 students per year, representing 0.66% of the current amount spent by GSAS on graduate student salaries. In Table 9-3 we also estimated the additional cost to GSAS in terms of the costs for supporting G5+ students in the Humanities and Social Sciences for a period of 3 months. If 100 students had a child in a given year, then on average 57% will be in the Humanities and Social Sciences (see Table 9-1). Within that pool, on average 50% are in G5+ (see Figure 9-1). Following this logic, the additional costs to GSAS would be equivalent to admitting 3 new graduate students per year into the Humanities and Social Sciences, representing at most a 0.19% increase to the amount that GSAS currently spends on graduate student stipends. This cost assessment was repeated for each birth rate discussed in section 9.2 and the results are summarized in Table 9-4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Rate (# of births)</th>
<th>Total Cost (# of new students admitted)*</th>
<th>% of current amount spent**</th>
<th>Additional Cost (# of new students admitted)</th>
<th>% increase to current amount spent**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008 (40)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average 06-08 (33)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Limit (100)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The total and additional costs from Table 9-3 are restated using the approximation that supporting 4 students for 3 months = admitting 1 new graduate student

** The percentage of or increase to the current amount spent on graduate student salaries, is determined assuming there are a total of 3783 students in GSAS.

Overall we find that the relative costs for a parental leave policy in which fathers and mothers are provided with financial support (health insurance + stipend + tuition + student fees) for a period of 3 months to be no more than ~1% of the current amount GSAS spends on graduate student stipends. However, since most students do not currently take 3 months of leave, the actual increase in cost to GSAS is estimated to be at most 0.2% of the current amount spent on graduate student salaries. As such, the upper limits on the expected cost of a 3 month paid parental leave policy for GSAS students (across all divisions and for both genders) would represent a small perturbation to the total amount GSAS currently spends on graduate student salaries.
Section 10: Childcare

In order for Harvard graduate student parents to successfully continue their Ph.D. studies, most must find childcare for their children. Reliable childcare affords the student parent a consistent work schedule necessary for making steady progress towards a dissertation, as well as the ability to plan meetings, sections, experiments, and other interactions with the academic community. Securing reliable, quality, and affordable childcare is the single biggest stressor for the student parent. Of the respondents to the survey, 60% have found satisfactory childcare, while the remaining are unsatisfied with the level of childcare they are able to afford. Although a pilot program for child care scholarships for PhD students exists, it is not currently meeting the needs of student parents, as the program is under-publicized and has overly restrictive application requirements.

10.1 Current Graduate Student Parent Childcare Arrangements

Our survey allowed respondents to freely answer as to what type of childcare arrangements they make and whether they are satisfied with them. Many respondents qualified their satisfaction by breaking down the aspects childcare that were most important to them. The basic qualities parents consider when selecting childcare are: time (does the schedule consistently and predictably meet their academic obligations), quality (safe, nurturing environment), and cost (does the care fit their budget). Most seem to be satisfied if the childcare is of good quality and meets one of the remaining two aspects, either it is affordable or allows them adequate time to get their work done. Those that are unsatisfied with their childcare arrangements are generally unable to afford full time care and therefore are forced to “make up” time missed during the day caring for their child by either working at night or extending the length of their Ph.D. Those parents with fulltime care are nearly twice as likely to be satisfied with their childcare arrangements: 75% for full time care versus 41% for part time care.

There are many types of childcare arrangements. For our purposes, we have distinguished eight categories of childcare and have evaluated if a particular child is cared for full time or part time by someone other than their parent. The eight categories are: Babysitter/Nanny, Daycare (non-Harvard affiliated), Harvard-affiliated Daycare, Flexible Schedule, Relatives, Public School, and Stay-at-Home Parent. Those parents expecting a new child were counted in a separate category, “Currently Pregnant”, and their anticipated childcare arrangements were...
categorized as full time, part time, or “no plans”. Figure 10-1 shows the usage of different types of full time and part time childcare reported for 115 children. Children were counted individually, as many times siblings had different care situations. For parents with children younger than school age, full time care is provided by one of three sources: a daycare center, a nanny, or a stay at home spouse (mother). Of these three options, half of the parents opt to use daycare centers, a third have a stay at home mom, and the remaining sixth use a nanny. Thirty-six of 115 (31.3%) children are currently in part time childcare, mostly due to cost.
The most common type for childcare is a daycare facility in which adults care for a group of children at a ratio set by the state (i.e. 1:3 for infants). These are generally licensed facilities either out of a person’s home (family childcare) or in a commercial facility. We distinctly counted children attending Harvard affiliated childcare facilities, as this impacts both the convenience and cost of childcare. Daycare facilities often offer part time as well as full time care options, with family daycare offering the most flexible scheduling and at less expensive rates than commercial facilities. The majority of children with full time care are in daycare (44%). Note that the percentages refer to the number of children, not the number of parents.

The most common type for childcare is a daycare facility in which adults care for a group of children at a ratio set by the state (i.e. 1:3 for infants). These are generally licensed facilities either out of a person’s home (family childcare) or in a commercial facility. We distinctly counted children attending Harvard affiliated childcare facilities, as this impacts both the convenience and cost of childcare. Daycare facilities often offer part time as well as full time care options, with family daycare offering the most flexible scheduling and at less expensive rates than commercial facilities. The majority of Harvard graduate student parents who have full time childcare arrangements use a daycare facility (44%, Figure 10-2a). Harvard student mothers, who are much less likely to have at-home spouses (0% compared to 28% of fathers), rely on full time daycare centers and nannies even more so (50% compared to 37% of fathers, Figure 10-3). Only 23% of children who have part time care go to a daycare, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that these children are “part time” because full time care is cost prohibitive.
A babysitter or nanny typically cares for the child in the child’s home, and may be part time or full time. This is the best option for scheduling childcare needs to meet specific time demands, however, given that there is only have one caregiver, if they are sick or otherwise unavailable, the child is without care. This option also requires the parents to report and pay taxes for nanny care. Once a family has several children under school age, hiring a nanny becomes a very cost effective solution. Children with full time nanny care make up ~12% (Figure 10-2a) of the childcare arrangements, while those with part time care have nannies twice as often (~30%, Figure 10-2b).

Some students have relatives caring for their child part time and act as the primary caregiver the rest of the time. This is distinguished from “flexible scheduling” because the student did not indicate they were attempting to work evenings or otherwise to make up the lost time. We deem “flexible schedule” as the common combination of childcare arrangements:

“Two days, part time. Total of 10 hours/week. I find this is insufficient to get work done but the cost of daycare is extremely high and the wait list is very long so there is little room to pick and choose.”

--Mother, G7, Social Sciences

Figure 10-3 Childcare Arrangements by (a) fathers and (b) mothers. Both mothers and fathers have comparable numbers of children in daycare, 31% and 28% respectively. However, fathers more often rely on their stay-at-home spouses than mothers, and 3% of mothers are currently without childcare due to unforeseen issues.
working from home and splitting at-work hours between the parents. This arrangement often shortchanges the person with the most flexible time, i.e. the full time student. If one parent works full time, the student-parent is often left with childcare responsibilities since they are not the primary financial supporter. About an equal number of mothers and fathers reported having flexible schedule childcare arrangements. The last category is the stay-at-home parent, which according to our survey only applies to fathers (28% of the children of student fathers have a stay at home mom, Figure 10-3); there are no stay-at-home dads.

Of the mothers who reported to be pregnant with their first child, only 40% of them are seeking full time childcare. The remaining 60% are seeking part time childcare due to the high cost of full time care.

There is a great divisional disparity amongst mothers with full time care. Those in the physical and social sciences are twice as likely to have full time care than mothers in the humanities (Science and Engineering 71%, Social Sciences 66%, Humanities 33%). One mother in the humanities said, “I pay a babysitter to watch my baby 10 hours a week. My husband watches the baby on his two days off each week. I am not satisfied with this arrangement. It does not give me enough uninterrupted time to prepare for my general exams, which I will be taking in October. However, I cannot afford to pay for any additional childcare.” However fathers seem less immune to divisional disparities when it comes to obtaining full time childcare support (Science and Engineering 60%, Social Sciences 85%, Humanities 72%).

10.2 Parents Satisfaction with Childcare

The type of childcare arrangement (daycare center, nanny, etc.) is also an important factor as to whether or not parents are satisfied. Parents with children in Harvard-affiliated daycare centers are very satisfied (88.9%, from Figure 10-4 and 10-5), with the one dissenting parent who finds the cost “outrageous” and is not eligible for a scholarship. The next most satisfying

“I take care of my child during the day and work over the night. I can take a lot, but I'm physically breaking down. We have to get some daycare or I won't make it. The current daycare support is a joke. I hate to complain about any aid, but it would only cover 1 month of care. Daycare hovers around $1200 a month!!!! How am I expected to pay that?”

--Father, G4, Sciences and Engineering
childcare arrangement is to have a stay-at-home mom (75%, Figure 10-5). It should be noted that only the husbands of the stay-at-home moms reported their satisfaction; the percentage of stay-at-home moms who are satisfied may be very different. Daycare centers were generally perceived as satisfying parents’ childcare needs (66.7%, Figure 10-5), though the distance from campus and limited hours were cited as reasons for not being completely satisfied. Only 53% of parents are satisfied with using a babysitter or nanny, primarily because of reliability (average part time and full time babysitters, Figure 10-4 and 10-5). At the time of the survey, 9% of mothers (3.3% of children) were “without childcare” because their arrangements had fallen through; these mothers were unhappy with their lack of childcare.

Harvard-affiliated childcare centers are excellent. They have extremely long wait lists because the few spots that open up each year are coveted. Of the students who reported having a child in a Harvard affiliated daycare (8.8%) several made it a point to tell us that they were on waitlists for 18-24 months. Most of those who got into the Harvard daycare center put their name down on waitlists when they conceived the child and hoped for a spot to become available after the child was one year old. The Harvard affiliated centers run on an academic year, admitting children in the Spring for the September 1st. The minimum age that a Harvard affiliated center will take an infant is 3 months old by September 1st of a given year. Only babies born in the Spring can make full use of the Harvard affiliated centers; summer babies must find alternative care for their first year of life and apply to Harvard affiliated centers once they are 15 months old. Daycare centers that are commercially operated (not family daycares) often impose age restrictions, as well as diversity requirements for their classrooms. Harvard affiliated centers are not outside of the norm in this respect.

The two most unsatisfactory childcare arrangements are trading off childcare with your spouse (flexible schedule, 33% satisfied) and using relatives (17% satisfied). Though these are
Figure 10-4 Part time Childcare Satisfaction. The majority of student parents without full time childcare are not satisfied with their current situation. These parents stated that their part time childcare arrangements cut into their ability to do their Ph.D. work.

Figure 10-5 Full time Childcare Satisfaction. The majority of student parents with full time childcare arrangements are satisfied. These parents have found childcare that meets their scheduling and budget needs, as well as providing excellent care for their child(ren).
the least expensive options for childcare, they afford the least amount of time to focus on research, writing, and teaching responsibilities. All of the respondents who were unsatisfied with their flexible scheduling options or their use of relatives to watch their children cited a lack of affordable childcare to fill their needs.

10.3 Harvard’s Current Childcare Scholarship Program

From the data discussed above, it is clear that students who cannot afford childcare sacrifice their academic progress by attempting to cobble together care for their children at home. All academic divisions and both mothers and fathers are affected by a lack of affordable childcare. The Office of Work/Life Resources (OW/LR) administers a pilot childcare scholarship program for doctoral/PhD students. The OW/LR also administers childcare scholarship programs for faculty, staff, and postdoctoral fellows. The childcare scholarships for post-doctoral fellows administered through the Office of Work/Life Resources at Harvard have a maximum annual award of about $5,000, depending on household income. Princeton University has a student childcare assistance program\(^1\), available to both undergraduate and graduate students, with a maximum annual award of $5,000, as well. Both the post-doctoral program here at Harvard, and the student program at Princeton allow the award to be used at a wide range of programs, from licensed day care centers and family providers to in-home care providers. For the scholarship fund available to PhD students, "It is the program’s goal to award between $1,000 and $5,000 per family," which is consistent with scholarships for other groups at Harvard and similar institutions.

\(^1\) http://gradschool.princeton.edu/studentlife/childcare/sccap/
However, of the 95 Ph.D. students with children, only 7 have received scholarships, which ranged from $7,000 to $13,000.\textsuperscript{2} There are two main reasons why the program is under enrolled. First, most (54\%) parents simply are not aware that the scholarships exist. Indeed, the OW/LR webpage for child care scholarships\textsuperscript{3} lists scholarships for faculty, staff, and post-docs, but makes no mention of scholarships for PhD students. The only mention of scholarships for PhD students that the author was able to find was a single sentence: "Harvard doctoral/PhD students with a child enrolled in a Harvard-affiliated center may be eligible for limited funds from a pilot child care fellowship program," found at a webpage\textsuperscript{4} to which the OW/LR does not seem to have a link. Second, and more importantly, the scholarships are only available to PhD students who have the child enrolled in Harvard-affiliated day care. Again, only 7 of the 95 children of PhD students are enrolled in Harvard affiliated day care due to the long waiting lists. The requirement of enrollment in Harvard-affiliated day care to receive a child care scholarship is inconsistent with both common practice here at Harvard and other universities, as well as the goal of providing accessible "financial assistance to families for whom child care costs pose the greatest comparative financial burden."\textsuperscript{5} Indeed the OW/LR has conceded that this requirement is in place to reduce the cost of the program. If this pilot program for childcare scholarships for PhD students is to be successful as a full fledged program, it must be more widely publicized, and parents must be able to use the awards at a range of childcare facilities.

\begin{center}
\begin{quote}
"The [scholarship application] process is obscure. It must be easier to go through for native English speakers."
--G3, Father, Humanities
\end{quote}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\begin{quote}
"Demanding that students be enrolled at Harvard affiliated daycares before they can be eligible for scholarships puts undue financial strain on families and supports [a] lucky few."
--G5, Mother, Sciences
\end{quote}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{2} as reported in the survey.
\textsuperscript{3} http://harvie.harvard.edu/workandlife/children/scholarship.shtml
\textsuperscript{4} http://childcare.harvard.edu/childcare/paying.shtml
\textsuperscript{5} http://harvie.harvard.edu/workandlife/children/scholarship.shtml
Section 11: Recommendations

Based on the student and departmental responses and based upon policies at peer institutions, this report recommends two facets of a parental accommodation policy. First, support for new parents should include these five separate articles (a.) one year G-clock extension for all parents for each new child, (b.) full enrollment with continued health insurance for the duration of time off for all parents, (c.) stipend support from a central source for all new parents, (d.) medical rest for birth mothers in addition to any parental accommodation period, and (e.) flexible course work, teaching positions, and degree requirements for new parents. Second, this report documents serious disparities in childcare support for graduate student parents. In particular, the Doctoral/PhD Student Child Care Scholarship Pilot Program should be reviewed and extended.

In order to design and execute an effective parental accommodation policy, GSAS should establish a Task Force on Parental Accommodation with representatives from the GSAS administration, departments (interested Chairs and/or administrators), students, the Registrar, Faculty Development and Diversity, and the Work Life Office. In addition, the surveys and analysis contained in this report should be disseminated to administrative offices around the University.

11.4. Overview

Given the evolving academic workforce, the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences must adopt a formal parental accommodation policy in order to:

i. Recruit a substantial and diverse population of individuals to attend graduate school,

ii. Compete effectively with peer institutions,

iii. Fill the academic pipeline, and

iv. Address inequalities between departments and divisions.

This policy should apply to children by birth or adoption and should allow parents of both genders an accommodation period to bond with a new child and adapt to the new situation.

In order to consistently protect all graduate students, the policy should be formally adopted at the graduate school level and publicized to all departments and students. However, some recommendations might be best enacted by the departments themselves. Further discussion by stakeholders at the various administrative levels will best determine the point at which each recommendation should be handled.
Based on the student and departmental responses and based upon policies at peer institutions, this report recommends two facets of a parental accommodation policy. First, support for new parents should include these five separate articles:

a. One year G-clock extension for all parents for each new child,
b. Full enrollment with continued health insurance for the duration of time off for all parents,
c. Stipend support from a central source for all new parents,
d. Medical rest for birth mothers, as recommended by a physician, in addition to any parental accommodation period, and
e. Flexible course work, teaching positions, and degree requirements for new parents.

Each of these recommendations fulfills a different need identified in this report, and each should be considered as a separate policy point.

Second, this report has documented serious disparities in childcare support for graduate student parents. While the Doctoral/PhD Student Child Care Scholarship Pilot Program provides substantial support for the small number of eligible parents, it does not adequately address the needs of graduate student parents. This policy should be reviewed and extended to the other 90% of student parents.

11.2 Departmental Support

Most departments who responded supported the development of a GSAS-wide parental accommodation policy. All agreed that the current system fails to protect and support new parents. The departments varied widely on the level at which such a policy should be implemented, however. Many felt that the departments, in consultation with the students, would be best able to accommodate the specific needs of individual new parents. Very few departments thought that advisors could best manage the program, which is striking since many new parents currently arrange leave with their advisors (or with no one at all). Other departments felt that, given the funding structure of the University, the graduate school could best provide the

![Management Level of Ideal Program](image-url)
necessary funding and oversight to enable comprehensive parental accommodation.

Most departments felt that an ideal parental accommodation policy would provide stipend support to new parents. In addition, most agreed that flexibility in coursework, teaching duties, and degree requirements were all important elements of a successful policy.

The departmental responses confirm the need for a consistent parental accommodation policy for all of GSAS and cite many of the same concerns raised in the parental surveys. The vast majority of departments who responded support a comprehensive policy, providing both stipend support for new parents and maximal flexibility in responsibilities.

11.3 Moving Forward

In order to enact the recommendations outlined in this report, administrators from all levels of GSAS and the greater University must work together to determine how to manage and fund the policy points. While the surveys in this report identify the current practices and outstanding needs of student parents, this committee does not have the information or the authority to determine specific organizational roles and responsibilities for the various stakeholders. In order to design and execute an effective parental accommodation policy, GSAS should establish a Task Force on Parental Accommodation with representatives from:

a. the GSAS administration,

b. Departments (interested Chairs and/or administrators),

c. Students,

d. the Registrar,

e. Faculty Development and Diversity, and

f. the Work Life Office.
While these last two offices are not specifically responsible for graduate students, they have experience and resources which will be instrumental in the establishment of an effective policy. In order to capitalize on the current interest and information generated by this report, we recommend that this Task Force be formed as soon as possible.

In addition, the surveys contained in this report will serve as a valuable resource for many offices around the University. This report contains the first in depth analysis of student parents in GSAS and their needs and current practices. It should be disseminated to such offices as the Vice Provost, University Health Services, and Work Life.

11.4 Discussion of Recommendations

11.4.a One year G-clock extension for all parents for each new child

As discussed in detail in Section 3 (see particularly Figures 3.6-3.8), the current policy concerning G-year extensions is inconsistently and inadequately available to graduate student parents. Few parents are aware of the possibility, and many departments only grant extensions when they are specifically requested. G-year extensions should be offered and automatically granted to every new parent, and these extensions should be recognized and noted by both departments and the Registrar.

G-year extensions are necessary because of the significant increase in length of studies for parents as compared to other students. This increase depends upon more than simply the amount of time taken off immediately after the arrival of the child; it stems from all of the continuing familial responsibilities that limit or preclude evening activities and occasionally disrupt daytime commitments as well. The discussion of comparative demographics and G-year in Section 2 documents the disproportionate percentage of high G-year (G7 and above) among student parents.

By formally recognizing this lengthening of the degree, the graduate school establishes a culture of acceptance and inclusion. Extending the G-year will guarantee that departments are not penalized for student parents who need longer than seven years to graduate, and this should, in turn, increase departmental tolerance. In addition, it will extend guaranteed teaching years, so that student parents, who need income most acutely, are not denied the opportunity to teach. In
order for all of these rights to be consistently applied, the administration should formally extend the G-clock, through the Registrar, if necessary.

11.4.b Full enrollment with continued health insurance for the duration of leave for all parents

Time off with a new child is of critical importance for both child and parents. Fears of losing student status or health insurance serve as major impediments for student parents who wish to take time off. Many returned earlier than they would have liked because of such concerns (see Figure 3-5 and attendant discussion). Student status and health insurance play a key role in supporting new parents and making parental accommodation truly accessible. GSAS should guarantee enrollment and health insurance for new parents, funding tuition and health insurance where necessary.

In most cases, leave will only affect enrollment and health insurance for one semester. However, given the impossibility of controlling conception, there will be cases when leave spans two semesters. In such cases, new parents should be supported and protected for both semesters.

11.4.c Stipend support from a central source for all new parents

Concern over loss of income serves as the largest impediment to taking leave for both mothers and fathers, and unpaid leave resulted in many returning before they were ready. In addition, stipend support was completely inconsistent across departments and divisions. Finally, Harvard cannot compete adequately with its peer institutions, nor recruit successfully against the employment sector, unless it offers stipend support during parental accommodation periods. Many Humanities and Social Science departments do not directly pay their students and do not have the funding structure to provide stipends to new parents. Consistent and fair financial support can be best provided from a central source. Identification of funding and organizational resources to provide stipend support will be a significant goal of the Task Force on Parental Accommodation.

11.4.d Medical rest for birth mothers in addition to any parental accommodation period

Mothers who give birth to a child occasionally require extra time off due to difficulties with the pregnancy. This need is not necessarily predictable and will require special accommodation. As the intention of parental accommodation is to allow parents to bond with the new child and
support them during the transition to parenthood, every new parent deserves a full accommodation period, irrespective of any time off for medical reasons.

11.4.e Flexible course work, teaching positions, and degree requirements for new parents

As discussed above, parental responsibilities extend beyond the period of time taken off after the arrival of a new child, and departments should provide flexibility for parents as needed. Student parents should have flexibility in scheduling course and degree examinations after the arrival of a new child. In addition, GSAS should encourage (by suggestion and seed funds) flexible teaching positions for parents as discussed in Section 5. This will not only help accommodate the needs of student parents, it will also bear some of the cost of stipend support during parental accommodation periods, relieving the burden on the central fund.

11.4.f Review and extend Doctoral/PhD Student Child Care Scholarship Pilot Program

In order for Harvard graduate student parents to successfully continue their Ph.D. studies, most must find childcare for their children. Reliable childcare affords the student parent a consistent work schedule necessary for making steady progress towards a dissertation, as well as the ability to plan meetings, sections, experiments, and other interactions with the academic community. Securing reliable, quality, and affordable childcare is the single biggest stressor for the student parent. Of the respondents to the survey, 60% have found satisfactory childcare, while the remaining 40% are unsatisfied with the level of childcare they are able to afford. The current pilot program for childcare scholarships for Ph.D. students does not meet the needs of student parents, as the program is under-publicized and has overly restrictive application requirements.
Section 12: Other Considerations

The report also investigated other concerns that impede research for graduate student parents, including laboratory safety during pregnancy, field research in the context of young children, and dependent health insurance. Pregnant women had little or no expert guidance on chemical safety, and many chose to abandon projects entirely because they lacked the infrastructure and controls to safely enable hazardous research. Further investigation is necessary. Similarly, mothers were unable to afford childcare for young children to enable field research, and several abandoned projects because they could not perform the necessary travel. Funding for travel grants should be increased to cover field-related childcare. Finally, graduate student parents bear an exceptionally large financial burden in providing dependent health insurance. The Harvard-offered Family Plan does not meet their medical or their fiscal needs. Raising the specialist visit limit for dependents under 18 years of age will hopefully address some of the concerns of student parents. Harvard GSAS should review the health insurance program and consider additional measures to ease the financial pressure on graduate student parents. Such measures would allow parents to work full-time on their graduate research, as required for timely progress towards a doctoral degree.

12.1 Laboratory safety and pregnancy

Many experiments and chemicals are significantly more dangerous for a developing child than for healthy adults. However, accurate data concerning safe exposure levels are difficult, if not impossible, to find. Student mothers were surveyed about lab safety considerations during their pregnancy. In general, mothers had little or no informed guidance, with many being told to ‘stay away from chemicals.’ Students often developed strategies for dealing with dangerous chemicals for themselves. These strategies ranged from hiring undergraduates or asking colleagues to help with dangerous experiments to changing projects or delaying key experiments until after pregnancy. Others made little or no changes, trusting in their own judgment and ability. Unless a student was given significant support by colleagues, she often was forced to delay research progress.

Of note were several mothers who use radioactivity, which is closely monitored by Environmental Health and Safety. These mothers, and their advisors, were familiar with published guidelines on radiation exposure for pregnant women and took steps to adequately protect themselves. This contrasted sharply with mothers who used hazardous chemicals, where

no established exposure limits exist. Both advisor support for change and personal attention to safety depend upon accessible and formal guidelines.

An investigation into proper laboratory safety procedures is outside the scope of this report, but as GSAS and the University consider policies for supporting graduate student parents, further attention to this question is urgently needed. Similar concerns exist for post-doctoral fellows and junior faculty, who also work in laboratories with hazardous chemicals. Safety experts from research departments and EH&S must partner with UHS to develop safe, yet non-prejudicial, guidelines for pregnant lab researchers.

12.2 Field Research and Parenthood

Student mothers were surveyed concerning field research and parenthood. All the mothers in applicable research fields highlighted the difficulty of traveling with an infant or finding long term childcare. In some cases, mothers were able to overcome these difficulties by depending on spouses or extended family. In most cases, however, mothers were forced to change their topic of study. In the extreme case, a mother delayed her research trip by over a year in order to accommodate the birth of her child. Field research is significantly impacted by motherhood and, under the current system, having a child can dramatically delay or disrupt a dissertation based upon field research. Harvard offers childcare stipends specifically for post-doctoral and faculty field researchers to minimize this disruption. However, there is currently no graduate student equivalent. GSAS should consider programs like those offered by the Work Life Office to ease the disproportionate burden on field researchers with young children.

12.3 Dependent Health Insurance

Student parents reported which health insurance they purchased for their children. In many cases, they noted that the Harvard Student Health Plan’s insurance extension for dependents was prohibitively expensive and did not meet their family’s medical needs. Most students who were able to purchase health insurance through a spouse’s employer did so instead. Many students also enrolled their children in MassHealth, the Massachusetts public program for low-income families. Figures 12-1 and 12-2 depict the dependent health insurance used by student mothers and fathers, respectively, with respect to the employment status of their spouse or partner.
Surveyed parents cited a number of reasons why the Harvard UHS Family Plan did not meet their needs. First, for many students, it is prohibitively expensive. Students noted that this plan is several times more expensive than comparable plans from other employers. Also, many parents noted that having their children’s primary pediatrician at the Holyoke center facility is burdensome, especially as several students live and work in the Longwood Medical Area. Finally, the student Family Plan currently limits dependents to three visits to outside specialists per year. While this is a similar stipulation to the student health insurance, it is much more restrictive for children because there are no in-house pediatric specialists. In response to this concern, the Student Health Planning Committee and HUHS have worked with Blue Cross Blue
Shield to expand the number of outside visits for AY2008-2009 to ten for dependents under 18 years of age. This will hopefully address the concerns over coverage, although this insurance remains significantly more expensive than other options.

Figure 12-2. Dependent Medical Insurance for Fathers. Chart size reflects the number of respondents with the listed spousal support; sections identify the insurance purchased for their children. Most fathers use the HUHS Family Plan. The majority of those with employed spouses buy insurance through their partner’s employer. Those who qualify for MassHealth (largely those with an at-home spouse) use it.

The majority of parents who have a spouse who is employed full-time outside the home buy insurance from the partner’s employer. These respondents cited the cheaper cost and improved coverage as reasons for their choice. Several mentioned that their spouses worked full-time specifically for the health insurance benefits. Therefore, the problems of prohibitively expensive
health insurance and childcare are linked. Providing more reasonably priced health insurance would allow some spouses to stay at home, reducing the need for childcare subsidies.

Finally, many parents enroll their children in MassHealth, when possible. This public health insurance can only be purchased by low-income families, but it allows greater flexibility and a reasonable standard of care. Because of the income restrictions, only some student parents are eligible for MassHealth, largely those who provide the sole income for their family. Those respondents who are eligible, however, expressed general satisfaction with the program.

Other parents have no choice but to purchase dependent insurance either through the HUHS Family Plan or from an independent private insurer. Both of these options are extremely expensive, requiring up to 20% of a family’s income for health insurance alone. Several respondents accepted outside consulting or teaching work in order to cover these costs. Such measures significantly slow the student’s progress towards a degree.

Graduate student parents bear an exceptionally large financial burden in providing dependent health insurance. The Harvard-offered Family Plan does not meet their medical or their fiscal needs. Raising the specialist visit limit will hopefully address some of the concerns of student parents over coverage. Harvard GSAS should review the health insurance program and consider additional measures to ease the financial pressure on graduate student parents. Such measures would allow parents to work full-time on their graduate research, as required for timely progress towards a doctoral degree.