



UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WITWATERSRAND,  
JOHANNESBURG

## POLICY DOCUMENT

**Title**

**Student Pregnancy Policy  
WITS POLICY**

**Version No. 1**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Context / Background	3
2.	Definitions	3
3.	Purpose	4
4.	Scope	4
5.	Principles	4
6.	Roles and Responsibilities	7
7.	Process	7

<b>Policy Title</b>	Student Pregnancy Policy
<b>Policy Officer</b>	Carol Crosley
<b>Date Approved</b>	02 November 2017
<b>Date Effective From</b>	December 2017
<b>Last updated</b>	19 September 2017

## 1. CONTEXT

Pregnancy is a natural occurrence in the course of human life which has the consequence of changing the circumstances of those directly affected by the process. It is in recognition of these changes in circumstances which include certain health implications which may impair the academic performance of students that the University has provided the following policy. The University believes that students should not be unduly hampered in their studies due to pregnancy and the policy seeks to address the challenges that pregnant students may experience due to pregnancy.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 **“Pregnancy”** refers to the state of carrying a developing embryo or fetus within the female body.
- 2.2 **“OHS&E”** refers to the Occupational Health, Safety and Environmental Management unit.
- 2.3 **“CCDU”** refers to the Counselling and Career Development Unit.
- 2.4 **“CHWC”** refers to Campus Health and Wellness Centre.
- 2.5 **“CHRL”** refers to Campus Housing and Residence Life.
- 2.6 **“POPI ACT”** refers to the Protection of Private Information Act.
- 2.7 **“Student”** means a person registered full time or part time at the University for a qualification.
- 2.8 **“Fieldwork”** means any off –campus activity that a student may be engaged in, in the course and scope of her studies.

**3. PURPOSE**

This policy seeks to address the needs and responsibilities with regard to the health, safety and support of pregnant students within the University.

**4. SCOPE**

The policy applies to a student who is or becomes pregnant during her studies.

**5. PRINCIPLES**

- 5.1 It is the right of every pregnant student at the University not to be discriminated against on the basis of her pregnancy.
- 5.2 The privacy and dignity of pregnant students must underpin all interactions in supporting a pregnant student.

**6. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY**

This section deals with duties and responsibilities the University has in supporting pregnant students.

- 6.1 The University will endeavour to accommodate pregnant students as far as reasonably practicable to allow them to continue their studies.
- 6.2 Information given by students should be treated confidentially and can be passed on where necessary only with the student's consent or in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act and with sensitivity.
- 6.3 Staff should not attempt to influence any student's decision but should provide impartial advice on the way forward in terms of support.
- 6.4 When a student contacts a member of staff to discuss any circumstances covered by this policy, a response should normally be made within five working days and a meeting arranged as soon as possible thereafter.

- 6.5 While it is recognised that each request must be dealt with on an individual basis, there are some measures that can be used to enable the student's continuation of her studies. These include:
- 6.5.1 allowing time out of study (for a pre-determined amount of time) for the birth and a period thereafter;
  - 6.5.2 prior to and after the birth, giving permission for periods of absence for medical appointments, and making arrangements for the student to catch up on missed classes in terms of General Rule 7.4;
  - 6.5.3 showing appropriate flexibility regarding assignment deadlines if the student's circumstances make it difficult for them to be met;
  - 6.5.4 allowing deferred examinations to be counted as first attempts where the pregnancy or birth prevents the student from taking them at the usual first attempt;
  - 6.5.5 consideration of any requests to transfer to part-time study, where this is possible (although the student should bear in mind the financial implications of this course of action). Staff should refer the student to the Faculty;
  - 6.5.6 Students registered for research degrees can apply to have their studies placed in abeyance.
  - 6.5.7 Offering support to help the student reintegrate into their studies after any period of prolonged absence.
- 6.6 It is important to take the views and wishes of the student into account, rather than applying a standard set of arrangements. All decisions taken should be based on discussion with the student.
- 6.7 While an appropriate degree of flexibility should be exercised, care must be taken to ensure that academic performance is not compromised. A balance must be achieved between ensuring the student is not disadvantaged, and giving undue special treatment. Appropriate care will be exercised in attending to all requests made as far as is reasonably possible. If any request is refused, the reasons for the refusal should be provided in writing for the student.
- 6.8 Where specific arrangements are required to be put in place for a student who is already granted additional arrangements (e.g. in the case of students with disability), these should be kept separate in order that it remains clear which arrangements relate to which particular circumstance. This ensures that these arrangements are in place for the required amount of

time and also clarifies adherence to the different sets of legislation.

## 7. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STUDENT

7.1 The University will not be able to take a flexible approach to the student's programme of study, or provide specific support to the student unless it knows about the situation. The student is to inform the relevant University Residence/ Department/ School/Faculty at an early stage of pregnancy particularly where there is potential risk to the health and safety of the student and/or unborn child. Students are under no obligation to inform the University if they become pregnant, have a child, or decide to terminate a pregnancy whilst they are a student.

7.2 The student will be responsible for:

7.2.1 disclosing the pregnancy to an appropriate and/or trusted member of staff within their University Residence, Department, School or Faculty at an early stage of the pregnancy, with a view to discussing any necessary support arrangements or adjustments – particularly where elements of the programme of study might present a health and safety risk to the student or unborn child.

7.2.2 familiarising themselves with the policy and associated guidelines in order to understand the University's approach to supporting pregnant students.

7.2.3 having a clear idea of what will be expected of them in their course of study in order to understand the potential impact of pregnancy related absence.

7.2.4 discussing any concerns they have relating to their pregnancy with the Campus Health and Wellness Centre or their own doctor.

7.3 In making a decision on whether or not to inform the University, students are encouraged to consider the following:

7.3.1 There may be elements of a programme of study that could present a health and safety risk to a pregnant student and/or her child. The University will not be able to arrange appropriate risk assessments unless it is aware of her pregnancy. Health and Safety measures may need to be put in place to protect the student and her unborn child. This will be particularly relevant in certain departments, for example where a student might be exposed to harmful chemicals or radiation, or be expected to lift heavy objects or undertake other strenuous activity. Once a student has informed her Department/ School/ Faculty of her pregnancy, a [risk assessment](#) must be carried out by [CHWC](#). This will identify any risks that may be present which could

harm the student or her baby, and detail any steps that need to be put in place to alleviate or minimise these risks. The risk assessment should also include any risks that may arise from any placement period or fieldwork due to be undertaken. Advice on carrying out a risk assessment can be sought from OHS&E. As a guide a student may not be permitted to take part in fieldwork any later than the 32nd week of pregnancy. Faculty specific guidelines in addition to this policy may be used in this regard.

7.3.2 If a student's pregnancy-related absence (for example, for antenatal appointments) impacts significantly on the student's studies, the University will only be able to take proper account of the reasons for absence if it is notified of the pregnancy. In some cases, a student's pregnancy-related absence from University might be something that the student needs to discuss with role players. A student in possession of a bursary/ scholarship/ research grants, for example, if a postgraduate research student is in receipt of a University or Departmental Scholarship or funding from a Research Council or an external body, the student should refer to the terms and conditions relating to her award. Should, the absence of a student from University adversely affect the work of other students she is working alongside with a group project or in a research team, it is important to notify the School/Faculty, so that plans can be made to deal with any such issues arising from the absence.

7.3.3 A pregnant student residing in a University Residence, must inform the Head of Campus Housing and Residence Life, Residence Cluster Manager or Warden so that appropriate assessments can be made and support given. Each case will be individually assessed, with a view to providing appropriate advice and ensuring adequate professional medical support. It is recommended that the student consult the CHWC or an appropriate obstetrician before the end of her second trimester, and that she should provide her Warden with proof of such consultation.

7.4 Students who, due to their partner's pregnancy, may not be able to meet the academic obligations of a course or program of study, are responsible for informing their Department, School or Faculty as soon as possible. The student must provide relevant medical and other supporting documentation, such as confirmation of pregnancy, medical appointments, expected date of delivery, confirmation of birth or the like.

## 8. PROCESS

This section outlines a series of steps for students and staff to follow to discuss and respond to the requirements of an individual student who is pregnant.

- 8.1 A student is strongly advised to consult Campus Health and Wellness Centre or her doctor to discuss medical issues relating to her pregnancy prior to approaching her Faculty. It is particularly important to take advice at an early stage if there are any possible health and safety risks.
- 8.2 A pregnant student has the right to request a meeting with her lecturer or any other trusted staff member.
  - 8.2.1 At the meeting, it is essential that urgent consideration be given to undertaking a risk assessment. In addition, careful consideration must be given to the variety of ways in which the student can be enabled to continue her studies during her pregnancy and after the birth of her child. These may include: agreeing to periods of absence and making arrangements for the student to catch-up on lectures/tutorials missed due to pregnancy or birth related reasons to ensure that she is not at an academic disadvantage and adjusting timetables or deadlines for assessed coursework if the pregnancy or birth prevents compliance.
  - 8.2.2 Seeking approval, as appropriate, from the Faculty for alternative means of assessment for the student (i.e. a written assessment instead of an oral examination if possible) if the pregnancy or birth prevents the normal methods of assessment, allowing the student to write their examination at a future examination period, for example in a situation in which the pregnancy or birth prevents the student from taking an examination at the normal time for her programme of study the student taking so suspension normally for a pre-determined amount of time. The period of temporary suspension may be extended if the time required to complete the programme of study will still fall within the maximum time limit allowed for the programme either by the University (and/or, where applicable, professional bodies). Where necessary a student can be referred to the University Registrar for guidance. Consideration of a transfer to part-time study (information on the financial support available to part-time students is available from the University Registrar) may also be considered.
  - 8.2.3 If a student experiences complications as a result of their pregnancy and needs additional time off from her study, she should inform the School/ Faculty, as is required for any other absence on health grounds. If the time off impacts on her studies then she should submit a letter to the Faculty prior to the meeting of the Board of Examiners.



- 8.2.4 A plan should be devised (in writing) by the member of staff, detailing any special arrangements required during the student's pregnancy, and the agreed timescale for her return to study. The student should receive a copy of this, as should other appropriate member(s) of staff requiring this information.
- 8.3 International students require a Visa to remain in the country during the period of study and the pregnancy is likely to result in the need to remain in the country longer than planned, or if an international student is considering temporary suspension from her course of study, then appropriate related guidelines can be provided by the International Student Office. As a guide to students from other countries who fall pregnant while away from their home countries and who would like to give birth in their country of origin, it should however be noted that a pregnant person may not be able to take an international flight after the 30th week, or a local flight after the 34th week. Airline guidelines differ in this regard.
- 8.4 The personal circumstances of pregnant students living in residences differ widely, as do their academic commitments at various times of the academic year. For these reasons each case is assessed individually. The University's approach is supportive, and the basic guideline is that a pregnant student may continue residing in a University residence until the end of the 28<sup>th</sup> week of her pregnancy. In exceptional circumstances, the Director of CHRL may extend this until the end of the 32<sup>nd</sup> week of her pregnancy. A pregnant student living in a University residence is expected to visit CHWC before the end of her second trimester, and should make appropriate arrangements for her confinement and for the care of her new baby with effect from the date of discharge from hospital.
- 8.5 The protection, health, confidentiality, scholarship and ability of the pregnant student-athlete to participate in sports events is another important aspect of this policy. If a student-athlete chooses to compete while pregnant, they should be made aware of the potential risks of their particular sport and implications of exercise in general while pregnant. Medical issues related to participation should be discussed. Participation by the pregnant student-athlete will require approval from the obstetrician and the team physician. A medical clearance is required to ensure the student athlete's safe return to athletics.
- 8.6 Once discussed and agreed to, a written plan for the student's continuation of study (detailing any specific flexibility agreed to allow the student to continue her studies) should be sent by the Department/School/Faculty to the student. Where possible, written agreement to this plan should be sought from the student.
- 8.7 It is acknowledged that it is not possible to provide a definitive list of special arrangements that might be considered reasonable in every possible situation because the decisions about which

arrangements are appropriate in each particular case will vary according to a wide range of factors. These factors include the student's individual circumstances, the time of year, the structure and content of the particular programme of study, restrictions imposed by professional bodies and any related health and safety matters.

- 8.8 A student who is unable to continue with her studies and who needs to deregister from the degree programme need to refer for all rules pertaining to cancellation of registration to the Faculty Rules and Syllabus booklet, General rule 5.10: Cancellation of registration by a student and point 8: Cancellation of registration in the Fees booklet.
- 8.9 The member of staff overseeing the support arrangements should communicate the agreed continuation plan to the Research Supervisor, where applicable, and other relevant teaching staff and/or examination boards, as appropriate. Information should be passed on sensitively.
- 8.10 The student and her lecturer/ supervisor (or other chosen/designated staff member) should monitor the situation on an ongoing basis, particularly to assess the effectiveness of any special arrangements that have been agreed to in order to facilitate the student's continued study. The student can request further meetings with her School/Faculty, particularly if she is experiencing any difficulties with her academic work as a result of these arrangements. The student should also consult with the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office for any student loan or award implications of suspending a course.
- 8.11 Students or staff who wishes to file a complaint regarding any aspect of this policy must follow the formal University grievance procedure which can be viewed on <http://www.wits.ac.za/students/student-grievance-procedures/>

**VERSION HISTORY**

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Changed by</b>
1	16 November 2015	The purpose of this policy seeks to address the needs and responsibilities with regard to the health, safety and support of pregnant students within the University Context.	Ashina Sarawan
	19 September 2017	Updated with final comments and corrections to proceed to Senate and Council for approval.	Registrar's Office