Pregnancy and Grad School

Managing a graduate program is hectic on its own with research, teaching, seminars, conferences and meetings. Now add in a pregnancy. While it may seem impossible at first glance, dealing with pregnancy is a reality for many graduate students, male and female. The median age of graduate students at the University of Alberta hovers around 27 and according to Statistic Canada, the average age of mothers at childbirth in 2005 for the province of Alberta was 28.6 (Source: Statistics Canada. Live births, mean age of mother, Canada, provinces and territories, annual (years) (CANSIM Table 102-4504). Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 2007). Some of us (partners included) are pregnant, planning for pregnancy, or already have children. This article aims to provide some tips and resources with regards to this particular topic.

Tips

1. Health
   The UofA Health Centre provides excellent prenatal/maternity care and has an in-house obstetrician/gynecologist (http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/healthcentre). The University Pharmacy (located in the Bookstore in SUB) provides excellent service and reasonable prices for medications and vitamins. If you feel overwhelmed with your experiences, contact Student Counselling Services (http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/counselling).

2. When to announce your pregnancy
   This varies with each individual. Usually a pregnancy is a private matter of celebration; therefore, you can choose to announce it or not. There is no legal requirement to do so. However, as a graduate student, you do have a duty to develop an open communication with your supervisor. For instance, if you are working with biohazards or equipment that may affect the health and safety of the fetus, or your travel is limited by your pregnancy, then yes, you would be recommended to discuss your situation with your supervisor.

3. Taking a leave
   If you plan to take maternity/paternity leave, you are required to fill in Parental Leave forms in advance. Taking parental leave may affect your on-going collaborative projects or funding. Under the Alberta Employment Standards Code, you must give your employer at least six weeks' written notice before the date you intend to start your leave. If in any case you feel uncertain about how to or worried about the consequences of sharing the jubilant news, speak to your graduate coordinator who may be able to provide some guidance. You may also contact FGSR, the Graduate Students Association and the Ombudsperson for more information.

4. Funding
   This is perhaps one of the most asked questions. In most cases, a graduate student is entitled to some paid parental leave. Check with the agencies which fund your research.

   - AHFMR full-time Studentship and Fellowship awardees may receive up to 20 weeks of paid maternity leave. (http://www.ahfmr.ab.ca/grants/trainee_awards_general_policies.php#c130)
Those funded by the department or by a trust account may be eligible for 75% of his or her most recent Salary and Award for the period of leave, which in no case shall exceed 4 months. See http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/awardsfunding/assistantships


Smaller funding sources, for example: awards and prizes, may not cover any parental leave benefits, so please check with administrators for these policies.

Regardless of the funding source, it is important that you research your benefits and rights in advance as you will need time to gather the appropriate documents and adhere to the correct application procedures outlined by your department, funding agencies and FGSR (www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/examsconvo/leave.htm). Note also that a leave of absence does not count towards the time limit of expected graduation regulated by FGSR. Continue to apply for eligible funding even when you are on parental leave.

5. Networking
Speak to other graduate students or post doctoral fellows who are expecting or have children. You may gain useful insights from their experiences and build a support network along the way. You may find a network useful when you wish to leave your child with someone you trust while you attend a departmental seminar or meeting with your supervisor.

6. Community Support
Reach out to resources outside campus. Some community centres provide complementary prenatal courses and prenatal nutrition education. Check out online resources too, such as:

- Alberta Health Services New Moms Network: http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/services.asp?pid=service&rid=7822
- Parent Link Centre: www.parentlinkalberta.ca
- The Family Centre: www.the-family-centre.com
- Mill Woods Family Resource Centre Society: www.mwfrc.org

7. Child Care
Many working parents agree that securing a suitable child care arrangement is paramount for their ease of minds during work hours. This will also be important during graduate studies. You will find it difficult to sit through a meeting or seminar when your mind is unnecessarily occupied about the well-being of your child. Make sure you research in advanced the different options of child care facilities you may prefer. Some places have long waiting lists and you may have to register well before the baby is born. Check out these online resources for more information and subsidy programs:

- University of Alberta Affiliated Day Cares: http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/childcare
- Government of Alberta Child Care Look Up: http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/ChildCareLookup.cfm
- GSA offers child daycare subsidy program: http://www.gsa.ualberta.ca/index.php/funding/content/category/child_daycare_subsidy
• The Government of Alberta also has a similar child daycare program and other information: 
  http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/587.cfm

• Once your baby is born, you qualify for the Alberta Child Health Benefit program: 
  http://employment.alberta.ca/FCH/2076.html

8. International students

Most policies governing parental benefits also apply to International graduate students. However, please be 
aware that you still require a valid student permit while being on leave.

Other Resources

• Blog about mothers with or doing PhDs: 
  http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/mama_phd

• Article on finance for couples with babies: http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-investor/investment-
  ideas/investor-education/having-kids-pull-out-the-wallet-and-get-set-to-invest/article1387685

• Discussion forums for graduate students and their partners who are pregnant:
  o  http://community.babycenter.com/groups/a1315895/pregnant_or_parents_in_graduate_school
  o  http://community.babycenter.com/post/a8762145/graduate_student_maternity