

RACKHAM GRADUATE PARENTS QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2008-MAY 2008

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RACKHAM'S NEW PARENTAL ACCOMODATION POLICY

In an effort to increase support for its graduate students, Rackham Graduate School has implemented a new Graduate Student Parent Accommodation Policy (GSPAP). Effective January 31, 2008, the policy allows a student to maintain registered full time student status immediately following the birth or adoption of a young child, along with all the benefits of such status, while facilitating the return to full participation in courses, research and teaching.

Two main features of this policy deal with time. Eligible students may be granted a parental accommodation of up to six weeks, with extension of certain time limits. Eligible students also receive a one year time to degree extension.

Rules of research funding or external fellowships may require suspension of payments during the parental accommodation period. In this instance, the

Rackham Childbirth Accommodation Fund may provide salary or stipend, and benefits.

Graduate students reported anxiety over the prospect of managing the rigorous academic demands and timelines required of their programs along with the challenges of a new child. An even greater source of angst for students was the thought of having to disclose their pregnancy or adoption to an advisor without fully understanding their rights or options with regard to parental accommodations. The GSPAP systematically leverages support to new parents by setting minimal standards for assisting students after the birth or adoption of a child; ensuring consistent and fair application of accommodations; and providing transparency of student rights and responsibilities with regard to parental accommodations.

Eligible students must submit a Request for Graduate Student Parental Accommodation after consultation with her/his advisor, principal investigator, and graduate chair. The form, with appropriate documentation of the anticipated birth or adoption (a letter from the student's medical provider with an estimate of delivery date or from the adoption agency with an estimate of adoption date), must be submitted to the student's graduate program office for approval and to Rackham OARD for approval.

Graduate students who work as GSIs and GSSAs need to take into account that the contract between the University and the GEO covers the terms of employment for students with these appointments.

For complete information about the GSPAP please go to <http://www.rackham.umich.edu/rns.php?faqid=1961>

STARTING EDUCATION EARLY: FIRST STEPS OF WASHTENAW



Did you know a child's brain is 85% developed in the first 5 years of life? Every experience helps develop this foundation. First Steps Washtenaw-Ann Arbor, based on the national program Parents as Teachers, is an innovative partnership between home, school and the community. It is open to all families with children from birth until kindergarten entry who live in the Ann Arbor School District.

Most families join the program in order to participate in their diverse and engaging classes. They offer more than 35 each week, appropriate for 6 week old babies to 5 year olds getting ready to attend kindergarten next year. The classes are either specific-age, meaning only that age child is in the class (e.g. Curious Wiggle Worms or Exploring Science & Nature), or multi-age, all ages are welcome. Each class lasts for 7 weeks so you can get to know other children and adults and is led by a well-trained teacher. By the end of the session you will have signed up for the next 7-week session. It can be the same class or you may try something new.

Parents are their child's most important teacher and everything they do, from classes to personal visits, helps support that goal. There is a membership fee for the program and they have full and partial scholarships available. (Continued on page 3.)

NEXT GRADUATE PARENT EVENTS: JUNGLE JAVA & DOMINO'S PETTING FARM

Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 29th and April 19th for our next graduate parent events. The March 29th event will be at Jungle Java. Jungle Java is an indoor playground that kids love. To get a better idea of the place, visit their website: <http://www.junglejavaplay.com/>. They have a café for parents to sip a latte or have a bite to eat while their kids work out all of that pent up energy from winter. Children's admission will be provided for

those who pre-reregister (adults are free). To find out more about the event, and to register, check out the Rackham calendar, www.rackham.umich.edu/calendar/.

Our Saturday, April 19th event will be outdoors. Pack up the family and head out to Domino's Petting Farm where you can pet farm animals, feed ducks, take a hayride and meet other graduate parents and their children. A pizza lunch will be

served, first-come, first-served. You need to pre-register to receive the free entrance fee and lunch. Go to the calendar at www.rackham.umich.edu/calendar/ to register.



LAST GRADUATE PARENT EVENT: ANN ARBOR HANDS-ON MUSEUM VISIT

Grad parents and their children had a great time at the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum on Saturday, January 19th. The younger ones loved playing on the fire truck and in the ambulance. Older ones preferred the Light & Optic Gallery where

they could experiment with lights and colors. So Jung Um (a PhD student in History), said that her son's favorite part was playing with the bubbles on the 4th floor. She went on to say, "I didn't know that there was so much for a two-year old

to do there." Rackham provided pizza that kept kids and their parents going all day. If you didn't get a chance to join us, check out the museum on your own. It is a great rainy day or snow day activity for children.



PICTURES FROM THE ANN ARBOR HANDS-ON MUSEUM EVENT



So Jung Um and Ian eating lunch



Rachel Brown and her family explore the inside of an ambulance



Small child with too much energy

CONT. STARTING EDUCATION EARLY: FIRST STEPS OF WASHTENAW

Membership in First Steps-Ann Arbor offers you:

- One parent-child class per week, per family (you may add classes for an additional fee.)
- Monthly family gatherings or parent meetings on interesting topics
- Personal visits with a Parent Educator
- Developmental screenings for your child
- Referrals to other community resources
- Parenting Pathways, their monthly newsletter
- Connections to other families

To join First Steps, you should first attend one of their many orientation sessions (dates can be found online). There they will explain the program in detail.

More information is also available on their website, including the newest class and orientation schedules at www.aaps.k12.mi.us/firststeps.home, or visit them at 2775 Boardwalk Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

CREATING COMMUNITY

In a recent article in *Greater Good Magazine* (<http://peacecenter.berkeley.edu/greatergood/>) Jeremy Adam Smith talks about the social isolation that comes from having children—in his particular case, as a stay-at-home dad. Research suggests that the two major causes of isolation are that many families no longer live nearby and that within our communities we rarely know our neighbors. Consequently, our social circles have become limited. Bring children into the equation and the problem is exacerbated. Suddenly the results are a sense of isolation and an extra strain on a couple's relationship. Adam Smith's remedy is to develop a social network of other parents and children. For

him, it isn't just about finding friends for the kids, it is about maintain family harmony as well. The author found that creating his own community out of like-minded parents and their children created a strong social circle that facilitated child rearing and improved his relationship with his wife.

As graduate students, finding a social circle can present a challenge, especially for those new to the area, or unfamiliar with the language and/or culture. At the same time, we also have a built population that is just waiting to be organized. Over 200 parents have signed up on our grad parent listserv, for example. However, establishing your own

group, like most good things, takes time to cultivate, something that as graduate students we always are short on. An alternative is to join a pre-existing program. Below is a list of some already established groups. Each group has different aims, so feel free to try out more than one. Once you have joined, you can then find people who share similar values when it comes to child rearing, and hopefully create a community in which you and your family can flourish.

LOCAL CHILDREN/PARENT GROUPS

Lamaze Parents Group. This group is an interactive parent/toddler group. The group leader organizes games and songs that you can also do later at home. Each twelve week session costs \$148. <http://www.lamazefamilycenter.org>

First Steps Parents Group. You must be a member of First Steps to participate in their monthly parents group meeting. They tend to talk about issues that deal with raising children. Children are welcome and childcare is available if you wish.

Yearly fees are \$384, which include a weekly class of your choice and other benefits. <http://www.aaps.k12.mi.us/firststeps.home/home>

Rackham Grad Parents Facebook. Here you are welcome to post any relevant information of interest for graduate parents. To get registered, you must request an invitation at gradstudentlife@umich.edu

The Ann Arbor Meetup Group. The focus of this online group is to organize play dates, dinners and clothing exchanges. Yearly fees are \$12. <http://sahm.meetup.com/2245/>

ArborParents. This organization functions as a virtual community. They offer great advice for schools, doctors, and activities, but rarely organize group activities. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/arborparents>

FACEBOOK: RACKHAM'S NEW ONLINE COMMUNITY

Since December Rackham has been maintaining a Graduate Parents Facebook group. It has become a great source of information that doesn't make it into the newsletter due to time or space constraints. The group is under the highest privacy settings possible, for those who are concerned about privacy issues. Although participation is still in the early stages, we would like to invite everybody to join and to get involved. To sign up, you must first request an invitation. To do so, please e-mail us at gradstudentlife@umich.edu. We are hoping this site will become a vibrant online community that facilitates more interaction beyond the virtual world among graduate students.



The goal of the Rackham Graduate Parent Newsletter is to help our graduate and professional student parents participate in the local and University community. Our aim is to provide information about organizations and services to make your time here in at the University as enriching as possible.

If you have any comments about our newsletter or ideas for future articles, feel free to e-mail:

gradstudentlife@umich.edu

RAISING BILINGUAL CHILDREN BY ERIN HOWE

In my journey as a graduate student one of the biggest challenges and joys has been that of raising my daughter bilingually. I have often wondered if the choices we make in raising my daughter with two languages are the best choices. Is it wise to try and expose her to both languages from such an early age? Are my husband and I helping or hurting her language development by exposing her simultaneously to two languages? Are there things we should be doing to optimize these important early years? Will our choices to raise her bilingually have positive effects, or worse, negative effects? In my quest to find answers to these questions, like most areas in parenting, I found there is no shortage of advice. However, as a doctoral student studying childhood bilingualism, I have found some of the advice about raising a child bilingually more helpful and based on sound research than others. And since approximately 20 percent of Ann Arbor's population who are at least 5 years of age speaks a language other than English at home, hopefully others will find these tidbits of use as well.

A few of the biggest myths I have encountered:

By far the most prevailing myth I have come across in my everyday and academic conversations about bilingual children is that bilingual children will have language delays. However, children do not develop cognitive confusion or language delays by virtue of being exposed to a multilingual environment (De Houwer, 1999).

The second biggest myth is perhaps that children pick up a second language easily. In order to develop strong language skills all children need rich verbal environments. They need to interact and experience the world in the languages they are expected to use. Conversations on a variety of topics and book reading in both languages support children's language development. (De Houwer, 1999).

Trying to be helpful, some teachers (and others recommend not speaking the native language or teaching literacy skills in the home language. Tabors and Snow (2001) argue "that there are multiple pathways available to young bilingual children" in which to become literate. They also contend "that it is the quality of the interaction, not the language that it is carried on in, that is the critical factor" (p.175).

A few helpful links:

<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/earlychild.html> for further information on bilingualism in children

<http://www.wash.k12.mi.us/students/earlychild/wisdfsteps.cfm> for information about playgroups and contact information for Bilingual Program Consultants in the Ann Arbor area

De Houwer, A. (1999). *Two or More Languages in Early Childhood Some General Points and Practical Recommendations ERIC Digest*: Report: EDO-FL-99-03.

Tabors, P. O., & Snow, C. (2001). "Young bilingual children and early literacy development." S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 159-178). New York: Guilford.

Erin Howe is a 3rd year PhD student at the School of Education in the literacy, language and culture program. Her research takes a sociocultural look at the factors that influence bilingual families. She has a three-year-old daughter who speaks German and English.

In next quarter's issue:

- Summer Camps
- Summer Safety
- Working at Home with Children