

POLICY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE ON STUDENT PREGNANCY

1. Definitions and abbreviations

1.1 Commuter student

An undergraduate or post-graduate student registered at the University who resides off campus.

1.2 CUADS – Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support

1.3 HRA – Housing and Residence Affairs

1.4 PEPUDA – Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act

1.5 POPI Act – Protection of Private Information Act

1.6 Pregnancy

The state of carrying a developing embryo or foetus within the human body.

1.7 Pregnant student

A registered student at the University who is pregnant at the time of registration or who becomes pregnant during the course of study while registered at the University.

1.8 Residence student

An undergraduate or post-graduate student registered at the University who resides at an on-campus University residence.

1.9 SART – Sexual Assault Response Team

1.10 SAS – Student Academic Service

1.11 SCD – Student Counselling & Development

1.12 Student

A person registered full time or part time at the University for a qualification.

1.13 University

Refers to the University of the Free State (UFS).

2. Background

2.1 The University believes that students' studies should not be hampered due to pregnancy.

2.2 This Policy seeks to humanise the experiences of students during pregnancy.

2.3 The University recognises the sexual and reproductive rights of students.

2.4 This Policy provides advice and guidance related to study, health and safety to:

2.4.1 Students who become pregnant during their studies.

2.4.2 Students who give birth during their studies.

3. Guiding Principles

The University commits to the following principles in dealing with students during their pregnancy:

3.1 Humanising Engagements

- 3.1.1 Wherever practical, students will not be unreasonably prevented from applying for, registering for, or successfully completing a programme of study.
- 3.1.2 All reasonable steps will be taken to humanise a student's experience during their pregnancy.
- 3.1.3 The health and wellbeing of students will be considered of paramount importance at all times.
- 3.1.4 Written and verbal language used by staff and students will reflect non-judgemental and anti-discriminatory attitudes. Language will be used in a manner that is affirming and empowering and that enables students to make informed decisions.
- 3.1.5 Informed by the human rights imperative of the Equality Clause contained in the Bill of Rights, the University recognises and upholds that students may not be discriminated against on the basis of pregnancy and gender.
- 3.1.6 The University also recognises the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1996 (Act No. 92 of 1996) which allows abortion on demand up to the 12th week of pregnancy; under broadly specified circumstances from the 13th to 20th week; and only for serious medical reasons after the 20th week.

3.2 Anti-Discrimination

The University advocates for support to be provided in a non-discriminatory and non-judgemental manner in accordance with the Anti-Discrimination, Promotion of Equality, and Social Justice Policy and Procedures, which states: "The UFS undertakes to protect all students and staff from direct and indirect unfair discrimination, whether such discrimination is based on listed, unlisted analogous or arbitrary grounds of unfair discrimination." These rights have been enshrined in the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA).

3.3 Gender

The University recognises that sexuality and pregnancy are issues that affect all students and that all students are responsible for their decisions, lifestyle choices and academic careers. Accordingly, opportunities for life skills and educative programmes shall be provided to all students.

3.4 Confidentiality

3.4.1 Staff shall:

- 3.4.1.1 be cognisant of ethical considerations relating to confidentiality;
- 3.4.1.2 respect a student's right to confidentiality; and
- 3.4.1.3 obtain written, informed consent before referring a student or releasing information to other relevant staff members or to external service providers.

4.

4.1.1 The students:

- 4.1.1.1 are encouraged to disclose their pregnancy to either an academic or other support staff member, but preferably to a social worker at the Social Support Unit; and
- 4.1.1.2 are not required to inform any staff member should they decide to terminate their pregnancy. However, should the student be absent from classes, tutorials or tests as a result, the student is advised to inform the relevant module coordinator/s of their absenteeism due to 'medical

reasons' and to make alternate arrangements for submission of work or writing tests, as required. A medical certificate may need to be produced as per relevant University regulations.

5. Policy

The Pregnancy Policy aims to:

- 5.1 Create conditions that are conducive for academic success and wellbeing during pregnancy.
- 5.2 Ensure that pregnant students are not arbitrarily excluded from academic programmes, residences and other University activities.
- 5.3 Provide reasonable support to pregnant students.
- 5.4 Provide guidance to staff and students on how to offer a humanising experiencing to pregnant students.

6. Student Roles and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of pregnant students to:

- 6.1 Inform the relevant university department/school/faculty/residence within 24 weeks of the pregnancy, in order to facilitate the provision of appropriate support.
- 6.2 Attend and participate in any educative and life skills programmes that the University may offer.
- 6.3 Access information and support in relation to academic advice, social support, health services and student counselling.
- 6.4 Inform the module coordinator of each module in the event that students are registered for programmes that involve work placement and/or field trips in an environment that uses procedures, substances and chemicals (for example laboratory, hospital and educational settings) that may be potentially hazardous to the student and unborn child's health.
- 6.5 Inform the relevant residence head, in the event that they reside at a University residence.
- 6.6 Catch up with work (written, practical, laboratory) that may have been missed.

7. University of the Free State

- 7.1 The University will endeavour to accommodate pregnant students as far as reasonably practical to allow them to continue their studies.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 Staff should not attempt to influence any student's decision but should provide impartial advice on the way forward in terms of support.

- 7.4 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 discussions with the student.
- 7.5 While an appropriate degree of flexibility should be exercised, care must be taken to ensure that academic success and wellbeing are 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 to the student in writing.
- 7.6 The University undertakes to support all pregnant students as best as possible to enable completion of the academic programme within the limits of available resources.
- 7.7 The University undertakes to protect all pregnant students from unfair discrimination and harassment associated with pregnancy.
- 7.8 If a pregnant student goes into labour during an examination or during class, the protocol for medical emergencies must be followed. In an event of an examination, an alternative examination date should be arranged for the student.
- 7.9 Pregnant students may decide to suspend their academic studies in consultation with the relevant academic staff within their department. In such cases, the Student Academic Services office needs to be consulted to facilitate suspension and/or de-registration from modules and to ensure that all relevant documentation is completed. Students are to be advised on applicable timelines for suspension, de-registration and re-registration.

8. Implementation

- 8.1 A pregnant student is strongly advised to consult Campus Health Services or a doctor to discuss medical issues relating to the pregnancy prior to approaching the department/school/faculty/residence.
- 8.2 Where possible, the academic, administrative and support services should work jointly to manage individual cases. All referrals between offices shall be with the student's written, informed consent and the reasons for referral will be explained to students.
- 8.3 Support offered by different divisions/departments/offices includes:
- 8.3.1 Academic Departments**
- 8.3.1.1 Should a student disclose the pregnancy to a department, the relevant academic staff should discuss the implications of the pregnancy on the student's academics. The discussion should include the development of a plan of action. The plan of action should include any disruptions to study, possible precautionary measures, and concessions that may be granted.
- 8.3.1.2 A flexible approach should be adopted that allows for adjustments to the agreed-upon plan of action.
- 8.3.1.3 All academic departments that involve work, clinical/educational placements and/or fieldtrips, in contexts that may be potentially dangerous to the pregnant student and the unborn child, must provide such information to all students prior to the commencement of the relevant module or course. All disclaimers used for fieldtrips, laboratory work and clinical and educational placements should provide relevant information relating to student pregnancy.

8.3.2 Student Support Services

8.3.2.1 A pregnant student may use any of the following support services:

- **Campus Health Services** – provides voluntary limited health services to registered students, including pregnancy testing.
- **Social Support Office** – provides social work services, including pregnancy options.
- **SCD** – provides individual or group support counselling to pregnant students, as per issues presented.
- **CUADS** – promotes inclusive practice and compliance with the legislation and relevant policy frameworks across the UFS (including Pregnancy Policy) in respect of students with disabilities.
- **Unit for Institutional Change and Social Justice** – focuses on empowering and advocating for a socially just and gender equitable anti- discriminatory environment.
- **HRA** – provides reasonable support to pregnant students within 24 weeks of their pregnancy. Students who return to residence after having vacated the University residence due to pregnancy will be eligible for residence accommodation upon their return to University.
- **SAS** – assists pregnant students who may decide to de-register from certain modules or suspend their studies, by ensuring that students complete all relevant documentation and that all relevant staff or offices are informed of the student's academic status.

9. Scope

- 9.1 This Policy applies to all students who are enrolled in a study programme at UFS.
- 9.2 The Policy covers any student who becomes pregnant during their studies or gives birth during their studies.
- 9.3 The Policy is in support of Goal 1 of the UFS Strategic Plan 2018-2022.
- 9.4 This document provides both students and staff with information about the University's humanising approach to supporting a student who is pregnant.

9. Resourcing the Policy.

The UFS commits to providing reasonable resources in ensuring the successful implementation of this Policy.

10. Review Procedure

This Policy will be reviewed every three years or when the statutory law changes.

11. Policy Record

Document name Dokumentnaam	Student Pregnancy Policy
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Coordinating UMC member Koördinerende UBK-lid	Dean: Student Affairs

Contact person Kontakpersoon	Dean: Student Affairs
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Person responsible for review Persoon verantwoordelik vir	Dean: Student Affairs
Monitoring by Monitering deur	DVC: Institutional Change, Student Affairs & Community Engagement
Related documents Verwante dokumente	Refer Below
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LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS FOR THE UFS STUDENT PREGNANCY POLICY
The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution-republic-south-africa-1996)
Employment Equity Act 1998 (http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/downloads/legislation/acts/employmentequity/eegazette2015.pdf)
Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (http://www.justice.gov.za/inforeg/docs/InfoRegSA-POPIA-act2013-004.pdf)
UFS Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP) (https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/the-ufs-integrated-transformation-plan.pdf?sfvrsn=9752a521_0)
UFS Policies (https://www.ufs.ac.za/about-the-ufs/governance/policy-documents)
Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act - (https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a38-04.pdf)

Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA)
(https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-anti-discrimination-policy_council-approved.pdf)

Consulted Pregnancy Policies from Other Universities:

University of the West of England
(<https://www2.uwe.ac.uk/services/Marketing/about-us/pdf/Policies/Student-pregnancy-policy.pdf>)

University of the Witwatersrand
(<https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/students/gender-equity-and-tolerance/documents/Students%20Pregnancy%20Policy%20.pdf>)

University of Kwazulu-Natal
(<https://aessupport.ukzn.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Principles-and-guidelines-for-support-of-pregnant-students.pdf>)