

Leave of Absence Policy

Effective Date: May 21, 2013

Responsible Party: University of Alabama at Birmingham Marnix E. Heersink's
Associate Dean for Students

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POLICY ABSTRACT

The policy establishes guidelines for student leaves of absence initiated by the student or by the medical school. The procedures include the types of leaves and the submission, review, and return from leave processes. The policy also outlines situations during the MS3 and MS4 years when students may take time away from coursework without requiring a leave.

REASON FOR POLICY

Students are expected to proceed through the medical school curriculum as designed. There are circumstances, however, when students may request or be placed on leave of absence. This policy and the coordinating procedures define different types of leaves as well as the process for submission, review, and return from leave. The procedure also outlines the rationale and amount of time MS3 and MS4 students may take away from coursework without going on leave.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all medical students who request a leave of absence, are placed on a leave of absence by the medical school, and specific to the MS3 and MS4 years, circumstances when students may take time away from coursework without placement on leave.

POLICY

Medical students are expected to proceed through the medical school curriculum as designed. In the event of extenuating circumstances which necessitate a temporary period of non-enrollment, students may request a leave of absence (LOA). In certain circumstances, students may be placed on LOA by the medical school. Students on LOA are still considered medical students, but they are in an inactive status not taking coursework.

LOA is granted for a specific period of time (up to but not exceeding 12 months), unless granted an extension by the Student Academic Standing Committee (SASC). Students who do not return to coursework and active enrollment status at the end of the established period of leave or who are not approved for an extension of the LOA may be dismissed by the SASC. Conditions for return from LOA are established at the time that leave is taken, determined by the type of LOA taken, and based on the specific needs of

the student; conditions for return may be modified if the student’s circumstances change.

Students may take time away from coursework without going on LOA in the MS3 and MS4 years. Up to 8 weeks of approved time away from clinical coursework may be allowed in the MS3 year. During the MS4 year, up to 12 weeks of time away from coursework is allowed in the Fall term and up to 10 weeks is allowed in the Spring term. Reasons for approved time away are outlined in the Time Away section below. Students who are not participating in clinical coursework are expected to complete all requirements for longitudinal courses (i.e. Learning Communities and Scholarly Activity).

PROCEDURE

The School of Medicine recognizes the following types of student- and school-initiated leaves:

Type	Definition	Student may initiate	School may initiate
Academic	Due to academic difficulty, including, but not limited to, course failure, additional USMLE preparation time, USMLE examination failure, and multiple NBME subject examination failures	Yes	Yes
Financial	Due to financial difficulty	Yes	Yes
Health	Due to health reasons	Yes	Yes
Other	Due to personal, unknown, or other reasons	Yes	Yes
Participation in a joint degree program	To complete requirements for the non-MD degree portion of an established joint degree program	Yes	Yes (MSTP only)
Participation in non-research special studies	To take part in special studies that are not part of an established joint degree program	Yes	
Participation in Special Studies/Research	To work on research not related to joint degree program studies	Yes	
Administrative	For failure to abide by the medical school, health system, or university policies, including, but not limited to, those related to: student behavior or conduct technical or professional standards		Yes

	computer use financial affairs health and safety impairment or substance abuse		
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Student-initiated Leave of Absence

Students considering a leave of absence should meet with the Associate Dean for Students, the Assistant Dean for Students, the Director of Medical Education and Student Services (Huntsville and Montgomery campus), and/or the Director of Medical Student Affairs (Tuscaloosa campus) as early as possible prior to the start date of the proposed leave to discuss the rationale for taking a leave, the steps to initiate a leave, conditions for return from leave, potential consequences of taking a leave, and, when pertinent, alternatives to a leave. After discussions, students request a leave through the Leave of Absence Management System (LAMS). The length of the leave and conditions for return from leave are established and recorded in LAMS by the student and the Associate or Assistant Dean for Students. The student may access this information in LAMS at any time using their Blazer ID and password. In cases of LOA for health reasons, clearance from a healthcare provider directly involved in the student’s care is required prior to return to active status. In rare instances when a student requests a leave without having discussed the leave with a school administrator or the student’s leave request does not comply with the conditions established in discussions with school administrators, the leave will be denied. In cases of denial, the Associate or Assistant Dean for Students will contact the student to discuss the rationale for denial. A student may choose to resubmit a modified leave request. Students may also choose not to modify their leave request and to appeal a denial for voluntary LOA. Appeals are made to the SASC as described below.

A student-initiated LOA may be approved for up to 12 months. Requests for an extended LOA beyond 12 months requires approval by the SASC (see below). Students may appeal denials for an extension of leave (see below). Students in the Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP) are exempt from the 12 month LOA time limit.

The approval of a LOA does not negate other school policies related to course remediation or repetition, academic status, and time limits for successful completion of the curriculum, nor does it negate previous SASC decisions affecting the student (See School of Medicine Policies under “Related Policies”). Requirements for remediation or repetition of coursework, time limits for successful completion of coursework, and the student’s current academic status will be reviewed with the student prior to initiation of the leave.

If a student chooses not to return from leave at the designated time and does not request an extension of leave, the student may resign from the school of medicine. In cases

where the student does not resign, the SASC may choose to dismiss the student from the school of medicine (see Resignation Policy).

Students who begin LOA prior to the end date of a course(s) in which they are enrolled will receive a grade of Withdraw (W). As with all other medical school grades, a grade of W will be reviewed by the SASC.

Students are encouraged to meet with the Coordinator of Medical Student Financial Services to understand the impact of leaves on financial aid and scholarships. See UAB Heersink School of Medicine Tuition Policy under “Related Policies” for impact of LOA on tuition and fees.

It is recommended that students meet with the Associate or Assistant Dean for Students at least thirty days prior to the return date originally established to assess readiness for return. In cases where the conditions of leave have been met, the student will return to coursework. In cases where the student has not met conditions for return or is not ready to return for other reasons, leave may be extended up to 12 months. Student needing leave beyond 12 months require approval from the SASC.

In cases of LOA for health reasons, the healthcare provider directly involved in the student’s care will provide documentation to the Associate Dean for Students that the student is ready and safe for return. If the student is unable to see the healthcare provider directly involved in their care to assess readiness to return, the student will see a provider identified by the Associate Dean for Students to assess readiness to return. Clearance for return must be received by the Associate Dean for Students at least 1 week prior to the designated LOA return date. The student may be required to comply with the healthcare provider’s prescribed treatment plan as a condition for returning from LOA. LOA may be extended by the Associate Dean for Students until such clearance is received from a healthcare provider for up to 12 months from the original start of the leave. LOA for health reasons extending beyond 12 months from the original start of the leave will require approval by the SASC (see below).

Students may appeal a denial for leave, the conditions for return from leave, and length of a leave. Appeals are reviewed by the SASC (see below).

Students may return earlier than the established return date when conditions of return are met more rapidly than anticipated and when approved by the Associate Dean for Students.

School-initiated Leave of Absence

Students may be placed on a leave of absence by the medical school based on an individualized determination of a student’s needs and circumstances. Students may be removed from coursework temporarily without being placed on leave while final decisions about the need for school-initiated leave are made. Student conduct, Title IX,

or other proceedings may continue even when a student is subject to a school-initiated leave of absence.

Students may be placed on LOA for academic reasons. The SASC will determine the academic requirements needed for the student to continue in medical school (i.e., remediation, full recycle), and may determine the length of the LOA and the conditions for return from leave. All decisions by the SASC are final, subject to student appeal outlined below and in the Medical Student Academic Progress Review Policy (see “Related Policies”). A student may opt to remain in coursework pending the decision of the SASC and any subsequent appeal. If the ultimate outcome of an SASC decision and/or appeal requires the student to end active enrollment prior to such a course's end date, the student will receive a grade of W (withdrawn).

In consultation with, and guidance from, the Senior Associate Dean for Students and UAB's Vice President for Student experience, the Associate Dean for Students may place a student on LOA for failure to abide by medical school, health system, or university policies, including, but not limited to, those related to student behaviors and conduct, the school's technical or professional standards, computer use, financial affairs, health and safety, and impairment and/or substance misuse.

The Associate Dean for student may place a student on leave when the student poses a risk to themselves or others. Examples include

- Inability or unwillingness to carry out substantial self-care obligations such as participation in their own healthcare through compliance with healthcare visits, rehabilitation or monitoring programs.

- current medical knowledge and/or the best available objective evidence indicates that a student poses a significant risk to their own health or safety.

- current medical knowledge and/or the best available objective evidence indicates that a student poses a significant risk to the health or safety of others.

In such circumstances, the Associate Dean for Students will advise the student to take a student-initiated LOA. If the student is unwilling to take a student-initiated leave, the Associate Dean for Students will place the student on a school-initiated LOA. Such decisions may be made in coordination with UAB school officials, if appropriate, judgment from the student's healthcare provider, and the Senior Associate Dean for Students. Before placing any student with a disability on a school-initiated leave of absence, the school will also perform an individualized assessment to determine if there are reasonable accommodations that would permit the student to continue to participate in the medical school community without taking a leave of absence.

With guidance from UAB school officials, if appropriate, and/or the student's healthcare provider(s), and the Senior Associate Dean for Students, the Associate Dean for Students will determine the length of leave, conditions for return, requirements to remain in active status once the student returns from leave and system for student monitoring once they return. To protect PHI, all non-emergent communications between the Associate Dean for Students and the student's healthcare provider(s) will

occur through a student-approved liaison and with written consent. All decisions related to placing a student on leave, length of leave, and conditions for return will be based on relevant medical school, health system, and university policy(ies). These include, but are not limited to, those policies on the medical school's Policies & Procedures webpage (See "Related Policies").

Prior to returning from a school-initiated LOA, the student will meet with the Associate Dean for Students to assess readiness for return. In cases of LOA for health reasons, the healthcare provider directly involved in the student's care will provide documentation to the Associate Dean for Students that the student is ready and safe for return. If the student is unable to see the healthcare provider directly involved in their care to assess readiness to return, the student will see a provider identified by the Associate Dean for Students to assess readiness to return. The student may be required to comply with the healthcare provider's prescribed treatment plan as a condition for returning from LOA. In cases where the conditions of leave have been met, the student will return to active status and coursework. In cases where the student has not yet met conditions for return or is not ready to return for other reasons, leave may be extended. It is recommended that students meet with the Associate Dean for Students at least thirty days prior, when feasible, to the return date originally established. LOA greater than 12 months must be approved by the SASC (see below).

A school-initiated LOA does not negate other medical school policies related to course remediation or repetition, academic status, or time limits for successful completion of the curriculum, nor does it negate previous SASC decisions affecting the student (See "Related Policies").

Students may appeal a requirement for leave, the conditions for return, or length of a leave. Appeals are reviewed by the SASC (see below).

Students may return earlier than the established return date when conditions of return are met more rapidly than anticipated and when approved by the Associate Dean for Students.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE EXTENSIONS AND APPEALS

Students who feel that they need more than 12 months LOA may request an extension from the SASC. The student will provide written documentation to the SASC for the extension, leave length, and the rationale for the extension. The Associate Dean for Students will present the student's request to the SASC. The committee will vote to approve or deny the extension. Students may appeal a denied request for LOA extension. Students wishing to appeal a decision of the SASC must contact the Senior Associate Dean for Students (by e-mail or other written form) within 2 business day of learning the SASC's decision. See SASC Student appeals process outlined in the Medical Student Academic Progress Review policy and procedure.

Students granted an extension by the SASC or the SASC Faculty Appeal Panel are required to return by the date established by the SASC or Faculty Appeal Panel. Students remain subject to other medical school policies related to course remediation or repetition, academic status, and time limits for successful completion of the curriculum (See School of Medicine Policies under “Related Policies”). Students whose request is denied are required to return to coursework within 12 months of the initiation of the original LOA. Students who choose not to return may resign from the school of medicine. Students who do not resign are subject to dismissal from the medical school by the SASC.

Students may appeal decisions made by the Associate Dean for Students. Appeals are handled by the SASC. The student will provide written documentation to the SASC providing a rationale for their appeal. The committee will vote to approve or deny the appeal. Students may also appeal a decision made by the SASC. Students wishing to appeal a decision of the SASC must contact the Senior Associate Dean for Students (by e-mail or other written form) within 2 business day of learning the SASC’s decision. See SASC student appeals process outlined in the Medical Student Academic Progress Review policy and procedure.

Students granted their appeal are required to abide by the decisions of the SASC or the Faculty Appeal Panel and remain subject to other medical school policies related to course remediation or repetition, academic status, and time limits for successful completion of coursework (See School of Medicine Policies under “Related Policies”). Students whose appeals are denied are required to abide by conditions set forth at the time the LOA was established. Students who choose not to abide by these conditions may resign from the school of medicine. Students who do not resign are subject to dismissal from the medical school by the SASC.

TIME AWAY FROM COURSEWORK NOT REQUIRING LEAVE

Preclinical Students. MS1 and MS2 students are not eligible to take time away from coursework without taking a LOA.

Clinical Students. Students may take time away from coursework in certain circumstances during the MS3 and MS4 years of medical school without requiring LOA.

Students may take 4 weeks off to pursue academic activities¹ in the MS3 year. Student may take an additional 4 weeks (a total of 8 weeks) for these academic activities after review and approval by the Associate Dean for Admissions and Enrollment Management. Student may request time away to pursue academic activities by submitting a Schedule Change Request Form (<https://www.uab.edu/medicine/home/current-students/scheduling>).

Student requesting time away from coursework to pursue academic activities other than those described¹ may submit a written request to the Associate Dean for Students, the Associate Dean for Admissions and Enrollment Managements and the Associate Dean

for Undergraduate Medical Education. The associate deans will review request and approve or deny based on academic merit. Students may appeal denials of requests for time away from coursework to the SASC as described above

Students may take up to 12 weeks in the Fall term and up to 10 weeks in the Spring term away from coursework in the MS4 year.² Students requiring time away from coursework beyond these time limits are required to take LOA. Students are encouraged to meet with career advisors, academic advisors, other regional campus directors, and/or the Associate or Assistant Dean for Students for guidance on scheduling the MS4 year including time away from coursework. Approval is not required for MS4 students to schedule breaks in clinical coursework. However, students exceeding time limits per term will be placed on LOA when they reach the limits of time away from coursework.

Students are encouraged to meet with the Coordinator of Medical Student Financial Services to understand impact of leaves on financial aid and scholarships. See UAB Tuition Policy under “Related Policies” for impact of LOA on tuition and fees.

¹ Reasons why MS3 students take time away from coursework without requiring leave include but are not limited to: dedicated time to participate in scholarly activity, remediation of a failed USMLE Step 1 examination, remediation of a clerkship shelf examination, preparation for USMLE Step 2 examination.

² Reasons why MS4 students take time away from coursework without requiring leave include but are not limited to: dedicated time to prepare for USMLE Step 2 examination, to prepare residency applications, and to participate in residency interviews.

RELATED POLICIES

Heersink School of Medicine Tuition Policy
Heersink School of Medicine Medical Student Academic Progress Review
Heersink School of Medicine Policies and Procedures

HISTORY

Policy Created: 05/21/2013

Approved: 10/01/2021 by UA Systems Office

Revised: 10/1/2021

University of Alabama at Birmingham Marnix E. Heersink School of Medicine policies shall be reviewed periodically to determine whether revisions are appropriate to address the needs of the medical school community.