

## **Policy on Leaves of Absence**

### **I. PURPOSE**

Students may need to take a leave of absence from the MD degree program, for medical or personal reasons, academic difficulty, or academic enrichment.

### **II. SCOPE**

This policy applies to:

- Medical students

### **III. POLICY**

A Leave is a temporary approved absence from one's required attendance at UPSOM. The Committee on Student Promotions approves all leaves except for emergency medical leave of up to 3 months (approved by Associate Dean for Student Affairs) and special academic study (approved by the Vice Dean for Education).

In general, a non-medical leave will typically not be granted to a student who has not yet completed at least one course, is not in good academic standing (as defined in the Policy on Academic Progress and Promotion), or who is within two weeks of the beginning of final examinations at the end of a course.

Students may not take more leave than would violate the 6-year rule (see Policy on Academic Progress and Promotion).

### **MEDICAL LEAVE**

Medical leave permits a student to seek treatment for a health-related condition that interrupts the student's ability to meet the educational demands of the curriculum. Students are encouraged to

seek medical care when appropriate. The Associate Dean for Student Affairs may grant a medical leave of absence of up to 3 months in emergency situations to students who complete the requisite documentation of a need for medical leave. Students returning from a medical leave must submit a letter from the treating physician certifying the student's fitness to resume their studies by meeting the standards. The treating physician's letter must be submitted at least 1 month prior to scheduled return date. A third party medical evaluation may be required prior to a student being allowed to return from a medical leave of absence.

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs will advise the Committee on Student Promotions of approved emergency medical leaves for any student on observation or on leave for greater than or equal to 1 month.

All extensions of medical leaves, or leaves >3 months, require approval from the Committee on Student Promotions.

Students who disclose that they are misusing alcohol or drugs will be referred to the Federation of State Physician Health Programs (PHP) for assessment and possibly management. Any expenses incurred as a result of PHP assessment, treatment, transportation, and monitoring are solely the responsibility of the student. Before returning from a medical leave of absence, students who have been referred to the PHP will need the PHP to provide assurances to the school that the student is "fit for duty" and is actively engaged in an advocacy agreement with PHP as appropriate.

## **PERSONAL LEAVE**

The Committee on Student Promotions may grant a leave of absence for up to one year for personal reasons for a student who is in good academic standing as defined by the Policy on Academic Progress and Promotion (i.e., without academic deficiencies).

Personal leave permits a student to take time off in extenuating circumstances to address issues of a personal nature, including military leave or those related to the health and well-being of a family member or partner including bereavement. All personal leaves of absence will be decided at the discretion of the Committee on Student Promotions. The Committee on Student Promotions will specify terms for re-entry to the curriculum.

## **LEAVES FOR ACADEMIC DIFFICULTY**

Any student who has not taken USMLE Step 1 prior to the start of Pre-clerkship Course will be placed on academic leave of absence until the USMLE Step1 has been taken and passed, unless

the student is granted a Board Study Elective, as described in the Step 1 Guide, of the Clerkship Phase.

Leaves of absence for unsatisfactory academic progress are granted only with the concurrence of the Committee on Student Promotions which shall specify the duration of such leaves. For further details refer to Policy on Academic Progress and Promotions. Such students may return on an academic observation status. Such leaves shall be for the shortest time needed to address the need and may not exceed one year.

### **LEAVES FOR ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT: SPECIAL ACADEMIC STUDY, SPECIAL PROGRAM, GRADUATE STUDY, AND RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS**

The Vice Dean for Education may grant up to a two-year leave of absence for special academic study for a student who is in good academic standing as defined by the Policy on Academic Progress and Promotions. Students in the MD program may choose to take a special academic study leave of absence to participate in a dual or joint degree program, choose to pursue an advanced degree outside of an official program, or participate in a special program (e.g., entrepreneurship). With proper documentation including verification of acceptance from the school/program, specific start and end dates, program objectives, and intended outcomes, this leave may be granted. The student may not have been previously delayed in education or not projected to on-time graduation.

The Vice Dean for Education may grant a leave of absence for up to one year for a research fellowship for a student who is in satisfactory academic progress as defined by the Policy on Academic Progress and Promotions. A research fellowship is one in which the student is paid a stipend while working under the mentorship of an experienced scientist. Examples of research fellowships include the Dean's Year-Off Research Fellowship, the Sarnoff Fellowship, and the NIH Medical Research Scholars Program.

In order to be approved for a research fellowship leave, the student and research mentor must submit documentation from the research program confirming the research fellowship dates and that a stipend will be provided. See Procedures section for specific content requirements for the letter from the research mentor.

Internal research fellowship leaves must be formally approved by the Vice Dean for Education in collaboration with the Office of Medical Student Research after submission of a prospectus that is signed off by the research mentor and Departmental Chair.

Students who have had to repeat a year of the curriculum may be considered as a candidate for a graduate study, research fellowship, or special program leave after they have completed all MD program requirements through passage of Step 2CK, so long as the 6-year rule is not violated.

Students who have been awarded a competitive research fellowship at UPSOM will retain their full-time student status through special registration for up to a period of one year. This UPSOM registration will assess no tuition; applicable student fees will be charged.

#### **IV. POLICY AUTHOR(S)**

- Office of Student Affairs

#### **V. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

- Policy on Academic Remediation, Observation, and Warning
- Policy on Academic Progress and Promotion
- Policy on USMLE Examinations
- Committee on Student Promotions (CSP), Professionalism Subcommittee (PS), and Appeals Committee to CSP Decisions (ACCD) Charter
- University of Pittsburgh Nondiscrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action Policy

#### **VI. REFERENCES**

- LCME Standard 9.9: Single Standard for Promotion, Graduation and Appeal Process
- LCME Standard 10.3: Policies Regarding Student Selection/Progress and Their Dissemination.

#### **VII. APPROVALS**

Educational Policy Council approved revisions on July 22, 2025

## VIII. Procedures

- A. Requesting a Leave of Absence (LOA).
  - a. A request for a medical LOA of three months or less must be in writing and directed to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.
  - b. Requests for a medical LOA of more than three months or a personal LOA must be in writing and directed to the Committee on Student Promotions, in all cases with a copy to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.
  - c. Requests for academic enrichment (special academic study, graduate study, special program, and research fellowships) must be in writing and directed to the Vice Dean for Education, in all cases with a copy to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.
  - d. Requests must include all required information as set forth in the policy above. Requests that fail to provide the requisite information shall not be approved and prognosis for return to the program. It is the student's responsibility to include information to support the request.
    - i. Students requesting a medical leave must submit a letter from their physician attesting to the need for a medical leave.
  - e. Research Fellowship LOA Request: The research mentor's letter to the Vice Dean for Education must include:
    - i. Dates of proposed leave of absence
    - ii. The explicit statement that a stipend will be provided (the amount of the stipend is NOT required)
    - iii. A detailed prospectus of the project in which the student will be engaged (template for completion will be provided to the student).
- B. Approval.
  - a. Approval of LOA requests must be in writing and include at a minimum, the type of LOA, the beginning and end dates, any requirements that the student has to meet during the LOA (i.e. proof of continuation of a special academic program), clearance of any issues related to tuition, financial aid, and health insurance, and any stipulations associated with the student's return.
- C. Technical and Academic Standards. Returning students who are unable to meet Technical or Academic Standards in any course shall be reviewed by the Committee on Student Promotions. The Office of Student Affairs shall share all official academic, and with authorization from the student, medical records with the Committee. The Committee may choose not to permit a student to return who does not meet the technical standards.
- D. Requirements the student must complete at start of a LOA:
  - a. Review tuition obligations with Registrar and Office of Financial Aid
  - b. Review financial aid/student loans with Office of Financial Aid
  - c. Review medical insurance coverage with University of Pittsburgh Benefits Office
  - d. Regular meetings with Associate Dean for Student Affairs or their designee
- E. Requirements the student must complete before returning from a LOA:
  - a. Review tuition obligations with Registrar and Office of Financial Aid
  - b. Review financial aid/student loans with Office of Financial Aid
  - c. Review medical insurance coverage with University of Pittsburgh Benefits Office

- d. Any student returning from a medical leave with changes in observation; communication; motor; behavioral and social abilities; intellectual, conceptual, integrative and qualitative will be required to submit a 3<sup>rd</sup> party evaluation verifying their fitness to return to medical education.
- F. Failure to Return. Any student failing to return from a LOA on the date specified in the approval or any extension date granted pursuant to the appropriate Policy will be administratively withdrawn from the School of Medicine.
- G. Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE). All LOAs shall be included in the MSPE component of the residency application. The category of leave (e.g., academic, medical, research, etc.) will be indicated and explained.