

University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

Policy on USMLE Examinations

I. POLICY

All students must pass USMLE Step 1 and Step 2-CK as graduation requirements for the MD degree.

USMLE Examinations:

USMLE Step 1 should not be attempted prior to successful completion of the second year curriculum. USMLE Step 2-CK should not be attempted prior to successful completion of the first year of the clinical curriculum (typically, the third year). The Associate Dean for Student Affairs must approve any exceptions in advance, in collaboration with the school's academic success professionals.

The National Board of Examiners stipulates the number of times a student may attempt to take and pass the exam: <https://www.usmle.org/common-questions/attempt-limit>

USMLE Step 1:

All students must take USMLE Step 1 prior to the start of the Preclerkship Course (and therefore, before beginning any clerkship, clinical elective, or research elective). Any student who has not taken USMLE Step 1 prior to the start of Preclerkship Course will either receive an approved extension from the academic success team or be placed on an academic leave of absence for up to one year until the USMLE Step 1 has been taken.

If a student fails the Step 1 examination, they will be placed on academic leave of absence and removed from course work until Step 1 is retaken. If the student has completed 50% or more of a rotation when a Step 1 failure notice is received, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs will determine if it is appropriate for the student to complete the remainder of their current rotation before being withdrawn. If the student has completed less than 50% of a rotation when a Step 1 failure notice is received, the clerkship must be repeated in its entirety.

Students who retake Step 1 after a failure cannot enter clerkships until a passing score is received. They may re-enter the curriculum by taking electives if they wish.

If a student fails Step 1 on a repeat attempt, they will be returned to academic leave of absence (either immediately, or after completion of that rotation, as per the Associate Dean for Student Affairs).

Any student who does not receive a passing score on Step 1 by the end of the calendar year intended for board study will be reviewed by the Committee on Student Promotions. The

Committee will review the entire academic record and any information the student provides and make appropriate recommendation to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

The committee would typically recommend dismissal of the student unless compelling circumstances are presented that would warrant consideration of a one-time extension of the leave of absence in order to attain a passing score. This extension would be no longer than one year.

Under certain circumstances based upon review of a student's academic record and performance on Step 1 practice assessments (provided by the school), students will be guided to defer their first attempt at Step 1 until later than the Preclerkship Course. In all cases, students may not begin clerkships or year 3 electives until they have attempted Step 1.

The student has the right to make a final appeal to the Dean for a review that the above policies were adhered to and the information about the applicable policies were explicitly reviewed with the student by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs or her/his designee.

USMLE Step 2:

The USMLE Step 2-CK examination must be taken no later than December 31 of the final year of the curriculum.

For students on an off-cycle schedule, the deadline for taking Step 2-CK is two months after completing the third-year curriculum in its entirety (clerkships and other courses), if this is later than the routine deadlines listed above. The Associate Dean for Student Affairs must approve any exceptions to this requirement in advance.

Failure to register passing scores on the Step 2-CK exam prior to certification for the NRMP Match may require the School of Medicine to remove the names of such candidates from the NRMP Match. Exceptions to this policy will be made by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

A student must pass Step 2-CK within one year of completing all other curriculum requirements, in order to be eligible to be granted the MD degree.

II. PURPOSE

To define requirements for USMLE completion.

III. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- Medical students

IV. POLICY AUTHOR(S)

- Office of Medical Education

- Office of Student Affairs

V. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Policy on Academic Requirements for Advancement and Graduation
- Policy on Academic Dismissal and Appeals
- Policy on Leave of Absences
- Policy on Requirements for Granting of the MD Degree
- Policy on Standards for Performance and Academic Progress
- Policy on Time Limitations for Completing Portions of the MD Degree Program

VI. REFERENCES

- LCME Standard 9.9: Single Standard for Promotion, Graduation and Appeal Process: A medical school ensures that the medical education program has a single standard for the promotion and graduation of medical students across all locations and a fair and formal process for taking any action that may affect the status of a medical student, including timely notice of the impending action, disclosure of the evidence on which the action would be based, an opportunity for the medical student to respond, and an opportunity to appeal any adverse decision related to promotion, graduation, or dismissal.
- LCME Standard 10.3: Policies Regarding Student Selection/Progress and Their Dissemination: The faculty of a medical school establish criteria for student selection and develop and implement effective policies and procedures regarding, and make decisions about, medical student application, selection, admission, assessment, promotion, graduation, and any disciplinary action. The medical school makes available to all interested parties its criteria, standards, policies, and procedures regarding these matters.

VII. APPROVALS

Dean, School of Medicine, originally approved December 30, 2018.

Curriculum Committee, approved August 2, 2021

Education Policy Council, revisions approved October 28, 2019; September 2, 2021.

Executive Committee, revisions approved December 10, 2019; October 29, 2021.

Dean, School of Medicine, revisions approved December 16, 2019; December 7, 2021.

PROCEDURES

Requests for an extension to USMLE deadlines must be made in writing to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, either directly or through another member of the Academic Success team. The Associate Dean for Student Affairs and the team will make decisions about extensions based on a student's readiness to successfully pass the assessment. If a student is not demonstrating academic performance commensurate with passing performance, or if there are significant extenuating circumstances related to health/wellness, or personal/family life, then a student could be granted an extension. Students who want more time solely to achieve a higher passing score will not be granted such an extension. The length of the extension will be determined in collaboration with the Academic Success team and the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

Besides the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, the Academic Success team typically consists of the Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; the Assistant Dean for Medical Education (MS1-2 curriculum); the Director of Coaching Services; and the Senior Medical Advisor.

In addition to extension decisions, this group will also make recommendations on curricular re-entry post-repeat Step 1 testing. Those decisions must balance the goal of academic progression with the academic risks to the student, based primarily on the student's individual academic performance to date and the context of academic experiences. Based on that individualized review of academic performance, some students may be able to return to non-clerkship experiences immediately, while others may be asked to wait for a passing score to be received first. Clerkship experiences will be deferred until a passing score is obtained, to prevent further academic risk to the student and to assure appropriate clerkship capacity for other learners.

Students who need to retake Step 1 can always schedule the exam such that a passing score is obtained prior to the start of a scheduled clerkship. Every effort will be made to support learners in maintaining academic progression.

The December deadline for taking Step 2-CK allows for appropriate remediation if needed prior to graduation, and for certification prior to the residency match.