



UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

POLICY TITLE: <i>Leave of Absence Policy</i>	APPROVAL DATE: <i>June 7, 2018</i> <i>Revisions approved June 4, 2020</i>
RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT: <i>Office of Medical Education</i>	APPLIES TO: <i>All Students</i>

## POLICY STATEMENT

### Voluntary Leaves of Absence

- Leaves may be voluntary as a result of student petition, (e.g., to pursue another academic program, to fulfill a fellowship, to conduct research, to take care of personal issues, parental leave, or to recover from an illness). All voluntary leaves are subject to approval by the COM. A student cannot unilaterally decide that he/she will be taking a Leave of Absence for any reason. A student who is considering a Leave of Absence must meet with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs if they are planning a 1-year leave to pursue research, additional degree or other academic enrichment. A student who is considering a Leave of Absence, regardless of duration, for any other reason e.g. medical, personal, etc. must meet with either the Associate or Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. Any student who wishes to take a Leave of Absence must submit a request in writing to the PAC.

### Petition Requirement

- A petition for a voluntary Leave of Absence must be requested on a Medical Student Status Form (MSSF) in MedOneStop (see Appendix) and must include a written petition which clearly describes the reason(s) for the leave, steps the student will undertake to address the reason(s) for the leave and an anticipated return date. If the Leave of Absence is for medical reasons, documentation is required from the evaluating physician, or in the case of mental health, a licensed clinical psychologist or psychiatrist. This documentation should include a statement indicating that the student is under the provider's care and the student is currently unable to continue his/her medical education responsibilities. The provider, as defined above, should not be a family member of the student's (as defined by the University policy). If the Leave of Absence is for research, documentation is required from the faculty supervisor on the research project providing a description of the student's role and responsibilities. The petition must be initiated by the student and submitted to the appropriate PAC with a copy to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Students are advised to consult with the Office of Student Affairs prior to petitioning for a Leave of Absence.

### Authority to Grant Voluntary Leaves & Timeframe for Approval and Timing of Leaves

- Except in cases of Emergency Leaves of Absence (see next section), Leaves of Absence must be approved by the appropriate PAC **prior** to a student going on leave. Students are to remain in the curriculum until notified by the PAC that their request has been approved (or denied) and the effective start date of their leave has been determined. In M1/M2, Leaves of Absence requested within 7 calendar days of the first final of the final exam week will not be approved, except for extraordinary and compelling circumstances (e.g. if the first exam of the final exam week is scheduled for Tuesday, the request for Leave of Absence must be submitted prior to the Tuesday of the week before).

Leaves of Absence are granted for a specific period of time up to a maximum period of 12 months and the length of all leaves is subject to approval by the PAC. Students wishing to extend the leave beyond what was initially approved by PAC will be required to re-petition. The PAC may modify the period of time for which a requested Leave of Absence will be allowed and may extend a Leave of Absence in the unusual event that a student's desired time of return cannot be accommodated by the curriculum or the time requested is not sufficient to resolve the stated problems. A student must be registered and pay tuition and fee charges for the semester in which they

plan to return, as well as be current with all immunizations, TB screening and flu vaccinations.

- If an M1 or M2 student takes a Leave of Absence after successfully completing (no Failure grades) all of the courses in the previous semester, at the discretion of the PAC, the student may re-enter coursework at the next chronological semester after the one completed (the student would not have to repeat the entire year). The student would also have the option of repeating the entire year if the student feels this would benefit his/her long-term learning objectives. Students choosing to voluntarily repeat the entire year instead of repeating only the semester they missed are advised to talk with the Assistant Dean for Student Financial Planning to discuss the financial aspects of that decision. However, if a student goes on a Leave of Absence, having received a Failure in that year, the student must repeat the entire year. If an M3 or M4 student takes a Leave of Absence after successfully completing (no Failure or Conditional grades) all of the courses taken thus far, he/she may re-enter coursework where appropriate in the clerkship model of M3 and M4. If a student goes on a Leave of Absence without having completed all of the requirements to pass a clerkship, the PAC, in consultation with the clerkship director, will determine the remaining components required to pass the clerkship as well as what grade will appear on the transcript until the final grade is recorded.
- The PAC will review the petition in a reasonable timeframe and may request the student to appear before the Committee to discuss the petition and provide any additional information and insight into the reasons for the request.
- The PAC chair will communicate the PAC's decision on all requested Leaves of Absence to the student via email within 24 hours of the PAC reaching their decision. If approved, this email will state the effective start date of the Leave of Absence. A formal letter with the stipulations for the student's return will follow the chair's email notification to the student.

#### **Mandated Leaves of Absence**

- Leaves of Absence may be mandated by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, if circumstances warrant. Leaves mandated by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs will be considered temporary until the Leave is reviewed and approved by PAC, which will grant formal approval and stipulate the time frame for the Leave.
- The PAC may consider any failures in one year as grounds for dismissal.

#### **Emergency Leaves of Absence**

- Emergency Leaves of Absence generally refer to situations in which students have reported unexpected and significant health, or personal issues that immediately interfere with their ability to participate in the curriculum.
- The Associate Dean for Student Affairs or his/her designee may grant an Emergency Leave of Absence when extraordinary circumstances do not allow the PAC to consider the leave in a timely manner.
- Emergency Leaves of Absence are subject to approval by PAC.
- In the case of an Emergency Leave of Absence the Associate Dean for Student Affairs or his/her designee will complete the Medical Student Status Form (MSSF) to document the leave.

#### **Petition for Return from a Leave of Absence**

- Returning from a leave is not automatic. A student seeking to return from a voluntary, mandated or emergency leave must submit a petition to return to the appropriate PAC with a copy to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. The PAC has the authority to approve or disapprove the petition for return and to establish timing and other stipulations for return. In cases where a student is taking only a short LOA, e.g., 2 or 3 weeks, the PAC may waive the student's duty to petition for a return and instead will approve a specified return date when the LOA is

approved.

- In order to return from a Leave of Absence, a student must fulfill the obligations specified in granting the leave. The PAC may, if the obligations have not been fulfilled, extend the leave of absence (which cannot be appealed by the student) or may recommend dismissal of the student from the COM. The decision to recommend dismissal of the student may be appealed by the student as described elsewhere in this handbook (see **APPEALS**).
- Failure to petition either for a return from a leave or an extension of the existing leave within the time period specified on the approved petition will be considered grounds for dismissal from the College of Medicine. Such dismissal may be appealed by the student under the procedures for an Academic Appeal as set forth in the **ACADEMIC STATUS APPEAL PROCESS**. Such appeal must be requested by the student in writing within (5) five business days of the PAC's notification of recommendation for dismissal being sent to the student. No extension of this time period will be permitted due to a student's failure to review correspondence or other negligent behavior, nor shall such circumstances serve as grounds for an appeal.
- Students granted a leave for medical reasons must support their petition for return with a statement from the evaluating physician, or in the case of mental health, licensed clinical psychologist or psychiatrist confirming their medical fitness for return to school. The provider, as defined above, should not be a family member of the student's (as defined by University policy). The PAC may reserve the right to have a physician of its choosing evaluate the student for fitness to return to school, in addition to the statement from the student's evaluating physician. The evaluation may include a toxicology screen. This fitness for duty assessment will be at the expense of the COM.
- A student on a Leave of Absence who has an unpaid balance owed to the University will not be able to register for classes and will not be allowed to re-enter the curriculum until that balance is paid in full.
- Students returning from a Leave of Absence will be considered a member of the class into which they return and fall under the existing policies, including coming under the jurisdiction of the PAC of the class that they enter.

### **Enrollment, the Student Record, and Student Services during the Leave of Absence**

- Students on a Leave of Absence are generally not permitted to participate in any school activities – either academic or non-academic. Exceptions may include, but are not limited to, a student who has to sit for a USMLE Exam, the UCCOM Clinical Competency Exam (CCX), or a student who may be required to attend an M3 Intersession while on a Leave of Absence. Any exceptions to participate in school activities while on Leave of Absence must be approved by the PAC. The student's UC email account remains active during the Leave of Absence. Students are responsible to check their UC email while on leave and to respond to communications from the PAC. In the event that the student's access is restricted to email during the Leave of Absence, the student will be informed and will be instructed on how to communicate to the college.
- The student is not eligible to receive financial aid during the leave period.
- Each graduate of the College of Medicine must successfully complete all course requirements to receive the Doctor of Medicine degree. This principle is applicable even when a student takes a Leave of Absence. In the case of the curriculum changing while a student is on leave, the College will, at its sole discretion, create an alternative to any courses that have either been restructured or moved to another time in the curriculum such that the student will experience the entire curriculum. The College will determine the specific timeline and schedule for any student who requires such an alternate course.
- A student who has been granted a Leave of Absence and who is enrolled in the UC Student Health Insurance policy may remain covered under the policy according to the terms established by the Student Health Insurance

Office. In such case, the costs for the insurance coverage will be the responsibility of the student. Any statements in this section are subject to the terms and conditions of the Student Health Insurance policy and are not under the control of the College of Medicine.

- Copies of all approved MSSFs are retained in the student's academic file as part of the official student record.

If a student takes a leave for a Program-Related Activity, the student will pay one credit hour of tuition per semester and will be enrolled full-time (see PROGRAM-RELATED ACTIVITY POLICY).