

Graduate Student Leave of Absence Policy

During the course of graduate study, students may find themselves in circumstances that require them to interrupt their graduate work. When these occasions arise, the University allows students to request a leave of absence for either personal or medical reasons. The information provided below is designed to assist students in making a smooth transition away from graduate study and then back again.

Students are required to submit the **Leave of Absence Request form** to the Office of Graduate Student Life. If the student is eligible, the Office of Graduate Student Life will then notify the academic adviser, program director, department chair, graduate associate dean of the appropriate college and the registrar. In order to enhance their successful return to graduate school, students are strongly encouraged to meet with their advisers to discuss their plans and to keep the lines of communication open.

Please note that a “withdrawal” indicates the student intends to *discontinue* graduate study, whereas a “Leave of Absence” indicates that the student intends to return at a specified later date. This policy address leaves after which the student intends to return and resume his or her studies.

Important Information about Requested Leaves of Absence:

- Only students who have successfully completed at least one semester of graduate work and are in good academic standing are eligible for a leave of absence. Students in their first semester who request a leave will need to petition for readmission.
- Funded students who are requesting a leave due to the birth or adoption of a child should apply for a Graduate Student Parental Leave. Students can access information and the form here: <http://www.lehigh.edu/~inprv/pdfs/GraduateStudentParentalLeavePolicy11-17-09withForm.pdf>
- The University will grant a leave of absence for up to one year. If more time away is required, students may request a second year of leave. Should students require more than two years away from the University, they will be required to apply for readmission to the program at the end of their time away. A leave that commences during the semester will count as an entire semester away in terms of total leave time allowed.
- If students take a leave during the semester, they may be required to submit a drop/add form to the Registrar’s Office (http://www.lehigh.edu/~inengrit/gradforms/pdfs/add_drop.pdf). Students may be eligible for a prorated refund. Please consult the Bursar’s Office for details: (<http://www.lehigh.edu/~inburs/refund.html>).
- An approved leave of absence extends the time-to-degree deadline for the length of the approved leave, but only up to the university-mandated maximum of two years.
- While on leave, students are not registered with the University. This has important implications:
 - The student may not submit work, take exams, propose or defend theses or dissertations, or use faculty time.
 - The student will not have access to University services, including the Health and Counseling Centers, the Fitness Center, and Library and Technology Services. This means the student’s Lehigh email account will be suspended and he or she will be unable to use library services. However, the College Dean’s Office may request that the email account and library privileges remain active during the term of the approved leave, up to a maximum of two years.
 - Funded students cease to receive stipend payments from the start of the approved date of the leave. Students receiving funding provided to the university by external grants or contracts should consult with their funding-related adviser/supervisor about applicable rules, procedures and possible limitations. While those who have provided financial support for students who go on leave will do their best to support those students when they return and resume their studies, it is not possible to guarantee such support will be available when the student returns.
 - Student loans may come out of deferment and the student may be required to begin repaying his/her loans. Please consult Financial Aid: <http://www.lehigh.edu/~infao/graduate/index.html>.

- Immigration status may be affected for international students. Please consult the Office of International Students and Scholars: <http://www.lehigh.edu/oiss/>
- Students living in campus housing will need to make other living arrangements, since only registered students in good standing are eligible for such housing. Unfortunately, Residential Services also cannot guarantee space upon the student's return.
- Students enrolled in the University health insurance plan may be able to keep their health insurance during the term of the health insurance contract. In this case, students can contact the University Health Center to obtain a list of primary care doctors in the community to use during their leave of absence. Please consult the student health insurance brochure for eligibility restrictions: <http://www.lehigh.edu/health/insurance.shtml>
- Students requesting a leave for medical or psychological reasons must include documentation from their health provider which indicates a recommendation for the leave and expected time away. The documentation is submitted to --and is only available to-- the Director of Graduate Life. Such documentation remains kept confidential.
- Students who need to be absent within the semester (no more than a few weeks in duration) must consult with their professors about the possibility of making up missed classwork and, if applicable, work related to their funding support. In these circumstances, students do not need to submit an official Leave of Absence request. Students may consult the Director of Graduate Student Life with questions and concerns.

Important Information about Involuntary Leaves of Absence:

- The University may require an involuntary leave of any student who appears to have a serious physical, psychological or emotional disorder which offers reasonable cause to believe he or she may be a danger to self or others, or may disrupt proper activities of the University community and its members, or may be unable to look after his or her affairs adequately. An involuntary leave of absence is included in the maximum leave of two years. Please consult the Student Handbook for more information: <http://www.lehigh.edu/~indost/conduct/handbook/sect7.shtml>.
- Time-to-degree deadlines are not extended for students who are suspended due to Code of Conduct violations.

Returning from Leave and Resuming Graduate Studies

- When ready to resume graduate study, returning students are encouraged to contact their program adviser as early as possible to discuss registration.
- Returning students may only re-enroll for a full semester or summer session. In order to meet this requirement, such students need to be aware of registration deadlines.
- Students who take a leave from graduate study without requesting an official leave of absence will be required to petition the Standing of Graduate Students (SOGS) committee for readmission if they've been away from the University for more than one year. Unapproved leaves count toward the two-year leave maximum.

<http://lehigh.edu/go/gradloa>

If you have any questions about this policy or its application, please contact the Director of Graduate Student Life, Kathleen Hutnik, either by email kaha@lehigh.edu or telephone 610-758-3648.