



TITLE OF POLICY

School of Medicine Offices of Medical Student Education: Policy on Leave of Absence

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This Policy establishes the conditions and student responsibilities associated with a Leave of Absence (LOA) as well as specifications for different types of LOA.

This Policy applies to:

- i. all students ("Students") enrolled in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ("University") School of Medicine (SOM) Medical Doctorate (MD) degree and dual MD degree programs, and
- ii. all staff who are responsible for its implementation.

RESPONSIBLE PARTY AND REVIEW CYCLE

Education Committee will review and approve it in odd-numbered years or as needed.

LCME REFERENCE(S)

N/A

HISTORY OF APPROVALS AND UPDATES

Approved by Education Committee October 2016

Approved by Education Committee March 2019

Approved by Education Committee June 2025

DEFINITION(S)

Leave of Absence (LOA): Occurrence of a Student not being registered for at least six (6) credit hours in a semester. Reasons for LOA include, but are not limited to:

- graduate study;
- personal reasons;
- research;
- administrative reasons; and/or
- medical reasons.

Graduate LOA: LOA granted to Students for pursuit of another academic program (e.g., a graduate degree).

Personal LOA: LOA taken by a Student for personal reasons that are not academic, medical, or disciplinary in nature.

Research LOA: LOA for Students to engage in dedicated research activities.

Administrative LOA: LOA initiated by the MD degree program for administrative reasons such as a Student's academic standing, professionalism concerns, or pending requirements.

Medical LOA: LOA granted to a Student for physical or mental health reasons that temporarily prevent a Student from participating in the MD degree program curriculum.

LOA Letter: Letter documenting the type and time period of a Student's LOA from the MD degree program curriculum.

POLICY

During an LOA a Student is not enrolled and not paying tuition; however, they remain a student on the SOM roster (with one exception during Research LOAs, when Students have the option of enrolling for program credit). Students may take or be placed on, as applicable, the following types of LOA:

I. Graduate LOA

Prior to beginning a Graduate LOA, non-MD-PhD program Students must pass the USMLE Step 1 and all Application Phase courses and requirements, including National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) examinations, barring extraordinary circumstances. It is strongly recommended that Students also complete the USMLE Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK) examination before beginning a Graduate LOA.

Students applying for a Graduate LOA must provide documentation from their graduate program (including length of study) before initiation of the leave and must obtain permission from the SOM Office for Student Affairs via email to SOMRegistrar@med.unc.edu prior to committing to the graduate program. The length of a Graduate LOA varies depending on the graduate program. Students may request to extend this leave by submitting documentation of satisfactory progress from their graduate program to the SOM Registrar via email to SOMRegistrar@med.unc.edu.

Student responsibilities for a Graduate LOA include maintaining full compliance with Offices of Medical Student Education (OMSE) Policy on Health, Safety, and Immunization.

II. Personal LOA

Students applying for a Personal LOA must obtain permission from the Office for Student Affairs. Personal LOA is typically granted for one (1) year and is renewable for a maximum of one (1) additional year with the approval of the Office for Student Affairs. Students are limited to a maximum of two (2) years, whether consecutive or nonconsecutive, of Personal LOA during their course of study at the SOM except in extraordinary circumstances. Written request to extend Personal LOA must be submitted to the SOM Registrar's office via email to SOMRegistrar@med.unc.edu and approved by the Office for Student Affairs.

Students who are unable to complete the MD degree or Dual MD degree curriculum after two (2) years of Personal LOA will be administratively withdrawn from the SOM.

III. Research LOA

Prior to beginning a Research LOA, non-MD/PhD program Students must pass the USMLE Step 1 examination and all Application Phase courses and requirements, including NBME exams, barring extraordinary circumstances. It is strongly recommended that Students also complete the USMLE Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK) examination before beginning a Research LOA.

Students applying for Research LOA must notify the Office for Student Affairs of their intent to begin a Research LOA. Students must have a research preceptor provide a letter with a brief description of the research to be pursued during their Research LOA or complete a research elective form which includes their preceptor's signature.

Student responsibilities for Graduate LOA and Research LOA include maintaining full compliance with the OMSE Policy on Health, Safety, and Immunization.

Research LOA is typically granted for one (1) year and is renewable for one (1) additional year with the approval of the Office for Student Affairs. Students must request such renewals by via email to SOMRegistrar@med.unc.edu. Research LOA is restricted to a total maximum of two (2) years, except in extraordinary circumstances. Written request to extend Research LOA must include a letter of support from a Student's research mentor submitted to the SOM Registrar's office and be approved by the SOM Office for Student Affairs.

IV. Administrative LOA

Students may be placed on Administrative LOA and removed from Administrative LOA according to University and SOM policies. An appeal of an Administrative LOA initiated by the University must be handled according to University policies. Students may appeal an Administrative LOA initiated by the Student Progress Committee (SPC) or the Office for Student Affairs using the procedures outlined in the Policy on Appeal of Student Progress Committee Action. The SPC may place a Student on administrative LOA based on the Policy on Student Progress Committee Functions.

Administrative LOA may be initiated by the Office for Student Affairs for the following reasons:

Students are typically placed on Administrative LOA for one (1) year. Written requests to extend an Administrative LOA must be approved by the Office for Student Affairs. Administrative LOA is restricted to a maximum total of two (2) years except in extraordinary circumstances. After two (2) years, if the Student still has not met requirements, they will be withdrawn from the SOM.

A Student may be placed on an Administrative LOA for up to fourteen (14) days if the Student fails to meet the MD degree program's Technical Standards or standards for professional conduct. The SPC may extend this period as deemed appropriate, and may establish requirements for returning to the curriculum.

Students who are unable to complete the MD degree or Dual MD degree program curriculum after two (2) years of Administrative LOA will be administratively withdrawn from SOM.

- Failure to meet University-published deadlines for payment of tuition and fees;
- Failure to file a request by University-published deadlines for deferring payment of tuition and fees if financial aid is not yet available;
- Failure to meet the University's health and safety requirements, or any other University requirement, by the stated deadline;
- Failure to meet the SOM's health and safety requirements, or any other SOM requirement, by stated deadlines;
- Failure to repay an outstanding debt owed to the SOM (e.g., emergency loan) or failure to pay a debt owed to the University (parking fine, library fine), following a written warning; or
- Failure to comply with the SOM USMLE exam requirements.

V. Medical LOA

The Office for Student Affairs may request that a Student be evaluated by Campus Health Services, Taking Care of our Own, or the Emergency Evaluation and Action Committee for Medical LOA or Administrative LOA if the Student is jeopardizing their own health and safety or the health and safety of

patients or other individuals. Failure to comply with this request will result in the Student being placed on Administrative LOA until the Student undergoes the requested assessment.

Medical LOA is typically granted for one (1) year and is renewable for one (1) additional year with the approval of the Office for Student Affairs. Medical LOA is restricted to a maximum total of two (2) years except in extraordinary circumstances. Written request to extend Medical LOA must be approved by the SOM Office for Student Affairs.

If it is not feasible to meet with Student Affairs personnel to document terms of the LOA, the Office for Student Affairs will provide written documentation of the LOA terms to a Student via email.

Campus Health Services/Counseling and Psychological Services/Taking Care of Our Own must evaluate and approve all requests for return from Medical LOA.

Students who are unable to complete the MD degree or Dual MD degree program curriculum after two (2) years of Medical LOA will be administratively withdrawn from the SOM.

Return from LOA

Upon returning from an LOA:

- Students on any type of LOA who have an incomplete or pending SPC review must be reviewed by the SPC before returning from LOA. The OMSE and SPC will initiate review processes and reach out to Students via email to schedule reviews.
- A Student's North Carolina residency status may be affected by their actions during an LOA. Students may be required to submit documentation to re-confirm their residency status.
- Students who are not registered with the University for one (1) semester or longer will need to be reinstated and reactivate their ONYEN.
- Students are expected to comply with University and SOM policies in effect at the time of their return to the curriculum.
- Students may be unable to re-enroll as they had planned if course schedules have already been finalized or if a class is at full capacity.
- Students are expected to comply with the graduation requirements in effect for their intended year of graduation when they return to the curriculum.

Non-Compliance with LOA Letter

A Student who fails to comply with the provisions stated in the LOA letter will be 1) placed on administrative leave, 2) withdrawn from medical school, or 3) reviewed by the SPC for dismissal, depending on the terms stated in the LOA letter.