MD: Absences & Leaves

Leave of Absence (LOA) Policy

Return of students from involuntary leave of absence requires clearance of both the director of Student Health Services and the associate dean for student affairs.

I. Voluntary LOA: A student may request a leave of absence for academic or personal reasons by submitting a statement in writing to the Office of Student Affairs. Such a statement should include indication of the beginning and anticipated ending dates and a brief statement of the reason (academic or personal). Requests for leaves of absence must be approved by the associate dean for student affairs. Leaves of absence shall be granted for no more than one year, but in unusual cases may be renewed by the Committee on the Academic and Professional Evaluation of Students (CAPES) for additional time after discussion with the associate dean for student affairs. Students requiring a personal leave of absence for medical reasons must submit a supporting letter from the director of Student Health Services. A written statement of medical clearance will be required before the student may return from such a leave.

II. Involuntary LOA: If there is a reasonable basis for believing that the continued presence of the student on campus or in clinical rotations poses a substantial threat to the student, to patients, or to the rights of others to engage in their normal university functions and activities, the following procedures apply:

A. The chancellor or his designate may impose an involuntary leave of absence when there is evidence that a student has committed an offense under these rules or the University’s Judicial Code, and when there is evidence that the continued presence of the student on the university campus or as a participant in a clinical rotation poses a substantial threat to themselves, to patients, or to the rights of others to continue their normal university function and activities.

B. Imposition of the involuntary leave of absence may result in denial of access to the campus, prohibition of class attendance and/or prohibition of participation in clinical rotations.

C. If an involuntary leave of absence is imposed, the suspending authority shall prepare a written notice of the imposition and shall have the notice mailed certified or personally presented to the student. The written notice shall include a brief statement of the reasons therefore and a brief statement of the procedures provided for resolving cases of involuntary leave of absence under these rules.

D. The student shall be given an opportunity to appear personally before the suspending authority within five (5) business days from the date of service of the notice of imposition of the involuntary leave of absence. If the student asks to appear personally before the suspending authority, only the following issues shall be considered:

1. Whether the suspending authority’s information concerning the student’s conduct is reliable; and

2. Whether under all the circumstances, there is a reasonable basis for believing that the continued presence of the student on campus or in clinical rotations poses a substantial threat to the student, to patients, or to the rights of others to engage in their normal university functions and activities.

E. Within one week of the date of imposition of the involuntary leave of absence, the suspending authority shall either file a statement of charges against the student with the University Judicial Board, and shall have the statement or charges served, by mail or personal service, upon the student and the dean of the school or college or director of the program in which the student is enrolled, or initiate proceedings under these rules to convene a Disciplinary Committee.

F. A temporary suspension shall end

1. when rescinded by the suspending authority, or

2. upon the failure of the suspending authority to promptly file a statement of charges with the University Judicial Board or a Disciplinary Committee, or

3. when the case is heard and decided by the University Judicial Board or the Disciplinary Committee.

Return of students from involuntary leave of absence requires clearance of both the director of Student Health Services and the associate dean for student affairs.

III. LOA Impact on Financial Aid: Students receiving financial aid should be advised that at the end of sixty (60) days or more leave of absence, the grace period for loan repayment during a leave of absence may be exhausted. In such cases there will be an obligation for the student to start payments. According to the federal rules under which loans are made, the use of a grace period during a leave of absence will generally mean that the schedule for loan repayment may be changed. Students who are receiving financial assistance should consult with the Financial Aid Office to determine the implications of a leave of absence for their financial aid.

IV. LOA Impact on Tuition: A student returning from a leave of absence of one year duration or less will maintain the same tuition rate. Students returning after more than one year leave of absence will assume the tuition rate of the class they are rejoining. Appeals of this policy should be submitted in writing to the registrar. Please refer to the Financial Information (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/medicine/
Absence Policy for MD Students on Clinical Clerkships

The profession of medicine requires the utmost commitment of time and energy to patient care and research activities. While the development of this commitment begins in the preclinical years, it is further practiced and developed during the clinical clerkship year.

The clinical clerkship year at Washington University School of Medicine (WUSM) comprises 48 weeks of required core clinical experiences. All students on the clinical clerkships have a scheduled two-week winter recess break, a three-day spring break and a two-week break between the end of the third-year clinical clerkships and the start of fourth-year elective rotations (plus free time prior to graduation for MSTP students). During every clinical clerkship, each student is expected to participate fully in all activities of the clerkship up until the designated end time of the clerkship or the start time of a holiday break. This regularly requires participation beyond formal weekday hours to include evening and nighttime call and clinical responsibilities on weekends.

If a student is ill or has a personal emergency, they should notify the clerkship course director’s office and the resident supervising their clinical team the morning of the absence. If the absence extends beyond two consecutive days, the student should also notify the Office of Student Affairs.

It is recognized that a student may, on a very occasional basis, desire to be excused from clinical activities for professional or significant personal events. For the third year, the Clinical Curriculum Committee agreed upon the following guidelines regarding the maximum number of days of excused absences (including illness) from clerkships: Please refer to the chart below (p. 3) (Allowable Absences for Third- and Fourth-Year Students) for specifics. Students must recognize that clerkship teaching, learning and evaluation are dependent on the student's presence and participation in every aspect of the clerkship. While students will not be graded down only because of an excused absence, time spent away from the clerkship may decrease learning and impede effective evaluation; students are encouraged to make up missed work on rotations in which this can result in meaningful learning and should discuss this option with the clerkship director. It is the responsibility of the student to directly contact the clinical clerkship course director in writing (by letter or email) to obtain permission for any planned absences well in advance.

At the discretion of the course director, any student who misses portions of the clinical clerkship experiences due to planned and/or unplanned absences that exceed the maximum time may be required to utilize winter recess, spring break or free time at the end of the third-year clinical clerkships to complete the 48 weeks of mandatory clinical clerkships.

Absence Policy for MSTP Students on Clinical Clerkships

MSTP students are allowed to miss up to three days of any four-week clerkship, five days of any six-week clerkship (not to exceed two days per two-week rotation) and up to nine days of any 12-week clerkship for any reason including interviews. This is a substantially more flexible policy than we have toward the MD students, in which we limit the number of days off to three in a four-week or six-week period, and five in a 12-week period.

We recognize that for some MSTP students entering competitive specialties with limited interview dates it may be necessary for them to plan far enough ahead in their training to schedule a month for either a very light elective or a free month to allow appropriate flexibility for interviews. The committee also agreed that the MSTP students should be encouraged to:

1. Talk with Dr. Kathryn Diemer early for assistance in residency planning;
2. Seriously consider coming out of lab a month earlier to allow flexibility for interviewing; and
3. Delay graduation by one year to increase flexibility.

When absences are necessary on a clerkship, advanced discussion with the clerkship director will better allow placement on a team to allow maximum educational value. We believe this policy strikes an appropriate balance between increased flexibility for the MSTP students and assuring a meaningful educational experience on the core clerkships.

Absence Policy for MD Students in the Fourth Year

The profession of medicine requires the utmost commitment of time and energy to patient care and research activities. While the development of this commitment begins in the preclinical years, it is further practiced and developed during the clinical years.

The fourth year at Washington University School of Medicine encompasses a 44-week time block and requires students take a minimum of 36 weeks of credit (32 weeks of electives plus the required four-week Capstone experience). All students have a scheduled two-week winter recess and a three-day spring break during the academic year. During each elective, each student is expected to participate fully in all activities of the elective up until the designated end time of the elective or the start time of a holiday break. This could require participation
beyond formal weekday hours to include evening and nighttime call and clinical responsibilities on weekends.

If a student is ill or has a personal emergency, they should notify the elective course director’s office and the resident supervising their clinical team the morning of the absence. If the absence extends beyond two consecutive days, the student should also notify the Office of Student Affairs.

It is recognized that a student may, on a very occasional basis, desire to be excused from clinical activities for professional absences or significant personal events. For the fourth year, the Clinical Curriculum Committee agreed upon the following guidelines regarding the maximum number of days of excused absences (including illness) from electives.

The elective year generally follows the clinical clerkship absence policy. During interview season, students will be allowed to miss up to five days in a four-week rotation; any additional days off would require approval by the associate dean for medical student education and the elective course director. Please refer to the chart below for specifics. Students must recognize that elective teaching, learning and evaluation are dependent on the student's presence and participation in every aspect of the elective. While students will not be graded down because of an excused absence alone, time spent away from the elective may decrease learning and impede effective evaluation. Because of these meaningful learning experiences, students are encouraged to make up missed work on rotations and should discuss this option with the course director. It is the responsibility of the student to directly contact the course director in writing (by letter or email) to obtain permission for any planned absences well in advance of the planned absence.

At the discretion of the course director, any student who misses portions of the elective experience due to planned and/or unplanned absences that exceed the maximum time may be required to utilize winter recess, spring break or free time to complete the elective.

The required fourth-year Capstone course has a separate absence policy. Please refer to the course syllabus for details.

**Absence Policy: Clinical Rotations**

**Allowable Absences for Third- and Fourth-Year Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-week elective</th>
<th>4-week elective</th>
<th>4-week clerkship</th>
<th>6-week clerkship</th>
<th>12-week clerkship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>3 days (1 day max per 2-week rotation)</td>
<td>5 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Maximum Allowable Absences for Special Cases: MSTP Students and Fourth-Year Interviewing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-week elective</th>
<th>4-week elective</th>
<th>4-week clerkship</th>
<th>6-week clerkship</th>
<th>12-week clerkship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A*</td>
<td>5 days</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>5 days (2 days max per 2-week rotation)</td>
<td>9 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Students not advised to enroll during interview season

**Policy on Student Status and Benefits During Research Years or Leave of Absence**

**MD/PhD**

Student status is maintained while in the research phase of the MD/PhD programs. During research years, students are registered in either the graduate school or under the program granting the master's degree. Both student health and disability coverage are provided by the Division of Biology and Biomedical Sciences.

**Master's/MD**

Student status is maintained while in the research phase of the MSCI and MPHS programs. Both student health and disability coverage are provided.

**Five-Year MD Program**

**Research Year at WUSM**

Student status is maintained throughout the approved research year. In exceptional circumstances, a second research year may be permitted. The student may receive a stipend, but may not be considered an employee of the university. Students are registered in the School of Medicine. Both disability and student health coverage are required and are payable by the student. Outside funding often covers such fees.

**Approved Research Year Away**

Student status is maintained throughout the approved research year. Students are registered in the School of Medicine. Both disability and student health coverage are optional with proof of like coverage. The cost of either elected coverage is payable by the student. Outside funding often allows these costs.

**Leave of Absence**

**Leave of Absence Year at WUSM**

Student status is not maintained during the leave of absence though benefits of student health coverage and disability insurance are optional throughout an approved leave. Costs are payable by the MD program students. MD/PhD students
may request support for these costs from the Division of Biology and Biomedical Sciences if funds are available. The Office of Financial Aid should be consulted for information regarding loan repayment and grace periods when on a leave of absence.

**Leave of Absence Year Away**

Student status is not maintained during the leave of absence away from Washington University School of Medicine. Both disability and student health coverage are optional with proof of like coverage. The cost of either elected coverage is payable by the student.

**Preclinical Course Attendance Guidelines**

**Attendance Guidelines for All Preclinical Courses**

**Team Activities**

Students are assigned to teams prior to the beginning of the course session and are accountable to these teams as they work together on a task. Team Activities allow for the development of interpersonal and communication skills as well as of the ability to work collaboratively and effectively in teams. These are essential competencies for all professionals and, consequently, attendance at Team Activities is required.

**Patient Presentations**

Patient Presentations are live presentations by patients to learners during which patients recount their personal experiences. Attendance at Patient Presentations is required out of respect for patients and their time commitments.

**Other Activities**

Attendance at events of additional activity types may be required for individual courses.

**Attendance Expectations for All Preclinical Courses**

The expectation is that all students will be present for all sessions with required attendance. However, the Preclinical Curriculum Committee acknowledges that students may need to be excused from some of these sessions due to unavoidable illness, professional obligations, or significant personal events/emergencies (hereinafter referred to as unavoidable/emergency absences). Thus, the Preclinical Curriculum Committee has agreed on the following guidelines regarding the maximum number of excused absences (including for illness) from required sessions:

**Maximum Number of Excused Absences Without Required Remediation**

A student may miss no more than 10% of sessions (including for illness) with required attendance within an academic year. Individual courses will adhere to this 10% allowance for unavoidable/emergency absences unless they have fewer than 10 sessions requiring attendance; in these cases, the course director will set the number of allowable absences at a level higher than 10% but not exceeding 25% of required attendance sessions.

**Approval of Absences**

Absences do not need to be approved, but the expectation is that they will be used for unavoidable/emergency situations. It is expected that students will not use all of the allowed unavoidable/emergency absences.

**Reporting of Absences**

Students who are unable to attend a session are expected to contact the course director prior to the session that they will miss (or as soon as possible after the session if missing due to sudden illness or emergency). For planned absences, students should notify course directors well in advance of the absence. In addition, students unable to attend a Team Activity should notify their team members. Failure to attend a required learning activity without providing notification is considered an unprofessional behavior.

**Completion of Associated Assignments**

All required assignments associated with a missed session must be completed. Course directors may require additional makeup work for missed sessions.

**Consequences for Exceeding the Maximum Number of Absences Within a Course**

Absences beyond the allowed percentage within each course may result in one or both of the following:

1. A grade of Incomplete for the course will be given until remediation is completed. The remediation will be determined by the course director.
2. A Professionalism Concern Form will be filed.

**Addressing Concerning Patterns of Absences**

Attendance data will be tracked longitudinally for all preclinical courses, and this data will be monitored by the associate dean for student affairs in collaboration with the Office of Medical Student Education. An absence will be recorded even when makeup work for a missed session is completed. For students for which a concerning pattern of absences is identified, the associate dean for student affairs will be required to meet with the associate dean for student affairs. Students for which a professionalism concern is identified will be referred to the associate dean for medical student education, and this may also result in referral to the Committee on the Academic and Professional Evaluation of Students (CAPES) (http://bulletin.wustl.edu/medicine/policies/md-assessment).