

# PhD Program Policies & Guidelines

The following policies apply to the PhD programs offered by Washington University School of Medicine:

## Confidentiality & Records Retention Policy (Leaves of Absence)

The university will strive to protect, to the greatest extent possible, the confidentiality of students involved in matters of voluntary or involuntary leave. Because the university has an obligation to preserve the security of its community, the university cannot guarantee confidentiality where it would conflict with the university's obligation to investigate meaningfully matters that may threaten a student's health or safety or the safety and security of the university community. When some disclosure of the university's information or sources is necessary, that disclosure will be limited to the extent possible. Medical records of a student will be protected in accordance with the Washington University School of Medicine Student Health Services Notice of Privacy Practices. The university will, to the extent permitted by law, keep confidential all records of committee reviews. The records maintained by the Case Conference Committee will be available only to the administrator and other university officials in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). All records will be destroyed after a period of 10 years from the date of the final decision on involuntary leave or the student's decision to take voluntary leave or 10 years from the date of graduation or the last semester of enrollment.

More general university policies on records retention can be found on the Records Management Policy page of the Washington University Financial Services website (<https://financialservices.wustl.edu/wfin-topic/other/records-management-retention/>).

## Course Level Policy

Undergraduate courses (399 and below), School of Continuing & Professional Studies courses, and courses taken for pass/fail or audit grade options do not count in cumulative units toward any graduate degree. Graduate courses (400 and above) taken in other graduate divisions of the university will count in cumulative units unless specified otherwise by the student's home department or program.

## Dissenting Vote(s) at a Dissertation

Faculty members of the Dissertation Examination Committee will normally examine the student candidate and vote to approve the dissertation. In the vast majority of cases, these votes are unanimously for approval. In the rare case that there are faculty concerns that cannot be resolved through subsequent revisions and therefore result in dissenting (negative) vote(s), the Committee Chair will refer the case to the Graduate Program Council (GPC) for resolution.

In the case of a single dissenting vote, the Committee Chair and the dissenting voter will be asked to explain the reasons for the dissent in a letter to the GPC. After consulting with these and other members of the committee, the GPC may then decide to accept the majority opinion and approve the dissertation, or they may seek the opinion of an additional reader. After considering this additional evidence, the GPC may approve or decline to approve the dissertation.

In the case of two or more dissenting votes, the Committee Chair and the dissenting voters will again be asked to explain the reasons for the dissent. The GPC may then decide to decline to approve the dissertation or to ask the department or graduate program to name a Resolution Committee. This committee will consist of three faculty members who will reexamine the dissertation and the candidate; members must be authorized to supervise PhD students, have appropriate expertise in the proposed field of study at Washington University or elsewhere, and have not served on the candidate's original committee. A unanimous positive recommendation from this committee will be required in order for the GPC to approve the dissertation. The failure of a department or graduate program to identify three faculty members to serve on this Resolution Committee will be tantamount to a rejection of the dissertation.

## English Proficiency

International students considering application to Washington University School of Medicine for graduate study should have a general familiarity with academic practices and university customs in the United States. All international students are required to present evidence of their ability to support themselves financially during graduate study. International students whose native language is not English must submit score reports from the TOEFL offered by ETS (<https://www.ets.org/>) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS (<https://www.ielts.org/en-us/>)) Academic. The test should be taken in time for results to reach Washington University directly from ETS before the application deadline. Each PhD program within the School of Medicine must follow the guidelines for minimum score requirements established by the Office for International Students and Scholars (<https://students.wustl.edu/international-students-scholars/>). Interested applicants should refer to each specific program's handbook for the minimum scores required for consideration of admission.

To be eligible for a TOEFL waiver, the applicant must have completed at least three years of study toward their degree from a regionally accredited university located in an English-speaking country. Please also note that the entire length of study must have been completed at the institution.

## Enrollment Extension

Students may be permitted to register for one additional year beyond their program length limit. When recommended by their department and approved by the School of Medicine Graduate Program Council, these students will be registered in a zero-unit, 9000-level course that confers full-time enrollment status. Students registered for that zero-unit course may or may not receive stipend support, but they are eligible to receive other benefits available to full-time PhD students, including health insurance and wellness fee subsidies.

Students may be registered for this extension for a maximum of two semesters. There will be no exceptions to this limit. Students who do not complete their programs within this time limit must withdraw from the program.

## Grading Option Policy

Credit-conferring grades for students in the School of Medicine are as follows: A, outstanding; B, good; C, conditional (an A, B or C grade may be modified by a plus or minus); S, satisfactory; and U, unsatisfactory (used almost exclusively for credit units earned by doing research). Other grades are F, failing; N, not submitted yet; X, final examination missed; and I, incomplete. The mark of I becomes a permanent part of the student's record after the lapse of one calendar year unless the program in which the mark was assigned requests an extension of time.

The School of Medicine uses a 4-point scale for calculating grade-point averages, with A = 4, B = 3, and C = 2. A plus adds 0.3 to the value of a grade, whereas a minus subtracts 0.3 from the value of the grade.

Zero-unit program-specific 9000-level courses will have only the satisfactory/unsatisfactory grade option.

## Graduate Student Vacation and Time Off Policy

Students working toward School of Medicine graduate degrees are entitled to all official University holidays (<https://hr.wustl.edu/items/holidays/>). To the extent that responsibilities essential to the maintenance of research, such as managing the care of laboratory animals, must be done on university holidays, graduate students may be required to share in this responsibility.

Faculty mentors should approve other planned absences, and unplanned absences should be reported to them. "Faculty mentors" during the graduate years are program directors and research rotation or dissertation advisors, as appropriate.

The total amount of excused absence should be consistent with that of academic employees in the same area. (Assistantship or stipend payments are not subject to reduction as they represent agreed-upon financial aid.) Decisions regarding the granting of time off will not be based upon the existence of or source(s) of funding.

The program director should address disagreements between faculty mentors and students over absences. If the director cannot resolve the dispute, the Vice Chancellor for Medical Education or their designee will serve as the final arbiter.

## Health Fees

The Student Health Service is a mandatory program of services available to full-time students enrolled in the medical or allied professional schools of Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine. Students do not have the option to decline the Student Health Plan. The service is supported solely by the fees paid by full-time students of the School of Medicine. The health care coverage is in accordance with the minimum essential coverage mandate under the Affordable Care Act (<https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/minimum-essential-coverage/>). The School of Medicine subsidizes costs for all full-time students, including disability insurance. All current medical and allied professional programs as well as all new incoming students receive long-term disability insurance. Details can be found on the Student Health Services website (<https://studenthealth.med.wustl.edu/>).

## In Absentia Registration

During a student's period of regular registration, they may have a need or opportunity to study away from Washington University. Requests for registration in absentia will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the student's designated faculty graduate program director. If approved, the student will be registered in a program-specific 9000-level course indicating full-time graduate study in absentia. Students may be allowed to register for that program-specific 9000-level course for up to four consecutive or nonconsecutive fall/spring semesters. Semesters in which a student is registered in absentia are counted as part of the student's program length.

## Leaves of Absence

A student may request and be approved for a leave of absence during their regular registration period if they are not registered in absentia. Leaves of absence must be endorsed by the degree program and approved by the School of Medicine for up to one year. Extensions must be reapproved.

Approved leaves of absence are not counted as part of a student's program length and will not be approved for semesters beyond the program length, including enrollment extension. While on a leave of absence, the student is not registered and has no student status at Washington University. Students who begin a leave during any semester will be dropped from all course registration for that semester and will receive no course credit for work completed during that semester prior to the leave.

Leaves of absence may be personal or medical. In the case of a medical leave, the student must present authorization from Student Health Services at the beginning and again at the end of the leave. At the end of any leave of absence, a student is reinstated into the School of Medicine under the conditions prevailing at the time the leave was granted. Being on leave suspends student status and financial support from the university. Taking a leave may therefore adversely affect loan deferment, visa status, the right to rent university-owned housing, and so on. Most visa types would prevent international students from remaining in the United States while taking a leave of absence; such students should consult the Office for International Students and Scholars (<http://oiss.wustl.edu>) as well as their faculty advisor, their program's director of graduate studies, and perhaps a dean.

Prior to taking a leave of absence, students should consider their need for health insurance coverage. The continuation of access to Student Health Services depends on such factors as the kind of leave (medical or personal) and the student's location during the leave. Students should consult their program leads, Student Health Services, and the School of Medicine registrar and financial aid office before making a decision regarding leave whenever possible.

## Part-Time Employment of Full-Time PhD Graduate Students

If a full-time supported PhD graduate student in the School of Medicine accepts part-time employment within Washington University or outside of the university, the following guidelines must be followed. The Internal Revenue Service, the Washington University Human Resources Office, and US Citizenship and Immigration Services all make important distinctions between students and employees. These guidelines are designed to assist graduate students in retaining their status as students.

*Fall & Spring Semesters:* During a semester in which a School of Medicine PhD graduate student receives, as a student, any form of full-time fellowship or assistantship, that student may, as an employee, obtain employment up to a maximum of 220 total hours during the fall semester (Aug. 1-Dec. 31) and 220 total hours during the spring semester (Jan. 1-May 31) (i.e., 10 hours per week for 22 weeks). International students on F-1 and J-1 visa status must further limit their employment to a maximum of 6 hours during any individual week.

*Summers:* Restrictions on summer employment depend on whether the student retains their status as a Washington University student during this time. Students on 12-month awards are limited to 80 total hours of employment for the period from June 1-July 31 (equivalent to 10 hours per week for 8 weeks).

The number of additional hours refers to the time engaged in discretionary employment. It does not include time spent as a research assistant (RA) during the fall or spring semesters. A short list of some types of work to which these limitations do apply include the following: instructor in the School of Continuing & Professional Studies; part-time lecturer; employment by university libraries, museums, computer centers or the Alumni and Development Office; and tutoring, paid research assistance to a faculty member outside of a full-semester RA award, summer RA awards to students on 10-month support, or paid hourly work assisting at department events. The maximum number of

hours may be further restricted (but may not be expanded) by external granting agencies, by department policies, or by individual dissertation advisors and dissertation committees. International students on F-1 and J-1 visas may not teach in the School of Continuing & Professional Studies during the fall or spring semesters or during summers if they are on 12-month support.

## Probation and Dismissal for Academic Reasons

This policy describes guidelines and procedures for probation and dismissal because of poor academic performance (Academic Dismissal) for students enrolled in PhD programs in the School of Medicine.

Academic Dismissal is distinct from withdrawal (initiated by the student), deactivation of a student's record by a failure to register, and dismissal or other sanctions associated with the Academic and Professional Integrity Policy for PhD Students or the University Student Conduct Code. Dismissals are recommended by the degree program and are not final until approved by the Dean of the School of Medicine or their designee.

Students may be dismissed immediately for extreme academic underperformance. Examples of extreme underperformance might be two grades of C or below in one semester or three unfinished courses (I, X or N) in one semester. Students who encounter personal situations that contribute to academic underperformance during a semester should be informed of the option to request a leave of absence rather than continuing enrollment with poor performance. The ability to complete mentored teaching responsibilities is not a sufficient basis for remaining enrolled.

Most academic difficulties are not of the severity associated with immediate dismissal. The School of Medicine's explicit criteria for maintaining minimal standards for satisfactory academic progress are as follows: (1) a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 or greater; (2) no more than 9 units of incomplete (I), final examination missed (X) and/or not yet submitted (N) on the transcript at any one time; and (3) submission of a dissertation proposal. A completed Title, Scope, and Procedure Form, signed by the Research Advisory Committee members and by the Program Chair, must be submitted to the School of Medicine Registrar or the appropriate record custodian at least 6 months before the degree is expected to be conferred or before beginning the ninth semester (fifth year) of continuous enrollment, whichever is earlier. A program may add requirements for good standing (e.g., the completion of comprehensive or qualifying examinations by a certain time) but may not relax the School of Medicine or university-wide requirements. Faculty are also responsible for evaluating the ability of the student to identify and undertake an original scholarly project at the level of excellence expected for a Washington University PhD as well as whether the student is making timely progress toward completion of the degree. The program may place a high value on the quality of performance in mentored teaching and or other professional activities. The judgment of the faculty on these issues can lead to Academic Dismissal for students who meet other criteria for good academic standing. Programs are expected to maintain written guidelines that

help students understand the major categories of expectations for satisfactory progress. Such guidelines should be provided to students at the beginning of their academic program and reviewed with students on a regular basis.

## Guidelines for Academic Probation and Dismissal

Except for circumstances justifying immediate dismissal, a student cannot be dismissed on the basis of academic performance without the opportunity to return to good standing during an identified period of probation. The purposes of probation are as follows: (1) to explicitly warn the student of their status; (2) to provide the student with clear guidelines regarding the performance that will be necessary to return to good standing; and (3) to provide the student with reasonable time to meet these expectations. To meet these objectives, probation normally should be designated for a minimum of 3 months. When the probation criteria involve course work, then the probation period would normally correspond to a semester's duration. A student on probation must receive a detailed letter from the director of their program stating the reasons for the probation and explicitly identifying the steps necessary for the student to return to good standing by the end of the probation period. A copy of this letter should be sent to the registrar and to the chair of the School of Medicine Graduate Program Council. If a student does not meet all criteria for good academic standing but the department does not wish to place the student on probation, an appeal for this exception can be made to the chair of the School of Medicine Graduate Program Council.

At the end of a first probation, one of three things will occur: (1) the student will be returned to good standing; (2) the student will be placed on a second consecutive probation, which generally will be for a full semester; or (3) the student will be dismissed from the program. A second consecutive probation must be accompanied by a new letter identifying the steps required to return to good standing. While the purpose of the probationary period is to provide the student with time to improve, the decision of the program at the end of a probationary period could involve immediate notification of dismissal.

At the end of a second continuous probation, the student will be either returned to good standing or dismissed. A third probation will be allowed only if it is not continuous. A fourth probation will not be allowed. A student whose performance would result in a fourth probation will be dismissed immediately. A leave of absence cannot be used by a student to delay or nullify the consequences of a third consecutive or fourth probation.

Each program must have a standard procedure (e.g., a Graduate Advisory Committee or similar) to manage decisions regarding placement on probation, removal from probation, recommendations for dismissal after a probationary period, and recommendations for immediate dismissal due to extreme underperformance. The procedure for managing such decisions must be applied to all students in the program and cannot be managed solely by an individual faculty member, including the student's research mentor, although input provided by the research mentor may play a key role in the process.

Stipend support should continue during a probationary period unless the student is failing to meet the basic expectations of their position (e.g., repeatedly misses classes, repeatedly absent from the lab and fails to carry out lab assignments). If a program or school decides to suspend stipend support under these circumstances, the student must be given a minimum of 2 weeks' notice prior to the withholding of such support. If the student's performance improves and they begin meeting the basic expectations of the program, stipend support should resume at that time. During all probationary semesters, tuition remission will remain as offered at initial enrollment.

## Notification Procedures for Academic Probation

1. The explanation of academic performance issues leading to probation should be specific (e.g., low grade-point average, failed exam) and contain a clear statement of what must be done within a specified period of time for the student to return to good standing. This includes probation associated with faculty judgments of research potential, timely progress toward the degree, teaching performance or professional activities. The expectations will be consistent with those held for all students in the program. They must be communicated in writing, accompanied by the opportunity to meet with the program director or designated departmental faculty representatives for a clarifying discussion, and copied to the chair of the Graduate Program Council and the registrar.
2. If the student does satisfactorily meet the requirements of the probation, a written notice of reinstatement, including the date that the student has returned to good standing, will be provided to the student. Students may be reinstated before the end of the probation period if they have met the requirements for reinstatement.
3. Copies of any letter or e-mail to the student or summary notes of discussions with the student regarding the student's placement on probation should be placed in the student's file in the School of Medicine with the registrar, which the student has the right to review.

## Notification Procedures for Academic Dismissal

1. If the student does not meet the requirements of the probation by the specified time and the program recommends dismissal, the program will send a request for dismissal and a draft of the dismissal letter to the Graduate Program Council and the registrar, along with copies of all previous communications and/or warnings. The draft dismissal letter will include the grounds for dismissal, the effective date of dismissal, and advice to the student that voluntary withdrawal from the program is an option. All academic dismissals require approval by the Dean of the School of Medicine or their designee.

2. If the student is an international student on a visa, the program should consult with the Office of International Students and Scholars prior to drafting the dismissal letter. It is often advisable for an international student to withdraw ahead of a dismissal to avoid an adverse impact on future entry into the United States.

## Appeal Procedures

In cases of probation or dismissal, a student may appeal within 14 calendar days to the School of Medicine Graduate Program Council.

### Probation

Appeals of probation end with the Graduate Program Council (i.e., placement on probation cannot be appealed to the Dean of the School of Medicine). For cases in which there is a conflict of interest with a member of the Graduate Program Council, the chair of the Council can identify an appropriate designee to serve on the Council to consider the appeal. If the chair has a conflict of interest, the Dean of the School of Medicine or their designee may identify appropriate persons to serve on the Council and to serve as chair of the Council for purposes of addressing the appeal.

### Dismissal

For academic dismissal decisions, a graduate student in the School of Medicine may submit a final appeal of the dismissal to the Dean of the School of Medicine or their designee. Appeal requests to the Dean must be submitted within 14 calendar days of formal notification of dismissal from the Graduate Program Council. Responses to appeals generally occur within the next 14 calendar days after the appeal is requested. Stipend support is discontinued at the time the student is notified of dismissal. The student is not eligible to receive stipend support during an appeal of dismissal; however, if the appeal is upheld, the student is eligible for stipend support covering the period of the dismissal appeal process. Students who have chosen to withdraw from their program (as opposed to taking an authorized leave) cannot appeal or seek reconsideration of this decision.

### Refunds

A student who withdraws or takes a leave of absence from the school will receive a pro rata refund of tuition, of other payments made for health and disability insurance, and of other fees that they themselves have paid. For situations in which students elect to continue to receive student health benefits, they will not receive a refund for payments made for health and disability insurance for the term in which they are enrolled. The refund will be based on the ratio of the number of weeks enrolled (from the first day of classes to the termination date) to the total number of class weeks in the term for which tuition and fees were paid. There is no point in the semester at which a student would have \$0 refunded in tuition. It is understood that the date on which a student formally notifies the Office of the Registrar in writing of the decision to withdraw or to take a leave of absence from the School of Medicine shall be regarded as the termination date, with no retroactive clause to be accepted. A prospective date will be accepted, however. If tuition and fees were paid entirely or in part by financial aid from the school, the refund will be applied first to the total repayment of the accounts

from which financial aid was drawn, with any remaining refund balance given to the student. Financial aid received in excess of the costs of tuition and fees must be refunded by the student to the school on the same pro rata basis as calculated for the tuition refund outlined above, per federal guidelines regarding the return of Title IV funds. Any questions about these policies may be directed to either the Office of the Registrar (<https://registrar.med.wustl.edu/>) or the Office of Student Financial Planning (<https://finaid.med.wustl.edu/>).

## Reinstatement

A student who has left the School of Medicine for a period of time or who has neglected to register for more than two semesters must apply for reinstatement. The reinstatement form must be endorsed by the student's department or program, signed by the department chair, and submitted four weeks prior to the start of the term. A reinstatement fee will be charged based on the length of time the student was absent.

A reinstatement from an approved medical leave of absence requires clearance from Student Health Services before it can be processed.

## Satisfactory Academic Progress

Satisfactory academic progress for students in PhD programs is monitored by the School of Medicine as well as by the degree program. Failure to maintain satisfactory academic progress may result in a student's immediate dismissal or in their placement on academic probation for the ensuing year. Most financial awards — and all federally funded awards — are contingent on the maintenance of satisfactory academic progress. Moreover, satisfactory academic progress is a prerequisite for service on any committee authorized by the School of Medicine or the Graduate Council. The following are minimal standards of satisfactory academic progress for PhD students; degree programs may set stricter standards but must not relax these.

1. Students are expected to proceed at a pace appropriate to enable them to finish within the time limits set forth by the program. Students are expected to have completed all PhD requirements except for the dissertation by no later than the end of the fourth year of full-time graduate study.
2. Students are expected to maintain a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Note that plus and minus marks alter the numerical value of a letter grade.
3. Students are expected not to carry at one time any more than 9 credit units for which the grades of I (incomplete), X (final examination missed), or N (not yet submitted) are recorded. The School of Medicine may deny a student with more than 9 unfinished credits permission to register.
4. After four years of full-time graduate study, doctoral students who cannot identify three faculty members who are willing to serve on their Research Advisory Committee are not considered to be making satisfactory academic progress. The Title, Scope and Procedure form (PDF) (<http://bulletin.wustl.edu/pdf/SOM-Title-Scope-Procedure-PhD-Form.pdf>) must be filed before the fifth year in order to identify the membership of the student's Research Advisory Committee.

## Student Grievance

Students with complaints regarding academic matters should initially seek resolution from their faculty advisor, then from their program director, and finally from the director of their degree program or department/program head, if applicable. The final court of appeal for all students in School of Medicine areas of study (<http://bulletin.wustl.edu/medicine/areas-of-study/>) is the Senior Associate Dean for Education. The Senior Associate Dean may follow up with the complainant, with faculty in the student's degree program, or with other stakeholders on campus or within the university to review and investigate the grievance and work toward a resolution. Faculty involved in the process of receiving or reviewing a complaint should treat the information and relevant conversations as highly confidential.

Students with complaints regarding nonacademic matters (including but not limited to unprofessional behavior, a hostile learning environment, and abusive or offensive language and/or behavior) — whether by faculty, staff, or fellow students — should refer to the Student Mistreatment Reporting and Monitoring Policy (<http://bulletin.wustl.edu/medicine/policies/student-mistreatment/>). That policy contains mechanisms and protocols for students to report mistreatment against them or for other individuals to report student mistreatment they have observed.

All complaints regarding academic and professional integrity should be first addressed with the graduate program director or the respective program head(s). The program, with the counsel of the Senior Associate Dean for Education, can submit a report of academic and professional integrity through the appropriate mechanism (i.e., the Vice Provost for Graduate Education Academic and Professional Integrity Officer; see the Academic and Professional Integrity Policy for PhD Students (PDF) ([http://bulletin.wustl.edu/pdf/Academic and Professional Integrity Policy for PhD Students\\_2022.pdf](http://bulletin.wustl.edu/pdf/Academic%20and%20Professional%20Integrity%20Policy%20for%20PhD%20Students_2022.pdf)) for more information). It is recommended that all grievances be reviewed and monitored by the Senior Associate Dean for Education to ensure the consistency of the process.

## Transfer Credit

Credit for previous courses will be transferred to a student's Washington University record only to fulfill departmental course/credit requirements. Departments may request transfer credit from official transcripts after a student's admission to a PhD program.

## Tuition Remission

The School of Medicine will approve tuition remission for up to 72 course units. The 72-unit calculation includes courses transferred from other graduate programs.

Students pursuing a certificate or an unrelated master's degree in addition to their PhD must consult the departments and advisors about credit sharing between the programs. Tuition remission for units in excess of 72 will not be provided by the School of Medicine.

To be eligible for tuition remission, courses must be offered at the graduate level, taken for a grade, and approved in advance by the student's advisor and program as necessary for the student's degree. Depending on the program, graduate-level courses begin with courses numbered in the 400s or 500s. Audited courses and courses taken pass/fail are not eligible for tuition remission. Students should consult their advisors regarding course selection.

When certain conditions apply, graduate students may be permitted to register for courses numbered below 400, but they may not ordinarily be covered by tuition remission unless approved by the program director. Full-time students in the School of Medicine who wish to take graduate courses in the School of Continuing & Professional Studies or Summer School must obtain the approval of both their academic advisor and the program director. Tuition remission may be available for such approved courses.