

Leave of Absence

a. Any PhD candidate can request to take a leave of absence. A PhD candidate who finds it necessary to interrupt the continuity of their graduate studies must petition the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for an official leave of absence via the WCGSMS leave of absence application form. A leave of absence pauses your student status, with the opportunity to return to your program at a set time. The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs will meet with the student prior to finalizing the request and may then grant or deny the petition. The candidate shall have made the Program Director aware of the petition and shall have received approval from the Major Sponsor. This written petition must state the reason for the requested absence and estimate the length of the leave.

A student is not permitted to return from a leave of absence within the semester that the leave was taken. A student's return from a leave is aligned with the start of a new academic term. In addition, WCGSMS may set a minimum and maximum duration for the leave of absence based on academic and other considerations. WCGSMS may permanently withdraw the student if they do not return from their leave of absence or request an extension within the maximum time allowed by the school. Students on a leave of absence are not eligible to receive financial aid or funding while away. Also, depending on the timing and duration of the leave, it may need to be treated as a withdrawal for federal financial aid (Title IV) purposes. Students currently taking federal Title IV aid, or those with student loans from prior educational experiences, are encouraged to contact the Office of the Registrar or the Office of Financial Aid to understand the aid implications of their leave. A completed and approved leave of absence form is sent by the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs to the following offices: financial aid, student stipend support (doctoral students only), student accounting, the registrar, student health, housing, the MD-PhD office (if applicable), graduate school administration, major sponsor, and the program director.

For international students, taking leave of absence may have implications for the student's visa status. International students are advised to consult with the WCGSMS PDSO or their program DSO regarding federal immigration requirements.

Time spent on authorized leave of absence does not count toward time-to-degree limits. A student on an authorized leave of absence may not undertake any activities related to degree progression, in- person or remote. The terms of the authorized leave of absence will be stipulated in the leave of absence (LOA) agreement.

Prior to returning, the student should be in communication with the Graduate School to notify the relevant offices of their anticipated return. The student should confirm with the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs that they are returning from leave on the pre-scheduled date of return no less than 30 days before that pre-scheduled date. As part of the confirmation, the student should submit all required documentation that was stipulated in the LOA agreement.

b. If the leave is for medical reasons, the petition must be accompanied by a letter or communication from a treating physician or healthcare provider to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs recommending the leave for the student and estimating the length of the leave. If a student is acutely hospitalized the leave of absence request must come from the Director of Student Mental Health.

c. A student returning from a leave of absence must petition the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs asking to return to full-time graduate student status. A student's return from a leave is aligned with the start of a new academic term. Requests to return that are submitted later than the recommended deadline or pre-scheduled date may be postponed until a later academic term. If a student is returning from a leave of absence for medical reasons, following a mental health or medical evaluation or hospitalization, or after a prolonged leave of absence, the student must also present a letter and documentation from a physician or healthcare provider stating that the student is deemed fit to return to normal graduate student activities (coursework, laboratory research and interactions) in order to return to full-time graduate student status. Additionally, the student shall also be required to:

- 1) Submit hospital discharge summary if applicable.
- 2) Participate in an independent, non-confidential assessment with a mental health or medical professional identified by the graduate school who will submit a report and recommendation about return to school. The student must also sign the New York State HIPAA form to authorize the release of health information for the mental health or medical professional conducting the assessment.
- 3) Engage in any follow-up treatment as determined by the independent assessor and/or the student health/mental health program, and consent to disclosure to the graduate school periodic confirmation of engagement in care.

Decisions about returning to graduate studies are made by the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, who can decide if further evaluation is necessary.