

Policy on Leave of Absence

I. PURPOSE

Students may need to take a leave of absence from the MD degree program, for academic, medical, or other personal reasons. This policy lays out time limits for permitted leaves and procedures for requesting them.

II. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- Medical students

III. DEFINITIONS

A **Leave** is a temporary approved absence from one's attendance at UPSOM. Except otherwise specified herein, the Associate Dean for Students Affairs may grant up to a total of 12 months of leave without approval from the Committee on Student Promotions.

Academic failure is defined as failure of an USMLE Step exam or failure to meet the standards of the Policy on Standards for Performance and Academic Progress or the Policy on USMLE Examinations (i.e., a student who has not taken USMLE Step 1 by the beginning of Period 1 of the MS-3 year, or who has not taken USMLE Step 2 by the end of Period 7 of the MS-4 year), , or a student who has been noted to have a major lapse in professional behavior as adjudicated by the Professional Working Group as outlined in the USPOM Policy of Professional Behavior, as determined by process defined in the Policy on Professional Behavior.

Academic observation is defined as having 1 or more unsatisfactory transcript grades in a course or clerkship, or 1 or more incomplete grades in a course or clerkship, as outlined in the Policy on Academic Observation.

A student with either an academic failure or academic observation is considered to be **a student with academic deficiencies**.

IV. POLICY

ACADEMIC LEAVE

Any student who has not taken USMLE Step 1 prior to the start of Pre-clerkship Course will be placed on academic leave of absence until the USMLE Step1 has been taken, unless the student is granted a Board Study Elective in Period 1 of the MS-3 year.

Leaves of absence for academic failure must be granted only with the concurrence of the Committee on Student Promotions which shall specify the duration of such leaves. Such students will return on a probationary status.

MEDICAL LEAVE

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs may grant a medical leave of absence up to a one-year period to students who complete the requisite documentation of a need for medical leave. Students returning from a medical leave must submit a letter from the treating physician certifying the student's fitness to resume their studies by meeting the standards, with or without accommodation, laid out in the Policy on Technical Standards for the Doctor of Medicine Degree. The treating physician's letter must be submitted at least one month prior to the date the student anticipates returning to school. Students requiring accommodations should contact the University's Disability Resources and Services.

SPECIAL ACADEMIC STUDY LEAVE

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs may grant up to a two-year leave of absence for special academic study for a student who is in good academic standing (i.e., without academic deficiencies). Students in the MD program may choose to take a special academic study leave of absence to participate in a dual or joint degree program or choose to pursue an advanced degree outside of an official program. With proper documentation, this leave will be granted.

Students registered in an academic program elsewhere will maintain student status at the UPSOM through that program's registration. Students who have been awarded a competitive research fellowship will retain their full-time student status at UPSOM through special registration for up to a period depending on the length of the program. This UPSOM registration will assess no tuition; applicable fees will be charged. A student may request a one-year extension of a special study leave of absence. Such an extension would require review and approval by the Committee on Student Promotion.

RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY LEAVE

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs may grant a leave of absence for up to one year for a research fellowship for a student who is in good academic standing (i.e., without academic deficiencies). A research fellowship is one in which the student is paid a stipend while working under the mentorship of an experienced scientist. Examples of research fellowships include the

Dean's Year-Off Research Fellowship, the Sarnoff Fellowship, and the NIH Medical Research Scholars Program.

In order to be approved for a research leave, the student and/or research mentor must submit documentation from the research program confirming the research fellowship dates and that a stipend will be provided. See Procedure section for specific content requirements for the letter from the research mentor.

Leaves for scholarly activity beyond those classically defined as "research" may be permitted if the activity a letter of support is submitted by the scholarly activity mentor and subsequently approved by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

PERSONAL LEAVE

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs may grant a leave of absence for up to one year for personal reasons for a student who is in good academic standing (i.e., without academic deficiencies). If the personal leave is for entrepreneurial reasons (starting a business), additional requirements apply for extending the initial leave beyond one year (see below).

EXTENSIONS OF LEAVES

If a student in good standing would like to extend their leave of absence beyond one year, they will be required to submit their request in writing, along with supporting documentation, to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs and the Committee on Student Promotions for consideration. Students making such requests should expect to meet with the Committee on Student Promotions to answer any questions they have regarding the reasons to extend the leave.

The Committee on Student Promotions may place stipulations on the leave to ensure that the student will be successful once they return to their studies. Extension of leaves is only available for medical, special academic study, research and scholarly activity leaves, and exceptional personal leaves; generally, students may not take longer than 5 years of total leave.

EXTENSIONS OF LEAVES FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL REASONS

In rare circumstances and on an individual basis, a student who takes a personal leave of absence for entrepreneurial reasons (starting a business) may request extensions of the leave up to and beyond 5 years if the student can demonstrate that the business is making significant progress and that an extension is essential to maintain that progress. Such extensions may only be granted by the Committee on Student Promotions in one-year increments. To be eligible, the student must be actively planning or must have already established a new company and must be the company's initial founder or member of the founding team. The new company must have identified a strong potential in the market and secured initial funding or revenue. The student's full attention and energy during the requested leave extension must be dedicated to launching, operating, further financing, and establishing the company to a point at which the company can either attract the necessary full-time, external talent to scale and operate itself; or can attract an acquirer; or can transition to a new management team/decide to close. In deciding to approve the

extension, the Committee on Student Promotions will consider the assessment of an ad hoc committee of physician-entrepreneurs, who will judge the student's success in identifying real market potential, securing external funding, and developing a plan to devote full-time attention to the business until a logical point of transition.

V. POLICY AUTHOR(S)

- Office of Student Affairs

VI. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Policy on Academic Observation
- Policy on Standards for Performance and Academic Progress
- Policy on Structure and Function of the Committee on Student Promotions
- Policy on Technical Standards for the Doctor of Medicine Degree
- Policy on Time Limitations for Completing Portions of the MD Degree Program
- Policy on USMLE Examinations
- University of Pittsburgh Nondiscrimination, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action Policy

VI. REFERENCES

- LCME Standard 9.9: Single Standard for Promotion, Graduation and Appeal Process: A medical school ensures that the medical education program has a single standard for the promotion and graduation of medical students across all locations and a fair and formal process for taking any action that may affect the status of a medical student, including timely notice of the impending action, disclosure of the evidence on which the action would be based, an opportunity for the medical student to respond, and an opportunity to appeal any adverse decision related to promotion, graduation, or dismissal.

- LCME Standard 10.3: Policies Regarding Student Selection/Progress and Their Dissemination: The faculty of a medical school establish criteria for student selection and develop and implement effective policies and procedures regarding, and make decisions about, medical student application, selection, admission, assessment, promotion, graduation, and any disciplinary action. The medical school makes available to all interested parties its criteria, standards, policies, and procedures regarding these matters.

VII. APPROVALS

Dean, School of Medicine, originally approved December 30, 2018. Revisions approved December 16, 2019; January 7, 2022; January 6, 2025.

Curriculum Committee, last revision approved May 20, 2024.

Education Policy Council, last revision approved May 28, 2024.

Executive Committee, last revision approved November 7, 2024.

VIII. PROCEDURES

- A. Requesting a Leave of Absence (LOA).
 - a. Requests for LOA must be in writing and directed to the Associate Dean of Student Affairs.
 - b. Requests must include all required information as set forth in the policy above. Requests that fail to provide the requisite information shall be denied. It is the student's responsibility to include information to support the request.
 - i. Students requesting a medical leave must submit the UPSOM Medical Student Leave Request/Return form.
 - c. Research Fellowship LOA Request: The research mentor's letter to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs must include:
 - i. Dates of proposed leave of absence
 - ii. The explicit statement that a stipend will be provided (the amount of the stipend is NOT required)
 - iii. A detailed prospectus of the project in which the student will be engaged (template for completion will be provided to the student).
- B. Approval.
 - a. LOAs shall be duly reviewed to ensure that all information required to support the leave is present.
 - b. Approval of LOA request must be in writing and include at a minimum, the type of LOA, the beginning and end dates, and any requirements that the student has to meet during the LOA (i.e. proof of continuation of a special academic program), and any stipulations associated with the student's return.
 - c. Replies to LOAs must be completed no later than 30 days from the date that the student makes the request.
- C. Technical and Academic Standards
 - a. Returning students who are unable to meet Technical or Academic Standards in any course shall be reviewed by the Committee on Student Promotions. The Office of Student Affairs shall share all official academic, and with authorization from the student, medical records with the Committee. The Committee shall recommend dismissal to the Dean of the School of Medicine unless there are convincing medical or academic reasons to permit a second Leave of Absence.
- D. Failure to Return. Any student failing to return from a LOA shall be academically withdrawn from the School of Medicine.
- E. MSPE. All LOAs shall be included in the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE) component of the residency application. The category of leave (e.g., academic, medical, research, etc.) will be indicated and explained.
- F. Students who take a leave for longer than 2 years will be required to complete the Clinical Refresher course as their first clinical experience after their return.

G. Extending personal leaves for entrepreneurial reasons.

- a. While on a personal leave for entrepreneurial reasons, the student must meet annually with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. During this meeting, the student must provide a written update on the work completed and the progress of the entrepreneurship activity, including:
 - i. Information about funding and/or revenue of the new company, total hours worked in support of the new company, and market research supporting the need for the new company.
 - ii. A summary from the Associate Dean for Commercial Translation regarding the value prospects and impact of the work justifying time away from the medical school.
- b. In the event that the student requests an extension of a personal leave for entrepreneurial reasons beyond one year, the materials provided by the student [see G (a) (i).] will be assessed by an ad hoc panel of 3 physician-entrepreneurs and their recommendation will be forwarded to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs to share with the Committee on Student Promotions, which will either approve or deny the extension request.

H. Leaves greater than 5 years for entrepreneurial reasons.

- a. In rare, individual circumstances, the Committee on Student Promotions may approve extensions of personal leaves beyond 5 years for entrepreneurial reasons if the value prospects to a student's career and to society are impactful enough to justify additional time away from the curriculum, and if the student can provide materials demonstrating both that the company is making significant progress and that an extension of the leave is essential to maintain that progress. Such extensions beyond 5 years may be approved in one-year increments.
 - i. The materials the student submits will be evaluated by an ad hoc panel of 3 physician-entrepreneurs and their assessment will be forwarded to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs to share with the Committee on Student Promotions, which will either approve or deny the extension request
- b. Students who are away from the curriculum for greater than 7 years will be required to repeat the most recent component of the curriculum completed.
 - i. Example: a student who began their leave after MS2/Organ Systems will be required to repeat the entirety of the Organ Systems courses, Patient Centered Care courses, the Evidence, Discovery, and Reasoning Course, and the Longitudinal Alliance Program requirements upon reenrolling in USPOM.
 - ii. Students who previously passed Step 1 or Step 1 & Step 2 will be required to retake the exam(s) as the NBME requires all 3 Step exams be completed within 7 years of each other.