



# VCU

## Leave of Absence Policy

### Policy Statement and Purpose

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This policy establishes the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine's (VCU SOM) process for students to request a leave of absence from the MD program and is designed to be consistent with the leave of absence academic regulations in the VCU Bulletin for graduate and first-professional students, including students in the MD program. The purpose of this policy is to define the types of leaves of absence available to students, outline the parameters surrounding each type of leave of absence, and define the procedural steps for students to request a leave of absence. If there is any conflict between this policy and the VCU Bulletin, the VCU Bulletin supersedes this policy.

### Stakeholders

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The faculty, staff, and students of the VCU School of Medicine are responsible for knowing this standard operating procedure, its contents, and provisions.

### Definitions

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**VCU SOM:** Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine.

**LCME:** Liaison Committee on Medical Education. The group with authority to accredit medical education programs leading to the MD degree in the United States and Canada.

**OME:** Office of Medical Education.

**ADME:** Assistant Dean for Medical Education.

**LOA:** Leave of Absence. A LOA is a contiguous, extended absence from the curriculum for more than two (2) weeks.

**MSPE:** Medical Student Performance Evaluation.

**AAMC:** Association of American Medical Colleges.

**PAC:** Promotion and Advancement Committee.

**DAS:** Division of Academic Success.

**Good Academic Standing:** A designation that indicates a student is making adequate progress toward completion of the requirements of the MD program within the maximum six (6) year time limit from matriculation, and is not on academic probation. In order to maintain good academic standing, a student must remedy any incompletes or failures by the first day of the next semester in the pre-clinical



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phase. Grades of incomplete or failure in any M3 required clerkship must be remedied by the beginning of Block 7 of the M4 year if the student plans to apply for May graduation.

## Responsibilities

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**Students:** Students are responsible for submitting a LOA request form prior to taking any LOA. Students are also responsible for ensuring they have met all requirements (ex: completion of Step 1, maintaining good academic standing, etc.) for the specific LOA they are requesting prior to submitting the LOA request form.

**ADME:** The Assistant Dean for Medical Education is charged with reviewing all LOA requests. A student may request an LOA by meeting with the ADME and submitting a written explanation for the leave request and the expected length of the leave. The ADME is responsible for notifying students of an approved LOA request. Notifications will be in the form of a letter that is emailed to the student, and outlines the stipulations of the leave and requirements for return.

**PAC:** The PAC is responsible for reviewing all LOA requests that extend beyond one (1) calendar year to determine if an extended leave is granted as outlined in the Student Promotion and Advancement Committee Policy.

## Procedures

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### Leaves of Absence (LOA)

- A LOA is granted for no more than one (1) calendar year.
  - A request to extend beyond one (1) calendar year for extraordinary, compelling circumstances will be reviewed by the PAC.
  - Supporting documentation for the requested extension may be required.
- Students who take more than one LOA will be referred to the PAC for discussion in order to ensure appropriate resources are provided to the student to promote student success.
- The ADME will provide information regarding the LOA and reinstatement processes, including written notice of any reasonable conditions the student will be required to satisfy in order to be reinstated (LOA Notice). The university will determine reasonable conditions for reinstatement based on an individualized assessment of the student's reason for taking leave.

### Types of LOA

#### ***Research or Academic Enrichment LOA***

- A request for LOA for research or academic enrichment outside of existing VCU SOM dual degree programs requires documentation of the basis of this request three (3) months prior to the beginning of the requested LOA.
- Students requesting a Research or Academic Enrichment LOA must:
  - Be in good academic standing and



- Take and pass the USMLE examination for their phase of the curriculum prior to commencing an LOA
- Students requesting a LOA between the M3 and M4 phase of the curriculum must complete all clerkship requirements prior to commencing a LOA

### ***Medical LOA (or MLOA)***

- When a student requests a medical LOA, the ADME will meet with the student to discuss their need for a medical leave of absence and the extent to which reasonable academic accommodations through the DAS may enable the student to remain enrolled
  - The ADME will provide information regarding the MLOA and reinstatement processes, including written notice of any reasonable conditions the student will be required to satisfy in order to be reinstated
    - The university will determine reasonable conditions for reinstatement based on an individualized assessment of the student's reason for taking leave, including consideration of current medical knowledge and/or the best available objective evidence of the student's ability to function academically at the university with or without accommodations
    - Careful consideration will be given to available opinions and recommendations of a qualified healthcare professional who treated the student
- Typically, a return to active status from a medical LOA must be supported by documentation from a qualified healthcare provider who treated the student, indicating what further care or treatment the student may need to meet the technical standards for the MD program, with or without accommodation
- The university will engage in an interactive assessment with the individual student to determine whether they can satisfy the technical standards for the MD program with or without accommodation

### ***Personal LOA***

- A LOA for personal reasons may be requested by a student as needed.

### ***Academic Remediation LOA***

- A student may be placed on an academic remediation LOA by the PAC due to inability to successfully progress through the curriculum.
- Upon commencement of the leave, the student must meet with the appropriate academic assistant/associate dean to develop a remediation/study plan to be followed during the time away and to ensure appropriate resources are provided to the student to promote student success.

## Process for Requesting a Leave of Absence

- Students may meet with any Assistant/Associate Dean within the OME to review reasons for requesting a LOA. However, students must meet with the ADME and complete the LOA request form, which includes providing requested documentation to support the LOA.

## Review of Leave of Absence Requests

- The ADME will review all submitted LOA requests after meeting with the student and all required documentation has been submitted.
  - Requests will be reviewed within fourteen (14) calendar days of receipt of the request, with the exception of LOA extension requests which must be reviewed by PAC.
- The ADME will provide official notification of an approved LOA request to the student.
  - Notifications will be in the form of a letter that is emailed to the student within five (5) calendar days after approval.
    - The notification will be sent via DocuSign and, to begin the LOA, students must sign the letter to acknowledge receipt within three (3) calendar days of the notification.

## Educational Records and Reporting of Leaves of Absence

- LOA will be documented in a student's educational record, including:
  - Notation on the official academic transcript
  - Notation in the MSPE Academic History section
  - Reported to the AAMC
- In instances where an LOA interrupts a course or clerkship currently in progress, a grade of Incomplete (I) will be recorded on the student transcript
  - The PAC will determine what components of the course or clerkship a student must complete upon their return from a LOA
    - These components may include previously taken components of the course or clerkship
  - The grade of Incomplete (I) will be removed from the student transcript once the student has completed all of the work within the course or clerkship and is assigned a final grade

## Tuition and Fee Impacts

- Any LOA, regardless of duration, may have implications for financial aid eligibility
- A student receiving financial aid or who has been awarded a scholarship is required to meet with a member of the VCU SOM Financial Aid Office prior to requesting a LOA or, in the case of extenuating circumstances for medical LOA, as soon as practicable thereafter

- The date of the meeting should be included on the LOA request form

### **Enrollment Status**

- During a LOA, students are not enrolled in the VCU SOM and generally do not have access to the services otherwise provided for students. These include, but are not limited to:
  - University Counseling Services (UCS)
  - University Student Health Services (USHS)
  - RecWell
  - VCU Libraries
  - VCU School of Medicine malpractice insurance
- Because a student is not enrolled during a LOA, they are ineligible to participate in any VCU SOM organizations requiring enrollment or hold an office within a VCU SOM organization that requires enrollment
- Because students on LOA are not officially enrolled, students will no longer have badge access to VCU and VCUHealth facilities

### **Return from Leave of Absence**

- Students are expected to notify the ADME of their intent to return from a LOA, and return from a LOA by the dates in their LOA Notice
- Students who fail to return or who fail to notify the ADME of their request to extend their LOA by the date indicated in the notification will be withdrawn from the VCU SOM
- Students who wish to withdraw from the VCU SOM while on LOA may do so by contacting the ADME in writing and requesting withdrawal

### **Time to Completion of Requirements**

- Students must complete all required components to advance to graduation within six (6) years of initial matriculation, regardless of any LOA
- A student who has completed all graduation requirements and does not intend to take additional course work will not be permitted to take a LOA to delay graduation

### **Related Policies**

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Student Promotion and Advancement Committee Policy  
Student Appeal Procedures for Promotion and Advancement Committee Decisions Policy  
VCU Leave of Absence Regulation

### **Review Cycle and Revision History**

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The policy is reviewed and may be revised by the Curriculum Council as necessary, but at least every three years.

**Current Revision Approved: 07.27.2023**

**Applicable Laws, Regulations & Standards** \_\_\_\_\_

LCME Standards for Accreditation of Medical Education Programs Leading to the MD Degree: