

Leave of Absence Guidance
Frequently Asked Questions!
Updated February 2024

The Dean's Office at DGSOM brought together students, faculty, staff, deans, program leadership and financial aid leadership to learn more about the challenges faced by students who are exploring opportunities for a taking a leave of absence, and the unique concerns of students on a leave of absence and those planning for their re-entry to the medical school curriculum. This Leave of Absence Task Force collated feedback from student interviews and surveys, and explored ways to improve the experience for this subset of our student body, and the communication with these students both prior to and during their time away from the medical school.

This document incorporates the Task Force's efforts to address the needs of students planning and taking leaves of absence. There is comprehensive information shared in the form of Frequently Asked Questions to provide as much support and information for students considering a leave of absence, for those currently on a leave of absence, and for those preparing to return to the medical school curriculum.

Phase I - Basic information about Leaves of Absence (nuts and bolts) – Before leave

1. What is the DGSOM LOA Policy?

An approved Leave of Absence (LOA) is defined by an approved absence from the curriculum of more than six consecutive weeks.

The maximum period for most approved Leaves of Absence is one academic year, which may be extended for one additional academic year upon review on an individual basis by the Committee on Academic Standing, Progress, and Promotion (CASPP).

Details may be found: <https://medschool.ucla.edu/education/md-education/current-students/handbook-and-policies#LeaveofAbsence>

2. What are the different types of Leave of Absence?

A Leave of Absence may be for academic, medical, personal, and/or administrative reasons:

A. Academic Leave of Absence

An approved *Academic Leave of Absence* is generated by the student, and provides students with the necessary time to complete an academic pursuit and is not subject to the two-year maximum leave interval as indicated above. Examples of an approved *Academic Leave of Absence* include but are not limited to:

1. Participating in the Ph.D. phase of the UCLA-Caltech Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP). Students participating in the Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP) will require an approved *Academic Leave of Absence* greater than two years in order to complete the requirements of the MSTP program, and are not subject to the two year maximum leave interval as indicated above.

2. Pursuit of an additional degree, such as MBA, MPH, MPP, or Ph.D., either at UCLA or another institution (outside of the Discovery year).
3. Research, including working with a research mentor at UCLA or another institution, or participating in a formal research program (such as the Medical Research Scholars Program at the NIH).
4. Global Health Fellowships (such as the GloCal and SAPHIR Fellowships).

B. Medical Leave of Absence

An approved *Medical Leave of Absence* may be generated by the student, the Dean's Office, or the institution and must be accompanied by documentation from the student's health care provider and/or an independent evaluator attesting to the student's inability to participate in the curriculum due to a medical condition.

C. Personal Leave of Absence

An approved *Personal Leave of Absence* is generated by the student in order to attend to family, economic, or other personal factors that affect the student's ability to participate in the curriculum, or to pursue an opportunity outside of medicine. Examples of reasons for a *Personal Leave of Absence* include but are not limited to:

1. Loss of a loved one or family member
2. Need to care for a loved one or family member
3. Any personal situation preventing participation in the curriculum
4. An extracurricular opportunity such as employment

D. Administrative Leave of Absence

An Administrative Leave of Absence may be generated by several institutional entities including an Academic Performance Committee (APC), the Committee on Academic Standing, Progress, and Promotion (CASPP), Associate Dean for Student Affairs, and the Dean's Office. Examples of reasons for an Administrative Leave of Absence include but are not limited to:

1. Noncompliance with health clearance or other compliance requirements.
2. Nonpayment of registration fees.
3. Violations of the DGSOM Honor Code, UCLA Student Conduct Code or DGSOM's Non-Academic Technical Standards.
4. Remediation plans as determined by the identified APC and/or CASPP.
5. Not meeting deadline requirements for USMLE Step 1 and/or Step 2.
6. Students experiencing academic and/or professional difficulty.

3. What resources are available for students considering taking a Leave of Absence?

Multiple sources of support and counseling are available to students as they consider taking of Leave of Absence. Informational meetings are scheduled each semester by the Dean's Office detailing the wide range of opportunities that students may consider for an Academic Leave of Absence and specifics of the application process. In addition, students are strongly encouraged to reach out to their individual mentors and others for support. These key individuals include Society Deans, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, the Assistant and Associate Deans for Curricular

Affairs, the Associate Dean of the UCLA/Charles Drew University Medical Education Program, the leadership of PRIME-LA as well as the staff in the DGSOM Student Affairs Office and the DGSOM Financial Aid and Scholarship Office. In addition, faculty advisors, program directors, research mentors and other faculty may also be rich sources of assistance for the decision-making process.

Students must also meet with their financial aid counselor to fully understand the financial implications of taking a Leave of Absence.

4. [What is the timeline for considering a leave of absence and submitting a LOA request?](#)

Students considering a leave should plan to attend the informational meetings offered by the Dean's Office to learn about the different types of LOA, the myriad of opportunities for an Academic LOA, the steps needed to explore these options further, and the necessary steps to submit a LOA request for approval.

If students are considering taking a LOA, they should submit the appropriate leave of absence form ([FORMS](#)) as early as possible. For scheduling purposes, students should aim to submit their LOA requests by no later than February in the academic year prior to their leave. Submission of the form does not commit the student to taking a leave, but helps the Dean's Office to plan for the upcoming year's scheduling.

Students applying for an Academic LOA will ultimately have to submit supporting documentation (for example, an acceptance letter from a graduate school, or a letter from a research mentor who will be supervising their LOA). The LOA form may be submitted prior to the time when this supporting documentation becomes available, with supporting documentation that may not follow until later in the spring. Both the LOA form and subsequent documentation should be submitted the DGSOM Registrar.

Note that [MSTP students](#) only need to submit an [Academic Leave of Absence Request Form](#) and are not required to submit supporting documentation.

If a student submits an LOA request then decides not to take a leave, and to continue in the curriculum, the student should alert the DGSOM Registrar as soon as possible.

5. [How are students approved for a Leave of Absence?](#)

The Leave of Absence form, which includes the reasons for the leave request and the anticipated date when the student plans to return to the medical school curriculum, should be submitted to the DGSOM Registrar, who will in turn forward this to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

The Associate Dean for Student Affairs will in turn present the request to the Committee on Academic Standing, Progress, and Promotion (CASPP). This committee is responsible for reviewing and determining whether to approve a student's request for a Leave of Absence.

Students on *Academic/Professional Probation* must have significant mitigating circumstances for CASPP to approve a request for a Leave of Absence.

6. What is the permitted duration of a Leave of Absence?

The maximum period for an approved Leave of Absence is one academic year.

Students who wish to extend their Leave of Absence for an additional semester or year should submit a [Leave of Absence Extension Request Form](#) which will be reviewed for approval by the Committee on Academic Standing, Progress, and Promotion (CASPP).

If a student is not ready to return, the student may petition for an extension by CASPP. Students may also be administratively withdrawn from the medical school by CASPP.

7. Are there options for students who would like to take a shorter time away from the curriculum and not a full semester leave of absence?

For students wanting to take-time away from the curriculum for six weeks or less, they may submit a request for [Time Off from the Curriculum](#). This time away is not recorded on the transcript nor on the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE).

Time Off from Curriculum is a placeholder in the schedule for students approved for personal or medical reasons to step out of the MS3 curriculum. Approval is granted on a case-by-case basis, for a maximum of six consecutive weeks. Anything greater than six weeks may be considered a leave of absence. Time off from the curriculum cannot exceed >50% of any term in order for students to maintain full-time enrollment status and/or financial aid eligibility.

A. Time Off from the Curriculum for Personal Reasons:

1. Approved by Associated Dean for Student Affairs
2. Students are permitted to study and take exams
3. Participation in longitudinal experiences is determined on a case-by-case situation

B. Time Off from the Curriculum for Medical Reasons:

1. Requires documentation from a health care provider before being approved by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs
2. Students are not permitted to take exams
3. Students are not permitted to participate in longitudinal experiences
4. Students taking Time Off from the Curriculum for medical reasons must submit clearance from a clinician to return to the curriculum

8. What are the different options for an Academic Leave of Absence

A. Concurrent degree programs at UCLA. Please note: Academic LOAs are not required for students participating in concurrent degree programs for their Discovery year. Academic LOA requests are only necessary when students will be exceeding 4 years of enrollment at DGSOM and/or other degree programs at UCLA.

- MD/MBA (UCLA Anderson Graduate School of Management)
- MD/MPH (UCLA Fielding School of Public Health)

- MD/MPP (UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs)
- MD/MSCR (DGSOM)
- MD/MLS (UCLA Law)
- MD/MA (UCLA School of Education & Information Studies)

DGSOM students who are in good academic standing and have successfully completed the Year 2 curriculum (core clinical clerkships) may pursue the UCLA Concurrent degree programs listed above. For admission, applicants are required to satisfy the regular admission requirements for each program.

For non-Discovery participants, the MBA, MPP and MPH programs at UCLA are typically two years; however, the concurrent degree programs allow completion of the Master's degree concurrently with the MD degree, with only one additional year of enrollment. Students spend one year full time on coursework for the master's degree, and then complete the requirements of their program during the MS4 year back in the medical school, so that the Master's degree and MD degree are both awarded at the end of the MS4 year.

Students enrolled in the MD/MPP, MD/MPH, MD/MSCR, and MD/MA concurrent degree programs pay medical school fees and tuition throughout all the years of the program, Students enrolled in the MD/MBA and MD/MLS concurrent degree programs pay the tuition and fees associated with UCLA Anderson or UCLA Law during their Master's year(s).

Guidelines for students considering a non-concurrent master's degree at UCLA or interested in pursuing a master's degree at another institution are outlined below.

B. [Non-concurrent](#) degree programs

Other than the above concurrent degree programs, students may pursue non- concurrent graduate degrees at UCLA, as well as graduate degrees at other institutions.

[There are important considerations for students considering a Leave of Absence to pursue a non-concurrent degree between the MS2/MS3/MS4 years.](#)

1. [Non-concurrent](#) degree at UCLA [an example includes the Master of Social Science]

[When students are considering a non-concurrent degree at UCLA, they should be aware of the following:](#)

The student is **ineligible** to complete medical school coursework during their leave as they are **not** concurrently enrolled in the DGSOM.

The student does not pay medical school tuition and fees, but will instead be assessed and required to pay the specific program's annual [Tuition and Fees](#)

The student is ineligible to receive financial aid from the DGSOM Financial Aid Office; however, the student can apply for financial aid directly through their Master's degree program. Please consult directly with the program's financial aid office for their application details and deadlines.

When a student accepts an offer, and completes the Statement of Intent to Register (SIR) in a non-concurrent Master's program, the student's classification in the University system changes from Professional student (Medicine) to [Graduate student](#) (non-Medicine). Their classification will return to Professional (Medicine) after the student's approved return to the medical school curriculum. This change in classification results in the student being registered in the [quarter system](#) (for their graduate school) vs. the semester system (for the medical school).

The above change in registration to the quarter system may create a gap in the dates of enrollment and health insurance coverage for those with UC SHIP.

2. [Non-concurrent degree outside of UCLA](#)

Federal financial aid is available only for one campus at a time in the United States. If receiving financial aid, students are required to speak with their DGSOM financial aid counselor to understand their aid eligibility and options, including non-Federal financial aid.

C. [Medical Scientist Training Program \(MSTP\)](#)

More information about the UCLA/Caltech Medical Scientist Training Program is available [here](#).

Students in MSTP must submit an Academic Leave of Absence request form before transitioning from the medical school curriculum to the PhD curriculum.

During subsequent years, MSTP students should submit an [Extension of Leave of Absence form](#) annually.

In anticipation of their return to the medical school curriculum after completing the PhD program, MSTP students should notify both the medical school Registrar and the Coordinator of the MSTP program of their anticipated return date, in addition to submit a [Return from Leave of Absence form](#).

D. [Research opportunities in the United States](#)

Examples include the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Medical Research Scholars Program (MRSP) <http://www.cc.nih.gov/training/mrsp/index.html> and other programs including those listed on the AAMC's Careers in Medicine Website: <https://apps.aamc.org/cim-cr-web/#/user>

E. [Research opportunities abroad](#)

To learn more about global health research opportunities, please reach out to Dr. Traci Wells in the Global Health Program and see additional information [HERE](#).

Two popular opportunities for DGSOM students include the NIH-funded [GloCal Health Fellowship](#) and the NIH-funded [UCLA SAPHIR \(South American Program in HIV Prevention Research\)](#)

9. What are the Financial Implications of Taking a Leave of Absence?

Students *considering* a Leave of Absence from medical school must meet with a representative in the DGSOM Financial Aid and Scholarships Office to learn about and discuss the financial implications of each specific type of leave.

To make an appointment with a financial aid counselor, please visit:

<https://medschool.ucla.edu/education/md-education/financial-aid-and-scholarships/connect-with-us>

A. Financial Implications for students on Personal Leave of Absence, Medical Leave of Absence, Administrative Leave of Administrative, and Academic Leave of Absence for Research

Typically with a personal, medical, administrative or research leave, students are not enrolled in school for a specific approved length of time. During this period of non-enrollment:

1. Students are ineligible to receive financial aid.
For alternate sources of financial support during the leave, students should consult the financial aid office for possible private loan resources.
2. Student loans enter a grace period and then require repayment.
Students can request forbearance to postpone payments during the leave or, students can utilize Income Driven Repayment, if they choose to make minimal payments during their leave.
3. Once the leave of absence ends and the student returns to medical school, they should file a deferment form to return their student loans to “in-school deferment status” (so they are no longer in repayment). For assistance with a deferment form upon return to the curriculum, please contact your financial aid counselor or DGSOMFAS@mednet.ucla.edu.
4. Students who have already received federal aid and go on leave in the middle of a term *may* be required to return a portion of disbursed financial aid depending on the circumstances. This federal requirement is called [Return to Title IV](#).
5. Once the Financial Aid Office receives official notice of the LOA, the student is emailed instructions on how to complete the federally required online *Exit Interview*, which explains loan terms, and includes instructions on how to manage student loans during the leave. The student should make a follow-up counseling appointment (a second leave counseling session) with an DGSOM Financial Aid team member, to ensure they understand the next steps. This is important both *before* going on leave and *upon returning* from leave.

B. Financial Implications for students on Academic Leave of Absence to Enroll in a Graduate Degree Program

An academic leave of absence to pursue another degree is not considered a leave for financial aid considerations if the student is enrolled in a graduate degree program.

Whether at UCLA or at another institution, students enrolling in a degree program can apply for and receive financial aid from the specific program or institution. DGSOM students in concurrent degree programs at UCLA should continue to apply for and receive financial aid

through the DGSOM Financial Aid and Scholarships Office, while students in non-concurrent degree programs should apply for and receive financial aid directly through their Master's program, whether that be at UCLA or another institution.

Whether at UCLA or at another institution, students enrolling in a degree program should keep their student loans in "in-school deferment" status (not repayment). If the degree program is at another institution, the student will need to file an in-school deferment form upon enrollment at the other school. Upon returning to the DGSOM medical school curriculum, the student may need to file an in-school deferment form indicating their return to UCLA.

10. What is the impact of taking a Leave of Absence for students receiving a Geffen Scholarships?

Geffen Scholars are awarded four years of scholarship support. If a student on a Geffen Scholarship goes on a leave, their scholarship is held for the duration of the leave, and then renewed (reinstated) upon their return to the MD curriculum.

11. Can a medical student remain in University Housing while on a Leave of Absence?

Students on an approved LOA can stay in university housing for up to one term. If their leave is longer, the student may be required to leave housing and re-apply upon their return. Students should contact [UCLA Housing](#) directly with questions regarding eligibility.

12. Can Students Maintain Health Insurance while on a Leave of Absence?

Students enrolled in the University of California Student Health Insurance Program (UC SHIP) who are taking a Leave of Absence from the University may be able to extend their coverage for up to one semester.

More details on this option ("Voluntary UC SHIP) and the associated premium fees may be found here: <https://www.studenthealth.ucla.edu/insurance/benefits/voluntary-ucship-and-dependent-care>

13. Are there courses that are only offered one time per year that I should consider when taking deciding on the timing for a Leave of Absence?

Students should discuss with advisors the timing of required coursework that may only be offered one time per year, and the impact of this on the timing of their Leave of Absence and their anticipated date of return. Students must be registered at DGSOM to enroll in MD coursework.

With the exception of students enrolled in a UCLA concurrent degree program and MSTP students, students on leave and not registered at DGSOM are not able to enroll in coursework at the medical school.

Coursework in the current curriculum that is only offered once annually includes:

1. Assessment for Internship
2. Capstone

Dates for required courses can be found [HERE](#)

14. How will a Leave of Absence will be reflected on the transcript?

The transcript will reflect that a student has taken a Leave of Absence and will include the dates of the Leave of Absence.

The transcript will not reflect the type of Leave of Absence (Personal, Medical, Academic or Administrative Leave of Absence), unless it is for a UCLA concurrent or articulated degree program.

15. How will a Leave of Absence will be reflected in the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE)?

The Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE) will reflect that a student has taken a Leave of Absence and will include the dates of the Leave.

For students with Personal, Medical or Academic Leaves of Absence, the Medical Student Performance Evaluation will not reflect the type of Leave of Absence, it will just state that the student took a Leave of Absence and the associated dates. There are optional opportunities within the Medical Student Performance Evaluation to share more information about the specific reasons for their Leave of Absence.

For students with an Administrative Leave of Absence, the Medical Student Performance Evaluation may state the type of Leave of Absence and the reasons why a student was placed on Administrative Leave of Absence.

16. Are there an any University policies that may impact the timing of a leave of absence prior to my anticipated graduation dates?

It is University policy that students must be enrolled for the final term in which their degree(s) is/are awarded, even if the required number of elective weeks is completed by the end of the previous semester.

17. How do I submit a Leave of Absence request?

LOA request forms can be found on the DGSOM site [HERE](#) and should be submitted to the DGSOM Registrar.

18. What communication will I receive after submitting my LOA request to the Registrar?

Students will be notified by email when their LOA request has been approved. After receiving the LOA request, the form is forwarded to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs who in turn will present this for approval by the Committee on Academic Standing Progress and Promotion. Students should expect to receive a detailed follow up email within three months after their submission, but usually much sooner. This follow up email will outline the status of the LOA request with additional important information.

19. Can I change my mind and decide not to go on a LOA after I submitted a LOA request, even after it has been approved?

The approval of a LOA request is not binding. Students can decide not to take the LOA and can create a schedule to continue in the curriculum while finalizing their plans.

20. What is the DGSOM Continuous Registration Policy?

The DGSOM's Continuous Registration Policy requires that all medical students must be either registered and enrolled or on an official leave of absence every term until their degree(s) are awarded.

Phase II – Support for students while on a Leave of Absence:

21. What campus resources are available to me while on a Leave of Absence?

There are multiple resources available to students while on a leave of absence, including the following:

- A. [Behavioral Wellness Center](#)
- B. [Non-registered Voluntary UC SHIP](#) available for purchase for one term
- C. Student Affairs Office resources
- D. Society Dean resources
- E. Well-Being Team activities
- F. [Mednet Website](#) for email - Students on leave maintain their Mednet email accounts, and it is critical for students on leave to check their Mednet account regularly... both to stay connected and informed about medical school activities... and to be aware of communication related to their return to the curriculum.
- G. Students on leave may use the [University library](#) and [recreation facilities](#) and maintain access to digital services by paying additional fees as non-registered students.

22. How can I remain connected with the medical school during a Leave of Absence?

There are many opportunities for students to stay connected with the medical school, mentors, advisors and fellow students during their leave of absence. Depending upon the type of leave and location, these include the following:

- A. Recruitment activities with the Admissions Committee
- B. Student interest groups and associated activities
- C. Medical education/tutoring (these tutoring positions are only available to students concurrently enrolled, and students on leave will not receive credit for the activity).
- D. Society events
- E. Service events
- F. Regularly scheduled Society check-in meetings
- G. Pairing of LOA students one year apart to help with support while on leave, as well as advising on their re-entry into the medical school curriculum.

23. Are medical students eligible for DGSOM financial aid while on leave?

No, medical students must be actively enrolled to be eligible for financial aid. Please see more information here: <https://medschool.ucla.edu/education/md-education/financial-aid-and-scholarships/maintain-eligibility>

Students are encouraged to reach out to the DGSOM Financial Aid counselors who may be able to provide private loan resources if needed for the leave period.

An exception to the above would be students pursuing a concurrent degree. Since they are dually enrolled, they are eligible for financial aid through DGSOM.

24. Are medical students eligible for employment on campus while on leave of absence?

Students should discuss this with their specific hiring department to determine employment eligibility criteria during a LOA.

25. Can a medical student take DGSOM exams while on leave?

No, students must be actively enrolled at DGSOM to take medical school exams.

26. Can a medical student receive academic credit toward their MD degree while on leave?

No, medical students must be actively enrolled at DGSOM to receive credit towards their MD degree.

Phase III - Students preparing to return to the curriculum from a Leave of Absence:

27. What are the re-entry dates in the academic calendar to return to the curriculum?

Concurrent degree and Non-concurrent degree students can reenter the medical school curriculum at the start of the appropriate term.

MSTP students will meet with their MSTP advisor to plan for reentering the medical school curriculum following the completion of their PhD.

Non-enrolled students are able to reenter the medical school curriculum at the start of the appropriate term.

28. What support is available for students as they prepare to re-enter the clinical curriculum from a leave of absence?

- A. Clinical Coaching
- B. Resources for success in the clinical arena
- C. Buddy (Big Sib-Little Sib) system (pairing students with other students who returned from a leave the year before)

29. What are the ways in which students can get assistance to create their clerkship or elective schedule as they prepare to return to the curriculum?

- A. Students are required to attend mandatory scheduling meetings for the subsequent academic year prior to the start of their Leave of Absence

- B. Students may attend subsequent scheduling meetings held during their leave of absence, and if not available, may listen to all of these recorded presentations.
- C. Students are encouraged to meet with their Society Dean and/or program leadership to discuss their reentry to the curriculum, including schedule planning.
- D. Students are encouraged to liaise as well with Big Sibs, as well as students one year ahead of them who returned from a leave of absence one year earlier.

30. What do I need to know about meeting onboarding requirements in anticipation of my return to the clinical curriculum

It is critical that students plan in advance for rejoining the medical school curriculum as there are several compliance and onboarding requirements for each of the medical school's clinical teaching sites. These can be found [HERE](#).

Students should also pay close attention to emails from the Compliance & Onboarding Coordinator in the Student Affairs Office, as these contain important information about these requirements.

Delay in completion of these requirements may result in delayed reentry into the curriculum.

31. Upon returning from a Leave of Absence does the medical student need to pay non-resident tuition and professional fees in addition to registration?

Fees continue to be based on where the medical students are in the program.

Resident/non-resident tuition is determined by the [UCLA Residence Deputy](#).