

Undergraduate Medical Education Program

Pre-Clerkship Leave Policies and Procedures

Approved by:	Undergraduate Medical Education Curriculum Committee
Application/Scope:	
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Note: Any reference to the Associate Dean, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, Office of UGME or Office of Student Affairs will be taken to mean the site-specific official or office, depending on the student's home campus.

PRINCIPLES FOR LEAVE

Mandatory sessions: Medical students must assume personal responsibility for meeting the objectives of the curriculum. Mandatory components of the curriculum are kept to a minimum. Learning sessions are mandatory if group participation is required. Therefore, lectures are not mandatory as absence does not detract from other learners' experiences. Tutorials and Skilled Clinician sessions depend on group participation and are mandatory. Some labs are mandatory, while others are not, depending upon whether or not the class is being broken into smaller groups. If there is any confusion about whether or not a particular session is mandatory, students are advised to contact ugme@dal.ca or their year's curriculum coordinator.

Professionalism: Medical school should prepare the learner for the norms and expectations of medical education and, ultimately, medical practice settings. With patient care as the ultimate responsibility for physicians, prudent time out of curriculum, and clear and timely communication to others are important professional habits to develop. Respect for the collaborative nature of the clinical environment is an important part of student professionalism.

Support: Significant, recurring or persistent medical or personal concerns may be addressed confidentially with the Student Affairs office, which may assist a learner in requesting leaves or other supports.

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A. SINGLE LEAVE DAY

A **Single Leave Day** is an absence of a single day. Single Leave Days can be planned or unplanned:

- Whether the Single Leave Day is planned or unplanned the learner must promptly notify the UGME office of the absence by completing the “Single Leave Day” form on BrightSpace.
- When absences are planned, the learner is asked to provide as much notice as is feasible in the circumstances.
- In all cases, the learner must inform the relevant preceptor/unit head.

Concerning patterns of absence may be addressed with the learner at the discretion of the Associate Dean. Such patterns of absence include, but are not limited to: *more than three* Single Leave Days in an academic year; repeated absences in the week prior to an exam or assessment; repeated absences from the same session (e.g. Skilled Clinician) or same unit (e.g. Neuroscience). *When a student chooses to miss curriculum, the expectation is that the student understands he or she is still responsible for the relevant learning objectives. In extenuating circumstances, UGME may schedule a remediation session with the support of the Associate Dean*

Procedures:

1. Learners are required to notify UGME of the absence by filling out the “Single Leave Day” form on BrightSpace.
2. Learners may provide information around the circumstances of the leave request on the “Single Leave Day” form, to facilitate administration of curriculum, but they are not required to do so.
3. Learners must ensure that all relevant Faculty of Medicine members, including tutors, attending physicians, and/or preceptors are notified of their absence.

B. SHORT-TERM LEAVE

Short-Term Leave is an absence of more than one consecutive day. Students requesting short term leave should be in solid academic status. The number of days absent will be noted. Patterns of absence may be addressed with the learner at the discretion of the Associate Dean. Permission must be sought in advance from the UGME office, with the reason for the absence outlined. The relevant preceptor/unit head must also be informed by the learner of the anticipated absence. For short term leave, as much notice as possible is requested, and at a minimum, six weeks’ notice is required unless there are compelling reasons why this cannot occur. This is to allow UGME to reschedule mandatory sessions if possible. In general, a request for short term leave falling within three days prior to an exam, will not be approved.

Short-Term Leave may be granted for the following reasons:

- Research work accepted at an educational conference or scientific meeting
- Selection as a representative for Dalhousie University, a province or Canada for an extracurricular activity, such as a sporting event
- Selection as a representative by a Faculty of Medicine department or affiliated organization for an education conference or scientific meeting
- Attendance at an event, such as a funeral, wedding or family reunion
- Illness lasting more than a single day
- Academic or education leave
- Other reasons deemed appropriate by the Associate Dean and faculty member(s) involved

Procedures:

1. Students apply for short-term leave by completing the time-off request form found on BrightSpace. The student must include relevant documentation (conference program,

- proof of representation, etc.) with this form.
2. Students granted short-term leave must ensure that all relevant Faculty of Medicine members, including tutors, attending physicians, and preceptors are notified of their approved absence.
 3. Short-term leave during an exam will only be granted under exceptional circumstances, such as personal/health reasons or presenting research at a conference. Exam deferral for personal/health reasons must first be supported by the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, and be approved by the site-specific Associate Dean. Exam deferral to present at a conference will be approved on a case-by-case basis by the site-specific Associate Dean, who will first request approval from the Unit Head. Deferred exams are to be written on the designated deferral date. If short-term leave during an exam has been approved, students must also submit an exam deferral request form to ugme@dal.ca. In some circumstances, it may be possible for an exam to be written off-site during the leave, but it must be written at the same time as it is being written by the other students.

C. LEAVE OF ABSENCE

A **Leave of Absence (LOA)** is a more prolonged absence from the curriculum, during which a student cannot reasonably participate in effective learning and is not considered to be working toward the MD degree. An LOA will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with approval by the UGME/DMNB Medical Education Associate Dean, often after consultation and/or support by the Assistant Dean Student Affairs or DMNB Director Student Affairs.

A Leave of Absence may be granted for the following reasons:

- Academic or education Leave
- Parental leave
- Medical illness or injury
- Provision of care for an immediate family member
- Bereavement leave
- Crisis or personal circumstance affecting the student's educational commitments
- Extraordinary opportunity for personal growth and/or achievement
- Other reasons deemed appropriate by the Associate Dean and faculty member(s) involved

Note, an LOA may require the student to defer the full affected block/module/rotation to a later period in their medical education, and may involve a delay in graduation.

Length and Extensions: An LOA may be granted for up to one year. Extension of the LOA beyond one year requires the approval of the Associate Dean UGME with accompanying rationale, support and requested documentation. Confidential aspects of the learner's circumstances may be shared with the site-specific Student Affairs office to facilitate general support and liaison around the leave request, with the possibility of extension under exceptional circumstances.

Limit: Regardless of the number of LOAs approved and taken, a student must complete the UGME MD program within seven years of its commencement.

Policy Statements:

1. A request for an LOA is not automatically granted and may be declined or modified by the Faculty of Medicine based on the circumstances and conditions of the request.
2. A student may, at any time, consult with the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, for guidance as it relates to absence from a component of the UGME program.

3. The Faculty of Medicine reserves the right to impose a limitation on the number of leaves, as well as their total duration. Should a prolongation of an LOA be requested by a student and/or their health care provider, the Faculty reserves the right to request a second opinion from a Faculty-designated physician.
4. The period of time spent on an LOA will be included in the time period allowed for the completion of the MD degree. The MD program must be completed within seven years of its commencement.
5. A student's course of study that is interrupted due to a LOA will be reflected on his or her Medical Student Performance Report (MSPR).
6. During an LOA, the student is not permitted to maintain study and/or research work pertaining to the progress of their MD degree.
7. In the event that the educational content of a course/clerkship cannot be made up prior to course end-date due to an approved LOA, the student will receive a grade of "incomplete" until the coursework is completed. Year 1 and Year 2 students returning from an approved LOA will be scheduled to join the beginning of the next respective class.
8. An approved LOA shall set out the procedures and conditions required to facilitate the student's return to the UGME program after the leave. This will include a plan for remediation, reintegration, deferred exams, meetings with key academic leaders, and any documentation necessary to support the student's wellness and ability to return to studies (including any restrictions or accommodations). Formative clerkship rotations and/or written/OSCE examinations may be required as a condition of re-entry.

Procedures:

1. All requests for LOA must be submitted in writing to the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, who will forward the materials received and consult with the Associate Dean, UGME. The following details must be included in the LOA request:
 - The reason for the leave (If the leave is for medical reasons, see Item #4, below.)
 - Any relevant supporting documentation
 - The proposed commencement date of the LOA
 - The expected date of return to training (if this is not known at the time the leave is being arranged, a subsequent letter must be provided with those details)
2. The decision to support an LOA is at the discretion of the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, and is granted by the Associate Dean, UGME. Any request for a LOA is not automatically granted and may be declined. A request for LOA may be also be modified in order to better align with curricular requirements.
3. The Progress Committee must be made aware of all LOAs. The Progress Committee may provide clarification on the criteria and conditions to be enacted in support of LOA requests.
4. All students requesting a LOA as a result of a medical illness or injury must produce a medical certificate to:
 - Verify that medical care is being received.
 - Establish the anticipated duration of the LOA. If the duration of the LOA is uncertain, this must be indicated in the letter and a subsequent letter must be provided with these details.
5. In consultation with the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, an approved LOA due to medical illness or injury may contain conditions such as:
 - The affected student receiving appropriate care and support;
 - A written medical certificate or declaration of readiness to return to the UGME program from the health care provider involved in the student's care;
 - An additional independent medical opinion to ensure the student's capability to resume

their studies.

6. The reintegration process begins with the student meeting with Student Affairs to ensure all conditions for re-enrollment have been met. Students are asked to keep in mind that this process typically takes between six and eight weeks, occasionally requiring as many as twelve weeks, depending on the academic situation. This meeting, attended by the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, the Associate Dean, and the UGME Administrator or DMNB Operations Manager, is intended to ensure that the student is adequately prepared to resume his or her studies, based on the procedures and conditions set out at the time of LOA approval. Additional requirements established by Student Counseling Services, Faculty Counseling Services, the student's health care provider, or the relevant provincial Medical Regulatory Authority may need to be met prior to the student's re-entry to the UGME program.

Notification: Where an LOA involves conditions that may impact patient safety or is related to addiction, the Faculty of Medicine shall notify the relevant provincial Medical Regulatory Authority of the reasons for the LOA, such that the College may take whatever action it deems necessary, including, when necessary, suspension of the student's registration with the College.

Tuition: The Faculty of Medicine has a "tuition max" agreement with the Student Accounts office, which states that students who use the equivalent of four years' worth of resources will only be charged for four years of tuition. This agreement applies to students who take an LOA for a full academic year. LOAs for a partial year may impact the tuition max agreement. These scenarios will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Student Loans and Interest-Free Programs: Students proceeding on an LOA should understand that this situation may affect current loans and interest-free programs. Students are encouraged to contact the Faculty of Medicine's Student Affairs Office for further clarification prior to contacting their lenders and potentially requesting an LOA.