

 DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF MEDICINE Pre-clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy	Policy sponsor: Associate Deans, UGME	Approval date: September 2018
	Responsible unit: Undergraduate Medical Education Office	Amendments: UMECC: March 28, 2024 Faculty Council: April 2, 2024

A. Background & Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide students, faculty and administrative staff with clear expectations around attendance in the pre-clerkship years.

Dalhousie UGME pre-clerkship is comprised of several components of the curriculum that rely heavily on clinical and teaching faculty, simulated patients, volunteer and real patients to provide a realistic clinical teaching environment. As well as learning sessions that are structured around peer teaching, discussion and small group work. This includes the Skilled Clinician program including Interprofessional Education (IPE) sessions, block unit tutorial sessions and lab sessions.

These sessions are not easily replicated by independent, asynchronous study and are challenging to reschedule given limited time and resources. Absences from these sessions also may impact the learning of other students in the group. Therefore, Skilled Clinician sessions, IPE sessions, labs, RIM seminars and tutorial group sessions are considered “mandatory sessions.”

Attendance at other educational sessions is considered “non-mandatory” (though still strongly encouraged) but students are responsible to meet the learning objectives on their own time.

Professionalism is an underlying principle of the pre-clerkship attendance and absence policy. With patient care as the ultimate responsibility for physicians, the ability to prudently take time out of curriculum is important. In addition, establishing clear and timely communication to others are important professional habits to develop.

Significant, recurring, and/or persistent medical or personal concerns may be addressed confidentially with the Student Affairs office, which may assist a student in requesting leaves or other support. The Progress committee in certain circumstances may mandate attendance by those students who are in academic or professional difficulty, in accordance with an accessibility plan and accommodations should one be in effect. Such circumstances would be clearly documented and provided in writing to the student in advance in the form of an educational contract.

B. Application

This Policy applies to all pre-clerkship students in Med 1 and Med 2 enrolled in the Dalhousie MD program at any campus.

C. Definitions

Campus-Specific Associate Dean Responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education – Refers to applicable senior associate or associate dean responsible for undergraduate medical education at each campus.

Component – Refers to a discrete portion of the Skilled Clinician 1 or 2 units that focuses on a specific topic, organ system, or speciality. (i.e. procedural skills, musculoskeletal, pediatrics). It also may refer to a discrete portion of a block unit.

Educational Contract – A signed agreement between the student and the Progress Committee that outlines a predetermined arrangement to help ensure the student can meet expectations to maintain the professional and academic standard for their stage. In other words, this is the remediation plan for a student.

IPE – Interprofessional Education learning sessions that take place with students across the Faculties of Medicine, Health, and Dentistry.

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.

Mandatory sessions – These educational sessions have been deemed important and critical to the foundational learning of the pre-clerkship program. The learning objectives of these sessions are more challenging to make up and learn independently.

Non mandatory sessions – These educational sessions cover important aspects of the curriculum, but the learning objectives from these sessions are more reasonable to obtain independently (i.e., borrowing notes from a classmate, or viewing asynchronously a recorded lecture)

Pre-clerkship – The first and second years of Dalhousie’s Undergraduate Medical Education program are termed “pre-clerkship.”

Single Day Leave – A Single Day Leave is an absence of a single day. Single Day Leaves may be planned or unplanned.

Short Term Leave – Absence of two or more consecutive day

D. Policy

1.0 Learning Sessions:

Generally, there are two main types of learning sessions – mandatory and non-mandatory.

The following learning sessions in the pre-clerkship curriculum are mandatory:

1. All hospital based small/large group sessions

2. Small group Skilled Clinician tutorials
3. Any Skilled Clinician framing lectures at the start of components, or extra sessions such as auscultation etc.
4. Interprofessional Education sessions
5. Procedural Skills sessions
6. Integrated History and Physical Examination training
7. OSCE Preparation training
8. Ultrasound sessions
9. Critical thinking sessions
10. Sensitive Exam training
11. Taking a Sexual History sessions
12. ProComp Tutorial sessions
13. Block Tutorial sessions
14. Labs
15. RIM Seminars
16. Rural week
17. Family Medicine Experience (6 week, 1/day per week)
18. Case Practice

All students are required to attend the full duration of mandatory learning sessions during pre-clerkship. Efforts should be made to minimize planned absences around these sessions. Leaving early or arriving late is considered unprofessional and students should complete a Pre-clerkship Absence form in advance to get approval for attending a partial mandatory session. Students are responsible for meeting the educational objectives of their missed sessions regardless of the nature of the session (mandatory vs non-mandatory).

Failure to provide timely, advance notice for leave or disregarding a decision regarding a leave may result in a professionalism concern being reported and managed accordingly as per the [Progress, Promotion and Appeal Regulations](#) and the [Professionalism Policy](#).

2.0 Types of Leave:

Single Day Leave:

- Whether the Single Day Leave is planned or unplanned, the learner must promptly notify the UGME office of the absence by completing the "Pre-clerkship Absence" form.
- 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 campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education.
- Such concerning patterns of absence include but are not limited to more than three Single Day Leave 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 they are still responsible for the relevant learning objectives.

- In extenuating circumstances, UGME may schedule a remediation session with the support of the campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education.

Short Term Leave (Non-Medical):

- Students requesting short term (>1 day) 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 campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education.
- 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 for presentation 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 educational 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 campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education and faculty member(s) involved

Leave of Absence (LOA)

- An LOA will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with approval by campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education, often after consultation and/or support by the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs or designate.
- 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 campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education and faculty member(s) involved

Note that 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 campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education 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 MD program within seven years of its commencement.

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. A student may, at any time, consult with the campus-specific Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, for guidance as it relates to absence from a component of the UGME program. 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 of Medicine reserves the right to request a second opinion from a faculty-designated physician. The period spent on an LOA will be included in the time allowed for the completion of the MD degree. The MD program must be completed within seven years of its commencement.

A student's course of study that is interrupted due to an LOA will be reflected on their Medical Student Performance Report (MSPR). During an LOA, the student is not permitted to maintain study and/or research work pertaining to the progress of their MD degree.

If the educational content of a course/clerkship cannot be made up prior to the 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.

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.

E. Administrative Structure

The relevant site UGME coordinators, UGME administrative support and UGME managers will operationalize this policy. The ProComp and Block Unit Heads, Skilled Clinician 1&2 Unit Heads (DMNS), Skilled Clinician Director (DMNB), Assistant Deans Pre-clerkship and Assistant Dean, Skilled Clinician will be consulted as required. Non-compliance will result in notification of the campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education.

F. Procedures

Single Day Leave

1. Learners are required to notify UGME of the absence by filling out the “Pre-clerkship Absence” form which is located on the Brightspace landing page and the [UGME Policies and Regulations](#) website.
2. Learners may provide information around the circumstances of the leave request on the “Pre-clerkship Absence” form, to facilitate administration of curriculum, but they are not required to.
3. Learners must ensure that all relevant Faculty of Medicine members, including tutors, attending physicians, and/or preceptors are notified of their absence.
4. For Skilled Clinician the student is required to indicate their plan to make up the objectives of the missed session(s). When feasible, UGME coordinators may try to reschedule the learning sessions, but this may not always be possible due to scheduling and limited resources.

Short Term Leave

1. Students apply for short term leave by completing the “Pre-clerkship Absence” form found on the UGME Brightspace landing page and the UGME Policies and Regulations web page. Students must include relevant documentation (conference program, proof, 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 campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education.
4. Exam deferral to present at a conference will be approved on a case-by-case basis by the campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education, 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.

Leave of Absence

1. All requests for LOA must be submitted in writing to the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, who will confidentially store any supporting materials, and consult with the campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education. 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 campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical

Education. Any request for an LOA is not automatically granted and may be declined. A request for LOA may also be modified 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 an LOA because of medical illness or injury must provide Student Affairs with 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.
 - Such documentation is kept confidentially at Student Affairs.
5. The return from prolonged leave of absences are reviewed by the Progress Committee.
6. In consultation with the Assistant Dean, Student Affairs, an approved LOA due to medical illness or injury may contain conditions such as:
 - Assurance and documentation that the affected student is receiving appropriate care and support.
 - A written medical certificate or declaration of readiness to return to the UGME program is provided to Student Affairs from the health care provider involved in the student's care.
 - An additional independent medical opinion with documentation to ensure the student's capability to resume is provided to Student Affairs.

5. Other

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 of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia or the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick (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.

Skilled Clinician/Block/ProComp Tutorial Absences: If more than 3 sessions and/or over 40% of any component small group sessions are missed due to unexcused absences, the campus specific Associate Dean responsible for Undergraduate Medical Education (or designate) will be notified to create an educational plan and discuss professionalism around attendance.

If a student is identified to not be on track to meet their learning objectives after missing 3 or more sessions and/or missed more than 40% of their component sessions due to planned absences, then a

learning plan will be created to support progress and further absences that impact the relevant units may be denied.