

 <p>Guideline: Time-Off for Culturally Significant Events</p>	<p>Sponsor: Associate Deans, UGME</p>	<p>Approval date: December 4 2025 (UMECC)</p>
	<p>Responsible Unit: Undergraduate Medical Education Office</p>	<p>Amendments:</p>

A. Background & Purpose

The Faculty of Medicine recognizes the importance of supporting an inclusive learning environment that recognizes and affirms the diverse cultural, spiritual, and religious backgrounds of learners. This guideline is intended to provide guidance on time away from the undergraduate medical education curriculum to attend, observe, or participate in activities, events, or mentorship opportunities that are specific to a learner's cultural background and not meaningfully addressed by existing policies or programs.

B. Application

This guideline applies to all learners in the undergraduate medical education program, including those in pre-clerkship (Med 1-2), clerkship (Med 3-4), and clerkship extension (Med 5) years. This guideline works in tandem with the *Pre-clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy* and *Clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy*. The attendance and absence policies can be found on the UGME [policy page](#).

C. Definitions

Culturally Significant Events refer to a ceremony, observance, festival, or period of spiritual, religious, or cultural importance that holds deep meaning for an individual or their community. These events may include, but are not limited to, Indigenous ceremonies, gatherings, cultural celebrations, funerals, religious observances such as Ramadan, Diwali, Yom Kippur, or Easter, as well as cultural holidays or rites of passage that are integral to a person's identity and heritage. Mentorship opportunities that offer Indigenous and Black learners a distinct opportunity to network with and learn from Indigenous and Black physicians are also considered culturally significant events for the purpose of this guideline.

Secondary Reviewer is a person that is invoked to review a request under this guideline when the Campus-Specific Associate Dean believes there are exceptional circumstances that exist to warrant denying a learner's request made under this guideline. The purpose of a secondary reviewer is to ensure that adequate deliberation occurs before a decision is made that could have an adverse impact on a learner's ability to participate in a culturally significant event. Typically, the secondary reviewer in the case of learners admitted under the Indigenous Admissions Pathway is the Academic Director, Indigenous Health, and the Academic Director, Black Health in the case of learners admitted under the Black Learners Admissions Pathway. For all other learners, a secondary reviewer will be identified by the Campus-Specific Associate Dean in consultation with the Student Affairs Office.

Pre-Clerkship refers to learners in the first two years of the undergraduate medical education program.

Clerkship refers to learners in the last 2 years of the undergraduate medical education program.

Clerkship Extension refers to learners who did not match to a residency program after their Med 4 year and are undertaking a Med 5 year.

Campus Specific Associate Dean refers to the Associate Dean with responsibility for the undergraduate program at the campus at which the learner is registered.

D. Guidelines

Under this guideline:

1. Any undergraduate learner may request time away from mandatory curriculum to participate in culturally significant events.
2. Additional terms related to short term leave in the *Pre-clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy and Clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy* will also apply to such requests.
3. Time away from mandatory curriculum to participate in culturally significant events will be granted barring exceptional circumstances;
 - a. Where it is believed that exceptional circumstances exist that warrant denying the request in whole or in part, the campus-specific Associate Dean shall review the request and circumstances with a secondary reviewer;
 - b. The campus specific Associate Dean shall make a final determination on the request only once they have consulted with the secondary reviewer and considered the potential impact on the learner from a holistic perspective;
4. The Faculty of Medicine will strive to support the learner in meeting learning objectives where reasonably possible (e.g. offering additional call shifts, etc.). Learners are ultimately responsible for meeting learning objectives for all mandatory and non-mandatory sessions, regardless of any approved time away or ability to meet the request.

E. Administrative Structure

1. Authority: This Guideline is sponsored by and falls under the authority of the Associate Deans, UGME.
2. Implementation: The Undergraduate Medical Education Office is the unit responsible for implementing this Guideline.
3. Reporting: The campus specific Associate Deans, UGME reports aggregate, de-identified data to the Associate Dean, Serving and Engaging Society annually with respect to decisions made under this Guideline. This will include total number of requests received, total number of requests granted, total number of requests denied, and why requests were denied.
4. Review: This Guideline will be reviewed by the policy subcommittee as per the terms of reference.

F. Procedures

1. Learners will submit a short-term leave request as described in the *Pre-clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy and Clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy*; When doing so, learners must designate that it is for a culturally significant event.

2. Student Affairs is available at all stages to provide appropriate support as requested by the learner;
3. The Campus-Specific Associate Dean will review the request in a timely manner and:
 - a. Approve the request; or,
 - i. If applicable, the approved request will be submitted to the relevant clinical department with notice that it has been approved under this Guideline.
 1. If the clinical department also approves the request, the learner will be notified of the approval by UGME;
 2. If the clinical department denies the request, the campus specific Associate Dean will meet with the clinical department to determine the reasoning behind the denial and attempt to address any barriers to the clinical department approving the request in consultation with the secondary reviewer. If these barriers cannot be overcome and the clinical department denies the request following reasonable effort, the learner will be notified of the denial by UGME.
 - b. Identify any exceptional circumstances that they believe may warrant denial of the request, and, after consulting with the Secondary Reviewer:
 - i. Approve the request, notify the Secondary Reviewer, and proceed per section 3(a)(i) as applicable; or,
 - ii. Deny the request and provide the learner and Secondary Reviewer with the identified exceptional circumstances and reasoning for the denial in writing.
 - iii. At the completion of this process, the decision is final.