

Graduate Leave of Absence

During the course of graduate study, students may find themselves in circumstances that require them to interrupt their graduate work. When these occasions arise, the University allows students to request a leave of absence for either personal or medical reasons. The information provided below is designed to assist students in making a smooth transition away from graduate study and then back again.

Students are required to submit the Leave of Absence Request form (<http://lehigh.edu/go/gradloa/>) to the Office of Graduate Student Life. If the student is eligible, the Office of Graduate Student Life will then notify the academic adviser, program director, department chair, graduate associate dean of the appropriate college and the Office of the Registrar. In order to enhance their successful return to graduate school, students are strongly encouraged to meet with their advisers as early as possible and no later than 30 days prior to return to discuss plans and to keep the lines of communication open.

Please note that a "withdrawal" indicates the student intends to discontinue graduate study and should fill out the Graduate Permanent Withdrawal Form (https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?LehighUniv&layout_id=103). The "Leave of Absence" indicates that the student intends to return at a specified later date. This policy addresses leaves after which the student intends to return and resume his or her studies.

Important Information about Requested Leaves of Absence:

- Students who ask to withdraw from classes within the first two weeks of the semester of their first year should request a deferral of admission, not a leave of absence.
- Funded students who are requesting a leave due to the birth or adoption of a child should apply for a Graduate Student Parental Leave. Students can access information and the form here (<https://provost.lehigh.edu/resources/policies/policies-graduate-research-and-teaching-assistants/graduate-student-parental/>).
- The University will grant a leave of absence for up to one year. If more time away is required, students may request a second year of leave by submitting an additional leave of absence request form. Should students require more than two years away from the University, they will be required to apply for readmission to the program at the end of their time away. A leave that commences during the semester will count as an entire semester away in terms of total leave time allowed.
- Students may be eligible for a prorated tuition refund. Please consult the Bursar's Office (<https://catalog.lehigh.edu/informationofgeneralinterest/refundsofcharges/#:~:text=Prorated%20refunds%20are%20based%20upon,granted%20any%20housing%20rental%20refund>) for details.
- An approved leave of absence stops the student's time to degree clock for the length of the approved leave, up to the maximum allowable two years. Students are encouraged to consult their graduate dean's office for time to degree details.
- Students requesting a leave for medical or psychological reasons must include documentation from their health provider which indicates a recommendation for the leave and expected time away. The documentation is submitted to the Associate Deputy Provost for Graduate Education. Such documentation remains confidential.
- While on an approved leave, students are not registered with the University. This has important implications:
 - Students may not submit work, take exams, propose or defend theses or dissertations, or use faculty time.
 - Students will not have access to University services, including the Health and Counseling Centers and the Fitness Center.
 - Students will have access to their email account and to LTS services.
 - Funded students cease to receive stipend payments from the start of the approved date of the leave. Students receiving funding provided to the university by external grants or contracts should consult with their funding-related adviser/supervisor about applicable rules, procedures and possible limitations. While those who have provided financial support for students who go on leave will do their best to support those students when they return and resume their studies, it is not possible to guarantee such support will be available when the student returns.
- Student loans may come out of deferment and the student may be required to begin repaying his/her loans. Please consult the Office of Financial Aid (<https://www2.lehigh.edu/financial-aid/graduate/>).
- Immigration status may be affected for international students. Please consult the Office of International Students and Scholars (<https://global.lehigh.edu/oiss/current-students/maintaining-status/>).
- Students living in campus housing will need to make other living arrangements, since only registered students are eligible for campus housing. Housing Services also cannot guarantee space upon the student's return.
- All students enrolled in the University health insurance plan are required to pay their annual premium in full regardless of their registration status. This means that any unpaid premium will be due by the first day of leave. This ensures that students on leave have access to health insurance during the term of the health insurance contract. Students can contact the University Health Center (<https://studentaffairs.lehigh.edu/node/2554/>) to obtain a list of primary care doctors in the community to use during their leave of absence. Please see the Lehigh University Student Health Insurance Plan information (https://www.universityhealthplans.com/letters/letter.cgi?group_id=4).
- Students who need to be absent within the semester (no more than a few weeks in duration) must consult with their professors about the possibility of making up missed classwork and, if applicable, work related to their funding support. In these circumstances, students do not need to submit an official Leave of Absence request. Please also review the Graduate Vacation/Personal Time Away Policy. (<https://provost.lehigh.edu/resources/policies/policies-graduate-research-and-teaching-assistants/graduate-vacationpersonal-time/#:~:text=The%20current%20vacation%20policy%20is,time%20away%20can%20be%20paid>) Students may consult the Associate Deputy Provost for Graduate Education with questions and concerns.
- Important Information about separation from the university due to failure to request a leave of absence:
 - Students who have spent two years or less away from graduate study without an approved leave may need to pay a maintenance of student status or maintenance of candidacy fee for each of the semesters that they have been absent as a condition of readmission. The student will need to Petition to the Standing of Graduate Students (SOGS) Committee (<https://ras.lehigh.edu/sites/ras.lehigh.edu/files/pdf/SOGS%20Electronic%20Petition%205-2013.pdf>) to request readmission.
 - Students who have spent more than two years away from graduate study without an approved leave must pay a maintenance of student status or maintenance of candidacy fee for each of the semesters that they have been absent as a condition of readmission. The student will need to Petition to the Standing of Graduate Students (SOGS) Committee (<https://ras.lehigh.edu/sites/ras.lehigh.edu/files/pdf/SOGS%20Electronic%20Petition%205-2013.pdf>) to request readmission.
- Important Information about separation from the university due to Code of Conduct Violations:

- Students may be suspended for violating the University's Code of Conduct.
- Time-to-degree deadlines are not extended for students who are suspended due to Code of Conduct violations.
- Students who intend to return after a period of suspension are required to submit a petition to the Standing of Graduate Students Committee requesting permission to return.
- When ready to resume graduate study, students are required to complete the Graduate Return from Leave Form (https://publicdocs.maxient.com/reportingform.php?LehighUniv&layout_id=111).
- Returning students are encouraged to contact their program adviser as early as possible to discuss registration.
- Returning students may only re-enroll for a full semester or summer session. In order to meet this requirement, such students need to be aware of registration deadlines.
- If you have any questions about this policy or its application, please contact the Associate Deputy Provost for Graduate Education, Kathleen Hutnik, either by email kaha@lehigh.edu or telephone 610-758-4722.