

MEDICAL STUDENT POLICY

Title: Leave of Absence Policy	
Relevant LCME Element(s): 9.9: Student Advancement and Appeal Process	Last approved: 5/7/2025

I. PURPOSE

Outlines process under which currently enrolled MD students may request and return from a leave of absence and/or be placed on an administrative leave of absence.

II. PERSONS AFFECTED

Students currently enrolled in coursework leading to the MD degree at the Feinberg School of Medicine.

III. DEFINITIONS

1. **Student-initiated leave**

Students may request a leave of absence from the Feinberg curriculum for a wide range of reasons. These include:

- Health (physical or mental)
- Dual Degree
 - MD/MBA
 - MD/PhD
 - MD/MPH (accelerated)
 - MD/MA (accelerated)
- External Research/Experience not for credit (fellowship, internship)
- Academic (voluntary decision to take time away from curriculum to focus on academics)
- Personal/Other

2. **Administrative leave**

Students will be placed on leave by the Feinberg administration under certain circumstances:

- Board Exams
 - Not passing STEP 1 or 2 CK on first attempt unless enrolled in a Feinberg MD knowledge consolidation course.
 - Not passing STEP 1 or 2 CK on second attempt.
 - Not sitting for STEP 1 within six weeks after the end of Intro to Phase 2.
 - Not sitting for STEP 2 CK by end of August of Phase 3/M4 year without approval from FSM Deans.
- Enrollment
 - Failing to maintain full-time enrollment status at Feinberg. Full-time enrollment is defined as follows:
 - Phase 1a/1b (M1/M2): Enrolled in modules.
 - Phase 2/3 (M3/M4): Enrolled in at least 8 weeks of clerkships, electives, independent study, or required modules within a 16-week time frame. (Refer to [Phases 2 and 3 Scheduling Policy](#).)
- [Student Promotions Committee \(SPC\)](#)

- The SPC may mandate a student take a leave of absence due to academic or professionalism reasons.

3. Involuntary leave

If a student has engaged or threatened to engage in behavior that poses: 1) a significant risk to the health and safety of themselves or others; and/or 2) or a significant disruption to the programs, services, or activities of the University, the student will be referred to the Student Promotions Committee, which may make a determination about involuntary leave consistent with policy outlined in [Northwestern University's Involuntary Leave of Absence Policy](#). In doing so, the Student Promotions Committee may consult with the University's Behavioral Consultation team.

IV. POLICY AND PROCEDURE STATEMENT

Leave of absence (LOA) is defined as a temporary separation from the Feinberg School of Medicine. Students on a leave of absence will not be enrolled in any coursework within the MD program. They must surrender their hospital ID badge(s) and will not have access to CTA U-Pass/Ventra card. Students who are not enrolled at another Northwestern University (NU) degree program must also surrender their Wildcard and will not have access to NU student parking and other University resources and services. Students should contact the NU Student Health Insurance Office to determine their eligibility to remain enrolled in NU-SHIP.

A leave of absence will impact the timeline to graduation and access to, and eligibility for, financial aid. Tuition refunds are dependent on the timing of the leave. Prior to the LOA, students are responsible for meeting with the Registrar's office and, if relevant, the Senior Assistant Director of Financial Aid to discuss their individual case.

Feinberg is required to report all leaves/interruption of medical education in the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE) if the leave results in extended time to graduation. This is a brief 1-2 sentence description indicating the general reason for the leave.

Certain types of approved time off for credit-bearing research including fellowships, global health research, or other approved experience may be eligible for an independent study designation. The maximum total amount of time a Feinberg medical student can receive independent study status is 12 months. Any additional time off thereafter would constitute leave of absence status.

In general, a leave of absence is granted for a maximum of one year. In rare circumstances, the Student Promotions Committee (SPC) may approve a renewed leave of absence upon re-application and provision of justification before the initial year of leave is over.

All students on LOA will receive documentation from the Registrar outlining the details of the leave, including any requirements that must be met before the student may be reinstated from the leave. Notice of students going on LOA will be provided to the University Registrar, Office of Student Accounts, and the Chicago Office of Financial Aid by the Feinberg School of Medicine Registrar.

Process for Initiating a Leave of Absence

Voluntary Leave of Absence

Students requesting a voluntary leave of absence must submit a [Time Away Form](#) at least seven (7) days prior to the leave. Voluntary leaves of absence must be approved by a Feinberg education dean.

Administrative Leave of Absence

Students placed on administrative leave must complete a [Time Away Form](#) within five (5) days of the official start of their leave of absence and follow the instructions listed. If the form is not received by that time, it will be processed on the student's behalf by the Registration and Records team in conjunction with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

Requesting a return to active status/end of Leave of Absence

Students are required to present to the SPC before returning to active status, except for students taking a leave for dual or second degrees, research, or internships.

In certain circumstances, the SPC may require that a fitness for duty examination be performed on the student by appropriate professionals before reentry to Feinberg is granted. The committee may also ask how the student spent their leave of absence and how they have addressed their personal or academic issues in order to determine if a return to active status is in the best interest of the student at that time. Students may be asked to provide supporting documentation that will be reviewed by the SPC. Notification of the SPC decision is sent in writing within 14 calendar days after the meeting. On rare occasions, the SPC may decide that it is not in the best interest of the student or the patient care environment for the student to return to coursework at Feinberg and may deny the request to return or may extend the LOA. The student has the right to appeal the SPC decision.

Appealing a denial of reinstatement

If reinstatement is denied, the student may appeal the determination using the appeal procedure set forth in the [Student Promotions Committee Policy](#). Students may also refer to Northwestern University's [disability grievance procedures](#) if applicable.

V. APPROVING BODY

Curriculum Committee

VI. REVISION HISTORY

5/7/2025: Added definitions of leave and detailed process of going on and returning from a leave of absence.