



Taking a Break from Your Medical Education

Some medical students decide to interrupt their medical education to accommodate educational goals or special circumstances. It's important to know how to handle a leave of absence. Carefully consider the ramifications of how such a break in your education may delay graduation or other milestones.

Planning to Take a Leave of Absence

First consult with your advisor and make sure everyone on your campus, who needs to be, is in the 'loop.' Typically, a Leave of Absence (LOA) is a period of non-enrollment when a student is *not* required to pay (full) tuition and fees. However, for some institutions this process may be associated with a fee. Check your own institution's policy regarding a LOA for specific requirements. There are many acceptable reasons for a LOA, and may include:

- research
- additional graduate degree
- international educational opportunity
- extramural elective opportunities (outside of your medical school)
- family leave or medical leave
- additional time to study for boards
- customized curriculum
- other personal reasons

Preparing to Leave or Return to Campus

There are several simple things to do to ensure departure and re-entry are

as smooth as possible. Be sure to stay in contact with your financial aid office and apply for financial aid during the appropriate cycle. And be certain to communicate with *all* applicable departments at your institution—the earlier, the better, as some items, forms or service availability are likely to be time-sensitive. Be aware of your school's policy for re-entry *prior* to leaving campus. For example, some schools limit the amount of time a student is allowed to be away from their institution.

Typically students must start the academic year even if they need to take time off. Check with your dean or advisor (or someone in that role) to confirm your institution's policy. Although you may be allowed to take a leave of absence while enrolled at the school, it may not be allowed during certain medical school years or rotation cycles.

Refer to the checklist (right) as you prepare for your LOA and also upon your return. Make sure you investigate all policies and think about any ramifications the LOA may involve before you make the final decision, especially the implications on your financial aid package, expected date of graduation or family life. Talk to your financial aid

office if you have additional questions about a potential LOA.

Checklist

Before you leave:

- Familiarize yourself with your institution's leave policy
- Check status of loans and if you are entering repayment
- Notify offices (registrar, financial aid, student affairs, etc.)
- Get health insurance in order
- Suspend parking arrangements
- Suspend housing and miscellaneous living expenses (phone, laptops, pagers, IT etc.)
- Notify student email and amenities/accounts
- Participate in an exit interview
- Provide forwarding address and point of contact

Prior to your return:

- Check status of loans
- Notify the school (all relevant offices) of your intent to return
- Plan, sign up or confirm course registration
- Determine billing and payment
- Complete the FAFSA to begin application for financial aid
- Re-apply for all applicable loans
- Get health insurance in order
- Apply for parking
- Set up or confirm housing and miscellaneous living expenses (phone, laptops, pagers, etc.)