

## What should a graduate chair or graduate program director consider if a student requests a leave of absence?

The University has a shared responsibility to our admitted students. Whenever possible, we want to keep students registered and making progress toward their degree. If students must suspend their work temporarily for a term or more, they may consider a leave of absence. Discontinuation is only appropriate for students who are suspending their progress indefinitely or have left their Ph.D. program without a plan to return.

If a student is considering a leave of absence, please review and discuss the following materials with your student.

1. The student is not required to disclose any personal details related to the request to the graduate program community (faculty, staff, and students). If a student does share personal information with you, please exercise discretion and respect the student's right to privacy.
2. Please consider and discuss with the student how the following alternatives might accommodate the student's needs while still allowing him or her to remain registered and make progress toward the degree, even if at a slower pace:
  - University resources and services. The University has many resources and services to support students. Please share these resources with the student to help the student remain registered and connected.
  - Within-term accommodation. This is a period of modified duties and responsibilities to allow a student to remain registered in the current term. These may include:
    - Reducing coursework, research, teaching, or other academic responsibilities
    - Working at a slower pace
    - Delaying milestone deadlines
    - Taking incompletes in the current term with a plan to complete the work in a future term
  - Parental Accommodation Policy. If the student, or his or her spouse or partner, has given birth or adopted a child under the age of six, the student is eligible for an accommodation period up to a maximum of six weeks. The student remains registered during the accommodation period. Please work with the student to modify his or her work expectations during this period. A student may take a parental accommodation period without taking a leave of absence.
  - Within-Semester Medical Accommodation policy. Faculty should make reasonable accommodations for course-related work and other academic deadlines for students who have a brief illness or other health-related difficulties during the term. A student may take a within-semester medical accommodation without taking a leave of absence.

3. When circumstances arise that necessitate a leave of absence in the middle of a semester, please consider ways for the student to remain registered and earn credit for the current semester. For example, has the student made enough progress to earn some credit for the semester? If it is not possible for the student to remain registered and the student must begin a leave of absence in the middle of a semester, the student needs to withdraw his or her registration prior to beginning a leave. The Rackham Leave of Absence Coordinator is available to help clarify the implications of a term withdrawal:
  - The student will receive a “W” for each course that is not officially dropped after the first three weeks of a full term (or the first two weeks of a half term).
  - A term withdrawal can have implications in multiple areas including: visa status, tuition payment, loans, fellowships, employment, and benefits.
  - **Students who hold an appointment as a GSI, GSRA, or a GSSA will be responsible for tuition assessments for the current term, as the tuition waiver associated with their appointment will be terminated upon their withdrawal.**
  
4. If it is not possible to arrange an accommodation that allows the student to remain registered, help the student understand the implications of a leave of absence. Depending on the student's individual circumstances, the following implications may apply:
  - Health insurance coverage
  - New student loans and loan deferment
  - Registration status and tuition charges
  - Student employment
  - U-M issued F-1 and J-1 visa status
  - University Housing contracts
  - University-administered grants and fellowships

Funding commitments that were made to students prior to the leave should be held in reserve and made available again to the student when the student returns from the leave. The graduate chair or director should discuss the timing of communication with the student in order to secure the appropriate type of funding upon the student's return. The Rackham Leave of Absence Coordinator is available to help clarify the implications of a leave of absence.

5. If it is not possible to arrange an accommodation that allows the student to remain registered, help the student determine the most appropriate type of leave of absence given the student's individual circumstances. The Rackham Leave of Absence Coordinator is available to help clarify the eligibility criteria for the [four types of leave](#) (medical reasons, family necessity/dependent care reasons, military service, and personal reasons).
  
6. Graduate program chairs or directors will make a [recommendation to Rackham](#) about whether a student's leave request should be approved or denied. We expect that most leave requests will be recommended for approval. If you recommend denying a request, the Rackham dean reviewing the recommendation will want to discuss the reasons with you.

7. When considering a request for a leave of absence, faculty should consider the following:
- *Is the student requesting a leave of absence for personal reasons?* If yes, the request for a leave of absence likely should be recommended as students may take a leave of absence for personal reasons for one term in their doctoral career. If you believe that the timing is inopportune, you can discuss timing alternatives with the student.
  - *Is the student requesting a leave of absence for military service?* If yes, the request for a leave should be recommended. It is better for the student to remain connected through a leave of absence rather than discontinuing from the doctoral program.
  - *Is the student planning on making progress toward his or her degree during the requested term(s)?* If yes, the request for a leave should not be recommended, and the student should be registered.
8. Graduate chairs or directors need to create a [tentative re-entry plan](#) with the student to clarify expectations for the student upon return from a leave of absence. Involve the student's faculty advisor in the planning discussion, as appropriate. A tentative re-entry plan should include the following:
- The student's progress in the Ph.D. program
  - The student's expected return date
  - The deadline for the student to inform the program of his or her intent to return
  - Funding arrangements upon return
  - Work load expectations upon return
  - Plans to complete work from previous terms (if applicable)

[Example tentative re-entry plan](#)