

PHD STUDENT LEAVE OF ABSENCE POLICY

PhD students will be granted a leave of absence for military duty, medical reasons, or family leave (<https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/family-friendly-policies-phd-students/>); any of these may require documentation. Military, medical and family leave “stops the clock” on time to completion. Personal leave for other reasons may be granted with the approval of the Graduate Group Chair in consultation with the Graduate Dean of the student’s school, but does not, absent exceptional circumstances, “stop the clock” on time to completion.

Notification of permission or denial of leaves of absence will be communicated in writing by the student’s Graduate Group Chair. The terms of the leave will be specified at the time the leave is granted, including the extent to which the student will have access to resources, facilities, or campus – either physically or remotely – during the leave period. Requirements for return may be imposed by the Graduate Group Chair in consultation with the Graduate Dean of the student’s school; such requirements will be provided in writing to the student when the leave is approved.

Leaves of absence from PhD studies are typically granted for one or two semesters. Leaves requested for a longer period are approved only in exceptional circumstances (for example, mandatory military service). Students may request an extension of leave, to be approved by the Graduate Group Chair in consultation with the Graduate Dean. Extension requests should be made by the student at least 30 days before the expiration of the original leave of absence.

Continuous registration as a graduate student is required unless a formal leave of absence is granted. A student is considered to have withdrawn from candidacy for the degree if the student: (1) fails to return from leave as scheduled, (2) fails to secure an extension of a prior leave, or (3) does not have an approved leave of absence and fails to register each semester. In these cases, approval to return by the Graduate Dean and recertification are required as outlined in the Academic Rules for PhD Programs (<https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/academic-rules-phd/>).

While on leave, a student’s funding from the University is deferred until the student returns from leave. Students receiving funding from external sources, such as government grants, are subject to the conditions established by the funding source. Students whose University funding includes coverage of the Penn Student Health Insurance Plan will continue to receive coverage for their individual health insurance while on medical or family leave for one full semester; students may petition for an additional semester. Students with external funding that includes health insurance coverage that will not continue if on leave will also receive coverage for their individual health insurance from their School while on medical or family leave for one full semester; these students may also petition for an additional semester. No language or other degree examinations may be taken while a student is on a leave of absence. Students may not earn credit for courses taken at another institution during a leave of absence. Leave should not be granted for the purpose of evading tuition charges.

Students returning from leave are not guaranteed to return to the same research group, project, or lab. If necessary, the Graduate Group will make every effort to find a suitable new research group, project, or lab for the student.

In order to ensure successful completion of the PhD, a student’s leave(s) should generally not exceed two years over the course of the doctoral program. If, however, it is determined in an individual case that extension of the leave period(s) beyond two years is appropriate, students may need to repeat coursework or other requirements, as determined by the Graduate Group Chair. Original funding limits remain in place for students who must repeat requirements. In addition, the Graduate Group Chair, in consultation with the Graduate Dean, will annually review each case in which a further extension has been granted, or repeated leaves have been taken, to assess if the length and/or number of leaves have made it impossible for a student to make sufficient continuous academic progress to complete the degree. In such a case, the student will be advised that no further extensions will be granted and that they will be withdrawn from the program.

Important note: Students taking Family Leave who anticipate adding a dependent (e.g., newborn) to their Penn Student Insurance Policy must remain in active student status at the start of the fall semester. See more information at <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/family-friendly-policies-phd-students/>.

The procedures for requesting and returning from leave are outlined here (<https://provost.upenn.edu/resources-phd-students/>).

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