**Work Schedule, Vacation, Sick Leave, Leave of Absence Policy**

The first day of your graduate studies is the first day of your career as a scientist. It is a big step-up from your undergraduate years and requires your ultimate commitment. Your first year of study focuses primarily on didactic education. Therefore, there are essentially set times for classes and holidays that follow the University calendar. In the Summer Semester, you will begin your dissertation research, so extended vacations during the summer are not permitted.

If you are sick for a journal club, class, or exam, please inform the faculty member in charge of that activity. This can be accomplished by phone or email or in person and should be done before the class or meeting. Do not assume that informing your mentor or a single faculty member of your absence will result in that absence being communicated to other faculty. Each faculty member with whom you have a class or other obligation must be informed individually for each absence. **BE PROACTIVE!**

Please become familiar with any policies with regard to absenteeism in the syllabi of your courses and in your chosen Ph.D. graduate program. Once you have entered a specific graduate program, the vacation schedule for the undergraduate University no longer applies. Discuss the expectations on vacation and sick policy with your mentor. These expectations are likely to vary among research laboratories so it is important to establish these expectations upon entry in the laboratory. You should be aware that these decisions are made in your best interest and for safety and efficient conduct of experiments. Please note that the Ph.D. degree is awarded based on completion of original dissertation research. Undue time spent away from the University will hamper your progress in research.

**Long-Term Leave of Absence Policy for HSC Graduate Programs**

1. **Introduction and Definition**

Under certain circumstances, graduate students may request or have imposed a long-term leave of absence (LOA) during which they are recessed without stipend from the program for a specified duration. There are several categories under which a student may petition for a leave of absence: medical, personal, and academic. In addition, an administrative leave of absence may be enforced due to serious academic or professional deficiencies.

A long term LOA is a period greater than 1 calendar month duration during which time the student is not engaged in significant productive activity toward the degree. The LOA may last up to 1 year. WVU policy is that students can only be inactive in their program for 1 year after which time they would need to reapply for admission.

2. **Policy**

The request for the long-term LOA should be presented in writing to the Graduate Program Director and reviewed by the Program’s faculty or subcommittee who will then recommend to the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs (Dentistry, Nursing, Pharmacy and Public Health) or the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education (Medicine) the terms under which the student may return to the program. Following the agreed upon time of absence, a student in need of more time in recess will be officially withdrawn from the program, unless the above administrative groups grant an extension because of special circumstances.
Once withdrawn from the program, individuals must reapply for and gain admission to resume their studies.

3. Types of Leave and Procedures

Student-initiated leaves:

**Procedure:** Request for a LOA must be initiated in writing. Student-initiated LOA requests use the Long-term LOA form. The student and the student’s advisor (if applicable) should sign the form and present it to the Graduate Program Director. The request will be reviewed by the Program Director, Program Faculty and/or subcommittee and appropriate Dean. Upon acceptance of the request the student will be notified in writing and the letter will contain any applicable requirements for return to the program. Upon return to the program, the student presents any required documentation to the Graduate Director. Once the return is accepted, the Graduate Director signs the LOA form indicating that the leave is over. If a student chooses not to return from the LOA, they should submit a letter to the Graduate Director indicating this fact.

**Medical LOA:** This type of LOA is reserved for acute medical problems of a physical or mental health nature affecting the student or a first-degree relative requiring intense medical care. In order to return to the program, the student will present a letter of release from the treating physician clearly stating that they are fit to return to the rigors of a graduate program.

**Personal LOA:** This type of LOA is used for reasons of a personal nature affecting the student's ability to be successful in the program. These may include, but are not limited to requests regarding family-related issues unrelated to health, visa issues, or a reconsideration of career direction.

**Academic LOA:** This type of LOA is reserved for students who desire a recess from the program while currently unsatisfactory in a course prior to the issue of a final evaluation in that course. Student’s leaving the program for this reason will have specific requirements for their return, which will generally involve successful remediation of their knowledge base. Return to the program will involve evaluation of the remediation as well as the entire academic record. Students who fail to successfully meet the criteria stipulated in the letter granting the leave may not be permitted to return. Should a student be permitted to return to the program, the Graduate Program will recommend if the student returns on academic probation or in good academic and professional standing. Students, who are recommended not to return to the program, must reapply and gain admission in order to resume.

Administrative-initiated leave:

**Procedure:** The administrator (Graduate Director, advisor, Dean) initiates this request in writing. The LOA should indicate the reason for the leave, the length of the leave, and any requirements for return. LOA requests should be approved by the Graduate Director and appropriate Dean prior to presentation to the student. The student should sign the letter indicating that they understand the terms. Upon return to the program, the student presents any required documentation to the Graduate Director. Once the return is accepted, the Graduate Director signs the LOA form indicating that the leave is over. If a student chooses not to return from the LOA, they should submit a letter to the Graduate Director indicating this fact.

**Administrative LOA:** This type of LOA is imposed by the Graduate Director and/or appropriate Dean for that Graduate Program due to academic or professional deficiencies, such as failure to
progress in research, inattention to the academic or professional standards of a graduate student, or unexplained absence from the program of greater than 1 week. This type of LOA will be part of the student’s permanent record.

**Academic LOA:** This is the same as the student-initiated leave and is due to a deficiency in academic standing prior to the final evaluation in a course(s).

4. **Exceptions/Conditions**

**LOA with stipend:** In some circumstances, the student may not be in residence in the program for greater than one month but may be able to achieve significant progress toward the degree. During this time, the student may remain on stipend. Such agreements should be documented in writing and include:

1. Reason for leave
2. Duration and timing of leave
3. Planned activities during leave
4. Planned method of communication during the leave

The letter documenting these conditions must be signed by the Graduate Director and placed in the student’s file.

**Extension of time in the program or to meet program-specific requirements:** If the student is unable to complete the degree within the University time limit for attaining the degree, they may petition for an extension equal to the time of the LOA. Petitions must be presented to the Graduate Director in writing 6 months prior to the end of this limit. Petitions for extensions of other program specific activities such as candidacy exams, seminars, etc. should also be handled in writing and occur prior to the semester in which the activity is to take place.

**Exceptions to the above:** Programs that are accredited may have specific residency requirements and the rules of the accrediting agency supersede these institutional guidelines.

**Failure to return:** If a student fails to return from the LOA on the specified time and has not made any request for an extension, they shall be immediately withdrawn from the program. Reentry into the program will require a new application for admission.

**Parental LOA:** This is a LOA due to the birth or adoption of a child. Stipend should remain intact for the duration of the leave term as specified below.

- 6 Weeks individual, unless doctor-ordered
- 8 weeks total per family if both parents are enrolled in HSC graduate programs
REQUEST FOR A LONG-TERM LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Name:
Graduate Program:
Type of leave:
  Personal
  Medical
  Academic
  Administrative
Person initiating request:
Date of the start of leave:
Date of anticipated return:
Reason for request:
Signature of student:
Signature of advisor:

UPON RETURN FROM THE LEAVE
Date of return:
Fulfillment of requirements for return:
Signature of Graduate Director:
Signature of Student:
Note: this form will be placed in the student’s file
LETTER GRANTING A PERSONAL LOA

(Date)

(insert student name and address)

Dear (insert student name),

The Graduate Program in the ________ approved your request for a medical leave of absence from _______________ to ________________ due to an (insert medical condition). Due to the medical nature of the request, a doctor’s clearance will be needed to return to the program. As per the leave of absence policy, if additional time is required, please keep in mind that an extension should be requested. We hope for your successful recuperation and return to the program in good health.

Sincerely,

(insert signature)

Graduate Director, Graduate Program in ______________

(insert signature)

Associate Dean/VP for Graduate Studies

cc:   student’s mentor’s name here

student’s file
SAMPLE LETTER APPROVING OTHER TYPES OF LEAVE

(Date)

(student name address)

Dear (insert student name),

The Graduate Program in the __________ approved your request for a personal/medical/academic leave of absence from _____ to _______.

Include any requirements for return to the program.

As per the leave of absence policy for the program, if you require more than a year before returning to the program, re-application for admission into the graduate program will be necessary.

Sincerely,

(insert signature)
Graduate Director, Graduate Program in ______________

(insert signature)
Associate Dean/VP for Graduate Studies

cc: student’s mentor’s name here
    student’s file

Student’s signature: