

UAMS Academic Affairs Policy – 2.2.10



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES

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PURPOSE

A Leave of Absence (LOA) is an officially approved period of time during which a student is not enrolled in regular coursework, but is not discontinued from a program of study, and has a predetermined date of anticipated return to regular study. An LOA may have significant implications not only for student academic progression, but also for institutional reporting, financial aid and veterans' benefits. This policy defines three categories of LOA and helps to ensure consistent practice, compliance with federal student aid guidelines, and accurate enrollment reporting to state and national agencies.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all student leaves of absence across all academic colleges, the Graduate School and the Clinton School of Public Service EMPS program. It defines the process for *official*, *institutional* and *departmental* LOA, as explained later in this document.

DEFINITIONS & ABBREVIATIONS

Active Student: For purposes of this policy, an active student is any student who is enrolled in the current term, or any student who is not enrolled, but has not been officially discontinued, withdrawn, graduated or otherwise canceled in the student information system.

Anticipated Return Date: The date by which a student expects to return from a Leave of Absence. This date may be modified with approval from the academic department, Financial Aid and the University Registrar, contingent upon the requirements and restrictions for the student's LOA.

Departmental Leave of Absence (DLOA): A College or Program (departmental) LOA is a period of time during which a student is "active" but not enrolled. Students on DLOA generally maintain continued interaction with the institution through IPE enrollment and access to secure facilities where required for her/his academic program, and access to library and other online resources. Students on DLOA may be engaged in course-related work, test preparation or other scholarly activities not directly resulting in class enrollment other than IPE. Students on DLOA are not reported to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) or the National Student

UAMS Academic Affairs Policy – 2.2.10

Loan Data System (NSLDS) as LOA; rather, they are reported as “withdrawn” during the period of non-enrollment, per NSC and NSLDS reporting guidelines. This is not considered an institutional withdrawal, only an enrollment withdrawal for reporting purposes. Interprofessional Education (IPE) enrollment does not count toward enrollment for NSC or NSLDS reporting purposes since IPE enrollment does not carry course credit or tuition/fee charges.

Institutional Leave of Absence (ILOA): An institutional LOA (ILOA) is one that does not meet the requirements of an Official Leave of Absence (OLOA) but is still considered at an institutional level to be an LOA for curricular purposes. Students on ILOA are not engaged in coursework, course-related study or IPE activities, and do not have access to secure university physical facilities during the LOA period. Students on ILOA are not reported to NSC or NSLDS as LOA; rather, they are reported as “withdrawn” during the period of non-enrollment, per NSC and NSLDS reporting guidelines. This is not considered an institutional withdrawal, only an enrollment withdrawal for reporting purposes.

Leave of Absence (LOA): A Leave of Absence (LOA) is an officially approved period of time during which a student is not enrolled in regular coursework, but is not discontinued from a program of study, and has a predetermined date of anticipated return to regular study. For purposes of this policy, UAMS has defined three types of LOA as outlined in this section: Official, Institutional and Departmental. Only the “Official” LOA is reported as such to the NSC or NSLDS.

National Student Clearinghouse (NSC): The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) is the national reporting agency to which UAMS reports student enrollment data. The NSC, in turn, reports enrollment information to the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS).

National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS): The National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) is the central database of the U.S. Department of Education that tracks student enrollment and progression for purposes of Federal Student Aid programs. Students are reported to NSLDS even if they do not have financial aid at UAMS.

Official Leave of Absence (OLOA): An Official LOA (OLOA) meets all requirements of a Financial Aid Leave of Absence and is reported as an LOA to the NSC and NSLDS. Students on OLOA are not engaged in coursework or course-related study and do not have access to secure university physical facilities during the LOA period. Upon return from the leave, the student continues coursework from the point at which she/he left off to earn the Title IV aid previously awarded for the period. See *Appendix A* for additional definitions and criteria related to OLOA/Financial Aid LOA.

Progression Clock: For purposes of this policy, a student’s progression “clock” monitors the student’s time-to-degree. Most programs allow a maximum period of time allowed for completion of the degree.

Student Health Compliance: Student health compliance requirements include all departmental, college and institutional requirements such as annual flu vaccination, pre-

UAMS Academic Affairs Policy – 2.2.10

enrollment health requirements, ongoing screenings such as TB, student health insurance, and any college/department-specific health screening or vaccination requirements.

UAMS Official First Day of Classes: UAMS publishes the Official First Day of Classes for each term in the 5-year Academic Calendar. This date represents the official start of the term, and is used for official reporting. It does not necessarily represent the first day of class for a particular academic program.

POLICY

This section outlines the individual components of the LOA. See *Appendix B* for a supplemental comparison chart for each of the LOA categories and components.

Length of Time for LOA

A student may request leave of absence for a number of reasons, and for varying lengths of time. An LOA implies that the student is ceasing coursework or other preparation work related to the degree program, and is not enrolled in coursework or related Interprofessional Education (IPE) activities unless the student has taken a Departmental LOA. Students approved for an LOA must complete the prescribed process included later in this document, and any student who fails to meet requirements of an LOA may be dismissed or administratively withdrawn.

The length of the LOA is a partial determinant as to whether it is considered Official, Institutional or Departmental. The maximum time allowed for any single LOA is 180-365 days (see *Appendix B* for limits by LOA category). Individual colleges and academic departments may have maximum allowed time lengths for LOA; see the *UAMS Academic Catalog* for more information. An LOA may be extended with approval of the college and academic department.

The student must submit a request to extend the LOA prior to the end date of the preceding LOA. Official LOAs must adhere to federal financial aid guidelines regarding length of time and reason for leave. See *Appendix A* for details.

Starting and Stopping an LOA

UAMS prohibits students from beginning an OLOA in the middle of any in-progress credit-bearing classes. The student must complete in-progress classes before beginning an OLOA. An OLOA may only begin at the start of an enrollment session immediately following a term of active, completed enrollment (excluding terms where enrollment is not typically required by the student's program, such as summer or pre/post sessions). A student who withdraws from all in-progress classes during a term is not eligible to begin an OLOA at the start of the next enrollment session.

An ILOA or DLOA may begin at any time during an in-progress term, but in-progress coursework and any future term enrollment will be dropped from the term(s) based on standard drop/withdrawal policy and grading policy. Dropped/withdrawn classes are subject to standard tuition refund restrictions and deadlines.

A student's progression "clock" may be stopped for an any of the three LOA types based on the requirements and policy of the student's academic department or college. A student should verify the progression impact of an LOA with her/his academic department prior to entering an LOA.

Institutional Access and Student Health Compliance during LOA

Students on LOA may retain UAMS email access, library/online systems access and Student Wellness services access. Students on OLOA or ILOA may not retain secure

UAMS Academic Affairs Policy – 2.2.10

facilities access since these students are not monitored for student health compliance. Students on OLOA or ILOA may not participate in academic or student activities during the LOA period. Students on DLOA retain all standard University access to systems and facilities, except those specifically available based on class enrollment. Likewise, students on DLOA are required to maintain all related university and student health compliance requirements based on their respective academic programs.

Students on any LOA may be allowed to live in campus housing with specific approval through the college/academic department and Office of Campus Life and Student Support Services, but on-campus housing requires student adherence to all student health compliance requirements, regardless of enrollment status or type of LOA.

Student Health Clinic services are funded through student payment of Student Health fees each semester of regular enrollment. Non-enrolled students (including students on any type of LOA) are required to pay directly for any services at the Student Health Clinic. Student Wellness services are available to all active students regardless of enrollment status, including students on any type of LOA.

Return from LOA

Every Leave of Absence request must include an anticipated return date. Students who fail to return or exceed the maximum leave time for an OLOA will be administratively withdrawn or reassigned to an ILOA or DLOA retroactive to the start date of the initial LOA per federal guidelines. A revised anticipated return date must be provided. Students who fail to return from an approved ILOA or DLOA by the anticipated return date may be administratively withdrawn effective at the originally scheduled return date or the date that the student notifies the University that she/he will not return, whichever is earliest.

A student may only return from an OLOA on the first day of classes for the student's enrollment term, and must enroll in coursework that begins at the start of the term. A student may not return from an OLOA to enroll in a class that starts later in the academic term. The student and academic department must carefully determine the anticipated return date for an OLOA prior to initial approval and submission to ensure it allows for immediate enrollment upon return. Students on ILOA or DLOA who are still considered active students in the UAMS student information system may return from LOA at any time during an in-progress semester (subject to prior approval by the academic department) but may not enroll in classes with start dates that precede the return date.

Changes to LOA

A student may request to change or extend the length of an LOA as long as the change is requested *prior* to the scheduled return date. Any change to an LOA must be approved by the academic department and reviewed by Student Financial Services and the Office of the University Registrar to ensure continued eligibility. The student should contact her/his college dean's office to report anticipated changes to a leave of absence, such as a change in anticipated return date or change in type of LOA. If a student is on OLOA and no longer meets requirements (exceeds 180 days, etc.), the OLOA must be retroactively returned, effective with the original start date. UAMS may administratively withdraw the student effective with the original start date, or change the OLOA to an ILOA as of that date. A DLOA cannot be applied retroactively to replace a returned OLOA.

Reporting Students on LOA to External Agencies

As described in the *Definitions* section, only Official LOAs are reported as a *leave of absence* to

UAMS Academic Affairs Policy – 2.2.10

the National Student Clearinghouse and the National Student Loan Data System. Institutional and Departmental LOAs are not reported as an LOA; rather, students are reported as *withdrawn* based on enrollment level. The Office of the University Registrar is responsible for ensuring accurate student reporting based on the type of LOA taken. A status of *withdrawn* is standard for any student not enrolled, and is automatically removed at the point that the student re-enrolls and that enrollment is reported to the NSC. IPE enrollment does not count toward regular enrollment for reporting purposes. A status of *withdrawn* immediately activates a student's repayment clock for financial aid, either starting the student's grace period or starting actual repayment.

Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits are certified based on enrollment status. A student on any LOA will be certified as non-enrolled for the LOA period. IPE enrollment does not count toward enrollment for purposes of VA certification. Contact the UAMS Veterans Services Coordinator in the OUR for additional information.

PROCEDURE

Request for LOA Process

A student who wishes to request a leave of absence should work with her/his college to complete the following steps:

- 1) The student must complete the initial LOA request using the approved *Student Leave of Absence Request* form, or, alternatively, a separate, *written* request that includes the mandatory data elements listed below. *The request must be initiated and submitted in writing directly by the student.* An LOA may not be initiated on a student's behalf except under extenuating circumstances that must be documented in writing by the academic department. If the standard *Student Leave of Absence Request* form is not used, a written LOA request must include the following elements:
 - Date of the request
 - Reason(s) and/or circumstance(s) for the request (e.g., medical reasons, financial reasons, personal reasons, etc.)
 - Expected Return Date (this is required—if the actual return date is unknown, the student must provide the closest, reasonable estimation possible)
 - Student signature and date
 - Departmental signatures/dates as required on the *Student Leave of Absence Request*
 - Documentation, if desired, for justification (e.g., doctor's note). For student privacy reasons, medical records should not be submitted with an LOA request.
 - Type of LOA requested: Official, Institutional or Departmental

Once submitted to the college dean's office, the college assistant/associate dean reviews and provides initial approval for the request.

- 2) The college assistant/associate dean will submit the request with any accompanying documentation to the UAMS Student Financial Services - Financial Aid Office (FA) for review. FA will contact the student to discuss how the requested LOA may affect financial aid (if applicable) and will verify that the requested LOA category is available for the situation described. Because an LOA may impact repayment for prior awards from other institutions, this step is required regardless of whether or not the student receives financial aid at UAMS.
- 3) Once a request is approved by the college and reviewed and approved by FA, it is submitted to the UAMS Office of the University Registrar (OUR) for final review,

UAMS Academic Affairs Policy – 2.2.10

verification of completion, and processing in the GUS student information system. The OUR updates the student's record in GUS and sends email notification to the student, academic department and Student Financial Services. The request and all included documentation must be maintained on file in the OUR.

Administrative Withdrawal by the Associate Provost for Academics

- 1) The Associate Provost for Academics may administratively withdraw a student and place them on ILOA for failure to comply with a UAMS Administrative Guide or Academic Affairs policy. For College of Medicine students, the Associate Provost for Academics will notify the Executive Associate Dean of Academics for students to follow College of Medicine processes for administrative withdrawal.
- 2) OUR, Student Financial Services, and the Associate Dean of the student's college will be contacted by the Associate Provost or designee to place the student on ILOA.
- 3) Return from an administrative withdrawal ILOA is coordinated with the college and dependent on compliance resolution.

Return from LOA Process

An LOA does not automatically end at the anticipated return date. To return from an LOA, the student must initiate the following steps:

- 1) The student must contact the college dean's office to request a return from LOA. This can be completed using a copy of the original LOA request form using the "Return from LOA" section, or can be done separately on a new LOA form, or in writing with the following required information:
 - Date of the request
 - Written statement by the student requesting to officially return from the LOA
 - Signature of the student, if hard-copy; otherwise, the request must come from the student's official UAMS email account.
 - Signature of the appropriate college official, if hard copy; otherwise the email must be copied to the appropriate college official and include her/his written approval.
 - Confirmed date of return. This is the official date that the LOA will end and the student will return to a regular status.
- 2) Once the request to return is completed, it must be submitted by the college assistant/associate dean to FA for review and verification of the return date.
- 3) Once reviewed and verified, FA will forward the notification to the OUR for processing in the student information system.

APPENDIX A

FSA Guidelines for Financial Aid LOA (FSA Handbook September 2019, 5-13)

- The school must have a formal written policy regarding leaves of absence requiring that all requests for leaves of absence be submitted in writing and include the reason for the student's request.
- The student must request and the school must approve the LOA in accord with the school's policy;
- There must be a reasonable expectation that the student will return from the LOA.

UAMS Academic Affairs Policy – 2.2.10

This condition is specified to make clear that a school may not grant a student an LOA merely to delay the return of unearned Title IV funds.

- The school may not assess the student any additional institutional charges, the student's need may not increase, and, therefore, the student is not eligible for any additional Title IV aid. The school may grant a full tuition credit toward the course the student chooses to reenter as a way to comply with this requirement that the student not be assessed any additional charges upon return from the leave.
- The LOA, together with any additional leaves of absence, must not exceed a total of 180 days in any 12-month period.

UAMS Academic Affairs Policy – 2.2.10

- Except in a clock-hour or non-term credit-hour program, a student returning from an LOA must resume training at the same point in the academic program that he or she began the LOA.
- If the student has a Title IV loan, the school must explain to him, prior to granting the LOA, the effects that his failure to return from an LOA may have on the loan repayment terms, including the expiration of the grace period.

APPENDIX B

LOA Category Comparison Chart

Element	Official LOA (OLOA)	Inst. LOA (ILOA)	Dept. LOA (DLOA)
Maximum Time Length for LOA	180 days	365 days. See <i>UAMS Academic Catalog</i> for individual college/department maximums allowed.	365 days. See <i>UAMS Academic Catalog</i> for individual college/department maximums allowed.
Library Resources	Available	Available	Available
Student Health Compliance	Not Required	Not Required	Required
IPE Enrollment	Not Allowed	Not Allowed	Allowed
Campus Housing	Approval Required	Approval Required	Approval Required
Physical Facility Access	Not Allowed	Not Allowed	Allowed
UAMS Email Access	Available	Available	Available
Non-Return Outcome	Student is officially withdrawn retroactive to original LOA start date.	Student is officially withdrawn effective at the originally scheduled return date or the date that the student notifies the University that she/he will not return, whichever is earliest.	Student is officially withdrawn effective at the originally scheduled return date or the date that the student notifies the University that she/he will not return, whichever is earliest.
Federal Reporting to NSC and NSLDS	Leave of Absence	Withdrawn	Withdrawn
Mid-Term LOA Start/Stop	Not Allowed	Allowed (with college/department approval)	Allowed (with college/department approval)
Student Activity Participation	Not Allowed	Not Allowed	Yes, subject to normal student participation guidelines of the individual program or event.
Student Health Clinic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Student Wellness Center	Available	Available	Available
Veterans Benefits	VA Benefits are certified based on enrollment status. A student on any LOA will be certified as non-enrolled for the LOA period.	VA Benefits are certified based on enrollment status. A student on any LOA will be certified as non-enrolled for the LOA period.	VA Benefits are certified based on enrollment status. A student on any LOA will be certified as non-enrolled for the LOA period.

Related Documents

- UAMS Student Leave of Absence Request Form