

VDS: Leave of Absence FAQs [Revised August 2016]

- **How do I request a leave of absence from my degree program?**
 - Students may request leaves of one semester or a full year. Students who take a leave of absence after mid-semester must be on leave for the following regular semester as well.
 - Students must petition for a leave of absence from the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs who *approves* all leave requests.
 - In addition to submitting the forms requesting a leave of absence, you are required to meet with the Associate Dean. Only upon written approval of the Associate Dean is a leave of absence granted.

- **What are the allowable reasons for a leave and how do I return?**
 - **Medical:** Upon advice of an appropriate medical authority, a leave may be granted for one or two semesters by the Associate Dean. **In order to return to Vanderbilt**, the student must present to the Office of Student Health and Wellness, at least four weeks prior to the start of classes of in the intended semester of return, a statement of clearance from the appropriate medical authorities that the student is capable of resuming normal study. If appropriate, the letter should include specific recommendations for follow-up care at Student Health and/or the Psychological and Counseling Center. Please see the overview of the process here: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/healthydores/taking-time-off/>
 - **Financial:** Any student who feels that financial reasons prevent a return to Vanderbilt may be granted a leave of absence for one or two semesters by the Associate Dean. **In order to return to Vanderbilt**, the student must present to the Associate Dean, at least four weeks prior to the start of classes of the intended semester of return, a written statement that the student is capable of meeting the financial obligations of the degree program.
 - **Personal:** Any student who wishes to take a leave of absence for personal reasons, that is, for any reason other than those covered by the first two categories, should first confer with the Associate Dean. If, in the opinion of the Associate Dean, these personal reasons are valid and it would be in the interest of the student to leave the University at that time, a leave of absence for one or two semesters may be granted. Valid reasons might include items such a desire to work in a special program or project without academic credit, family problems, or vocational discernment. **In order to return to Vanderbilt**, the student must register by the deadline for the intended semester of return. In addition, the student must present to the Associate Dean, at least four weeks prior to the start of classes of the intended semester of return, a written statement detailing activities while on leave.

- **Will my merit financial aid remain the same when I return?**

Yes—if you properly notify the Associate Dean by the dates required in the catalogue. August 1st for the fall semester enrollment and December 1st for spring semester enrollment.

- **Will I have to start repaying my student loans?**

If a student ceases enrollment *regardless of the reason* then one begins a six-month grace period for one's federal student loans. Repayment begins at the end of the six-month period. If a student is in a situation where one is unable to make a payment due to an economic hardship situation then one should consult with one's lender about loan deferment or forbearance options.

- **Will I still be eligible for Vanderbilt-related student health insurance?**

- Please review the latest information on the Student Health website and confirm your eligibility with a representative.
- Please be aware that students taking a year-long medical leave of absence must submit an enrollment form quite early—often August 1st.
- For medical leaves of absence, please review the process carefully with your student health insurance provider.

- **Will I be able to continue with my on-campus mental health professional at the counseling center?**

Because of the level of care required for students on leave, students are *not* able to continue with the Psychological and Counseling Center or Student Health during their leave of absence. But the PCC and Student Health will work with students for 1-2 sessions as needed to help them identify appropriate resources in the community that will assist them.

- **May I extend a leave of absence beyond one year?**

You must formally petition the Associate Dean to extend a leave of absence by August 1 for the fall semester and December 1 for spring semester. The Associate Dean then submits the request to the Academic Programs committee who will determine if a leave may be extended beyond one year; these occasions are rare.

- **Does a leave of absence count against my required time to degree?**

No...but also a little bit yes. A leave of absence pauses a student's clock on the 5 years to complete the MTS and 7 yrs. to complete the MDiv. **But**, our national accreditation requirements require students to complete all the credits for their degree within a ten-year period...with no pauses or exceptions for LOAs.

- **What happens if I don't return after my leave of absence?**

You are subject to dismissal from the degree program. If the student wishes to re-enter the degree program, the student must re-apply for admission to the Divinity School.