Academic Leave of Absence (ALoA) for Graduate Students

University of Wisconsin—Madison (UW—Madison) Graduate School’s academic leave of absence (ALoA) policy allows graduate students to temporarily suspend pursuit of their degree goals.

Students may request an ALoA as early as six months prior to the semester the leave is to start. Leave will be granted to students for the following four reasons.

- **Medical**: A serious or unexpected condition that precludes the student from being able to make academic progress.
- **Parental Accommodation**: Birth or adoption of a child.
- **Family Care**: To provide care to an immediate family member who is experiencing a serious or unexpected health condition. In accordance with State of Wisconsin guidelines, immediate family includes spouses (same-sex spouse included), domestic partners, minor children, adult children with disabilities that require care, parents, parents-in-law, and domestic parents-in-law.
- **Personal**: Personal needs not covered by the above three types.

Military leave is covered by existing University of Wisconsin, Madison policy for enrolled students called to active U.S. military service (see https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1034).

Students who are on approved ALoA suspend their active study for a semester or more during which they do not make progress towards their degree. During an approved ALoA, the student is considered meeting the Graduate School’s continuous enrollment requirement along with the Graduate School’s and the respective program’s minimum credit requirements for the semester.

Students are expected to return from an ALoA. They do not need to be re-admitted and they are not charged a fee to return to active status. When students return within the maximum allowed time frame of their requested leave, they must complete a simple re-entry process to return to active status. Students will return from an ALoA with the same academic standing they had prior to their ALoA.

Students with prior University commitments regarding funding will have the remaining commitments available when they return. Programs will also strive to extend funding commitments to account for the semesters where the student was on an ALoA.

When a student is on an ALoA, they will have access to email privileges in order to remain connected to their program. However, since students on ALoA will not be paying segregated fees, UW—Madison may limit access to services covered by the segregated fees including University Health Services. Furthermore, UW-Madison may limit students’ access to facilities such as non-public areas of UW—Madison buildings, research laboratories, libraries, and recreational facilities.

**Process to Request an Academic Leave of Absence**

Students should ask and plan for an academic leave of absence as soon as possible. Before requesting an academic leave of absence, students are encouraged to meet with their faculty
advisors and their graduate program chair (or their designee) to explore campus resources and alternative routes to determine if a leave of absence is necessary.

Once a student decides that they need to take a leave and has discussed the leave with their graduate program, the student submits a request for a leave to the Graduate School, providing basic information about the dates of the leave and reasons for the leave. Graduate School may request supplemental information such as a recommendation from a licensed health professional or information on the child or family member.

A recommendation from the International Student Services (ISS) is required to process a leave of absence request for students with F-1 or J-1 visas. Students with a UW--Madison issued F-1 or J-1 visa must contact a counselor at the ISS to determine how immigration regulations may impact their ability to take a leave of absence.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

- **Student:** A request for ALoA is initiated by the graduate student. If a student is unable to initiate the request, they may designate a person to work on their behalf. Students are encouraged to meet with the program chair or their designee to plan for a leave of absence. Whenever possible, students should discuss tentative plans for re-entry prior to requesting the leave and be willing to provide the needed supplemental information. Students are responsible for understanding the implications of taking an ALoA. Students or their designees are responsible for compiling all the documents and submitting them to the Graduate School.

- **Faculty Advisor:** The student’s faculty advisor may assist the student in requesting an ALoA. The advisor may also be involved in crafting a re-entry plan.

- **Graduate Program Chair or designee:** The graduate program chair or designee is responsible for making recommendations to the Graduate School regarding the student’s requested ALoA.

- **Dean of Graduate School or designee:** The Dean of Graduate School has final authority on the approval of the requested ALoA. The Dean reviews the supplemental information and the recommendation from the program in making this decision. Decisions will be made within a short time period (less than two weeks) of receiving a recommendation from graduate program chair/designee.

**ALoA Timing and Limits**

Students are eligible to request an ALoA after they have completed one semester of study in their program. A newly admitted student who has registered may seek an admissions deferral, rather than a leave of absence, if the request and approval occur before the end of the third week of classes in the initial semester of the program. If the request is made and approved after the end of the third week of classes in the initial term of the program, the student is discontinued and can apply for reinstatement.

ALoA is limited to a maximum of two semesters, including the semester in which the leave begins. If a student on ALoA does not return at the end of the leave, they will be discontinued from the program and they will be required to apply for readmission when they return.
In order to begin an ALoA in the middle of a semester, students may need to withdraw from their courses for the semester. Prior to requesting an ALoA in the middle of a semester, students are encouraged to explore options with their graduate program to remain registered for the current semester. If it is not possible for students to remain registered, students may request to begin an ALoA in the middle of a semester. Some students may qualify for a medical withdrawal under the U.W. System Medical Withdrawal Policy (see https://www.wisconsin.edu/uw-policies/uw-system-administrative-policies/medical-withdrawal-policy/).

Withdrawing from a semester may have implications on a student’s visa status, tuition payments, loans, fellowships, employment and benefits. Please consult appropriate campus units and staff regarding these implications.

**Return from an ALoA**

Students are expected to resume their studies. Prior to return, students must file a request to return at least 4 weeks prior to the start of the semester in which they will return. All requests to return are expected to be granted, except under extreme circumstances as determined by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Students on F12 or J1 visa must consult International Student Services and get their authorization prior to submitting a request to return.

Students are expected to update their re-entry plans based on discussions with their graduate programs.