

Leave of Absence & Term Withdrawals

Quick Reference Guide

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What is a **leave of absence**?

A **leave of absence (LoA)** is a student's decision to temporarily pause their studies to focus on other priorities. This might be for the remainder of a single semester or spanning several semesters, depending on the type.

While Columbia University has a [central leave of absence policy](#), each school determines how to request and take leave. Generally, there are several types of leave, although not all schools will have each type:

Medical leave: A pause to focus on your physical or mental health. This type of leave often requires documentation from a medical provider, like a physician, nurse practitioner, or psychiatrist.

Personal (voluntary) leave: A pause in your academics for any number of personal reasons that may interfere with your studies. This might include supporting family members, pursuing employment or professional opportunities, or taking a break from your studies.

Military leave: A pause in your studies due to being called in for active duty, either by voluntarily signing up for duty or being called up through a draft or mandated service.



Wondering how a leave of absence may affect your visa status or financial aid?

The International Student & Scholars Office maintains an [LoA website](#) with common questions and concerns.

The University Registrar also outlines [financial implications](#) for students with and without financial aid.



Not every situation will require you to take a leave of absence.

If you're considering if a leave is right for you, speak to your academic advisor or Dean of Students to discuss options and next steps.

There are also several types of personal leave that may be their own category, depending on your school or program:

Family leave involves directly caring for family members who need assistance.

Parental leave is to take care of a child (and partner) after birth, adoption, or foster placement. This can also include time before the child's arrival to prepare.

Bereavement leave is taking time to mourn the death of a family member or close personal connection.

How do I get started with a leave of absence?

Speak to your academic advisor or reach out to your school's Dean of Students. They will be able to discuss specific policies and help navigate the entire process.

For students planning to take medical leave, you may be asked to provide documentation from an off-campus medical provider or share health information with an on-campus provider within Columbia Health.

Relevant information and eligibility criteria will be available through your program's student handbook, website, or shared when you meet with your Dean of Students.

Columbia maintains a contact list for the Dean of Students on the University Life website.

- [Columbia Blue Folder](#)
- [JTS Registrar](#)
- [TC SSA](#)
- [UTS Student Affairs](#)
- [Barnard LOA](#)

Who is told about my leave of absence? What details are shared?

Your decision to go on a leave of absence is protected under the [Family Education Rights & Privacy Act](#), or FERPA.

Only select staff and administrators will know the full reason for your leave. This might include:

- **Your school's Dean of Students**
- **Your on-campus healthcare providers (if on medical leave)**

Other staff, faculty, or advisors will just be told you're no longer an active student. Your peers and other students will never be told the specifics of your situation. This means you get to decide what information to tell your peers and other support systems on campus!

Once I'm on a leave, can I still access University services?

Generally, you're not considered an active student while on leave, so you don't have access to most university services. You may lose access to services like your program's career center, student organizations, on-campus housing, and swipe access to on-campus buildings. This also applies to services through Columbia Health, except for select students on medical leave. Your advisor or Dean of Students will be able to discuss specifics with you when you initiate the process.

Students can book a [Health Promotion Appointment](#) for support while on leave or when you're planning to return to campus for well-being support and resource navigation.

Students going on a medical leave of absence have the option to remain on the Columbia Student Health Insurance Plan. These requests are processed by the School during the LoA process.

Want to ensure you remain on the plan? Contact the Columbia Health [Student Insurance Office](#) for support.

How can I prepare to return to my academic program?

As you get ready to return from leave, stay in contact with your Dean of Student's office who will help guide you through the re-enrollment process. This may include dedicated meetings with the Dean of Students or their representative, your academic advisor, or providers within Columbia Health.

Once you've been approved to return, you have access to resources like [Wellness Coaching](#) to come up with strategies to succeed on campus and rejoin your peers, or [mental health counseling](#) to navigate challenges in acclimating to your academic responsibilities.

How can I stay connected to the University community?

Navigating your change in status can be tricky at first. Even though you're temporarily not a student, you can still maintain connections with friends, peers, and even faculty who you've cultivated relationships with!

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