



Cornell University Policy Office
policy.cornell.edu

Policy 7.1 Voluntary Leave of Absence for Students

Responsible Executive: Vice President for Student and Campus Life

Responsible Office(s): Student and Campus Life

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1. Policy Statement and Requirements

1.1 Policy Statement

Cornell University is aware that there are situations where a student may wish to or need to interrupt their course of study. The university is committed to reasonable evaluation and responsible handling of such cases. Cornell may grant a student a voluntary leave of absence for health reasons. In other cases, not related to a student's health, Cornell may grant a student a voluntary leave of absence for personal reasons. As set forth in [University Policy 7.3, Processing and Reporting Changes in Student Enrollment Status Under Title IV](#), the university does not offer a leave of absence under the Title IV federal student aid program definitions, and therefore, any enrollment leave of absence under this policy will be treated as a withdrawal for federal financial aid purposes.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to students on the Ithaca campus and Cornell Tech and stakeholders who have a responsibility for:

- recommending, approving, or processing a leave of absence
- maintaining and updating student academic and administrative records
- ensuring compliance based on student enrollment
- reviewing changes to financial aid eligibility
- processing refunds
- implementing and advising students of academic unit policies and practices
- providing student insurance and student health services
- determining reasonable accommodations and services related to health concerns

An admitted applicant who accepted the university's offer of admission to a degree program but has not yet commenced attendance at the university is not eligible for a leave of absence.

1.3 Policy Requirements

1.3.1 Health Leave of Absence (HLOA)

1.3.1.1 Circumstances for an HLOA: A student may choose to request a Health Leave of Absence (HLOA) as a disability accommodation, or to provide time needed to pursue treatment for or attend to a health condition. Students seeking this kind of leave have an intent to return to academic pursuits at the university.

1.3.1.2 Process to Request an HLOA: A student considering an HLOA is encouraged to consult with the university's Student Disability Services office about possible accommodations to mitigate the need for a leave. The student is responsible for initiating an HLOA request by submitting the HLOA request form (via withdrawal.cornell.edu) or consulting with Student Disability Services.

- The Health Leaves Coordinator is responsible for consulting with the student, the student's health care provider, Student Disability Services, and the college before granting an HLOA.
- The student's college may place conditions on the student's return based on curriculum sequencing, time to degree requirements, or academic actions determined and communicated to the student by the end of the term.
- The Health Leaves Coordinator must provide the designated office in the student's college with the HLOA letter within two business days of notifying the student that the HLOA has been granted (per [University Policy 7.3, Processing and Reporting Changes in Student Enrollment Status Under Title IV](#)).
- The college's designated office is responsible for reporting the HLOA to the Office of the University Registrar and ensuring that all necessary and appropriate supporting documentation is included (per [University Policy 7.3](#)).
- The student's college or the university reserves the right to change a voluntary HLOA to a required leave or withdrawal if an academic or disciplinary review determines it appropriate.
- The Office of the University Registrar is responsible for reviewing and approving dates pertaining to the HLOA, processing the HLOA, and reporting the student's change of enrollment status (per [University Policy 7.3](#)).

When the student's enrollment status is changed, automated notification will alert the departments that manage financial aid, housing and residential life, the student health plan, international

services, and athletics, as well as the student's instructors and faculty advisor. **Note:** The change in enrollment status may have implications for financial aid, billing, student health benefits, and international student visa status.

1.3.1.3 Deadline to Request an HLOA: A student may request an HLOA at any time after the student has commenced attendance at the university as part of a Cornell degree program. If the HLOA is for the current term, the last day of the term is the deadline.

At any point throughout the term, the student can request to withdraw from the institution. Once withdrawn, the student must apply for readmission and registration for any future enrollment. Readmission to the university is not guaranteed.

1.3.1.4 Duration of an HLOA: A student is not permitted to return from an HLOA within the semester that the leave was taken. In addition, the student's college may set a maximum duration for the HLOA based on academic and other considerations. Beyond those parameters, the duration of the HLOA will depend upon the time the student needs for treatment and/or recovery and the resolution of academic conditions determined by the student's college.

1.3.1.5 Financial Considerations: An HLOA is considered a withdrawal for Title IV purposes. Implications for financial aid are described in [University Policy 7.3](#). Tuition charges assessed to the student may be reduced on a prorated schedule (see www.dfa.cornell.edu/bursar/students-parents/leaving). The effective date of the HLOA will determine the student's tuition liability for the semester.

Funded graduate students returning from an approved HLOA within the four-year window retain any financial support remaining from their original offer of admission, as outlined in the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty (see gradschool.cornell.edu/policies/code-of-legislation).

1.3.1.6 Student Status: A student on an HLOA is not registered with the university and therefore is not eligible for privileges afforded to registered students, including, but not limited to, residing in university housing, accessing university resources, and receiving direct supervision by faculty members. An HLOA does not terminate in-progress academic and non-academic student conduct proceedings.

For international students, taking an HLOA may have implications for the student's visa status. International students are advised to consult with the Office of Global Learning, International Services, regarding federal immigration requirements.

1.3.1.7 Transcript Notations: A student approved for an HLOA will have "Leave of Absence" noted on their official transcript.

- The student will receive a grade for any course that was completed prior to the HLOA request date.
- If the student submits the HLOA request after the published deadline to drop classes, the student will receive the "course withdrawal" notation (W) for any courses that have not been completed.
- The student is not eligible to take an incomplete or receive a grade for a course when the leave date precedes the class end date.

1.3.1.8 Process to Return from an HLOA: A student seeking to return to the university from an HLOA must submit documentation indicating fitness to resume their education at Cornell, which should include one or more of the following:

- Health care provider documentation form
- Personal statement form
- Medical records
- Accommodation recommendations

The Health Leaves Coordinator may request additional information or documentation to establish the student's fitness to resume their education at Cornell.

The Health Leaves Coordinator is responsible for consulting with the student; Student Disability Services; the student's college; and a health care provider, if needed, before approving the student's request to return from the HLOA. The Health Leaves Coordinator is responsible for approving the return request based on documentation of the student's fitness to return and confirmation from the student's college that prearranged academic conditions have been fulfilled.

The designated office for the student's college is responsible for processing the return from the HLOA and term activating the student.

1.3.1.9 Process for Appealing an HLOA Decision: Appeals will be considered only when the student can provide relevant new information, if incorrect facts were used, or in the event of a substantial procedural error. A student who wants to appeal a decision regarding an HLOA request should submit a letter of appeal within five business days to a committee chaired by the Director of Student Disability Services.

A student who wants to appeal any conditions placed on their HLOA by their college based on curriculum sequencing or academic actions must follow their college's applicable appeal process, if any.

1.3.2 Personal Leave of Absence (PLOA)

1.3.2.1 Circumstances for PLOA: A student may choose to request a Personal Leave of Absence (PLOA) due to an opportunity or personal circumstances that are not related to a health condition. Students seeking this kind of leave have an expected return date after the end of the current term.

1.3.2.2 Process to Request a PLOA: A student seeking a PLOA is responsible for initiating the request by submitting a PLOA Request: undergraduate and professional students via withdrawal.cornell.edu; graduate research degree students via gradschool.cornell.edu/forms

- The student's college is responsible for approving the PLOA request. The college may place conditions on the student's return from the PLOA based on curriculum sequencing, time to degree requirements, or academic actions determined and communicated to the student by the end of the term.
- The college's designated office is responsible for reporting the PLOA to the Office of the University Registrar and ensuring that all necessary and appropriate supporting documentation is included (per [University Policy 7.3, Processing and Reporting Changes in Student Enrollment Status Under Title IV](#)).
- The student's college or the university reserves the right to change a voluntary PLOA to a required leave or withdrawal if an academic or disciplinary review determines it appropriate.

- The Office of the University Registrar is responsible for reviewing and approving dates pertaining to the PLOA, processing the PLOA, and reporting the student's change of enrollment status (per [University Policy 7.3](#)).

When the student's enrollment status is changed, automated notification will alert the departments that manage financial aid, housing and residential life, the student health plan, international services, and athletics, as well as the student's instructors and faculty advisor. **Note:** The change in enrollment status may have implications for financial aid, billing, student health benefits, and international student visa status.

1.3.2.3 Deadline to Request a PLOA: A student may request a PLOA at any time after the student has commenced attendance at the university as part of a Cornell degree program. If the PLOA is for the current term, the last day of the term is the deadline.

At any point throughout the term, the student can request to withdraw from the institution. Once withdrawn, the student must apply for readmission and registration for any future enrollment. Readmission to the university is not guaranteed.

1.3.2.4 Duration of a PLOA: A student is not permitted to return from a PLOA after an academic term has begun. In addition, the student's college may set a minimum and maximum duration for the PLOA based on academic and other considerations. The college may permanently withdraw the student if they do not return from their PLOA or request an extension within the maximum time allowed by the college.

1.3.2.5 Financial Considerations: A PLOA is considered a withdrawal for Title IV purposes. Implications for financial aid are described in [University Policy 7.3](#). Tuition charges assessed to the student may be reduced on a prorated schedule (see www.dfa.cornell.edu/bursar/students-parents/leaving). The effective date of the PLOA will determine the student's tuition liability for the semester.

Funded graduate students returning from an approved PLOA do not retain unused financial support from their original offer of admission, as outlined in the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty (see gradschool.cornell.edu/policies/code-of-legislation).

1.3.2.6 Student Status: A student on a PLOA is not registered with the university and therefore is not eligible for privileges afforded to registered students, including, but not limited to, residing in university housing, accessing university resources, and receiving direct supervision by faculty members. A PLOA does not terminate in-progress academic and nonacademic student conduct proceedings.

For international students, taking a PLOA may have implications for the student's visa status. International students are advised to consult with the Office of Global Learning, International Services, regarding federal immigration requirements.

1.3.2.7 Transcript Notations: A student approved for a PLOA will have "Leave of Absence" noted on the student's official transcript.

- The student will receive a grade for any course that was completed prior to the PLOA request date.

- If the student submits the PLOA request after the published deadline to drop classes, the student will receive the “course withdrawal” notation (W) for any courses that have not been completed.
- The student is not eligible to take an incomplete or receive a grade for a course when the leave date precedes the class end date.

1.3.2.8 Process to Return from a PLOA: A student seeking to return to the university from a PLOA must submit a written request to return from the PLOA in accordance with college procedures. The designated office for the student’s college is responsible for processing the return from the PLOA and term activating the student.

1.3.2.9 Process for Appealing a PLOA Decision: The student’s college is responsible for approving a request to take or return from a PLOA. A student who wishes to appeal their college’s decision must follow the college applicable appeal process, if any.

1.4 Collection and Retention of Information

Certain information and documentation related to the student’s leave of absence are a part of the student’s education record and subject to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Under no circumstances should any academic faculty or staff member request health information or records directly from the student.

Records associated with this policy are retained or disposed of in accordance with [University Policy 4.7, Retention of University Records](#).

1.5 Compliance

A student who ceases academically related activities without requesting a voluntary leave of absence may face consequences related, but not limited to, academic action, financial aid eligibility, tuition refunds, and student visa status.

The University Compliance Office, University Audit, and others may audit or investigate to assess compliance with this policy. Non-compliance with university policies is addressed in accordance with applicable policies and procedures, and is subject to progressive disciplinary action up to and including termination.

2. To Whom This Policy Applies

Ithaca-based locations (includes Cornell Tech)

Who should read this policy:

- Any student seeking a leave of absence
- Administrators, deans, directors, and department heads
- University faculty
- College student services staff
- Cornell Health staff, including Student Disability Services
- Health Leaves Coordinator

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Academically Related Activities	<p>Academic activity is defined as activities that are academic in nature or directly related to academic endeavors, as determined by the university. Academically related activities include, but are not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attending a class online or in person where there is opportunity for direct interaction between instructor and students. ▪ Submitting an academic assignment (paper or electronic). ▪ Taking an exam, defending a thesis or dissertation, completing an interactive tutorial, or participating in computer-assisted instruction. ▪ Attending a study group assigned by the school. ▪ Participating in an online discussion about academic matters. ▪ Initiating contact with a faculty member or instructor to ask a question about the academic subject studied in the course. ▪ Participating in assistantship programs such as graduate assistantship (GA), graduate research assistantship (GRA), research assistantship (RA), and teaching assistantship (TA). Graduate Students only. ▪ Conducting academic research under the mentorship or leadership of a faculty member. <p>Academically related activities do NOT include activities where a student may be present but not academically engaged, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Living in institutional (for example, on-campus) housing ▪ Participating in a meal plan ▪ Logging in to an online class without active participation ▪ Participating in a student-organized study group ▪ Participating in academic counseling or advising
College	College is used to refer to both colleges and schools within Cornell.
Designated Office	<p>The office designated by each school or college where students must provide formal notification of a desired leave or withdrawal from the university to begin the official withdrawal process and which is responsible for posting conferred degrees (graduations).</p> <p>Note: Units will designate the school/college registrar or office of student services (or equivalent) as the designated office.</p>
Effective Date	Date the leave request form is submitted, or the last date of the prior term if the student submits the form between terms. The effective date can be adjusted to the last date of class attendance if a medical condition delays submission of the request form.

Term	Definition
Enrollment Status	<p>The status of a registered student with the university for academic enrollment purposes. The university recognizes four basic student enrollment statuses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enrolled (full time, three-quarter time, half time, less than half time) ▪ Leave (considered a withdrawal for Title IV purposes) ▪ Graduated ▪ Withdrawn
Health Leave of Absence	A temporary separation of a student from the university requested by the student as an accommodation for a disability and/or for the purpose of seeking treatment and recovery related to a health condition, with the intent to return to academic pursuits.
Last Day of the Term	The scheduled end date of the student's classes or the last day of exams for the academic term, whichever is later.
Personal Leave of Absence	A temporary separation of a student from the university requested by the student for reasons unrelated to health with an expected return date after the end of the current term.
Student	An individual enrolled in any program at the university that leads to a bachelor's, professional, or graduate degree.
Voluntary Leave of Absence	A temporary separation of a student from the university for health or personal reasons, which is requested by a student who intends to return to academic pursuits.
Withdrawal for Title IV Purposes	Any time a student does not complete all of the days in the term the student was scheduled to complete.

4. Policy Administration

Policy Clarification and Interpretation	Contact	Phone	Email/Web Address
Ithaca-based locations	Vice President for Student and Campus Life	(607) 255-7595	VPSCL@cornell.edu

5. Appendix

5.1 Key Contacts

Topic	Contact	Phone	Email/website
Academic planning and support resources for Cornell Tech students	Cornell Tech		studentservices@tech.cornell.edu studentwellness@tech.cornell.edu studentservices.tech.cornell.edu
Academic planning, curriculum sequencing, and support resources for students on the Ithaca campus	Ithaca Campus College Advising Resources		registrar.cornell.edu/service-resources/college-advising-directory
Accommodations and services related to a health concern	Student Disability Services	(607) 254-4545	sds_cu@cornell.edu sds.cornell.edu
Enrollment status and reporting, maintaining and updating student academic and administrative records	University Registrar	(607) 255-4232	univreg@cornell.edu registrar.cornell.edu
Financial aid eligibility - reviewing changes	Financial Aid	(607) 255-5145	finaid@cornell.edu finaid.cornell.edu
Grading, enrollment, and student records	College Registrars		registrar.cornell.edu/service-resources/college-registrar-directory
Health Leave of Absence – documentation related to leave	Cornell Health	(607) 255-5155	cornellhealth@cornell.edu health.cornell.edu
Health Leave of Absence – process and documentation	Health Leaves Coordinator		healthleaves@cornell.edu health.cornell.edu/get-care/health-leave-absence
Student Health Plan (SHP) – impact of leave on coverage	Student Health Benefits	(607) 255-6363	studentbenefits@cornell.edu studenthealthbenefits.cornell.edu

Topic	Contact	Phone	Email/website
Tuition and billing	Bursar	(607) 255-2336	www.dfa.cornell.edu/audience/bursar

6. Revision History

Date	Summary of Revisions
September 14, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added link for submitting a Health Leave of Absence
August 11, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corrected non-substantial typographical errors.
July 31, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarified differences between a Health Leave of Absence and a Personal Leave of Absence and delineated the separate rules and procedures for taking and returning from each type. Clarified disability accommodation and access to healthcare. Clarified roles and responsibilities of students, Health Leaves Coordinator (case manager), administrative offices, colleges, Student Disability Services, and Office of University Registrar. Applied updated university policy template.
March 14, 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added note regarding Title IV to end of policy statement.
December 22, 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Added note at end of procedures indicating that requests for health-care related leaves should be referred to Cornell Health to initiate the HLOA process, and that academic units should not request health information or medical records directly from a student.