

## Voluntary Medical Leave of Absence (MLOA) Policy

### Introduction

The University recognizes that students may experience health issues that significantly impact their ability to function successfully or safely in their role as students. In those situations, students may request a medical leave of absence (MLOA), which, if granted, permits them to take a break from University life and their studies, so that they may receive treatment.

Drake University has designed this policy to help students get the individualized attention, consideration, and support needed to address health issues that arise or escalate during their time at the University and significantly interfere with their academics or University life. This policy outlines a flexible and individualized process that students should follow to request a MLOA to address these types of health issues. Note: Students may also be eligible to take other types of leave from their academic program.

### Medical Leave of Absence Process

The following procedures provide for an individualized approach for assessing a student's eligibility to take and return from a MLOA and are designed to be reasonable and flexible.

### The Exit Process

A student who is experiencing a health issue that significantly interferes with their academics or University life may choose to request a MLOA. **Students interested in a MLOA may either:**

1. Contact the Associate Dean of the College in which they have most recently enrolled ("Associate Dean") to explain the reason they are requesting a MLOA and, if requested, arrange for their licensed health care provider to communicate with the Associate Dean to convey the health care provider's professional opinion as to the advisability of the student taking a MLOA. The Associate Dean, will then either:
  - a. grant the MLOA; or
  - b. contact the University Counseling Center or the Drake Student Health Center (hereinafter referred to as the "Primary Health Liaison") to explain the student's MLOA request and any information provided by the student and his/her health care provider. The Primary Health Liaison may meet with the student and follow up with the student's health care provider, if deemed appropriate, and then make a recommendation to the Associate Dean either to:
    - i. approve the student's request for a MLOA, if the Primary Health Liaison determines the student's health issue significantly compromises the student's academics or University life, including, but not limited to, the safety of others, or
    - ii. deny the student's MLOA request if the Primary Health Liaison determines the student's health issue does not significantly compromise the student's

academics or University life, including, but not limited to, the safety of others.

2. Alternatively, the student may contact the University Counseling Center or the Drake Student Health Center (hereinafter referred to as the “Primary Health Liaison”) to explain the reason they are requesting a MLOA and, if requested, arrange for their licensed health care provider to communicate with the Primary Health Liaison to convey the health care provider’s professional opinion as to the advisability of the student taking a MLOA. The Primary Health Liaison will then make one of the following recommendations to the student’s Associate Dean:
  - a. approve the student’s request for a MLOA, if the Primary Health Liaison determines the student’s health issue significantly compromises the student’s academics or University life, including, but not limited to, the safety of others; or
  - b. deny the student’s MLOA request if the Primary Health Liaison determines the student’s health issue does not significantly compromise the student’s academics or University life, including, but not limited to, the safety of others.
3. The Associate Dean is ultimately responsible for granting or denying all student applications for leaves of absence, including MLOAs, within their respective School or College.
4. The exit process proceeds as quickly as possible to allow a student experiencing significant difficulties due to a health issue to immediately step away from academics and University life in order to receive the treatment they need.
5. Because every student’s situation is different, the length of a MLOA will be determined individually. The goal of taking a MLOA is to help students return to the University with an increased opportunity for a successful academic and University life that is productive for the student and the University community. Students should take the time necessary to achieve this goal. Students should check in with office of their Associate Dean during their MLOA, as such leaves are not permitted to continue indefinitely.
6. When a MLOA is granted, the student will be reminded of the re-enrollment procedures set forth below.
7. Where a MLOA is granted the Primary Health Liaison may make individualized treatment recommendations to the student designed to help them become academically and personally ready to resume life at the University.

## Requesting Permission to Re-enroll following a MLOA

When a student is interested in re-enrolling at the University following a voluntary MLOA, the student should take the following steps in order to initiate the re-enrollment process:

1. Well in advance of the desired return date, students must contact either their Associate Dean or their Primary Health Liaison to advise them of the student's interest in re-enrolling. The Associate Dean, the Dean of Students, and the Primary Health Liaison ("Re-enrollment Committee")<sup>1</sup> will consider the student's request for re-enrollment. Students will need to submit the materials described in paragraphs 2 and, if applicable, 3 below, by November 1 for consideration for re-enrolling for the spring semester, April 1 for the summer sessions, and June 30 for the fall semester. This allows the Re-enrollment Committee sufficient time to review the student's request and associated information in advance of the semester in which student seeks to re-enroll.
2. At the outset of this re-enrollment process, students should also determine from their Associate Dean whether any unfinished course work should be completed prior to returning from the leave.
3. The Associate Dean or Primary Health Liaison will provide Students with a re-enrollment form for their licensed health care provider(s) to complete and send to The Primary Health Liaison documenting their treatment since the commencement of the MLOA, their clinical status, and an opinion as to the student's readiness to successfully resume academics and University life. The Re-enrollment Committee will rely heavily on information received from licensed health care provider(s) in considering requests for re-enrollment from a MLOA. Students will be asked to provide Release of Information so, in addition to discussing the request within the Re-enrollment Committee, the Primary Health Liaison may also communicate with licensed health care provider(s) and, where appropriate, Disability Resources, and/or the Office of Academic Assistance, regarding a student's return.
4. Depending upon the nature and individual circumstances of the MLOA, students requesting re-enrollment from a MLOA may be required to provide a brief statement (no more than two pages) describing (1) their experience away from Drake including the activities undertaken while away, (2) their current understanding of the factors that led to the need for the leave, and the insights they have gained from treatment and time away, (3) the current level of their day-to-day functioning,<sup>2</sup> and (3) how they plan for successful return to academics and University life. In

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<sup>1</sup> If the student seeks to enroll in a College other than the College in which the student was enrolled at the commencement of the leave, the Associate Dean of College in which the student seeks to enroll will also be included on the Re-enrollment Committee.

<sup>2</sup> There are many ways a student might be able to demonstrate their day-to-day functioning. Students may choose to provide a letter from a reliable, adult community observer who can comment on their activities and readiness to successfully resume studies at Drake University and participate productively in University life. A reliable, adult community observer could be a mentor, a member of the clergy, a work or community service supervisor, coworker, personal trainer, athletic coach, or some other individual in a position to have observed the student

some cases, students will be informed at the time a MLOA is granted if they will be required to provide this information at the time of their request for re-enrollment. However, even if a student is not informed of the need to provide this information at the time their MLOA is granted, it is possible they will be asked to submit this information at a later time if the Re-enrollment Committee determines that the information provided under paragraph 3 is not sufficient to make a decision on a request for re-enrollment. Any requests for additional information are made on an individualized basis and may extend the timeframe for reviewing the re-enrollment request. Students will be notified if consideration of their request is delayed and the cause for the delay.

### **Processing a Student's Request to Re-enroll following a MLOA**

1. Once students have arranged for the materials described in paragraphs 2-3 above to be sent to the Primary Health Liaison, they should call the Primary Health Liaison to double check that the materials have been received.
2. Following a review of the required materials, the Re-enrollment Committee will determine if, in the Committee's reasonable opinion, the student is ready to successfully return to their academic program and University life. Every effort will be made to respond to a student's request within 14 calendar days of submission of all the required materials. A longer response time may be caused by an inability to reach a treatment provider or other extenuating circumstances.
3. As described above, the Re-enrollment Committee gives significant weight to the opinion of a student's licensed health care provider(s). If the Re-enrollment Committee determines that information provided by a licensed health care provider is incomplete, requires further explanation or clarification, or when there is a disconnect between the medical information provided by a licensed health care provider and other information within the possession of the University pertaining to the student, the Primary Health Liaison will contact the licensed health care provider to obtain additional information. In extraordinary circumstances, the Primary Health Liaison may request that the student undergo an additional assessment to allow the Re-enrollment Committee to make a determination about the student's readiness for return. In those rare instances, the Primary Health Liaison will notify the student of its rationale for making this request.

### **Re-enrollment Approved**

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during the course of their leave (not a family member). Where possible, the letter should be submitted on letterhead stationery, signed, dated, and should describe the student's daily activities and the extent to which the writer feels the student is ready to resume studies at Drake University and participate productively in University life. The student may choose to have the letter sent to the Associate Dean or Primary Health Liaison. Alternatively, a student may provide the Associate Dean or Primary Health Liaison with the name and contact information of a reference who will be able to provide respond to telephone or written inquiry for information concerning the student's daily activity and readiness to successfully resume studies at Drake University and participate productively in University life.

1. If the decision is made to approve a request to reenroll, the Primary Health Liaison will contact the student to request a check-in visit to review the student's plan for sustained health to allow for an ongoing successful return to academics and University, including recommendations for ongoing treatment, on- or off-campus.
2. Students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable accommodations and/or special services in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students are responsible for communicating their requests for academic accommodations to Disability Services. Information on the process for requesting accommodations may be found at <http://www.drake.edu/acadassist/disabilityservices/>.
3. The Associate Dean will contact the student regarding any applicable academic requirements the student will be expected to fulfill upon returning to the University.

### **Re-enrollment Denied**

If upon review, the Re-enrollment Committee denies a student's request for re-enrollment, the student will be advised of that decision in writing along with recommendations that will enhance their chance of a positive decision the next time they submit a request for re-enrollment.

### **Appeal where Re-enrollment Denied**

1. Students may appeal a decision denying their request to re-enroll by submitting an appeal letter in writing to the Academic Dean of their school or college within 10 business days or receiving notice of the denial.
2. The student may also submit any information they believe to be relevant to the appeal.
3. The Academic Dean will review the student's submission and make a final determination as to a request for re-enrollment from a voluntary MLOA.