



Graduate Programmes: Guide to the *Leave of Absence Academic Policy*

1. Introduction

UCD recognises that in order for a student to successfully complete a programme of study they may need to take a leave of absence from the programme. A leave of absence is an approved extended period of time away from the programme e.g. a student may not take a leave of absence in order to remediate failed modules.

A leave of absence is one of a range of options available to Graduate Boards in supporting the academic welfare of their students. UCD has a policy and procedure to consider leave of absence applications. This Guide is designed to expand on the process, as well as to highlight the possible implications of a leave of absence.

2. Key points to note

- 2.1 The University recognises that it may not always be possible for a programme to offer a leave of absence. Individual Graduate Boards¹ are responsible for publicising the feasibility of a leave of absence period(s) for their programme and should communicate this clearly to students where it is not possible to offer a leave of absence.
- 2.2 The Graduate Board approves leave of absence applications.
- 2.3 Students are expected to apply for a leave of absence before the start of the requested leave of absence period. Retrospective applications will only be approved in extenuating circumstances.²
- 2.4 A student on a graduate taught programme may apply for a leave of absence for a period of one, two or three terms.
- 2.5 A student on a graduate research programme may apply for a leave of absence for a period of one, two or three terms. In extenuating circumstances, they may apply for a leave of absence for a period equivalent to one term if the timing of the absence spans two terms.
- 2.6 The total amount of leave of absence time that a student may be permitted to take over the course of the programme is at the discretion of the Graduate Board. The academic coherence of a student's study is a key consideration in all leave of absence applications.
 - 2.6.1 As an overall guide for programmes, the University recommends that the maximum amount of leave of absence time that may be granted is equivalent to 1/3 of the total length of the programme.
 - a. Leaves of absence from a one-year taught programme should be granted at the discretion of the Graduate Board on academic grounds and the duration of the leave of absence should be outlined to suit the specifics of the programme.

¹ 'Graduate Board(s)' is used throughout this document to refer to the relevant governing board of a programme.

² See Section 6 for more information on retrospective leave of absence applications, and the relationship between a leave of absence application and an application under the extenuating circumstances processes.

- b. Leaves of absence from programmes longer than one year and/or comprising more than one stage should be granted based on the academic programme requirements.
- 2.6.2 A leave of absence for the purposes of maternity leave from the programme is normally for a one year period. This period of leave may be for longer or shorter at a student's request.
- 2.7 The *Leave of Absence Academic Policy* solely relates to an academic leave of absence from the programme. If a student is a member of UCD staff and wishes to take a leave of absence from their work as well as their studies they should refer to the HR policy.³
- 2.8 Where a student requests a leave of absence in order to register to another UCD programme, they should be advised to withdraw from their current programme.⁴

3. Support systems within UCD

If a student is considering applying for a leave of absence they should first contact their School Office/Programme Office/Graduate School Office.

In addition, there are a variety of support systems within UCD where a student may seek further advice and assistance before making an application for a leave of absence. An up-to-date list of these support systems can be accessed at <http://www.ucd.ie/students/studentsupport.html> and include the School Office/Programme Office/Graduate School Office, UCD Student Adviser, UCD Student Desk, member of the UCD Access/New ERA or Disability Support Service staff, official UCD student counsellor, UCD Chaplain, UCD Students' Union, UCD International Office. Students on graduate research programmes should also talk to their Principal Supervisor in the first instance, and students on graduate taught programmes should also talk to a member of the academic staff of their programme (e.g. Programme Co-ordinator).

Students considering a leave of absence are advised that the sooner they contact their School/Programme Office, the more options their Graduate Board will have to support them in completing their programme.

4. What are the possible implications of taking a leave of absence?

There are a number of implications of taking a leave of absence and students are responsible for making themselves familiar with the specific implications for their own situation.

4.1 Student Programme Activity

While on a leave of absence from the programme, a student may not be active in their programme in any capacity. Some general indicators of student programme activity include the following:

- Attending lectures, field and research work, or laboratory work;
- Meeting the Principal Supervisor (students on graduate research programmes);
- Remediating failed modules;
- Payments from grants.

4.2 Student status and registration

Participation in the programme (i.e. a student's registration) is suspended during a leave of absence. A student is not expected to be engaged in any activities related to the programme, and is not permitted to remediate a failed module(s) while on a leave of absence.

³ Further information can be found on the HR website a-z search facility at <http://www.ucd.ie/hr/a-z/>.

⁴ Information on withdrawing can be found in the *Policy on Withdrawal for Graduate Research Degrees* (<http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol.htm#w>).

Decisions in relation to I and IX grades are made by a Graduate Board on a case-by-case basis.

- Please note: a student is expected to confirm their re-registration when they are due to return to the programme. Please see item 8.3 for further information (“What happens if a student does not confirm their re-registration following a leave of absence?”).

4.3 Grants and Payments under grants

If a student receives external funding, including grants, and they apply for a leave of absence, they should consult with the sponsoring/funding agency e.g. county council, hospital, after they have spoken to their Principal Supervisor and School/Programme Office.

- Continuous registration is a requirement of stipendiary scholarships as per the Revenue Commissioners. Normally this means that a student will not receive grant payments while on a leave of absence.
- A student who has been in receipt of payment(s) under a grant may not be eligible for a leave of absence (see items 5.3 and 6.2.1).
- Where a student takes a leave of absence they may be asked to return some or all of the monies received under the grant scheme pertinent to them.

4.4 Fees implications

- 4.4.1 Students are advised to contact the UCD Student Desk⁵ if they would like specific information on the potential fee implications of taking a leave of absence.

With regard to fees, the following general points should be noted:

- a. Fees are charged per term;
 - b. For graduate three-term programmes, fees are payable/refundable on a three term basis, i.e. where a leave of absence is granted for one term then a student is liable for 2/3 of the programme fee (and so forth); where a leave of absence is granted for three terms no fees are payable for that academic session.
- 4.4.2 Students who are resident in UCD Residences should contact the residences for information on the potential residences’ fees implications of taking a leave of absence.⁶
- 4.4.3 A student cannot return to the programme where they are in bad financial standing with the University. Please see item 8.6 for further information (“Are there any situations where the University cannot allow a student to return from a leave of absence?”).

4.5 Immigration issues

An international student with a residence permit from the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) is advised to consult with the International Student Adviser prior to applying for a leave of absence. The validity of a GNIB residence permit may be affected by college registration status.

4.6 Campus entitlements

While on a leave of absence, a student is not entitled to use the facilities of the campus. This includes, for example, health services, the library, UCD Residences and Blackboard. However, UCD Connect access remains available.

4.7 Programme curriculum and requirements

⁵ Information on the opening hours of the UCD Student Desk can be found at <http://www.ucd.ie/registry/adminservices/studentdesk/index.html>.

⁶ Contact details for UCD Residences can be found at <http://www.ucd.ie/residences/contactus/> and the UCD Residences refunds policy can be accessed at <http://www.ucd.ie/residences/studentpages/refunds/>.

When a student returns from a leave of absence they are governed by the University's Rules, Regulations, Codes and policies and procedures in place on their return. They are also subject to the programme curriculum and programme requirements in place for the programme on their return. Students should be reminded that the University cannot guarantee that the same modules available prior to or during a leave of absence period(s) will be available when they return.

5. In what circumstances is an application for a leave of absence refused?

- 5.1 First term of the programme: Applicants to UCD graduate programmes who wish to defer a place they have been offered should contact their School/Programme Office to see if this is permissible. Information is also available at http://www.ucd.ie/apply/grad_taught_apps.html. In the first term of a programme a student is not normally eligible for a leave of absence unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- 5.2 Depending on the programme requirements and structure or research supervisory arrangements, it may not be possible to grant a requested leave of absence. Where this is the case, the Graduate Board will recommend either an alternative leave of absence period or an alternative arrangement to support a student in completing the programme.
- 5.3 A student who has been in receipt of payment(s) under a grant may not be eligible for a leave of absence. UCD Registry cross-checks leave of absence decisions with grants payments and regularly confirms the status of students with funding agencies in an academic session.
- 5.4 Where a student has pending disciplinary action they are not eligible for a leave of absence.
- 5.5 Where a Graduate Board refuses a leave of absence application, they have a responsibility to suggest an alternative solution for the student.

6. Making an application (including retrospective applications)

- 6.1 Students should apply for a leave of absence on the official University form in advance of the start of the leave of absence period requested.⁷
 - 6.1.1 A student may apply for a leave of absence up to six weeks into a term.⁸
 - a. After the first six weeks, and where there has been programme activity, an extenuating circumstances application is the appropriate course of action.⁹
 - 6.1.2 A leave of absence application is considered retrospective when the period of time applied for has passed.
- 6.2 **Retrospective leave of absence**

Retrospective leave of absence is not normally permitted. However, it may be granted by a Graduate Board where it is satisfied that

 - a. the student has extenuating circumstances, **and**
 - b. there is no other available solution for the student given their circumstances, **and**

⁷ A guide to completing the form can be found at <http://www.ucd.ie/leaveofabsence>.

⁸ Normally students would be refunded any fee payment that they have made.

⁹ Applications for extenuating circumstances relating to all taught modules, including the Minor Thesis, are made under the *Policy on Extenuating Circumstances* (http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol_ext_circum.pdf) and in relation to the graduate research thesis are made under the *Policy on Theses in Graduate Research Programmes* (Section 4) (http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol_tgr.pdf).

- c. the student has not normally been engaged in any programme activity.
- 6.2.1 **A retrospective leave of absence application is an option where there is no other solution. However, a student who has been in receipt of grant payments for the period of time applied for is not entitled to a retrospective leave of absence.**
- 6.2.2 In considering a retrospective leave of absence application, the Graduate Board will also consider whether a student's academic history relating to the retrospective leave of absence period should be removed from their student record. Where required, the Graduate Board will accordingly instruct UCD Registry in writing (via existing delegated authority mechanisms).
- 6.2.3 Each Graduate Board will submit an annual report to the University Graduate Programmes Board (UGPB) documenting all retrospective leave of absence applications it approved since the previous academic session. This report will be submitted to Academic Secretariat, UCD Registry by the submission deadline for UGPB's final meeting in an academic session. Academic Secretariat will ensure that Graduate Board's are informed of this submission date.

6.3 **Leave of absence and extenuating circumstances**

The *Leave of Absence Academic Policy* provides an additional tool to build upon the extenuating circumstances process. It looks at the period of time at an overall programme level supporting the module-focused approach of the extenuating circumstances process. A retrospective leave of absence provides an alternative solution.

7. **During a leave of absence**

During a leave of absence:

- a. A student's participation in the programme is suspended and they are not registered;
- b. The only service provided by the University is access to the UCD Connect account;
- c. The University will, prior to a student's return date, provide them with information on re-registration procedures.

8. **Returning from a leave of absence: some Frequently Asked Questions**

8.1 **What happens when a student is due to return from a leave of absence?**

Students due to return to their programme will be automatically able to register to their programme. It is their responsibility to ensure they confirm their registration via SISWeb.

Students will be governed by the University's Rules, Regulations, Codes, policies and procedures, and the programme requirements and structure in place at the time of their return.

Students must notify their School/Programme Office of their intention to return to the programme as early as possible and before the end of their leave of absence period.¹⁰ Students on graduate research programmes must also notify their Principal Supervisor in the first instance.

8.2 **May a student return early from a leave of absence?**

Should a student wish to return early from a leave of absence period:

- Students on taught programmes may return to the programme within the first two weeks of any term;
- Students on research programmes may return to study at the discretion of the Graduate School Board;

¹⁰ This is particularly important where the programme has a clinical or work placement component.

- Students are liable for fees for the term in which they return.

8.3 **What happens if a student does not confirm their re-registration following a leave of absence?**

If a student does not return from a leave of absence and confirm their re-registration via SISWeb within the first six weeks of the term they are due to return or have not applied for a further leave of absence period their registration will be cancelled.

Cancellation of registration arises where someone has been expected back to their programme but does not re-register on time. It is only in such circumstances that someone's registration can be reactivated. Students are advised to contact the UCD Student Desk for fees information on reactivation requests.

8.4 **What if a student needs to take a further leave of absence at the end of their first leave of absence period?**

Where a student needs to take a further leave of absence period they should contact their School/Programme Office, and their Principal Supervisor (graduate research students only), **before the end of their approved first period of leave of absence** in order to make a formal application for a further leave of absence.

8.5 **What options are available if a student needs leaves of absence for more than 1/3 of the total length of the programme?**

The University recommends that the maximum amount of leave of absence time that may be granted is equivalent to 1/3 of the total length of the programme. Where a student requires a longer total period of leave of absence from a programme, they may opt to withdraw from the programme and apply for re-admission at a later date. Re-admission to the programme is subject to UCD admissions policy. For further information on withdrawing (and applying for re-admission), please refer to *UCD Withdrawal Procedures*.¹¹

8.5.1 What is the difference between a leave of absence and a withdrawal?

A student who has taken a leave of absence has the right to resume their studies at the end of the approved leave of absence period. Where a student who has withdrawn wishes, at a later date, to return to that programme, they must apply to be re-admitted.

8.6 **Are there any situations where the University cannot allow a student to return from a leave of absence?**

A student cannot return from a leave of absence where they are in bad financial standing with the University i.e. where they owe monies to UCD.

UCD recognises that monetary difficulties arise for a number of reasons. If a student finds themselves in this situation they are advised to contact their Student Adviser to see if they are eligible for financial assistance. Students may also contact the Students' Union Welfare Officer for information on financial assistance. However, the Student Welfare Fund and Student Assistance Fund cannot be used for tuition fees and cannot be used by someone who is not a registered student. Further information can be accessed at <http://www.ucd.ie/studentadvisers/financial.html> and contact details for UCD Student Advisers can be found at <http://www.ucd.ie/studentadvisers/advisers/index.html>. Information on the financial supports/funds that can be provided via the UCD Students' Union can be accessed at <http://ucdsu.ie/site/view/51/> and contact details for the Welfare Officer can be found at <http://ucdsu.ie/>.

9. Supporting Documentation

Policy on Leave of Absence – <http://www.ucd.ie/leaveofabsence>.

¹¹ Information on withdrawing can be found in the *Policy on Withdrawal for Graduate Research Degrees* (<http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol.htm#w>).

Leave of Absence Application Form (Graduate Taught Programmes) –
<http://www.ucd.ie/leaveofabsence>

Leave of Absence Application Form (Graduate Research Programmes) –
<http://www.ucd.ie/leaveofabsence>

UCD Withdrawal Procedures – <http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol.htm#w>

Policy on Theses in Graduate Research Programmes –
<http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol.htm#g>

Policy on Theses in Graduate Taught Programmes –
<http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol.htm#g>

Policy on Extenuating Circumstances –
<http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol.htm#e>