

Student Leave of Absence Policy

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Policy owner: Dean of Students

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SECTION I. PURPOSE

This policy is intended to support students who might benefit from pausing their education. Moreover, this policy provides the university with the ability to protect the safety and well-being of the community by removing students whose behaviors indicate a risk to themselves or the community. This Policy replaces the former Behavioral Leave of Absence and Readmission Policy. This policy does not replace existing academic performance, student conduct, or dismissal policies maintained by academic units or the Dean of Students Office.

SECTION II. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all St. Thomas students. If a school or college has a more specific policy regarding leaves of absence, the leave of absence may be governed by both policies.

SECTION III. DEFINITIONS

When used in this policy, the following terms have the following meanings:

- a. A ***voluntary leave of absence*** occurs when a student chooses to withdraw from all courses (also referred to as a “term withdrawal”) with the intention to return to the university or when a student chooses not to enroll for the next spring or fall term but intends to return to the university.
- b. An ***involuntary leave of absence*** occurs when the university has substantial evidence that a student’s behavior presents a risk to the health and/or safety of self or others. Under this policy the university reserves the right to remove a student from the university community by requesting or requiring a student to take a leave of absence.

SECTION IV. VOLUNTARY LEAVE OF ABSENCE

A student may take a voluntary leave of absence from the university due to, but not limited to:

- Physical or mental health concerns
- Family obligations
- Financial concerns
- Military service
- Internship or co-op experience

An undergraduate student considering a leave of absence should contact Academic Counseling. Graduate students should contact their program director, department chair or a dean. DFC students should contact the DFC associate dean of academics. Some programs may have limitations on the

¹ This policy was formerly known as the Behavioral Leave Policy.

length of any leave of absence and conditions for return. In addition, a student's financial aid may be affected by a leave of absence. Any student who is considering taking a voluntary leave of absence should talk with the Financial Aid Office about the impact of a leave of absence on their financial aid. If the student is currently enrolled in courses, the student must follow applicable university policies related to withdrawal and changes in registration. Students who take a voluntary leave of absence due to military service should consult the [Military Withdrawal Policy](#).

Undergraduate students who wish to return to the university from a voluntary leave must contact Academic Counseling. Graduate students who wish return to the university from a voluntary leave must contact their program. DFC students who wish to return to the university from a voluntary leave must contact the DFC associate dean of academics.

If a student takes a voluntary leave of absence following behavior or concerns that meet the criteria for an involuntary leave of absences under this policy, the Dean of Students has authority to establish and implement conditions and/or requirements for re-enrollment. Such conditions and/or requirements may be appealed as set forth below.

SECTION V. INVOLUNTARY LEAVE OF ABSENCE

The university may consider and implement measures short of an involuntary leave of absence when a student is struggling to function successfully or safely in their role as student or to meet behavioral and/or self-care expectations. Such measures may include, but are not limited to, meetings with university officials, behavioral contracts, temporary restrictions on a student's ability to engage in university travel like study abroad, temporary restrictions on a student's ability to live in the residence halls or temporary restrictions on the student's ability to participate in other programs and activities. Any such measures will be consistent with applicable laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.

While requiring a student to take involuntary leave of absence is rare, the university has the authority to place a student on involuntary leave in the following circumstances: (1) where current knowledge about the individual's medical condition and/or the best available objective evidence indicates that a student poses a significant risk to the health or safety of the university community or one of its members, (2) where a student is unable or unwilling to carry out substantial self-care obligations and poses a significant risk to their own safety not based on mere speculation, stereotypes, or generalizations, or (3) where a student's behavior significantly disrupts the university environment and the student does not want to take a voluntary leave.

Before requiring an involuntary leave, the university will conduct an individualized assessment and consult with the Office of Disability Resources to determine if any reasonable accommodations can be implemented to allow a student to continue to participate in the university community.

An involuntary leave may be considered based on the criteria above regardless of whether the student has engaged in conduct that violates university policies. If the student has engaged in behavior that potentially violates university policy, any disciplinary process is separate from this involuntary leave process. At the discretion of the Dean of Students or their designee, both processes may be conducted concurrently.

A. Interim Leave

In some cases, it may be necessary to take interim measures to protect the health and safety of a student or the community while determining whether to place a student on an involuntary leave of absence. The Dean of Students or their designee has discretion to take interim measures, such as requiring an interim involuntary leave of absence or restricting the student's access to campus,

housing, and/or services, programs and/or activities, before a final determination is made regarding an involuntary leave of absence. In such cases, a reasonable attempt will be made by the Dean of Students or their designee to discuss options with the student before deciding on an interim leave of absence. The Dean of Students or their designee will consult, as appropriate, with Disability Resources, the Behavior Intervention Team, and/or other university officials. If a student is put on interim leave, the decision will be communicated in writing to the student. The interim leave and/or restricted access will remain in effect until a final decision has been made by the Dean of Students or it has been determined that the reasons for requiring the leave no longer exist. A decision to place a student on an interim leave may be immediately appealed as set forth below.

B. Process for Involuntary Leave

The Dean of Students or their designee will generally follow the process set forth below prior to placing a student on an involuntary leave of absence. The Dean of Students or their designee may skip or alter any steps below when significant health or safety concerns or other unusual circumstances warrant a departure from this process, provided that the Dean of Students or designee is acting in accordance with other aspects of this policy and applicable law prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

1. The Dean of Students or their designee will provide written notice to the student that an involuntary leave of absence is under consideration. The notice shall provide the reason the leave is being considered, a link to this policy, contact information for a staff member in the Dean of Students Office who the student can contact with questions, contact information for Disability Resources, and information about how the student can provide additional information or share their perspective about a potential involuntary leave. The notice will inform the student that they have the option to take a voluntary leave of absence before a decision is made with respect to an involuntary leave of absence. The notice may also include a request for information, including a request for additional medical information or a request that the student consent to sharing medical information. If an interim leave or other interim measures are put in place while an involuntary leave is under consideration, information about the interim measures will be included in the notice.
2. The Dean of Students or their designee may gather information related to the possible involuntary leave, including information from university faculty, staff and students and information from outside resources as appropriate. With the consent of the student, the Dean of Students or their designee or personnel in the Center for Well-Being may speak to the student's treatment provider or other health care professionals. If the Dean of Students or their designee determines that the information provided by treatment provider(s) is incomplete or insufficient for the leave determination, the Dean of Students or their designee may request that the student participate in an independent medical examination.
3. The Dean of Students or their designee may contact the student's designated emergency contact or family, if appropriate.
4. The Dean of Students or their designee will consider information related to the leave based on the criteria set forth in this policy and will confer with appropriate university personnel, including Disability Resources, the Center for Well-Being, Academic Counseling, academic administrators and/or such other individuals as may be appropriate.
5. The Dean of Students or their designee will consider whether there are reasonable accommodations, short of the student's involuntary leave from the university that will adequately address the concerns.

6. The Dean of Students or their designee will strive to conduct this review as quickly as practical under the circumstances. In many cases, decision will be made within seven (7) business days, but this period may be extended as needed, particularly when additional medical information is needed.

The Dean of Students or their designee will provide a written notice of their decision to the student. If an involuntary leave is imposed, the notice will include information about when the student is eligible for re-admission, any requirements or conditions for re-enrollment, and information about how to appeal the decision. If an interim leave is not imposed, the Dean of Students or their designee may impose conditions and/or requirements under which the student is allowed to remain at the university. Any such conditions/requirements may be appealed.

SECTION VI. APPEAL

A student has the right to appeal the decision of the Dean of Students or their designee under this policy. A written appeal must be delivered to the Vice President of Student Affairs within three business-days of receiving written notice of the involuntary leave/interim leave decision. The Vice President for Student Affairs has full and final authority in decisions related to this policy.

SECTION VII. EFFECT ON ACADEMIC STATUS

In the event of a leave of absence pursuant to this policy, the university policy and schedule for withdrawal from courses and tuition refunds will apply.

SECTION VIII. EFFECT ON HOUSING STATUS

If the student lives in the residence halls, the university policy and schedule for housing and dining cancellations and refunds will apply.