



---

EAST TENNESSEE STATE  
UNIVERSITY

---

## **Graduate School Leave of Absence Policy**

**Policy Name:** Graduate School Leave of Absence

## **Policy Purpose**

This policy specifies when a graduate student may qualify for a Leave of Absence in their degree program.

## **Applicability**

This policy is applicable to students in the Graduate School. This policy does not apply to students who are exclusively enrolled in Quillen College of Medicine for the M.D. degree or the Gatton College of Pharmacy for the Pharm.D. degree.

## **Responsible Official, Office, and Interpretation**

The Dean of the Graduate School and Graduate Council are responsible for the review and revision of this policy. For questions about this policy, please contact the Dean of the Graduate School. The Provost, in consultation with the Office of University Counsel, has the final authority to interpret this policy.

## **Defined Terms**

*A defined term has a specific meaning within the context of this policy.*

### Census Date

As indicated on the ETSU [Academic Calendar](#), the date on which an official and final enrollment count is recorded.

### Continuous Enrollment

Registration during each semester (including summer) of the academic year until the degree is completed unless a Leave of Absence (or withdrawal) has been activated. Refer to the [Graduate School Enrollment Policy](#).

### Matriculation Limit

The time period in which course work can be applied to a graduate degree or certificate program as defined in the policy on [Graduate School Matriculation \(Time\) Limits](#).

**Policy Effective Date:** 12/15/2021 • **Policy Revised Effective Date:** 6/18/26  
**Procedures Effective Date:** 12/15/2021 • **Procedures Revised Effective Date:** 6/18/26

## Policy Name: Graduate School Leave of Absence

### Policy

A Leave of Absence (LOA) provides an ETSU graduate student with the opportunity to step away from graduate study for circumstances described in this policy for up to three consecutive terms. If a student has been enrolled in a term but withdraws due to medical or other reasons, an LOA is not needed for that term but would be needed for future terms.

#### 1. Eligibility.

A doctoral or master's student who is in the thesis or dissertation stage with a Continuous Enrollment requirement must have an approved LOA to be exempt from the Continuous Enrollment requirement. All other graduate students are not required to request a LOA if temporarily stepping away; however, it is recommended that they do so, as the process provides a vehicle for more easily resuming their studies.

#### 2. Circumstances.

There are four conditions under which a graduate student can petition for a LOA: personal exigency, personal illness, family care, and military service.

##### 2.1. Personal Exigency.

Personal exigency includes non-medical reasons or professional obligations that necessitate a student to temporarily halt graduate study. Documentation may be requested.

##### 2.2. Illness.

Personal illness is when a student has an illness that impacts their ability to pursue graduate study. The student may be requested to submit appropriate documentation.

##### 2.3. Family Care.

Family care includes (a) providing serious illness or end-of-life care for a family member or other persons living in a household, or (b) pregnancy, maternity, or paternity care, including adoption. Documentation may be requested.

##### 2.4. Military Service.

Military service includes when a student is called for active-duty military service. Documentation may be requested.

## **Policy Name:** Graduate School Leave of Absence

### 3. Request and Approval.

A student requests a LOA by completing the [Leave of Absence](#) form found on the Graduate School website. The student must specify if they are requesting one, two, or three consecutive semesters of LOA. The student must document a rationale for the time requested. A student can request a LOA more than once.

A student should submit a request before the start of the semester, and the last possible date to submit an LOA for the current is no later than the Census Date of the term in which the leave is needed. Emergency requests after the deadline will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. A LOA cannot be approved retroactively for a previous semester(s). A LOA will not be approved to avoid paying tuition, to avoid the policy on Continuous Enrollment, or to avoid the full-time requirement for international students.

The Dean of the Graduate School or designee may request additional documentation to make a determination.

All LOA requests are granted on a case-by-case basis. The decision of the Dean of the Graduate School or designee is final and cannot be appealed. If the request is denied, the student may file one reconsideration request with the Dean of the Graduate School if the student is providing additional supporting documentation or information. The Dean will review, decide, and notify the student. The reconsideration decision of the Dean is final.

### 4. Students Pursuing Two Degrees.

A student who is pursuing more than one graduate program must submit a LOA request to each program.

### 5. Length of LOA.

A LOA may be granted for up to three consecutive semesters (including summer) per request. A student who may need additional semesters of leave can submit additional requests.

### 6. Effect on Matriculation.

Since currency in the discipline is essential at the graduate level, a LOA for personal exigency, personal illness, or family care will not extend the Matriculation Limits to complete the degree. If a student is granted a LOA for military service, the student will receive a matriculation/time extension equal to the LOA request up to a maximum of three (3) semesters total.

## **Policy Name:** Graduate School Leave of Absence

### **7. Returning to Graduate School after an Approved LOA.**

A student who obtained an approved LOA in accordance with this policy will be eligible to resume graduate study if the student:

- 7.1. submits a [Readmission Update Form](#) found on the Graduate School website;
- 7.2. does not have criminal convictions or pending charges that would prohibit admission;
- 7.3. meets any additional verification requirements (e.g., Eligibility Verification Entitlements Act (EVEA), Selective Service, etc.); and
- 7.4. returns to the same graduate program(s) from which the LOA was approved.

A student may return from a LOA earlier than the date indicated on the approved LOA.

Depending on the length of time the student is away from ETSU, new program degree requirements may be in effect. With an approved LOA, the student may opt to complete the degree under the previous degree requirements or change to the new catalog and the new requirements. Changing to a new catalog requires the approval of the graduate coordinator and completion of the required documents.

The student is responsible for filing new financial aid applications (if applicable) by the appropriate deadlines and should consult with the Office of Financial Aid.

### **8. Access to University Resources during an Approved LOA.**

Because a LOA is intended for reasons of personal or other exigency, as opposed to degree progress, there is no support—whether faculty or university resources (library, office space, funding, etc.)— provided to the student during a LOA. Students with an approved LOA can complete outstanding work in course(s) for which they have been issued grade(s) of Incomplete (I) by the appropriate deadline for the term in which the course was taken; however, an approved LOA does not extend the deadline for an Incomplete. (Refer to the [Graduate School Incomplete Grade Policy](#).) The student cannot, however, fulfill any other degree requirements during the time on leave.

### **9. Canceling Registration.**

The student is responsible for canceling their registration or dropping classes by the deadline published on the ETSU Academic Calendar; failing to do so will result in billing and assigned grades for the term(s). An approved LOA does not automatically cancel any registrations; the student must contact the Office of the Registrar to complete this process.

## **Policy Name: Graduate School Leave of Absence**

### **10. Impact on Student Visas.**

A student on visa is responsible for contacting the Office of International Student Services to discuss the impact of a leave on their visa status prior to submitting a LOA request. The student is responsible for following all visa requirements.

### **11. Impact on Graduate Assistantship, and Other University Scholarships.**

A student who receives an approved LOA cannot hold a Graduate Assistantship (GA) during the LOA period.

The program or unit is under no obligation to hold the GA position for a student on a personal exigency, personal illness, or family care LOA. GA positions must be held for students on a LOA for military service, pursuant to the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act; however, a GA position does not have to be for the same project or with the same unit.

Before requesting a LOA, it is the student's responsibility to consult with their GA supervisor about the need for a LOA and implications on the GA position and on any remaining tuition charges for which the student will be responsible (if applicable). A student with a GA position funded through sponsored activity must also abide by the guidelines of their respective funding agencies.

A student cannot hold university scholarships while on LOA. The student is responsible for consulting with the ETSU Financial Aid Office on the impact of a LOA on their scholarship after the LOA.

### **12. Impact on Federal Financial Assistance.**

For a student receiving federal financial assistance, the U.S. Department of Education regulations require the university to report the student's enrollment status as withdrawn when students take a leave of absence for one semester or more. This may accelerate or impact the grace period and starting dates for repayments of federal loans. The student is responsible for discussing the possible impact of a LOA on federal loans with the Office of Financial Aid.

## **Policy Name:** Graduate School Leave of Absence

### 13. Accommodations.

To the extent possible, the Dean of the Graduate School (or designee) may grant, in the Dean's discretion, reasonable accommodations to the requirements of this policy.

## **Policy Name:** Graduate School Leave of Absence

### **Procedures**

#### 1. Student Responsibilities before Requesting and LOA.

Before requesting a LOA, a student should consult with the following individuals/departments, depending on their individual circumstances:

- 1.1. their graduate advisor and graduate program coordinator on the circumstances surrounding a needed Leave of Absence;
- 1.2. International Student Services on visa impact (if an international student);
- 1.3. Graduate Assistantship supervisor; and
- 1.4. The Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships.

#### 2. Requesting an LOA.

To request a Leave of Absence, a student fills out the [Leave of Absence](#) Form.

#### 3. Review of Request.

The graduate coordinator reviews the request and submits a recommendation to the Dean of the Graduate School (or designee). The Dean of the Graduate School or designee reviews the request and recommendations. The Dean or designee approves or denies the request. The student, graduate coordinator, graduate advisor, GA/TS supervisor (if applicable), and International Student Services (if applicable) receive notification of the decision. The student should retain a copy of the LOA request and notification for their records.

**Policy Name:** Graduate School Leave of Absence

## **Applicable Forms and Websites**

[Leave of Absence](#) form

## **Authority and Revisions**

**Authority:** TCA § 49-8-203, et seq.

**Previous Policy:** N/A

The ETSU Board of Trustees is charged with policy making pursuant to TCA § 49-8-203, et seq. On March 24, 2017, the Board delegated its authority to ETSU's President to establish certain policies and procedures for educational program and other operations of the University, including this policy. The delegation of authority and required process for revision to this policy can be found on the [Policy Development and Rule Making Policy webpage](#).

To suggest a revision to this policy, please contact the responsible official indicated in this policy. Before a substantive change to the policy section may take effect, the requested changes must be: (1) approved by the responsible office; (2) reviewed by the Office of University Counsel for legal sufficiency; (3) posted for public comment; (4) approved by either Academic Council or University Council; and (5) approved by ETSU's President.