

Guidance for Granting Medical Leave of Absence with Health Care Benefits for Graduate Students in the College of Biological Sciences

- CBS (/Medical School) will consider extending health care benefits to graduate students who are already approved for a leave of absence due to debilitating medical conditions.
- The student will need to provide official documentation that they are under the professional care of a physician at Boynton Health (or community medical practice) for a medical issue that prevents them from carrying out their thesis research and other expectations of their program for an extended period. This letter does not need to specify or disclose the student's personal health information. The physician should sign the letter and specify that the student is receiving treatment now. The physician should also provide an estimate of the time course of the treatment and when the student is likely to be able to rejoin the program.
- A plan must be in place for how the student will return to the program, based on the current treatment window and stage of their degree. The plan will be formulated and agreed upon by the student, DGS(s) and CBS (/Medical School) associate dean(s) for graduate education.
- If there are setbacks in treatment, an updated physician's letter may be submitted along with a request for extending the leave of absence and extending coverage.

Notes on this policy

Eligibility

Graduate students in Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, and Biophysics (BMBB); Ecology, Evolution and Behavior (EEB); Molecular, Cellular, Developmental Biology and Genetics (MCDB&G); Plant and Microbial Biology (PMB); and Microbial Engineering (MicE) are eligible for this support. Each student's request will be considered on a case-by-case basis. In order to be eligible for this health care benefit, a student must be receiving a stipend, tuition, and health insurance benefits at the time they are approved for a LOA. Students in the Genetic Counseling program (MCDB&G M.S. track) are not eligible for this benefit, because they do not receive graduate assistant stipend and benefits.

It does not matter what phase the student has reached in their graduate program, as long as they are in good standing with the program at the time of the approved leave.

Duration

Payments for Continuation of Coverage could conceivably extend to the full 18 months allowed on Continuation of Coverage, but this would need to be backed up by medical professional letters extending the time period that a student requires treatment before returning to the program. However, the policy does not include a time frame, so as to avoid a stated guaranteed entitlement. This benefit would never be granted for 18 months immediately, and 18 months is the absolute maximum time that coverage would be granted. The program could leave the window open for a student to return to the program, even after more than 18 months of leave, but the health insurance premiums would be covered only for a maximum of 18 months.

Process for requesting a medical leave of absence with health care benefits

1. Student, advisor, and director(s) of graduate studies consult on the options and need for a leave of absence. They must also confer with the (/Medical School) associate dean(s) for graduate education.
2. Student and their advisor establish and put in writing an agreement for the terms of the leave and a plan for the student's return to the program.

3. Student obtains a letter from their medical provider specifying that the student is in treatment and has a plan for continued care, with an estimate of the duration of care.
4. The director of graduate studies writes a letter of support for the leave of absence, confirming the need and the timeline.
5. The student completes the Leave of Absence form (https://cbs.umn.edu/sites/cbs.umn.edu/files/public/downloads/LOArequest_um1758.pdf).
6. Either the student, the graduate program coordinator, or the director of graduate studies compiles these documents (leave of absence agreement, health provide letter, and director of graduate studies letter) and submits the medical leave of absence request to the college coordinator for graduate programs.