



University of Cape Town (UCT)

Faculty of Health Sciences

LEAVE OF ABSENCE (LOA) FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

DEFINITION:

The University uses the term “leave of absence” (LoA) to indicate leave for longer periods, this is for a semester or up to a year. The Senate may grant leave of absence to students for a specified period. Reasons for granting leave of absence are:

1. Medical
2. Compassion
3. Maternity Leave
4. External Study opportunities other than a formal exchange programme

PROCESS:

A student obtains a leave of absence only if the necessary documentation in respect of reasons (see details below) has been submitted via PeopleSoft. These are automatically assigned to the Faculty Manager (FM) of Academic Administration, and the LoA is considered by the Dean or Faculty Manager.

The application process is outlined below:

1. The student must obtain the LoA application form from the UCT website (ACA37) Link: <https://forms.uct.ac.za/studentforms.htm>
2. The student must upload the application and the supporting documents via self-service on PeopleSoft. **An application received without supporting documentation will not be considered or approved**
3. The LoA is considered by the Faculty Manager: Academic Administration. *All faculty LOA applications are managed by the Faculty Manager (UG and PG) so please expect a response within 1 week of submission.*
4. If approved, the letter granting the LoA will specify the processes to follow when applying to return to studies.
5. Once the LoA application process has been concluded, the Faculty Manager: Academic Administration will inform the Student Development Support Office, Student Housing and the relevant programme convener.

NOTE: *Only the Faculty Manager may approve LoA in terms of UCT policy*

GROUNDINGS FOR APPROVAL:

The Specific Grounds for Approval are outlined below:

1. **Medical:** This type of LOA applies in cases where a student’s illness necessitates time away from their studies
 - 1.1. The supporting documents should include confirmation from the treating health care practitioner/s with clear dates required off from studies.
 - 1.2. **MBChB Programme Clinical Years of Study:**

Students in the clinical years 4 - 6 of study of the MBChB programme will be considered for an LOA as per the quarterly timelines below only.

Calendar year 2026

First Quarter 12th January – 28th April

Second Quarter 04th May – 22nd June

Third Quarter 13th July – 31st August

Fourth Quarter 7th September – 2nd November

Please Note:

Should an MBChB student in Years 4–6 apply for a Leave of Absence (LOA) during any of the specified periods, they will be required to take the full period as LOA and will not be permitted to return to, or participate in, any courses during that time. An LOA academic standing will be recorded for all courses scheduled within the LOA period, and the student will be required to complete all outstanding courses upon their return from LOA. *Medical Leave of Absence and Fit for Study Panel:* Once the MLOA is approved, students will receive details about the return from LOA (ACA43) process which includes an assessment by the Fit for Study Panel (FSP) to determine fitness to return (FTR). Please refer to General rule FGU 7.2.

- 2. Compassionate:** This type of LOA may be applied for following the death of a family member.
 - 2.1.** The supporting documents should include a copy of the death certificate of the deceased relative, an affidavit confirming the nature of the relations if the student and deceased have different surnames or other relevant documents to the request.
 - 2.2.** Students on compassionate leave do not need to apply to the Fit for Study Panel to return. They need to contact the faculty office (fhsreg@uct.ac.za) to indicate their intention to return from LoA.

- 3. Maternity:** This type of LOA applies when a student requires time away from their studies during pregnancy or the postnatal period.
 - 3.1.** The supporting documents should include confirmation of the professional care received during the pregnancy from the health care practitioner.
 - 3.2.** Consideration of approval will include a recommendation by the relevant medical practice specifying the expected delivery date and delivery plan.
 - 3.3.** Students on maternity leave do not need to apply to the Fit for Study Panel to return*. They need to contact the faculty office (fhsreg@uct.ac.za) to indicate their intention to return from LoA.
Note: Any changes to the maternity/delivery plan on which the approval of the maternity LoA was based need to be communicated to the FM: Academic Administration, as the LoA may need to be extended. Rule FGU7.3 may apply depending on circumstances.

- 4. External Study Opportunity:** This type of LOA is applied for when a student undertakes an approved external study opportunity.
 - 4.1.** The supporting documents should include written details of the student opportunity, precise dates of absence from primary studies, approval from the host supervisor and host organisation

PLEASE NOTE:

- 1. Timing and Duration of Leave of Absence Applications**
 - 1.1.** **The permitted duration for a LoA request is either for a semester or a maximum of a full year**, depending on the programme registered for; no approvals will be granted for periods of lesser duration.
 - 1.2.** Except in exceptional circumstances, students registered for year-long courses (W or H courses) or full-semester courses (F or S courses) must apply for a Leave of Absence (LoA) within the first ten (10) weeks of the relevant semester.
 - 1.3.** The approved duration of an LoA is limited to either one semester or, where permitted by the programme, a maximum of one academic year. Applications for shorter periods will not be considered.

2. Retrospective Applications

- 2.1.** Retrospective applications for LoA will not ordinarily be considered. The effective date of an LoA is the date on which the application is submitted via the PeopleSoft self-service portal, subject to approval.
- 2.2.** An LoA will not normally be granted where a student has completed approximately two-thirds of a course or is in the final quarter of the academic year. In such cases, a written motivation and supporting documentation must be submitted to the Faculty Manager for consideration

3. Extensions of Leave of Absence

- 3.1.** Approval of an LoA extension is not automatic and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4. Consequences of an Approved Leave of Absence: Upon approval of an LoA

- 4.1.** The student will be issued with a formal letter of approval and documentation outlining the return from leave of absence (RLOA) process.
- 4.2.** The relevant academic convener and the Student Development and Support Office will be formally notified of the approved LoA period.
- 4.3.** Fee rebates may be applicable where an LoA is approved within specified timeframes, in accordance with the Student Fee Policy (please consult the current Student Fee Handbook for the rebate dates and rates - [UCT Fee/Handbooks](#)).
- 4.4.** Where an LoA is approved prior to the course withdrawal deadline, the affected courses will be removed from the student's academic record. Where approval occurs after the withdrawal deadline, the PeopleSoft system will record an INC (Incomplete) or AB (Absent) on the academic record.
- 4.5.** During the period of an LoA, students may not access University facilities, reside in University accommodation, or receive academic supervision. Access to the @myuct email account will be retained.

5. Academic Standing and Progression

- 5.1.** The Faculty Examinations Committee will decide a student's progression on the basis of their performance at the time they took leave of absence.

6. Return from Leave of Absence and Fitness to Stud

- 6.1.** Students deemed Fit to Return (FTR) will be notified of the outcome by the Fit for Study Panel.
- 6.2.** Students in clinical years are required to undergo a secondary assessment conducted by an independent healthcare practitioner, who will provide feedback to the Panel.
- 6.3.** The final outcome will be communicated to the student, with copies to the Faculty Manager and the Student Development and Support Office.
- 6.4.** The Head of Programme or academic convener will then issue an official RLOA letter, including curriculum guidance and probationary academic conditions where applicable.
- 6.5.** Where the Fit for Study Panel determines that a student is not fit to return, the student must apply for an extension of the LoA, supported by relevant documentation and in consultation with Faculty Academic Administration.

7. Limits on Consecutive Leave of Absence

- 7.1.** An LoA may not be approved for two consecutive academic years unless recommended by the Fit for Study Panel or approved under exceptional circumstances.