

Leave of Absence (LOA) Administrative Guide

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Introduction

Leave of Absence (LOA)

Federal financial aid regulations (34 CFR § 668.22) require institutions to have a formal written and published Leave of Absence (LOA) Policy that meets the conditions specified in the regulations. As required, the below university-wide policy has been developed.

Policy

A leave of absence is a temporary period of time during which the student is not in attendance but is not considered withdrawn from the university. A student may request a leave when they can demonstrate an extenuating circumstance beyond the realm of their control. A request for leave due to poor academic performance, financial issues, or to delay the return of unearned Title IV funds is not considered an extenuating circumstance. Federal guidelines state the maximum period of time allowed for an approved LOA is 180 days within a 12-month period. If the student is granted one LOA, and then is granted a second LOA, the total period of both LOAs cannot exceed 180 days within the 12-month period. Prior to an LOA approval, the university must determine there is a reasonable expectation the student will return from the leave.

Purpose of Administrative Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide administrative process information regarding NSU's Leave of Absence Policy

Benefits of an LOA

The benefits of an approved LOA versus withdrawal from the university include: (a) continued deferment of student loans; (b) continued enrollment in the same catalog year (the student does not have to complete different requirements for degree fulfillment); and (c) the period of leave is not counted toward the total time period required for completion of the program of study. Note: Refer to the academic program accrediting or state agency's standards for b and c, if applicable.

LOA Basics

- The *Leave of Absence Request Form* must be submitted at least 14 days prior to the start of the requested leave unless the student is incapacitated and unable to meet the 14-day requirement. See Request for LOA after the Semester/Term Begins (pages 6-7).
- Leaves requested after the semester/term has started will be considered for LOA approval only in a documented extreme circumstance.
- Prior to submitting an LOA request to the Office of the Registrar to faarloa@nova.edu the college and/or the Office of the Dean of Students is required to address/finalize the student's currently in-progress course(s) by assigning the appropriate/applicable

registration code of drop, withdraw, or “I” with an *Incomplete Grade Contract*. ***See LOA Request Process on page 4.***

- Refer to the college’s *Incomplete Grade Policy* for in-progress coursework. If the *Incomplete Grade Policy* does not apply, then the student must be dropped or withdrawn from the semester/term that is in progress based on the standard drop/withdrawal policy.
- Dropped/withdrawn classes are subject to standard tuition refund percentage restrictions and deadlines.

LOA Eligibility Criteria

- To receive an approved LOA, students:
 - Must have successfully completed one (1) semester/term in their current degree program at Nova Southeastern University.
 - Students requesting an LOA in their first academic program semester/term will need to drop or withdraw from the semester/term in accordance with their college’s published withdrawal schedule.
 - Students may wish to discuss admission deferral options with their college.
 - Must confer with their academic advisor/program representative prior to submitting the *LOA Request Form*.
 - Must be able to demonstrate an extenuating circumstance beyond the realm of their control.
 - LOA requests cannot exceed a maximum of 180 days within a 12-month period. Based on the academic calendar, typically an approved LOA cannot exceed one semester.
 - Must confirm that they plan to and are eligible to return from their leave at the start of the semester/term indicated on their *LOA Request Form*.
 - Must not be in an academic standing that prohibits registration.
 - Must not have hold(s) (e.g., disciplinary, financial, etc.) that would prohibit registration. An employee hold is an exception to this requirement.
 - Must submit a written, signed, and dated *LOA Request Form* with supporting documentation detailing the reason for the LOA being requested and declaring an expected return date.
 - Medical (physical and/or emotional) health circumstances for LOA requests must be accompanied by a signed letter/form from a medical doctor or treating psychologist

on official letterhead verifying the timeframe of the leave (must provide an expected date of return within 180 days from the start of the student's LOA).

LOA Request Process

- The process begins with the student's initial consultation with their advisor/program representative. If the advisor/program office representative determines that the student meets the LOA eligibility criteria, the advisor/program office representative works with the student to complete the request process.
 - If the student is enrolled in a semester/term that has started, the advisor/program representative or the Office of the Dean of Students representative is required to take the appropriate administrative action to finalize the student's currently in-progress course(s) by assigning the appropriate/applicable registration code of drop, withdraw, or "I" with an *Incomplete Grade Contract* (see page 7 for details).
 - If the student is an undergraduate who is experiencing emotional health issues, the student may be referred to the Office of the Dean of Students for additional assistance, as needed.
 - Once the advisor/program representative or Office of the Dean of Students representative receives the completed request form and appropriate supporting documentation, the representative will indicate recommend or deny (via signature) of the student's LOA request and forward the *LOA Request Form* to the student's academic program dean's office.
- The dean (or designee) will review and either recommend moving the student's LOA request forward or deny the LOA request.
 - If the dean denies the request, the dean (or designee) will notify the student of the denial in writing.
 - If the dean supports/recommends the request, the *LOA Request Form* with the dean's (or designee's) signature and all supporting documentation will be submitted to the Office of the Registrar via email faarloa@nova.edu for a final decision.
 - The Office of the Registrar will only review *LOA Request Forms* that are supported/recommended by the college, have appropriate supporting documentation, and meet the LOA eligibility criteria.
- The Office of the Registrar will provide the dean's office with written notification of the final decision and confirm the student's record has been appropriately notated.
- Approved LOAs will be noted in the student's record and reported to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC).
- The dean's office (or designee) will notify the student of the Office of the Registrar's final decision in writing.

During an Approved LOA

College Responsibilities During Students' Approved LOA

- Communicate with the students during their LOA.
- Provide students with updates/information regarding enrollment for their scheduled LOA return semester/term.

College Responsibilities Prior to Students Return from Approved LOA

- Ensure students meet any return conditions.
- Ensure students with an approved LOA due to medical (physical and/or emotional circumstances) have submitted signed documentation from a medical doctor or treating psychologist on official letterhead stating they can resume academic activity prior to returning to the university.
 - Provide a copy of the return documentation to the Office of the Registrar.
- Ensure students are enrolled/registered prior to the start of their approved return semester/term specified on the approved *LOA Request Form*.

Returning from an LOA

College Responsibilities Upon Students Return from an Approved LOA

- Ensure students have returned from their approved LOA and are attending/participating in their course(s).
- Notify the Office of the Registrar of students' return status so that their records are appropriately updated.
- Students will remain under the same catalog and maintain all requirements associated with that catalog. Note: Refer to the academic program accrediting or state agency's standards, if applicable.
- Failure to return from an approved LOA will result in the student being withdrawn from the university retroactively to the last date of attendance. The student is required to reapply for admission. Note: Students must be advised to contact financial aid as this action may impact their future eligibility and loan repayment status.
- A student may return from an approved LOA prior to the expected return date as long as it is not after the start of a semester/term with the approval of the dean or designee.

Additional Considerations

Enrollment at Another Institution

- According to federal LOA regulations, students wishing to temporarily leave the university to attend another institution do not qualify for an official LOA
 - Students receiving federal or state financial assistance, who wish to attend another institution would need to meet with an advisor or program office to set up a *Consortium Agreement*. Students would be registered at NSU in the Consortium/Contractual Agreement course. This enrollment and the dates will be reported to the NSC. Students must adhere to all conditions of the Consortium/Contractual Agreement.
- Students participating in an NSU-sponsored study-abroad program do not need to apply for an LOA but must complete the appropriate documentation for the study-abroad program.

International Students/Scholars

- F-1 international students requesting an LOA apart from their annual vacation must confer with the Office of International Students and Scholars.
 - An LOA may require a SEVIS termination which could result in the student being required to depart the United States, repay the I-901 SEVIS fee, re-establish eligibility for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and/or Optional Practical Training (OPT), and other immigration consequences.

Residential Students

- Students living in university housing and/or on a university meal plan will need to confer with Residential Life & Housing and other respective offices to schedule a move-out date and cancel meal plan, if applicable.

Requests for LOA after the Semester/Term Begins

- An LOA may be requested after the semester/term begins only for extreme documented extenuating circumstances outside of students' control.
 - Examples of extreme circumstances are the student (or a member of their family, spouse, child, or parent) is hospitalized due to an accident, sudden illness, death of an immediate family member, unforeseen confinement due to a Baker Act or arrest.
 - If students have an unforeseen extreme circumstance that prevents them from submitting the written *LOA Request Form* prior to the leave, the institution may grant an LOA.

- The college must document the reason(s) for its decision to support the LOA; verify the student qualifies for an official LOA; ensure the student or the legal guardian/representative completes the *LOA Request Form* and provides the appropriate supporting documentation; and submits the form and supporting documentation to the Office of the Registrar at faarloa@nova.edu on the student's behalf.
- An *Incomplete Grade Contract* should be considered in lieu of an LOA if the student has completed a substantial portion (to be determined by the instructor or department chair) of the course with a passing grade.
 - An approved LOA does not change the deadline for submission of coursework as specified in an *Incomplete Grade Contract*.
- If coursework cannot be otherwise completed, an in-progress course(s) must be dropped/withdrawn from the semester/term based on the drop/withdrawal policy and grading policy.
 - Dropped/withdrawn courses are subject to the published tuition refund percentage restrictions and deadlines.

College Responsibilities for LOAs Approved to Start During an In-Progress Semester

- Ensure the following federal regulations are met if an approved LOA begins after a semester/term has started.
- Ensure students return to the same course at the same point in time they began the LOA.
 - Students may return to their course(s) prior to the exact point in time the LOA started but will not be reported as enrolled until they reach the actual LOA starting point.
- **Ensure students do not incur ANY additional charges or receive ANY additional financial aid until they have completed the course(s) they were enrolled in at the time the LOA was approved.**

LOA Examples

- **Many life circumstances may require a student to take a break in enrollment, but not all qualify for an LOA. Consequently, an LOA should not be considered as the first option.**
 - Examples of circumstances that may qualify for an LOA:
 - Medical (physical and/or emotional) health circumstances with supporting documentation from treating physician or psychologist that includes an expected date of return within the maximum 180-day timeframe.
 - Upcoming scheduled surgery for student or immediate family member.
 - Temporary travel required for employment.
 - Maternity leave based on due date or unforeseen complications.
 - Provision of short-term care for an immediate family member.
 - Examples of circumstances that do not qualify for an LOA:
 - A request that exceeds 180-days within a 12-month period.
 - Financial hardships (e.g., job loss, foreclosure, bankruptcy, etc.)
 - Academic status/standing (e.g., academic warning, probation, suspension, etc.)
 - Required test/exam failure (prevents program continuation)
 - Travel for personal/social engagements (e.g., vacation, wedding, family reunion, etc.)
 - Temporarily Attend another institution
 - Study for a licensure/board exam

Administrative Break in Enrollment

An administrative break is a temporary, institution-initiated pause in enrollment granted exclusively to graduate and professional students enrolled in lockstep, cohort-based programs. This category of leave allows students to separate from their program without formally withdrawing from the university, in cases where continuity of the program is impacted by exceptional personal or academic challenges.

Undergraduate students are not eligible for administrative breaks, except for specific lockstep, cohort-based professional programs.

Programs offering this option must document:

- The cohort structure of the academic program
- The reason for the student's inability to maintain lockstep progress
- The individualized support plan developed in conjunction with the student

Student Responsibilities and Status

- Students who complete academic work at another institution while on an administrative break, are required to disclose this information and submit academic credentials (official transcripts) prior to their return.
- Students will be reported to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) as withdrawn/nonattending during this period of time.

NSU OFFICIAL LOA CHART

Action	Official LOA (OLOA*)
Maximum Time Length for LOA	180 days in a 12-month period (typically no more than one semester).
Student Library Services and Other Student Resources	Not Available
Campus Housing & Meal Plans	Not Available
Physical Campus/Facility Access	Not Available
Failure to Return from an LOA on the Date Specified on the Student's Approved <i>LOA Request Form</i>	Student is withdrawn from the university retroactively to the last date of attendance and is required to reapply for admission. Student must be advised to consult with the financial aid office for future eligibility and loan repayment status.
Federal Enrollment Reporting to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) and National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS)	Reported: Leave of Absence Status
Mid-Semester/Term LOA Start	Allowed; however, colleges must ensure compliance with federal regulations listed on pages 6-7.
Athletics Participation	Not Available
Student Activity Participation	Not Available
Student Academic Participation /Registration	Not Available
RecPlex	Not Available
Administrative Break	Colleges' option available to students enrolled in lockstep, cohort-based programs (see pages 8-9 for details)
Student Health Insurance (SHI)	Students may contact NSU's insurance provider directly to purchase a 3-month SHI continuation policy while on a LOA.
NSU Center for Student Counseling and Well-Being	Students residing in Florida may contact the Office of the Dean of Students directly to discuss continuation of services.

*OLOA follows federal LOA regulations

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