



Union  
Theological  
College

## Union Theological College Leave of Absence Policy

<b>Version:</b>	<b>Date approved:</b>	<b>Approved by:</b>	<b>Date of Review:</b>
V1.2	July 2022	Faculty	July 2025



# Union Theological College Leave of Absence Policy

---

## 1. Introduction

This document sets out the processes for applying for, and taking, a Leave of Absence (LOA). It applies to undergraduate students and to postgraduate students taking CTM, MDiv or DTP modules. Online taught postgraduate students have the option, within programme regulations, to stretch their studies and take semester-long breaks from study.

The College expects all students to engage fully with their studies, attend all teaching events and produce assessments by the stated deadlines. From time to time, a student may experience personal circumstances that make it difficult for them to continue to engage fully with their programme and with student life. In such cases, a LOA may be a way of giving the student a necessary temporary break from their studies as an alternative to programme withdrawal.

## 2. Definition of a Leave of Absence

A Leave of Absence is a pause in studies when a student temporarily and formally, and with the agreement of the College, disengages from their studies at the College. The College deems a LOA to be a period between one semester and no longer than twelve months, normally. In some cases, such as pregnancy, it may not be possible to take a semester or a year off. Requests for a LOA made more than two weeks after the start of each Semester will not normally be granted. Where exceptional circumstances are not deemed to exist and the student still wishes to take a LOA at that time, any assessments taken on their return will be treated as repeat assessments and capped at 40%.



### 3. Reasons for Taking Leave of Absence

3.1. The College recognises that students may wish to take a break from their studies for a number of reasons. The following will be considered as appropriate reasons for requesting a LOA:

- a. Medical reasons, as recommended by the Student's GP or consultant
- b. Maternity/paternity/partner support/adoption leave
- c. Bereavement
- d. Other valid personal reasons

3.2 Students requesting a LOA may be asked to provide documentary evidence for their request, for example:

- a. Medical certificates
- b. Birth or adoption certificates
- c. Death certificates/divorce decrees

3.3 The College reserves the right to decline a request to take a LOA if insufficient, or inadequate or irrelevant documentary evidence is provided.

### 4. Implications of Leave of Absence: non-Ministry/Deaconess Students

The student must be made aware of the implications of taking a leave of absence on their studies, their finances and, potentially, on their accommodation. The Personal Tutor should signpost these issues in any conversation with a student considering a LOA, and refer them to the Operations Manager or the Executive Academic Administration as appropriate. Where appropriate, advice should be sought from the College Disability Officer to ascertain if reasonable adjustments may be necessary.

The initial conversation should cover:

- All of the options available to the student, including taking LOA or a shorter break, repeating a year, changing some modules, deferral or withdrawal.



- The implications of LOA on their finances, with clear advice that the student contact the Operations Manager and/or any other funding agency or sponsor to discuss their particular circumstances.
- What their programme of study will comprise on their return, including any planned changes in the programme of study that may occur whilst they are away and affect their choice on their return.
- The proposed duration of the LOA.

## **5. Implications of Leave of Absence: Ministry/Deaconess Students**

Ministry and Deaconess students must be made aware of the implications of taking a leave of absence on their studies and training pathway. Ministry students must consult with the Professor of Ministry and Deaconess students with the Programme Coordinator. Where appropriate, advice should be sought from the College Disability Officer to ascertain if reasonable adjustments may be necessary.

Ministry and Deaconess students must meet General Assembly requirements of 100% attendance during their training and therefore the conversation should progress within that context.

### **The conversation should cover:**

- All of the options available to the student, including taking a LOA or a shorter break, repeating a year, changing some modules, deferral or withdrawal.
- The possibility of special arrangements to facilitate learning including remote learning, flexibility with assessment deadlines, and library deadlines. In this instance a study support plan should be drawn up and agreed by Faculty, the student, the Professor of Ministry/Programme Coordinator for DTP and the student's home Presbytery.
- What their programme of study will comprise on their return, including any planned changes in the programme of study that may occur whilst they are away and affect their choice on their return.
- Financial issues in relation to student bursaries provided by the Council for Training in Ministry or Presbyterian Women.
- The proposed duration of the LOA.



## **6. Imposing Leave of Absence**

From time to time, the College may decide that it would be in the best interests of the student and/or the College community if they were to take a LOA. The most likely reason for requiring a student to take a LOA is mental ill health. When a LOA is required, the College will establish the initial duration of the period of absence in conjunction with the student. The financial implications of a LOA will also be discussed with the student. Regular communication will be established between a link staff member allocated by the College, and the student, during their period of absence.

Two months before the student is scheduled to return, the College will contact the student and arrange for a Doctor's report to be produced indicating whether the student is fit to return to their studies and to College life. Planned ongoing support will be established either at a pre-return meeting or by email correspondence. This may include referral to support services external to the College. If a student is unable to provide satisfactory evidence that he/she is fit to return, the College may, in exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Principal, formally terminate his/her studies.

## **7. Voluntary Leave of Absence**

A student may request a LOA by completing the Leave of Absence form with supporting documentary evidence and submitting this to their Personal Tutor. Once the request has been submitted and approved, the student will be notified.

## **8. During the Leave of Absence**

During a period of Voluntary Leave of Absence, a representative of the programme team should contact the student at least twice by email to enquire about the student's welfare and their plans to return to the College. The correspondence must also cover any support needs or questions relating to their course the student may have at the time and any additional help they may feel they need on their return, so that appropriate arrangements can be made. In addition, any changes to the programme, modules or assessment that occur after the student has begun their LOA must be communicated to them swiftly.



Any student on a LOA should inform the College Administration immediately if their circumstances or contact details change whilst they are on Leave.

Two months before the planned return, staff from College Administration will contact the student to discuss arrangements for their return.

## **9. Return from Leave of Absence**

When a student returns from LOA, they should meet their Programme Coordinator to discuss the plan for the year, any concerns the student might have following their period of leave, and to identify any academic support needs. The Programme Coordinator should initiate the meeting and send reminders if no response is received. College Administration will be responsible for providing each Programme Coordinator with the names of all students who are taking, or due to return from, a LOA. A student returning from an approved or imposed LOA will be allowed to defer any assessments due for any modules they have completed before their period of LOA.

## **10. Refusal of a Request for a Leave of Absence**

In the event of a request for LOA being refused, the student should receive a letter from the Programme Coordinator giving the reason for the refusal within five working days of their discussion. The student may appeal to the Senior Executive Academic Administrator within five working days of receipt of the notification, enclosing additional evidence if appropriate. A panel comprising Faculty representatives will review the decision and respond to the student within ten working days of receipt of the appeal.

## **11. Extension to Leave of Absence**

In the case of an imposed Leave of Absence, if the appointed doctor does not deem that the student is fit to return to study, it may be necessary to extend the period of LOA further. In such cases, ongoing support will be vital to facilitate the student's return once they are able to do so. Any request to extend the LOA beyond a year must be approved by the Senior Executive Academic Administrator. Undergraduate students should be aware that periods of LOA count towards their registration period for an award.



In the case of a voluntary LOA, a request to extend beyond a year should be submitted in writing to the Senior Executive Academic Administrator, with reasons and evidence in support of the request. Ministry and Deaconess Students must submit such a request to the Professor of Ministry/DTP Coordinator for consideration.