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**MEMORANDUM**

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ATTENTION Senate

DATE **February 15, 2024**FROM Mary O'Brien,  
Chair of Senate Graduate Studies Committee  
(SGSC)

RE: Graduate General Regulation 1.4.5 Leave of Absence



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**For Approval:** At its meeting on February 6, 2024, SGSC reviewed and approved the revision Graduate General Regulation 1.4.5 Leave of Absence. This gives rise to the following motion, effective **Fall 2024**:

**Motion 1:**

That Senate approve the revisions to Graduate General Regulation 1.4.5 Leave of Absence

**MEMORANDUM**

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**ATTENTION** Mary O'Brien, Chair of Senate      **DATE** January 30, 2024  
Graduate Studies Committee (SGSC)

**FROM** Pamela Stern, Graduate Studies  
Associate Dean, Policy and Curriculum

**RE:** Graduate General Regulation Revision:  
GGR 1.4.5



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**Motion:**

That SGSC approve the revisions of GGR 1.4.5 Leave of Absence effective Fall 2024.

**Summary of Revisions and Rationale:**

Updates the language in the GGRs to clarify the roles and responsibilities of graduate students, graduate programs, and Graduate Studies in initiating, acknowledging, and approving requests for a leave of absence. In response to feedback regarding unique and complex cases where it may not be clear from the policy alone what options are available or appropriate for a student, the proposed changes add language that students may consult with Graduate Studies about leave eligibility and options. Additional changes move away from restrictive categories of leave to two broadly defined categories: leaves that count towards time to completion and leaves that do not count towards time to completion. Examples of leave reasons that fall within either category are provided within the revised policy. Removal of the limitation of three terms of leave per medical or compassionate reason to a process that provides an option for leave requests beyond three terms (one year) to be reviewed. Updating the parental leave category to be in alignment with the extended parental leave offered by the federal government.

## General Graduate Regulation Change 1.4.5 Leave of Absence

<p>Summary of change: To simplify the types of leaves into two broad categories: those that count against time to completion (i.e., personal, professional) and those that do not (e.g., medical, parental, compassionate).</p>
<p>Rationale for change: Update the language in the GGRs to clarify the roles and responsibilities of graduate students, graduate programs, and Graduate Studies in initiating, acknowledging, and approving requests for a leave of absence. In response to feedback regarding unique and complex cases where it may not be clear from the policy alone what options are available or appropriate for a student, the proposed changes add language that students may consult with Graduate Studies about leave eligibility and options. Additional changes move away from restrictive categories of leave, replacing these with two broadly defined categories: leaves that count towards time to completion and leaves that do not count towards time to completion.</p> <p>The change from approval to “acknowledgment” of the graduate program and supervisor has been initiated as a result of the fact that supervisors and programs have not granted leaves of absence to many students in circumstances beyond students’ control (e.g., illness). The requirement for a) students to provide documentation in support leaves that do not count toward time to completion; and b) Graduate Studies to review such cases will ensure that students are able to take time away from their studies when necessary.</p>
<p>Effective term and year: Fall 2024</p>
<p>Will this change impact current students? If yes, what is the plan for current students? Yes. Current students will be positively impacted as they will be able to follow the revised policy.</p>

FROM	TO
<p>[...] 1.4.5 Leave of Absence</p> <p>From time to time, students find it necessary to interrupt their studies. In this case, they must apply for a leave of absence. Typically, a leave of absence begins on the first day of an academic term and approval for the leave is</p>	<p>[...] 1.4.5 Leave of Absence <b>and Academic Breaks</b> <b>1.4.5a Leave of Absence</b></p> <p>From time to time, students find it necessary to interrupt their studies. In this case, they must apply for a leave of absence. <b>Students should discuss their intention to take a leave with their supervisor and graduate program.</b></p>

<p><del>obtained before the term begins. Students in their first term should apply for an admission deferral rather than a leave of absence. A retroactive request for a leave of absence normally will not be allowed.</del></p> <p>During a leave of absence students normally should not use any of the university's facilities or resources, or undertake academic or research work related to the program from which they have taken a leave of absence.</p> <p>Awards for which the terms and conditions are established by SFU will be interrupted at the onset of the leave of absence and will resume at the termination of the leave period, provided the student returns to full-time study at that time. The duration of the award will not be changed from the time the award was initiated. Awards for which the terms and conditions are not established by SFU will be</p>	<p><b>Students may consult with Graduate Studies regarding their leave eligibility and options. Leave requests are approved by Graduate Studies with the acknowledgement of the graduate program.</b></p> <p>During a leave of absence students normally should not use any of the university's facilities or resources, or undertake academic or research work related to the program from which they have taken a leave of absence.</p> <p><b>Typically, a leave of absence begins on the first day of an academic term and approval for the leave is obtained before the term begins. If the leave is required at any other time of the term, students should consult with Graduate Studies to discuss options. Students in their first term should apply for an admission deferral rather than a leave of absence. A retroactive request for a leave of absence normally will not be allowed.</b></p> <p><b>Students on an approved leave will not receive University minimum funding during the term of leave. Applicable funding will be resumed in the next enrolled term. Except for students on a leave that counts towards time to completion, time on leave will not be counted against terms of minimum funding. For more information regarding the minimum funding policy, see GGR <u>1.17.8</u>.</b></p> <p><b>Similarly,</b> awards for which the terms and conditions are established by SFU will be interrupted at the onset of the leave of absence and will resume at the termination of the leave period, provided the student returns to full-time study at that time. The duration of the award will not be changed from the time the award was initiated. Awards for which the</p>
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paid according to the terms and conditions established by the donor or granting agency.

There are four types of leave:-

1. ~~Personal Leave~~
2. ~~—~~
3. ~~Parental Leave~~
4. ~~Medical or Compassionate Leave~~
5. ~~Academic Break~~

~~The time taken for a personal leave will be counted towards the maximum time allowed for program completion.~~

~~The time taken for an academic break, parental, medical, compassionate leave will not be counted towards the maximum time allowed for program completion. The maximum time limit will be adjusted accordingly but all other program requirements and academic unit expectations will remain the same.~~

#### ~~Personal Leave~~

~~A personal leave may be taken for any reason, other than those defined below. The maximum number of terms that are permitted for a personal leave is three throughout the length of the student's credential.~~

terms and conditions are not established by SFU will be paid according to the terms and conditions established by the donor or granting agency.

There are two categories of leave:

1. Leaves that count towards time to completion
2. Leaves that do not count towards time to completion

Leaves that count towards time to completion may include leaves for personal or professional reasons. Documentation is not required. Up to three terms of leave may be taken under this category.

Leaves that do not count towards time to completion may include, but are not limited to, leaves for military service or those for medical, compassionate or parental reasons. Supporting documentation is required. The maximum time to completion will be adjusted accordingly but all other program requirements and academic unit expectations will remain the same.

A student may initially request up to three terms of leave. Students who require more than three terms of leave may submit a request for renewal to be reviewed by Graduate Studies. Students are required to submit supporting documentation for initial and renewal requests. Renewal requests require a rationale, and additional documentation may be requested by the review committee.

A student may be asked to provide documentation from their clinician to confirm that they have recovered sufficiently to return to their course of study at the end of

**Parental Leave**

A student may take up to three terms for each childbirth or adoption (including multiple births)- Students are required to submit supporting documentation.

~~Medical or Compassionate Leave~~

~~A student may take up to three terms per personal medical condition or compassionate reason (including but not limited to legal matter, family care, illness of relative, or bereavement). Students are required to submit supporting documentation.~~

~~In some cases, a student may be asked to provide documentation from their clinician to confirm that they have recovered sufficiently to return to their course of study. If medical documentation is submitted for reasons related to a physical or mental disability, the student has a legal entitlement to disability accommodation.~~

~~If a student will require more than three terms for a medical condition, it is recommended that students discuss with their supervisor/faculty advisor whether it is in their best interest to temporarily discontinue their program and then apply for readmission when their circumstances have been resolved.~~

a leave for medical reasons. If medical documentation is submitted for reasons related to a physical or mental disability, the student has a legal entitlement to disability accommodation.

**Parental Leave**

A student may **request** up to **five** terms for each **instance of** childbirth or adoption. Students are required to submit supporting documentation.

<p>Students completing the requirements for their program past the normal completion time, as the result of having taken three or more medical leaves, may be required to repeat courses/comprehensive examinations or complete additional courses at the discretion of their graduate program committee. Responsibility for approving these additional degree requirements rests with the dean of graduate studies and the chair of the student's graduate program committee.</p>	<p>Students completing the requirements for their program past the normal completion time, as the result of having taken three or more terms of leave, may be required to repeat courses/comprehensive examinations or complete additional courses at the discretion of their graduate program committee. Responsibility for approving these additional degree requirements rests with the dean of graduate studies and the chair of the student's graduate program committee.</p>
<p><b>Academic Break</b></p> <p>An academic break (or scheduled break) can be taken when no courses are offered for a student's program within a particular term, or there is a scheduled break within a program (e.g. Summer term). Students in a thesis program are not eligible for an academic break. The maximum number of terms that are permitted for an academic break is one term per year <del>with</del> no consecutive academic breaks.</p>	<p><b>1.4.5b Break from studies</b></p> <p><b>Academic Break</b></p> <p>An academic break (or scheduled break) can be taken when no courses are offered for a student's program within a particular term, or there is a scheduled break within a program (e.g. Summer term). Students in a thesis program are not eligible for an academic break. The maximum number of terms that are permitted for an academic break is one term per year. <b>Additionally</b>, no consecutive academic breaks <b>are permitted</b>.</p>

## Supplemental information about Leave of Absence Policies for Graduate Students at Other Canadian Universities

We reviewed the Leave of Absence Policies at six (6) Canadian Universities:

University of British Columbia  
University of Victoria  
University of Alberta  
University of Calgary  
University of Toronto  
University of Ottawa

Our proposed policy changes keep us in line with the policies at these other universities:

- Most distinguish between leaves that count toward time to completion (personal leave) and leaves that do not count towards time to completion (medical, parental, compassionate) – exception is UofT that stops the clock for all leaves
- Limit the number of terms of leave that can be taken over the course of a degree program
- Require students to provide documentation for leaves other than personal
- Withhold all graduate student funding during the leave of absence
- Limit or decline access to university resources (libraries, supervisory committees) during time on leave

Where we differ in these proposed changes:

- Allow renewal of medical leave beyond 12 months
- We are permitting parental leave for up to 5 terms (rather than 3) to align with Federal government allowance of 18 months of EI and parental leave for workers.