

EXISTING POLICIES

GSH Section 11 - Benefits for Graduate Associates, Fellows and Trainees

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Time Off - 11.2

Most graduate associates are part-time student employees (50 percent time) and therefore do not meet the eligibility criterion for the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) [Policy 6.05\(opens in new window\)](#). GAs, fellows and trainees do not accrue vacation or sick leave. Rules regarding time off during semester or term breaks or other times are determined by the GA's appointing unit. GAs must check with their appointing units to determine when they are expected to be on duty. GAs that have held an appointment for more than 60.1 percent FTE for an entire 12 month period may qualify for leave under FMLA and should contact their local unit and [FML Administrator\(opens in new window\)](#) to determine eligibility.

Legal Holidays. GAs are not required to work on legal holidays noted on the university calendar. When university offices are required to maintain services on certain holidays and GAs are scheduled to work on a holiday, they must be given an alternate day off.

Paid Leave. Each program unit can determine the policy or guidelines for graduate student paid leave. Any leave additional to legal holidays is optional but are strongly encouraged by the Graduate School. One day off for students working 20 hours per week is recommended to be assessed as 4 hours/day over 5 working days. The Graduate School has the following guidelines that are strongly encouraged for students holding a GA, fellow or trainee appointment.

- **Sick/Bereavement Leave.** A period of one to three consecutive days at a time for up to a maximum of three times for personal and/or family illness each spring or autumn semester may be taken. Sick days do not accrue beyond a semester. Many GAs have nine-month appointments and thus sick leave would not be granted in the summer term. If the student is a summer GA, fellow or trainee, then 1-3 days off up to twice per summer term is recommended.
- **Personal Leave.** A period of up to 10 business days per year (two weeks per year) for vacation and/or personal reasons may be taken. Personal leave does not accrue.
- **Professional Development Leave.** It is recommended that at least 5 business days per year be allotted for professional development activities such as attending workshops, or attending and presenting scholarly work at national and international meetings.
- **Parental Leave.** Up to three weeks of leave may be granted for childbirth or adoption. Up to three additional weeks for health recovery of the birth parent is recommended ([Appendix F \(opens in new window\)](#)). One suggested allocation would be to use remaining sick-leave, personal leave, and professional leave followed by paid leave for up to three or six weeks as applicable. Parental leave should be discussed and planned with the advisor and local unit.

The university has formalized a set of practices to be used by academic and administrative units at Ohio State to support GAs, fellows, and trainees during instances of personal and/or family illness, bereavement, childbirth, and adoption (Appendix F). Each situation will be individually addressed according to the specific research, teaching, or administrative context and the individual's reason for requesting the leave. In the case that medical leave extends longer than recommended or leads to poor performance, the unit and GA, Fellow or trainee, can contact [Integrated Absence Management and Vocational Services \(opens in new window\)](#) for guidance.

All GAs, fellows, and trainees who are in good academic standing, making reasonable progress toward their degrees, and paid through the Ohio State payroll system, regardless of appointment length, type or FTE, are eligible to request use of the sick/bereavement leave as consecutive days, such that up to 9 consecutive business days could be taken for this purpose. This paid absence is to recover from a personal illness or to grieve the death of an immediate family member. This request should be an uncommon instance and will require prior approval and documentation to the appointing unit because the consequences to the student may be significant. If the length of leave does not permit continued enrollment in classes, then the tuition and fees will default to the student. GA tuition and fees are not paid if the student is not enrolled.

Unpaid Academic Leave. In some cases, a funded graduate student may request to take a period of time off from both academic program and appointment responsibilities (e.g., an academic leave for pre-candidacy students). A funded graduate student should discuss options with their advisor, Graduate Studies Committee Chair and administrative supervisor. Students who are approved for an academic leave should understand that the time of leave is unpaid, and what impact, if any, the time off will have on their expected funding opportunities upon their return to their graduate programs. Funded graduate students' academic leaves must be on file with the Graduate School.

Self-funded students who take time off from their studies (i.e., are not registered for classes) are not eligible for the leaves of absence.

Students may request an academic leave ([Section 3.1 \(opens in new window\)](#)), for up to one year, by submitting a Leave of Absence from Program form on GradForms. The advisor, program, and Graduate School must approve this form before the leave period begins. If approved, the Graduate School will update university records to reflect the date of return. Students can go on academic leave for up to two years but must seek approval from the Graduate Studies Committee for reenrollment. Post-candidacy students who do not enroll are subject to the continuous enrollment policy. Please refer to [Section 7.7 \(opens in new window\)](#) for more information regarding the continuous enrollment policy.

Military Leave. GAs who are members of the Ohio National Guard or any other reserve component of the United States Armed Forces or who are ordered involuntarily to extended United States military service are granted leave without pay in accordance with the Ohio State [Military Call for Active Duty \(opens in new window\)](#) policy. The GA is required to submit to the supervisor a copy of military orders or other statement in writing from the appropriate military authority as evidence of the call for training or duty. Students on military leave are encouraged to withdraw from all Ohio State courses and have no expectation to make progress toward their graduate degree during the time of leave. However, the graduate program and the college/regional campus office may exercise professional judgement on a case-by-case basis. Depending on the time of the term, course workload, percentage of work completed or other relevant factors, a student on military leave may be allowed to remain in one or more courses.

Within 90 days from the date of honorable discharge or completion of training or active duty, the GA will be returned to the former position or its equivalent, without loss of seniority, upon application for such a position and reenrollment as a graduate student.

More detailed discussion of leave circumstances can be found in Appendix F.

GSH APPENDIX F - Guidelines for Time Off for Graduate Students Appointed as GAs, Fellows, and Trainees

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- [Types of Leaves of Absence F.2](#)
- [Eligibility Criteria F.3](#)
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Introduction - F.1

These guidelines formalize a set of expectations, strongly encouraged by the Graduate School, to be used by academic and administrative units at Ohio State to support graduate associates (GAAs, GRAs, and GTAs, collectively referred to hereafter as GAs), fellows and trainees during instances of personal and/or family illness, bereavement, childbirth and adoption as well as other instances that may require time-off. The specific details of these expectations are found in [Section 11.2\(opens in new window\)](#).

It is impossible to list every life circumstance and every academic situation that an individual graduate student might face. It is also impossible to list every situation that a faculty or administrative supervisor might face in a teaching, research, or administrative setting. These guidelines recognize that it is important for faculty and administrative supervisors to retain flexibility in working with individual students to determine the most fitting response to a particular student's situation. At the same time, Section 11.2 sets out guidelines that are intended to provide more consistency across the university in managing leaves of absence for funded graduate students. Nothing in these guidelines should be read to require the alteration or diminution of policies presently in place in programs that go beyond what is presented here.

Whenever possible and academically appropriate, these guidelines aim to preserve student status and the student's means of financial support (including stipend, fee authorization, health care subsidy, and other appointment benefits).

Leaves of absence for GAs, fellows, and trainees should be less than one semester in duration.

Types of Leaves of Absence - F.2

Types of leaves of absence include Sick/Bereavement Leave, Personal Leave, Professional Development Leave, and Parental Leave (see Section 11.2 for details).

Eligibility Criteria - F.3

Ohio State graduate or professional students must:

- Be on fellowship, traineeship ([Section 10\(opens in new window\)](#)) or associateship ([Section 9\(opens in new window\)](#)) appointments of at least 50 percent FTE paid through the Ohio State payroll system (hereafter collectively referred to as “funded graduate students”).
- A GTA, GRA or GAA must hold an appointment of at least 50 percent FTE (or multiple concurrent appointments combined for at least 50 percent FTE) paid through the Ohio State payroll system to be approved for a leave of absence. In the case of multiple appointments, different appointing units should work together with the student (and their enrolling unit, where appropriate) to create a coherent plan for the leave of absence.
- Fellows and trainees funded by external agencies are also subject to the guidelines established by the funding agency.
- Be making reasonable progress ([Section 5.4\(opens in new window\)](#)) toward the degree.
- Be in good academic standing (Section 5.1).
- Be enrolled at the level required to hold the appointment (Sections 9 and 10) Requirements for full-time enrollment may be reduced with the approval of the appropriate Graduate Studies Committee, the Graduate School, and other relevant entities (such as a funding agency, Office of International Affairs, etc.).

Procedures and Guidelines for Leaves of Absence - F.4

Unexpected absences are usually the most difficult to manage, since they require careful balancing of the student’s personal needs with academic and administrative policies, the student’s academic standing and degree progress, unit or principal investigator needs, and funding realities. Appropriately addressing these challenging life situations, which can also jeopardize degree progress or degree completion, typically involves not only the graduate student and their supervisor but also the student’s advisor, Graduate Studies Committee Chair, and often the department head. Some situations may require additional expertise (from the Graduate School, the Office of International Affairs, the Office of Human Resources, the Office of Student Financial Aid, the Office of the Ombuds, or other areas).

Notification/Documentation. To be granted a leave of absence, the students must notify their advisor, in writing, as soon as possible. For parental, personal and professional leaves, advisor approval must occur before deciding to take these leaves of absence. All requests for leaves must be approved by the graduate advisor and/or the appointment unit, as applicable. Graduate associates and fellows in need of leave or workplace accommodations related to a medical condition should be directed by their advisor and/or their graduate program to contact [Integrated Absence Management and Vocational Services\(opens in new window\)](#) (IAMVS) within the [Office of Human Resources\(opens in new window\)](#). IAMVS provides assistance/consultation to units and employees (faculty, staff, and student employees) regarding FMLA leave, disability benefits including workers' compensation, and workplace accommodations related to a disability (e.g., scheduling adjustments, physical limitations, leave as an accommodation, assistive technology, etc.). Furthermore, in order to maintain confidentiality, supporting medical documentation is requested by and maintained solely within IAMVS.

Approval Process. The Graduate School has made these suggestions based on reasonable actions, but requests for all leaves of absence are handled at the local level. When in need of a leave of absence, the funded graduate student would make a request in writing (via e-mail) as promptly as possible to their immediate academic and/or administrative supervisor. A completed [GA request for leave form\(opens in new window\)](#) should be attached to the student's e-mail. In the case of short-term absences (less than 2 weeks) such as sick or professional development leaves, it is suggested at least the advisor make the decision. In the case of leaves of absence of longer duration, the academic and/or administrative supervisor should consult with the student's advisor and chair of the Graduate Studies Committee in the student's program of study. The appointing unit may designate additional individuals who must approve requests for leaves of absence. In some cases it may be necessary for the supervisor and/or student to consult with other entities (such as a funding agency, the Office of International Affairs, etc.). For students on a Graduate School fellowship appointment, the student's program of study must notify the Office of Fellowship Services of the student's leave of absence.

Denial. A request for a leave of absence without requiring makeup time may be denied by the advisor, graduate committee, supervisor of the unit, or IAMVS due to an inappropriate or unreasonable request, including inadequate documentation; repeated requests for leaves of absence; documented unsatisfactory performance; and/or incompatibility with funding agency or other institutional guidelines (such as requirements applying to international students).

Appeal Process. If a dispute over a request arises, the graduate student should follow the appointing unit's appeal guidelines. Such guidelines often begin with an informal

discussion with an advisor, Graduate Studies Committee Chair, department chair, college dean, and/or unit director. Such discussions will often lead to a successful resolution. In cases where a successful resolution cannot be reached at the local level, the Graduate School is available to offer advice and, in certain situations, to provide a formal hearing and adjudication. The Office of Human Resources and the Office of the Ombuds can also provide information and consultation.

Appointment and Stipend Protection. Whenever possible and academically appropriate, the funded graduate student's appointment and stipend (including fee authorization, health care subsidy, etc.) should be protected and should extend as long as is necessary by proper documentation, or until the end of the academic semester or summer term, whichever comes first. A funded graduate student who has been appointed for more than one year at or above 1,250 hours/year may be eligible for FMLA or ADA benefits. However, leave consideration is not contingent upon FMLA eligibility.

Extension of Leave of Absence. In some cases, it may be appropriate to extend a leave of absence into a new, contiguous appointment. Leaves of absence that need to be extended beyond the initial appointment may be stipend-protected (in whole or in part) for reasons stated in [Section F.5\(opens in new window\)](#) and Section F.6 and at the sole discretion of the appointing unit.

Registration Requirements. Graduate students on stipend-protected leaves of absence must meet the minimum Graduate School registration requirements to hold an appointment (Sections 9 and 10). Students on an approved medical leave of absence may request a reduced course load during their absence period. The student may also discuss with their advisor the possibility of registering for courses with more flexibility such as research credits or courses offered online.

Coverage of Responsibilities. Funded graduate students who are requesting paid or unpaid leaves of absence must follow the procedures established by their appointing units to cover responsibilities in cases of absence. When managing coverage of duties for an absent funded graduate student, appointing units must be sensitive to the load of other graduate students.

Appointing units currently use a variety of practices to manage leaves of absences that extend beyond two weeks. Approaches include temporary assignment of responsibilities to another funded graduate student, accompanied by a temporary increase in that graduate student's appointment percentage (e.g., from 50 percent to 75 percent) or a special payment to that graduate student to compensate for additional effort over a period of time.

In some situations, it is not necessary to cover the duties and the assignments can be held until the student returns from a leave of absence. In some cases, a graduate student who is not funded is placed on a new appointment to cover the duties. Graduate students may not serve as “volunteer GAs” for the duration of a leave of absence; that is, graduate students may not serve without a stipend, at a stipend not commensurate with the expected load, or without appropriate payment of tuition and fees. Circumstances that may warrant an exception must be approved in advance by the Graduate School.

Funding for Leaves of Absence - F.5

Appointing units at Ohio State currently manage the financial aspects of GA leaves of absence within their departmental budgets, seeking assistance from their colleges, the Graduate School or other offices (such as the Office of Research) in cases of hardship. College deans have expressed preference for continuing to use the present approach of managing GA leaves of absence locally.

As current practices are formalized, it is not intended that appointing units would experience financial hardship in managing leaves of absence. It is also recognized that principal investigators with externally funded research grants may have issue with the requirements of particular grants, where flexibility may be limited. If such concerns arise, appointing units should contact their college offices or the Office of Sponsored Programs (for PIs). The Graduate School will also be available to help with problem-solving.

In many cases, the costs associated with GA leaves of absence are fairly modest, such as the cost of temporarily increasing a funded graduate student’s appointment percentage (e.g., from 50 percent to 75 percent) or making a special payment to that graduate student to compensate for additional effort over a period of time. In some cases, it is not necessary to cover the duties, and the assignments can be held without harm until the student returns from a leave of absence.

There are cases where a person who is not currently on a university appointment has to be placed on a new appointment to cover the duties; this person would most often be another graduate student but, especially in the case of the performance arts, could be an instructor or lecturer with special skills. In such situations, costs could potentially include a stipend or salary and any benefits associated with the appointment, such as coverage of tuition and fees.

Selected Definitions for Medical Conditions - F.6

Serious Health Condition. An illness, injury, impairment, or physical/mental condition that meets either one of the following:

- Involves inpatient care in a hospital, hospice, or residential medical care facility, including any period of incapacity or any subsequent treatment in connection with such inpatient care.
- Continuing treatment by a health care provider that consists of a period of incapacity that also involves treatment multiple times by a health care provider or treatment at least once by a health care provider that results in a regimen of continuing treatment and continuing incapacity.

Chronic conditions, episodic incapacity (e.g., diabetes, epilepsy, etc.), permanent/long-term conditions (e.g., Alzheimer's, cancer, etc.) or multiple treatments (e.g., chemotherapy, dialysis, etc.).

Relevant Selected Definitions for Parental Leave of Absence - F.7

This leave of absence allows for a specified period of appointment- and stipend-protected leave associated with the birth or adoption of a child.

A funded graduate student on an approved paid leave of absence from appointment responsibilities for childbirth or adoption may receive 100 percent of their stipend and other benefits associated with the appointment (fee authorization, health care subsidy, etc.). See Section 11.2 for more information.

The same appointment status (with equivalent benefits, pay, and other terms) is to be available after this leave of absence has been taken, provided the appointment or reappointment would normally have been available. Assigned duties, however, may be subject to change.

A leave of absence following the birth or adoption of a child is not to have a negative impact on appointment status or opportunities.

For funded graduate students who are eligible for leave:

- The birth parent's stipend is to be maintained for up to six weeks (see Section 11.2) or until the last day of the appointment, whichever comes first.
- Non-birth parent's (up to two parents per new birth or adoption) stipend is to be maintained for up to three weeks or until the last day of the appointment, whichever comes first.

Definitions.

- **Birth parent**, an individual who gives birth to a child

- **Non-birth parent**, a parent who is legally responsible for child rearing as the spouse or domestic partner of the birth parent
- **Domestic partner**, a same- or opposite-sex adult partner who has met the requirements of and has a completed Affidavit of Domestic Partnership for Funded Graduate Students' Leaves of Absence on file with the Graduate School
- **Adoptive parent**, a parent who has taken a child into one's family, through legal means, to raise as one's own child. This is not applicable to foster parents.

Use. A leave of absence for childbirth or adoption for a funded graduate student should generally commence immediately following the birth or adoption of a child and not be used intermittently. In some instances parental leave may commence prior to the event when deemed medically necessary or when requisite to fulfill the legal requirements for an adoption.

If both parents are funded graduate students, parental leave can be taken consecutively but is not intended to be used intermittently.

A leave of absence for childbirth or adoption is available for each funded graduate student, for each birth or adoption event. The number of children involved does not increase the length of a leave of absence granted for that event.