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- **February 2019**
- **May 2022**

## POLICY

Bethel University recognizes that students may experience medical issues that significantly limit their ability to function successfully or safely in their role as students. A student experiencing physical or psychological conditions that significantly impair his or her ability to function successfully or safely as a student may request a medical leave of absence. This policy outlines a flexible and individualized process that students should follow in order to request a medical leave of absence.

A student may request that a medical leave of absence start *during* a semester in which he or she is currently enrolled, or start with the *next* semester to coincide with the academic calendar. In the event that a student starts a medical leave of absence following the first week of any semester, all courses on the student's transcript for that term will be assigned a grade of "W" to indicate a withdrawal from those courses. A medical leave of absence may be requested for up to two semesters, including a semester during which a student is enrolled in courses. Students seeking additional semesters of medical leave will need to submit a new request to the Dean of Student Development and provide appropriate documentation justifying the extension of leave.

**An approved medical leave does not relieve the student of his/her financial responsibilities to Bethel University and may have implications regarding financial aid eligibility and repayment.** For questions regarding financial aid or the University's tuition refund schedule, visit the Office of Business & Financial Aid. Other charges (room, board, course materials, etc.) may still apply and any refunds will be prorated accordingly.

## **PROCEDURE**

### **REQUESTING A MEDICAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

A student requesting a voluntary medical leave of absence must complete a Medical Leave of Absence Request Application, submit it to the Dean of Student Development, and provide supporting medical documentation verifying the reason(s) for, and necessity of, the requested leave. Acceptable documentation includes a letter or note from the student's physician, psychologist, or counselor, on their letterhead, which indicates the following: (1) the reason the student is requesting a medical leave, including a diagnosis; (2) the date of initial treatment; (3) the dates of subsequent treatment (if applicable); and (4) the expected length of recovery. The Dean of Students will review the application and either grant or deny the request for medical leave.

In cases where leave is taken for mental health reasons, it is strongly recommended that, prior to the start of an approved medical leave of absence, the student meet with a member of Counseling Services for consultation. For specific questions contact Counseling Services at: (731) 352-6786.

In cases where leave is related to a physical condition, it is strongly recommended that, prior to the start of an approved medical leave of absence, the student meet with a member of the Student Health Center for consultation. For specific questions contact the Student Health Center at: (731) 352-4291.

### **STATUS WHILE ON MEDICAL LEAVE**

Students who are on an approved leave of absence are no longer active students and therefore forfeit the privileges afforded to active students. Students who are on an approved leave of absence cannot enter university residential buildings, participate in student activities, or access student resources and services. We do, however, realize how important communication with Bethel is during this time away. Therefore, students' campus email accounts will remain active during the approved duration of their leave of absence.

Students who are enrolled in the college health insurance plan will continue to be covered until the end of the enrollment period (either January or August whichever comes first) even if the student leaves school on a Medical Leave. If a student continues his or her medical leave of absence beyond that semester, he or she will not be eligible to enroll in the college health insurance plan until he or she returns to active full time status. Students on Medical Leaves who are insured on non-college insurance should check eligibility for continuing coverage with their insurance companies.

### **RETURN FROM MEDICAL LEAVE**

Although a request for return will be assessed whenever requested by a student, a medical leave is generally granted for a period of no less than six months. A student's return from a Medical Leave of Absence requires approval from the Dean of Student Development following a re-entry assessment process. The medical leave return process must be completed prior to the first day of classes for the semester that the student is planning to return.

A student seeking to return following a medical leave of absence must provide a completed application for re-enrollment to the Dean of Student Development no sooner than six (6) weeks and no later than one (1) month prior to the first day of classes of the semester for which the student intends to re-enroll. The application for re-enrollment includes a Release of Information executed by the student so that representatives from the appropriate department (Counseling Services for leave related to mental health or Student Health Services for leave taken for physical reasons) can communicate with the student's medical and/or treatment providers and a completed questionnaire filled out by the student's primary licensed provider.

If the student's application is received shortly after the relevant deadline, the University will attempt to be flexible and review the student's request to return for the desired semester. However, if there is missing information and/or the University needs additional time to contact the student's treatment provider, as discussed below, consideration for a return may be made for the following semester rather than the semester for which he/she was initially seeking to return.

### **PROCESSING AN APPLICATION FOR RE-ENROLLMENT**

The Dean of Student Development will review the student's record and determine the student's academic eligibility for return to Bethel University. If the student's academic eligibility is confirmed, the Dean of Student Development will forward the student's completed application materials to the appropriate health service administrator: the Vice President of the College of Health Science, for leave taken for physical injury or illness, or the Director of Counseling Services, for leave taken for mental health reasons.

The appropriate health service administrator, or his or her designee, will review the materials provided and either make a recommendation regarding the student's request for reenrollment based on the materials provided, or request additional information. The request for additional information may include: a request that the student participate in a re-enrollment interview to discuss his/her condition and/or readiness to return to the University; clarification from the licensed health care provider; and/or any other information that may demonstrate that the student is reasonably capable of functioning on a day-to-day basis in the campus environment, with or without reasonable accommodations.

During the process of reviewing an application, if the appropriate health service administrator determines that information provided by the treatment provider is incomplete, requires further explanation or clarification, or when there is a disconnect between the medical information provided by the treatment provider and other information in the student's files, the administrator will contact the treatment provider to obtain additional information. In extraordinary circumstances (e.g., the University is concerned about the medical provider's credentials), the administrator may request that the student undergo an additional assessment, which will allow the University to make a determination about the student's readiness for return. In those rare instances, the administrator will notify the student of its rationale for making this request.

In reviewing a request to return from medical leave, any conditions or requirements for re-admission will be based on an individualized assessment of each student including consideration of current medical knowledge and/or the best available objective evidence. Careful consideration will be given to the opinions and recommendations of the student's treating physician or mental health professional, if available.

Following this review, the administrator will make a recommendation to the Dean of Student Development regarding whether or not the student is ready to resume academics and University life. The Dean of Student Service will make the final determination on whether to grant the student's application for readmission and will communicate that decision to the student along with any conditions of re-enrollment that must be met. Every effort will be made to respond to the student's request for return within 14 calendar days of submission of all the required materials. A longer response time may be caused by the inability to reach a student's medical and/or treatment provider, high volume in the appropriate health service department, or other extenuating circumstances.

Students, who have not returned from or re-applied to extend their medical leave after one year of the date their leave began, will be administratively withdrawn from the University after one year and will need to apply for readmission to the University if they choose to return at a later date.

#### **APPEALING A RECOMMENDATION OF DENIAL OF RE-ENROLLMENT**

If upon review, the appropriate health service administrator submits a recommendation to the Dean's office that a student is not ready for return, the student will be advised of the administrator's recommendation in writing along with recommendations that will enhance the student's chance of a positive recommendation the next time the student's request is considered.

The student may appeal the health service administrator's recommendation that he or she is not ready to return to the University by submitting an appeal letter in writing to the Vice President of the College of Arts and Sciences within ten (10) business days of receiving notice of the adverse recommendation. The student may also submit any information he or she believes to be relevant to the appeal. The Vice President of the College of Arts and Sciences will review the student's submission and make a final determination as to recommendation for return.

### **MANDATORY MEDICAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Bethel University provides a range of support services to address the medical needs of students, including mental health needs, within the context of the campus community. However, students who cannot adequately be assisted by the available facilities and/or refuse to accept recommended emotional and/or medical treatment and whose resulting behavior renders them unable to effectively function in the residential or campus community; that is, without harming others or disrupting the campus community may be required to leave the University following the described procedure below:

1. The Dean of Student Development, or designee, may require a mandatory assessment if there is a reasonable belief, based on current medical knowledge and/or the best available objective evidence, that the student's behavior poses a significant risk to the health or safety of others, or an actual risk to his/her own safety that is not based on mere speculation, stereotypes, or generalizations about individuals with disabilities, and the student does not want to take a leave voluntarily.
2. When, in the opinion of a member of the Counseling Services or Student Health Center staff, a student is unable to be adequately assisted by the center or by other available facilities, and the student's condition renders him/her unable to function in the University community without harming himself/herself or others, and/or disrupting the educational mission of the institution, the staff member shall notify the Dean of Student Development of the situation as soon as possible.
3. When the Dean of Student Development receives notification under either (1) or (2), described above, the Dean of Student Development or his/her designee will review appropriate documentation and make an individualized decision regarding the student's status. Before placing any student with a disability on a mandatory leave of absence, Bethel University will conduct an individualized assessment to determine if there are reasonable accommodations that would permit the student to continue to

participate in Bethel's campus community without taking a leave of absence. Such decision may be appealed in writing to the Vice President of the College of Arts and Sciences in accordance with the procedure set forth above for appealing a denial of re-enrollment recommendation.

4. Failure to appear for a mandated assessment will result in an involuntary medical leave of absence without further process. If the Dean of Student Development determines that the student should leave the University, the Dean of Student Development or his/her designee may inform the student's parent, spouse, or other close relative.
5. Although a request for return will be assessed whenever requested by a student, involuntary medical leaves of absence are generally for a period of no less than six (6) months. A student may apply for re-enrollment by following the re-enrollment process described in the procedures for re-enrollment from a medical leave of absence.

#### **RESPONSIBLE PARTIES**

Dean of Student Development, Vice President of the College of Arts & Sciences, Vice President of the College of Health Sciences, Members of Counseling Services, Student Health Center Staff, Others as Delegated by Policy

#### **PUBLICATION**

Student Handbook, University website

# BethelUniversity

## REQUEST FOR MEDICAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_ SSN: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact #: \_\_\_\_\_

College: \_\_\_\_\_ Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Ant. Graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

Beginning Semester of Requested Leave  Fall  Spring  Summer Year \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for requesting medical leave of absence:  Physical Health  Psychological Health

Please provide a brief description of reason for requested medical leave:

Last day you plan to attend class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Anticipated Return: \_\_\_\_\_

**By placing my initials in the boxes provided below I acknowledge that I have read, understand and agree to the terms and conditions of taking a medical leave of absence.**

Initials

- I understand that I am responsible for all outstanding financial obligations to Bethel.
- If I receive financial aid, I understand that there may be potential financial implications of my withdrawal, and that Bethel's Financial Aid Office is available to discuss these implications with me, including when my student loans might be due.
- I understand that all courses in which I am currently enrolled will be assigned a grade of "W" to indicate a withdrawal from those courses.
- I understand that if I have not returned from or re-applied to extend my medical leave after one year of the date my leave began, I will be administratively withdrawn from the University and will need to apply for readmission to the University if I choose to return at a later date.

*By my signature below, I attest that I have read the Medical Leave of Absence Policy, including the information set forth in that policy pertaining to the re-enrollment process and I agree to accept the imposed conditions and deadlines set forth therein. I agree to provide all of the required medical documentation related to this request for medical leave. I agree to abide by these terms and conditions and therefore request that I be granted a Medical Leave of Absence for the above-stated health reasons. I attest that the above-stated information is true and reflects my medical condition.*

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**For Dean's Use Only:**

Request Approved  Request Denied Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dean of Student Development Signature \_\_\_\_\_