



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

POLICY for LEAVE OF ABSENCE for STUDENTS

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

DATE OF APPROVAL BY RELEVANT COMMITTEES:

Office of Dean of Students: May 2010

Teaching and Learning Committee: 7 October 2009

DATE OF APPROVAL BY SENATE: 4 June 2010

DATE OF APPROVAL BY COUNCIL: 10 June 2010

COMMENCEMENT DATE: July 2010

REVISION HISTORY: last updated June 2010

REVIEW DATE: 3-yearly

POLICY LEVEL: All University students

RESPONSIBILITY:IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING:

- * All Deans will ensure that the various strategies outlined in this policy are implemented.
- * Specific task-linked responsibility rests at several levels, as follows:
 - LOA for medical reasons: Health Care Centre
 - LOA for psychological reasons: Counselling Centre
 - LOA because of sporting activities: Sports Administration; Dean of Students
 - LOA on compassionate grounds
 - LOA because of cultural/religious/leadership commitments

Review: Dean of Students & Sub-Committee / Student Services Council / Teaching and Learning Committee / Faculty Boards / Senate / Council

2. POLICY STATEMENT

The primary focus of Rhodes University is academic, and all our students ultimately aim to obtain a high-quality degree. For this reason, students are expected to attend all of their classes if possible. While in some Faculties, students may be permitted to miss a limited number of their classes without leave of absence, the proportion varies from Faculty to Faculty (see 2.1). A Faculty or department may prescribe a maximum number of lectures and practicals that students may miss, regardless of the reason for absence and whether a leave of absence certificate has been issued or not, in order to satisfy its DP policy.

This Leave of Absence Policy applies in cases where students wish to show genuine cause for their absence, or where circumstances are such that they cannot meet their Faculty's requirement. It outlines the particular circumstances in which students may be granted leave of absence from classes.

2.1 POLICY DECLARATION:

This policy recognises that the University strives to produce outstanding internationally recognised graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable, and that we aim to provide a safe and nurturing student support system as well as a diverse array of residential, sporting, cultural and leadership opportunities that will foster the all-round development of our students.

Leave of absence (LOA) is normally granted in cases of genuine ill health, or, in the case of sporting or cultural commitments, when such absence does not result in undue disruption to the student's academic program or undue harm to the academic progress of the student concerned. The LOA applies to the specific day(s) of absence granted and does not normally excuse students from work which must be submitted thereafter.

It is the responsibility of the student to complete the relevant LOA form (available from the Student Bureau) and submit it as soon as possible, along with all supporting documentation. This policy recognises that leave of absence is normally granted with the knowledge and approval of the relevant Department Head.

This policy also recognises that each Department has its own "Duly Performed" (DP) guidelines, which specify the maximum number of classes that any student may miss before they will lose their DP certificate. **Students must acquaint themselves with these guidelines after registration.**

2.2 POLICY OBJECTIVES:

This policy aims to

- a. Support the academic focus of the university by requiring students to attend classes unless special circumstances prevail.
- b. Recognise the need to grant leave of absence to students who can provide evidence that they are physically or psychologically unwell, and describe the protocol to be observed in each case.
- c. Recognise the need to grant leave of absence to students who are participating at a high level in sporting, cultural or leadership activities, and describe the protocol to be observed in each case.

3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Specific protocols are outlined for granting leave of absence for the following reasons:

- medical grounds
- psychological grounds
- compassionate grounds
- traditional / ceremonial grounds
- involvement in extramural activities including sport, leadership and cultural activities

3.1 LEAVE OF ABSENCE ON MEDICAL GROUNDS

1. The standard “Leave of Absence” application form on medical grounds is available from the Student Bureau.
2. All such applications must **be supported by** a qualified health practitioner (including Health Care Centre staff). In circumstances which prevent this, a Warden may support the application.
3. It is assumed those who sign in support of such an application have had the opportunity to assess the health of the student, and to perform their own on-site observation of the symptoms displayed, in order to satisfy themselves that there is clear evidence that the student is ill *at the time of the observation*.
4. Students in residence who are too ill to go to the Health Care Centre may request their warden to sign in support of their application on the grounds of illness, and are not required to go to the Health Care Centre as well.
5. LOAs will **NOT normally be supported** in the following circumstances:
 - when a healthy student comes to claim a retrospective LOA for being sick at a time prior to the consultation;
 - when a student misses a lecture or test while waiting to be seen, but proves to be in good health when attended to.
6. Oppidan students and students in residence may visit the Health Care Centre in order to get a Leave of Absence form signed, even if they do not wish to receive any medication for their condition.
7. It is the student’s responsibility to submit their LOA application and all accompanying evidence timeously to the relevant academic department, and to find out whether their application has been successful.
8. The Rhodes University Pregnancy Protocol specifies the procedure that should be followed in the case of pregnancy.
9. Should a requested LOA not be granted, the affected student may request the Dean of Students to appeal to the Head of Department on his/her behalf.

3.1.2 EXTENDED LOA ON MEDICAL GROUNDS

1. In the event that a student suffering from a severe medical condition which results in an extended period of treatment and recovery (longer than one month), the relevant academic Dean must confirm whether an extended LOA may be granted.

2. The nature of the curriculum and extent of absence may make it necessary for the student to resume studies the following year.
3. Students on an extended LOA who plan to return in the same calendar year are expected to maintain their studies from a distance and where relevant, to apply to write *aegrotat* examinations.
4. During the extended leave of absence, the Registrar's Division may arrange for the suspension of registration.
5. Academic and residence fees are normally charged *pro rata* and may be waived on compassionate grounds in such circumstances.

3.2 LEAVE OF ABSENCE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL GROUNDS

1. The application form for "Leave of Absence on Psychological grounds" is available from the Counselling Centre.
2. All such applications must **be supported by** a qualified psychologist (not an intern), either from the Rhodes Counselling Centre or in private practice. Intern psychologists must ask their supervising psychologist to countersign any supporting letter that they write for students.
3. The form requires the psychologist to indicate whether they have had contact with the student before, and are well acquainted with the details of the case. If the patient is new, the psychologist is requested to explain why their support is nevertheless justified.
4. In cases where a student is not known to the psychologist, the application should only be supported in exceptional circumstances, such as recent trauma or bereavement.
5. It is not appropriate for psychologists to support applications when the reasons for not meeting the academic requirements of a course are not psychological.
6. The form requires psychologists to specify the extent to which they believe the psychological disorder is responsible for disrupting the student's academic performance. There must be a valid reason (e.g. Axis I psychological disorders) which prevents the student from adequately preparing for and attending lectures, tutorials, tests and exams, or from completing coursework.
7. The Psychologist should discuss with the student the implications associated with disclosing the fact that the student is in psychological distress and ensure that they consent to whatever is included in the form
8. The psychologist may deem it necessary to write an accompanying letter, and will indicate this on the form. In such cases, the student must be requested to return to collect and read the letter.
9. The student is responsible for collecting any necessary collateral evidence of their condition from other experts to support their claim, and for delivering the LOA form and the letter (where relevant) to the relevant Head of Department.
10. In cases where the student is not currently, nor has recently been, undergoing therapy, and reasons for requesting support are not strong, then the psychologist should explain to the student that he or she is unable to support their application. In these cases, the psychologist may assist the student to write his or her own letter of support, but should not sign the letter.
11. Should a requested LOA not be granted, the affected student may request the Dean of Students to appeal to the Head of Department on his/her behalf.

3.2.1. EXTENDED LOA ON PSYCHOLOGICAL GROUNDS.

1. In the event that a student's psychological condition brings with it serious risk to life or safety of themselves or fellow students, the psychologist may recommend that a student be admitted to a psychiatric institution (in accordance with the Mental Health Care Act), or may submit a written recommendation to the Dean of Students advising that the student be sent home for an extended period of treatment and recovery.
2. The parents / guardian and student must be fully informed of the situation, and the reasons for the extended leave of absence, by the attending psychologist, and must be requested to accompany the student home.
3. The Dean of Students will write a letter to the student, advising them that they are required to take leave of absence in order to recover and resolve critical psychological issues, and indicating the minimum period required (normally at least one academic term).
4. Before the student returns to Rhodes, the student must submit a psychiatric assessment from an appropriate psychiatric specialist to the Head of the Rhodes Counselling Centre confirming:
 - that the student is stable and not in any danger of imminent relapse;
 - that the student is likely to adhere to medication prescribed (supplying full details of such medication);
 - that the student is not a danger to him/herself.
5. Once this information has been submitted to the Head of Counselling and s/he is satisfied that the criteria have been fulfilled, s/he will recommend accordingly to the Dean of Students, who will consult with the relevant academic Dean in cases of absences longer than one month (or in cases where second-semester work builds on first-semester work), before confirming in writing to the student that they may resume their studies.
6. Readmission is normally conditional on the student agreeing to see a psychologist for an agreed period.
7. During the extended leave of absence, the Registrar's Division will arrange for the suspension of registration.
8. Academic and residence fees are normally charged *pro rata* and may be waived on compassionate grounds in exceptional circumstances.
9. Students on extended LOA are encouraged to maintain their studies from a distance and where possible, to apply to write *aegrotat* examinations.
10. The Dean of Students will confidentially inform the Heads of relevant academic Departments of the need for compassion and support (where feasible) for such students when they return.
11. Should a requested LOA not be granted, the affected student may request the Dean of Students to appeal to the Head of Department on his/her behalf.

3.3. LEAVE OF ABSENCE ON COMPASSIONATE GROUNDS.

1. In the case of the death or terminal illness of a close family member, students will be granted a reasonable period of compassionate leave.

2. In case of such terminal illness of a close family member, written support from a medical practitioner must be submitted before LOA is confirmed. This evidence should normally be supplied within 2 weeks of the student's return.
3. In the case of death of a close family member, students will be required to submit evidence (e.g. a certified copy of the relevant death certificate) before LOA is confirmed. This evidence should normally be supplied within 2 weeks of the student's return.
4. Should a requested LOA not be granted, the affected student may request the Dean of Students to appeal to the Head of Department on his/her behalf.

3.4.1. LEAVE OF ABSENCE ON GROUNDS OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES, HEALTH, AND CULTURAL CEREMONIES

1. The application form for "Leave of Absence for Traditional Religious Activities, Health, and Cultural Ceremonies" is available from the Student Bureau.
2. All such applications must **be supported by** a recognised traditional leader, healthcare practitioner, a ward or local government councillor, or justice of peace in the student's community.
3. In circumstances which prevent (2) above, a Warden may support the application.
4. It is assumed that those who sign in support of such an application have had the opportunity to confirm that such activity or ceremony is necessary or satisfy themselves that there is clear evidence that the student is ill *at the time of the observation* and is consulting a healer or those performing the ceremony.
5. In the cases of cultural ceremonies that are planned at specific times of the year (circumcision, *Umhlanga*, or *Umkhosi/Incwala*) students are required to get approval well before the ceremony.
6. It is the student's responsibility to submit their LOA application and all accompanying evidence timeously to the relevant academic department, and to find out whether their application has been successful.
7. Should a requested LOA not be granted, the affected student may request the Dean of Students to appeal to the Head of Department on his/her behalf.

3.4.2. EXTENDED LOA ON GROUNDS OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES, HEALTH, AND CULTURAL CEREMONIES

1. In the event of a student attending religious or cultural ceremonies that require extended absence from the university (**longer than one month**), the relevant academic Dean must confirm whether an extended LOA may be granted.
2. The nature of the curriculum and extent of absence may make it necessary for the student to resume studies the following year.
3. Students on an extended LOA who plan to return in the same calendar year are expected to maintain their studies from a distance and where relevant, to apply to write *aegrotat* examinations.
4. During the extended leave of absence, the Registrar's Division may arrange for the suspension of registration.
5. Academic and residence fees are normally charged *pro rata* and may be waived on compassionate grounds in such circumstances.

3.5. LEAVE OF ABSENCE BECAUSE OF EXTRAMURAL COMMITMENTS

3.5.1 SPORT

1. The application form for “Leave of Absence because of Extramural Commitments” is available from Sports Admin, SRC Office and the Student Bureau
2. LOAs will normally be granted for a competitive sporting event at provincial, national or international level, and for students participating in an intervarsity team.
3. LOAs will normally be granted for attendance at practices which take place after 17h00 on a weekday and over weekends during the **two weeks preceding** a scheduled provincial, national or international event. No late applications (submitted after an event) will be supported. The application should normally be made at least ONE week in advance of the event, and must be accompanied by all relevant supporting documentation.
4. The application should be **supported by** the relevant captain / coach and the relevant sports officer. The student is responsible for timeous collection of the signed LOA form from Sports Admin, and for handing it to the Head of the relevant academic Department.
5. Should a requested LOA not be granted, the affected student may request the Head of Sports Admin to appeal to the Head of Department on his/her behalf.

3.5.2 CULTURAL / LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

1. Cultural activities include such things as representing Rhodes at a national debating competition, or attending a national / international Conference on Human Rights. Leadership activities are typically obligations for SRC members to attend certain meetings and/or conferences.
2. The application form for “Leave of Absence because of Extramural Commitments” is available from Sports Admin, SRC Office and the Student Bureau.
3. LOAs will normally be granted for a provincial, national or international competitive event or conference .
4. In such cases, the application should normally be made at least ONE week in advance of the academic activity to be missed, and must be accompanied by all relevant supporting documentation. No late applications (submitted after an event) will be supported.
5. The application should be **supported by** the relevant Society Chairperson and the Dean of Students.
6. Student leaders who must attend major University Committee meetings (scheduled in the Calendar) must ensure that their LOA application is supported by the Chair of the relevant committee.
7. The student is responsible for timeous submission of the signed LOA form to the Head of the relevant academic Department.
8. Should a requested LOA not be granted, the affected student may request the Dean of Students to appeal to the Head of Department on his/her behalf.

3.6 REVIEW PROCEDURE:

The Dean of Students should set up a sub-committee to reconsider the effectiveness of the Rhodes Leave of Absence Policy at the beginning of 2012. This committee should include the following people, or their nominees:

- Dean of Students
- One Academic Dean (nominated by the Deans Committee)
- Two HoD's (nominated by the Deans Committee)
- President of the SRC
- Head: Counselling Centre
- Head: Health Care Centre
- 1 Hall Warden

The Committee will submit the revised policy to Student Services Council, and then to the Teaching and Learning Committee, and Senate and Council for consideration. If revisions are recommended and approved, a copy of the revised policy must be widely distributed and the web version must be updated.