What is a medical leave of absence?

A Medical Leave of Absence (MLOA) is a way of taking time away from school to get treatment for an underlying medical or psychological condition, with the option to return to school in a future semester once that condition has been adequately treated.

Examples may include (but are not by no means limited to) a serious concussion or other injury, a serious physical illness or disease, severe depression/anxiety, bipolar disorder, or a psychologically traumatizing event. If the condition is getting in the way of the student’s academic success, the student might qualify for a MLOA.

• Taking a MLOA during the semester means withdrawing from all classes.
• All grades for that semester become “W’s” and do not count toward the student’s GPA.
• If a MLOA is taken between semesters, that student does not register for new classes until they are ready to return from the MLOA (see details of returning below).
• An MLOA could be for one semester or several semesters. Undergrads can be on an MLOA for up to two years, (4 semesters) while graduate students can be on an MLOA for up to one year (two semesters) without needing to re-apply to the university.
• For conditions that are primarily or entirely physical, a student’s eligibility for a medical leave would be determined through Health Services. Please contact the Health Center for more information on taking a MLOA for physical health reasons.
• For conditions that are primarily or entirely psychological/psychiatric, that student’s eligibility is determined through the Counseling Center.
• Students may voluntarily withdraw from a certain number of credits during their time at UMass Dartmouth without having an underlying medical condition. An MLOA does not count toward the credit limit for voluntary withdrawal.
• Except for very rare circumstances, a MLOA is only granted if it is sought on or before the deadline for withdrawing from classes. For example, sometimes a leave might be granted after the withdrawal date if the student was hospitalized during the withdrawal deadline. MLOAs are not retroactively granted for semesters that have already come to an end.
• A student cannot take an MLOA for mental health purposes just by filling out the appropriate paperwork. They must meet with a provider at the Counseling Center. The provider will evaluate the condition, the student’s eligibility for MLOA, and will provide more information about MLOA. If a student is eligible for an MLOA, they will be given the option to proceed with filling out the paperwork and will be guided through the process.

What are some alternatives to a medical leave of absence?

Depending on a student’s circumstances, a student might consider:

• Talking to professors to request an extension on individual assignments (if needed). Many professors are willing to be flexible if they understand that there is a good reason for the request.
• Seeking accommodations for medical/psychiatric/psychological conditions through the office for Access and Success.
• Talking to professors to discuss an “incomplete” for particular classes. An “incomplete” means that a student can complete their assignments and/or exams in the weeks and months after the semester has come to an end (determined by the professor). When the work for the semester is complete, your grade is recorded as normal. An incomplete might be taken in one class or many classes, as needed.
• Voluntarily withdrawing from some or all classes. Students may voluntarily withdraw from a certain number of classes during their time at UMass Dartmouth and do not need to have an underlying medical condition in order to do so. A MLOA is for students with an underlying medical condition (whether sudden or ongoing).

**How do I take a medical leave of absence?**

• Contact the Counseling Center or Health Services to set up an appointment, and let us know that you’re seeking an evaluation for a MLOA. Be mindful that the deadline for taking an MLOA is the same as the normal withdrawal deadline for the semester. Rare exceptions might include when a student was hospitalized during the withdrawal deadline.
• During or after your meeting with the Counseling Center, you will be given some simple paperwork to fill out. This paperwork includes details on the medical leave process as well as steps you need to take prior to returning to campus at the conclusion of the MLOA.
• You are encouraged to ask any questions you have about the MLOA process itself, as well as questions you might have about things like how it will impact tuition, financial aid, etc. You might be referred to other offices to get some of these questions answered, since the details of these issues may vary from individual to individual.
• If you live in the campus residence halls, make arrangements to check out and leave campus promptly. Students who are on a MLOA will generally not be allowed to live on campus or work on campus during their medical leave.

**What do I do during a medical leave of absence?**

In short, focus on your health. Seek treatment for your underlying health condition and take the steps you need to get better. We care about our students, and we want you to get the help you need so that when you return to campus you are able to succeed, be well, and thrive.

For a MLOA that is for a psychiatric/psychological health condition:

• Students are required to have 12 sessions or 3 months of psychotherapy. This is because most mental health conditions require at least 12 sessions to treat effectively, and we want to make sure that students are getting real help with the mental health condition so that they can be healthy and successful when they return to campus.
  o Therapy must be with a licensed mental health provider.
  o Sessions with a prescriber (psychiatrist or other medical doctor) are excellent and are encouraged, but do not count toward the 12 session/3 month requirement. **Therapy must be with a licensed therapist, counselor, psychologist, clinical social worker not just a provider for medication management.**
• Discuss your progress with your mental health provider(s)
If you are not sure how to connect with a mental health provider, the counseling center can provide you with referrals (and ways of finding a provider in your area).

Have open and honest discussions with your provider about when you’ve made enough progress that returning to school would be in your best interest. If possible, we want to ensure that any underlying mental health issues do not interfere with your wellbeing and your academic success upon your return.

The Counseling Center would be happy to provide a treatment summary or other records to your mental health provider(s) upon request.

**How do I return from a medical leave of absence?**

When you and your mental health provider agree that you are ready to return to school:

- First, have your provider write a brief letter summarizing your treatment, and have them mail/fax the letter to the Counseling Center at 508.999.9192. The letter should include:
  - A summary of the work that you’ve done (diagnosis, progress, lingering issues)
  - The number of sessions you’ve had, and over what period of time (for example, x sessions over the course of x months)
  - Their professional opinion on whether you are ready to return to school, or whether your underlying mental health condition would make this a bad idea for your physical or mental health.
  - Any other details that your provider thinks may be important for the Counseling Center to know

- Next, call the counseling center at (508) 999-8650 to arrange a meeting with a campus counselor. This meeting is usually brief (30 minutes), and you and the counselor will review:
  - The reason for your medical leave (depression, substance use disorder, etc.)
  - Your progress in addressing the underlying cause of the medical leave
  - Your readiness to return to campus (supported by the letter your provider sent us in the first step, above)
  - What steps can be taken to help you re-acclimate to campus and maintain your mental wellness for this semester and beyond
  - In some cases (such as when a student is very far from campus or when the world is in the midst of a global pandemic), the session may be conducted remotely.
  - If circumstances allow, the clinician will also schedule an intake appointment for you at the Counseling Center. You will be expected to have regular appointments at the Counseling Center during your first semester back.
  - When the visit is complete, if you have been cleared to return to campus you will receive an official letter confirming this.

- You will also need to contact your academic advisor and inform them that you are planning on returning to school. After meeting with them, the advising hold on your COIN account will be removed. You may also be asked to update your emergency contacts at this time.

- If you plan to live on campus, contact Res Life to arrange this.

- During your first semester back, you are expected to meet with a counselor at the Counseling Center on a regular basis. If you have a community mental health provider that you like, you may continue to see this person with occasional check-ins at the Counseling
Center. If you are receiving ongoing therapy in the community, your visits with the Counseling Center may be briefer and less frequent.