6. Official Graduate Leave of Absence

The following official graduate leaves of absence are intended to provide a student seeking a degree or certificate, who is in active status and in good academic standing, with some continuing services during their time away from campus for the reasons stated below. Students may not be enrolled during the semester(s) in which they have been approved for a graduate leave of absence (including medical leave). Graduate leave (including medical leave) does not extend the time limitations for degree completion (see Chapter 6.E). Extensions must be requested according to Graduate School procedures (see Chapter 6.F).

a. Graduate Leave

Graduate leave is granted for students in active status (enrolled or in CDS) who must be away from their studies for one or more semesters for personal, family, job, financial, military or Peace Corps service, or other compelling reasons. Only graduate leave for medical reasons, military service, and Peace Corps service is available to doctoral students in continuous doctoral status. Students must apply for a graduate leave of absence through the Graduate School by completing the Application for Graduate Student Leave form. The Graduate School must receive this form no later than the 30th day of classes during the semester in which the leave is requested. If the student is not enrolled in CDS, the student must follow procedures to either reenroll or reapply to their program before a graduate leave request will be considered. The leave must be approved by the student’s advisory committee chair, the chair or director (in the academic program, department, or school), International Programs (for international F-1/J-1 students only), and vice provost for graduate and professional education. A student may be on graduate leave for a total of up to one calendar year during their studies but leave time may be extended for special circumstances (e.g., for military and Peace Corps service) at the recommendation of the program and the approval of the Graduate School. Graduate leave beyond one calendar year during a student’s studies is not guaranteed. Graduate leave entitles students to maintain access to library services if needed. At the end of the leave, the student will be able to reenroll for credits without completing the Request for Reenrollment form or paying the reenrollment fee. International students must submit information on their finances to the Graduate School if they require issuance of new immigration documents (Form I-20/DS-2019). Students should contact Cougar Health Services Insurance and Billing office for information related to health insurance options for the semester(s) on graduate leave.

b. Medical Leave

Medical leave is a special type of Graduate leave. Medical leave must be coordinated with the Graduate School, the student’s program advisor and chair, International Programs (for international students only) and with Cougar Health Services if the student seeks counseling regarding health insurance options during their leave. Graduate students must submit the Application for Graduate Student Leave form, as well as the Medical Leave documentation form, to the program advisor, the chair or director (in the academic program, department, or school), and the Graduate School prior to the semester in which the medical leave is needed, unless the leave is an emergency. This medical leave policy does not apply to specific program requirements or the terms and conditions of assistantships, fellowships, and other forms of financial aid. At the end of the leave, the student does not need to complete the Request for Reenrollment form or pay a reenrollment fee to reenroll in their program. Medical leave generally is limited to one calendar year during a student’s graduate studies. Students who require medical leave for more than one calendar year must obtain approval from their program and the Graduate School in advance to extend the leave beyond the first year. Extensions to medical leave are not guaranteed.

Medical leave is granted by semester and is only applicable for the semester(s) in which the student is not enrolled. Medical leave cannot begin mid-semester; if the student must leave school in mid-semester, the university’s policies and procedures related to cancelation of enrollment, refunds, continuation of benefits, and termination of assistantships (and other forms of financial aid) apply for that semester. Students should contact Cougar Health Services Insurance & Billing office for information related to health insurance options for the semester(s) on medical leave.

c. Short-term Parental Leave

The Short-term Parental Leave plan provides up to four consecutive weeks of leave for the period directly before or after the birth or adoption of a child. During this time, the student continues to be enrolled and, if on an assistantship appointment, the student will continue to receive the assistantship stipend, graduate assistant benefits (e.g., tuition waivers will remain in place), and health benefits.

i. Eligibility. The Short-term Parental Leave plan applies to all full-time enrolled graduate students at all campus locations anticipating the birth or adoption of a child. Eligible graduate students are those who have been full-time graduate students for at least one academic year (two academic semesters, not including the summer) at the time parental leave is taken. Students must maintain their full-time enrollment status during parental leave.

- A full-time graduate student on an assistantship appointment is eligible for four consecutive weeks of paid parental leave from the graduate program. If both parents are full-time graduate students on an assistantship appointment at WSU, only one may be eligible for paid parental leave or the paid four consecutive weeks may be shared between them. However, both parents are eligible for 4 weeks of parental leave without tuition or stipend support. Note: Financial assistance as described below is available during the academic year appointment only.
- Full-time graduate students who are not on an assistantship may request parental leave without tuition or stipend support.

ii. Financial Support for Graduate Assistants. The Graduate School has established a process to provide temporary financial assistance to programs to enable them to continue to support students on graduate assistant appointments (during the academic year only) during Short-term Parental Leave. These funds will be provided by the Graduate School to ensure that the graduate student’s funding is continued during the approved leave period and the research/teaching efforts of the department are not adversely affected. Programs should request stipend replacement funds for graduate assistants who seek parental leave via the Short-term Parental Leave form, which should be signed by the student, the faculty advisor and the chair or director (in the academic program, department, or school), and submitted to the vice provost for graduate and professional education. These short-term replacement funds will be available for graduate assistants on any funding source, but only during the academic year. In addition to the temporary stipend funds, the Graduate School will maintain resident and non-resident tuition waivers for the assistant during the approved Short-term Parental Leave period, not to exceed the current appointment period. For students on grant funding, the Graduate School will provide flexible tuition waivers to replace the GTR during the approved Short-term Parental Leave period.

iii. Short-term Parental Leave Academic Plan. Faculty and other mentors are expected to work with graduate students to make fair and appropriate alternative arrangements during parental leave in the format of a written Parental Leave Academic Plan approved by the student’s course instructors, if applicable, and the major advisor. Students should alert the chair or director (in
the academic program, department, or school) and their advisor as soon as they know of the impending need for a leave so that any necessary work adjustments (for graduate assistants) and academic arrangements may be made. Students who are planning to request parental leave should meet with their faculty advisor no less than 10 weeks prior the proposed start of the leave to develop a plan for their academic work. The agreed upon plan should be attached to the Short-term Parental Leave form before it is submitted to the Graduate School. The Access Center should be consulted if there are medical issues that require reasonable accommodation. While graduate assistants will not be required to perform any duties during their period of parental leave, they may want to maintain a certain amount of involvement with their advisor during the parental leave period. This involvement should be mutually agreed upon by the student and the faculty member.

iv. **Short-term Parental Leave Procedures.** Parental leave may extend to four consecutive weeks. Graduate students who seek parental leave should complete a Short-Term Parental Leave form, attach a copy of their academic plan for the leave, and have the form signed by their faculty advisor and program/department chair. The form must be submitted to the Graduate School no later than eight weeks prior to the anticipated start date of the leave. The student and graduate program will be notified in writing of the Graduate School's decision on the Short-Term Parental Leave request. In addition, if the student is on an assistantship appointment, the Graduate School will work with the program to provide funds for the continuation of the student's stipend during the leave period. After the period of approved leave, graduate assistants are entitled to return to their assistantship positions for the duration of their current appointment.

v. **Absences beyond Short-Term Parental Leave.** The Short-Term Parental Leave plan does not cover medical situations or complications due to childbirth. Programs may provide additional unpaid time off beyond the parental leave based on the student's documented needs, but university policies regarding reasonable accommodation or graduate leave must be followed. Graduate students should apply for an official leave of absence (see Chapter 6.A.6.a and 6.A.6.b) from their graduate studies if they anticipate being absent for an entire semester or more. Students should be advised that there is no guarantee of an assistantship position after returning from an absence beyond the Short-term Parental Leave.