
INVOLUNTARY LEAVE OF ABSENCE POLICY

The Provost or Vice-President for Student Life may place a student on an Involuntary Leave of Absence for reasons of personal or community safety. This process will be undertaken only in extraordinary circumstances when there is compelling information to suggest that the student is engaging in or is at heightened risk of engaging in behavior that could lead to serious injury to others, including as a result of physical or psychological illness. In addition, this may be initiated if, based on an individualized assessment, it is determined that there is a significant risk that the student will harm him/herself, and that the risk cannot be eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level through reasonable and realistic accommodations and/or on-campus supports.

An involuntary medical leave may also be initiated in the event that a student is experiencing symptoms from a medical/psychiatric illness that so significantly disrupts daily functioning, judgement, and/or cognition that a student is not able to be safe on campus or participate effectively on campus. In these rare cases, the illness may affect insight and judgment to a degree that the individual does not recognize their condition. Examples may include levels of mania, psychoses, or acute brain injury. An involuntary medical leave may be utilized if the nature/duration of the current illness or injury is such that reasonable accommodations will not permit the student to be safe or able to participate successfully during the semester.

This policy provides students with general information regarding an Involuntary Leave of Absence. For more specific information regarding the circumstances and processes for an Involuntary Leave of Absence, as well as conditions relevant to returning from leave, students should speak with the Office of the Provost. Students are responsible for understanding the implications of an Involuntary Leave of Absence for housing, financial aid, health insurance, and progress toward the degree.

This policy will not be used in lieu of disciplinary actions to address violations of Mercyhurst University rules, regulations, or policies. A student who has engaged in behavior that may violate rules, regulations, or policies of the University community may be subject to discipline under the Mercyhurst University Conduct Code. A student may be required to participate in the disciplinary process coincident during the same time period that the student is on an Involuntary Leave of Absence. A student who is placed on an Involuntary Leave of Absence while on academic and/or disciplinary status will return on that same status.

Before an Involuntary Leave is considered, efforts may be made to encourage the student to take a Voluntary Medical Leave of Absence. These procedures are described in the Voluntary Medical Leave Policy. A readmission process is required of a student electing a Voluntary Medical Leave to determine his/her readiness to return to school (e.g., whether returning to school may increase the risk of self-harm and/or harm to others).

International students are advised that an Involuntary Leave of Absence will likely affect their student visa status and should consult with the International Students office on Mercyhurst University's Erie campus for more information.

When safety is an immediate concern, the Provost, or Vice President for Student Life may remove a student from the campus pending final decision on Involuntary Leave. If this action is deemed necessary, the student will be given notice of the removal. An opportunity to be heard by the Provost or Vice President for Student Life and, if desired, appeal the final decision, will be provided at a later time. In the event of an appeal, the administrator not involved in the original decision for the Involuntary Leave will hear the appeal.

Determining Whether Involuntary Leave is Appropriate

1. When an Involuntary Leave is under consideration, the Provost, Vice President for Student Life, or his/her designee, will notify the student in writing. In the Notification Letter the administrator will provide the student with information regarding procedures for an Involuntary Leave of Absence.
2. The Provost, Vice President for Student Life, or designee will gather information necessary to make an individualized and objective assessment of the student's ability to safely participate in his/her academic program and in the University community. The Provost, Vice President for Student Life, or designee may gather this information from various sources, including but not limited to campus administrators and faculty; Campus Police and Safety, Residence Life, and Student Outreach Committee (SOC).
3. In an effort to gather the most current information about the student, the student may be asked to consent to a psychological and/or medical evaluation. This evaluation will be completed by a licensed member of the Counseling Center staff for issues related to mental health or by the Health Center medical director or physician. This evaluation will be arranged through the Provost, Vice President for Student Life, or his/her designee's office. The student may also be asked to provide relevant medical and/or psychological information from his/her health care provider. If a student declines to consent to release the requested medical/psychological information this declination may be included along with all other available information in the decision whether to place the student on Leave.
4. Upon gathering relevant information, the recommendations of the above evaluations will be provided to the Provost, Vice President for Student Life, or designee for review/implementation.

If Involuntary Leave is Imposed

If a student is placed on an Involuntary Leave, the student's Mercyhurst University Identification Card must be returned to the Provost's office in the time period indicated in the Notification Letter. Occupied University housing must be vacated immediately.

The student may not visit the campus or any other University-owned facility except with the written permission of the Provost, Vice President for Student Life, or his/her designee. Such permission may be set forth in the Notification Letter. Otherwise, the student must remain off all Mercyhurst University campuses (Erie, North East, Booker T. Washington Center) during the period of Leave. Mercyhurst University Police and Safety and Mercyhurst University Housing and Dining Services will be notified of the student's Involuntary Leave status and will take appropriate steps to limit access of the student during the period of Leave. A transcript notation of "Withdrawn" may be noted on the student's transcript.

Appeal

A student who is placed on an Involuntary Leave may appeal the decision to the Provost or Vice President for Student Life. In the event of an appeal, the administrator not involved in the original decision for the Involuntary Leave will hear it. The appeal must be in writing, delineating the reason(s) why the student believes the decision is inappropriate. The administrator will review the student's appeal and uphold, reverse or alter the decision. This decision will be communicated to the student in writing and shall be considered final.

Return from Involuntary Leave

1. Requirements and deadlines relevant to the process for re-enrollment after an Involuntary Leave will be specified in the Letter of Notification.
2. All students returning from an Involuntary Leave will be required to have an assessment interview prior to being approved by the Provost or Vice President for Student Life for re-enrollment. If a psychological or physical illness contributed to the student's inability to remain safely on campus, this assessment will be conducted by the Mercyhurst Counseling and/or Health Center. In this event, the assessment process will include a clinical interview, and a review of relevant medical and/or psychological information from his/her health care provider(s) including from those providers utilized during the leave period. Students may additionally be asked to authorize his/her health care provider while they were on leave to provide their provider's recommendations and rationale regarding a return to campus. The Counseling and Health Center(s) may require additional testing or evaluation necessary for the assessment process, which may include referrals to providers outside of the Center. The Health and Counseling Center(s) assessments will not be conducted without the student first providing a signed

consent to care/evaluation at the Centers and a signed written consent for release of information to the appropriate Mercyhurst University administrator.

3. When a student's potential for violence is under review as part of the assessment of a student's readiness to re-enroll, Police and Safety may undertake a review of the student's behavior while on Leave, including, but not limited to, record of convictions, restraining orders, and interviews with individuals in a position to observe the student's behavior. Only findings relevant to the Involuntary Leave and the student's request for re-enrollment will be considered.
4. Upon gathering this information relevant to the student requesting to return from Involuntary Leave, the Provost, Vice President for Student Life, or designee will examine the materials presented and determine whether the student has demonstrated that it is appropriate for him/her to re-enroll and return to the University community.
5. The resulting decision will be provided to the student in writing. As needed, the Provost, Vice President for Student Life or his/her designee will notify the appropriate offices and administrators regarding the decision, and any relevant conditions thereof.
6. A student who fails to request re-enrollment upon the conclusion of an Involuntary Leave period may be denied permission to re-enroll at a later time.
7. Students who participated in campus housing prior to their Leave are not guaranteed housing upon re-enrollment.

Appeal

A student may appeal a decision denying re-enrollment to the Provost or Vice President for Student Life by submitting a written request for review of the decision. The administrator (Provost or Vice President for Student Life) that did not make the original decision to deny re-enrollment will review the student's appeal and all necessary additional information and will then render a decision, which shall be final.

Confidentiality

Mercyhurst University will maintain the confidentiality of all information regarding Involuntary Leaves of Absence in accordance with federal, state and local law, and to the greatest extent consistent with the goal of processing such Leaves. All records concerning Involuntary Leaves are confidential. The official copy of such records shall be retained by the Office of the Provost, and access to these records is limited by appropriate federal, state and local law.

Mercyhurst University reserves the right to notify a parent or guardian if deemed appropriate under the circumstances and as permitted by applicable federal, state, and local law.

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