

Policy Number: 402

Subject/Title: Enrollment Requirements, Degree Time Limits, and Leaves of Absence

Effective Date: Summer 2006

Policy Statement: Students at UTHealth SPH are encouraged to enroll continuously during their degree program. A steady pace in the educational process helps to ensure that the knowledge gained in basic courses can be applied in advanced courses and in practical experiences before that information is diminished by the passage of time. Secondly, continuous enrollment maintains the momentum of the program so that students may complete the degree in a timely manner and well before the time limit for the degree.

Students must be enrolled if they wish to access any school resources, including but not limited to the library, computers, and faculty time and effort. Other instances in which a student must be enrolled are listed under “Semesters of Required Enrollment.”

Full-Time Status

A student is classified “full-time” if enrolled in at least nine semester credit hours during the Fall or Spring semesters, and at least six semester credit hours during the Summer.

Time Limits for Degrees

Students are expected to complete Master’s degree programs (MPH and MS) within five (5) years of admission and doctoral degree programs (DrPH and PhD) within seven (7) years of admission. In case of extenuating circumstances, the student may request a one-year extension provided there is adequate justification. The possibility of a second year of extension exists for extraordinary circumstances. Students who do not graduate within the approved time limit will need to be readmitted to UTHealth SPH in order to complete the degree program.

Semesters of Required Enrollment

As provided in Policy Number 401 on Continuous Enrollment, students are required to be enrolled during the following semesters:

- the semester in which the proposal is submitted
- all semesters after the proposal is approved
- the semester in which the qualifying (or preliminary) examination is taken (for doctoral students only)
- any semester in which the student is involved in a practicum/internship
- the semester in which student completes the degree requirements

Non-Enrollment

The school recognizes that in some instances, students may need to take time away from their studies to attend to other important aspects and events in their lives. If such events are limited to a single semester during coursework, the student may choose not to enroll for that semester without unduly slowing the degree program. However, if the student needs to be away for more than one semester, a leave of absence should be seriously considered in order to preserve

continuing student status.

If the student is not granted a leave of absence and does not enroll for one calendar year (three consecutive semesters) the student is automatically dismissed from the School. To return and complete the degree, the student must be readmitted to the degree program.

Students seeking readmission to the School should contact the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs and Student Services for details regarding necessary application documents and procedures.

Leave of Absence (LOA)

Students who anticipate interrupting their degree program for more than two semesters should consider requesting a leave of absence (LOA). Students who have an approved leave of absence maintain their student status within the School. The LOA “stops the clock” on the student’s degree program and does not add to the timeline for completing the degree.

The LOA is requested by submitting a memorandum to the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs and Student Services explaining the reason(s) for the request and estimating the time away from the program. The memorandum should be signed by the student and the academic advisor. The LOA is granted for one calendar year. In extraordinary circumstances, a second year may be granted. LOAs do not extend beyond two years. Students who need to be away from the school for longer periods should consider withdrawing from the degree program and applying for readmission when their situation improves and the degree program can be given a higher priority.

It should be noted that during the Leave of Absence approved research protocols will be suspended, with notifications to the approval committees involved, until the student re-enrolls.

The student may enroll in classes at any time during the LOA if his/her situation changes and the LOA is no longer needed. Enrollment during or after the LOA period is done through the usual process with no added paperwork or procedures.

Discontinuation of Degree Program for Non-Enrollment

Students are automatically dropped from their degree program if they fail to register for classes after having sat out for a one calendar year period (total of three consecutive semesters). Once the program is discontinued, the student’s advisory committee is dissolved. Thus, students who wish to re-enroll must be readmitted to the School and an advisor (may be the same or different) is appointed during the admissions process. A simplified process of readmission exists, and readmission applications can be acted upon expeditiously.

Reason for Policy:

Definitions: N/A

Scope and Audience: All UTHealth SPH students.

Responsibilities and Procedures: Students are responsible for maintaining enrollment and time limits of their degree program.

Related Policies, Forms and Information:

[UTHealth SPH Policy 401, Continuous Enrollment](#) (click Policies tab)

History: Approved by Academic Council: December 8, 2005
Endorsed by Executive Council: December 15, 2005

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