

Effective Date: **January 25, 2022**

POLICY

ACADEMICS

Sick Leave Policy for PhD Students

RESPONSIBLE OFFICE

Office of the University Provost

1. Purpose (Rationale)

Boston University is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of our PhD students and has codified that commitment through policies that emphasize and draw attention to supporting students to take appropriate time away from their academic and scholarly responsibilities. These include our childbirth and adoption policy and our vacation policy for PhD students.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a gap in our policies, as students and departments/programs did not necessarily know: 1) the appropriate mechanisms for students to request short-term sick leave; 2) who should be involved in finding coverage for research or teaching related responsibilities; and 3) how disputes over sick leave are mediated or resolved. This policy seeks to fill the current policy gap at Boston University.

2. Covered Parties

All PhD Students at Boston University.

While this policy is specific to PhD students, the contours of the policy could be used as a

guide at the school/ college level for other terminal degree students supported by stipends.

3. University Policy

A. PhD students are entitled to 15 days of sick leave per calendar year regardless of their stipend funding source or the number of months (8, 10, or 12) of their stipend funding support. The need for sick leave commonly comes in consecutive days, and this policy seeks to ensure all students have an opportunity to take up to 15 consecutive days, if need be, regardless of the term of their stipend. Sick leave days do not roll over from year to year. 15 days was selected because this is the standard set by the National Institutes of Health for students funded on its grants.

B. This policy is primarily intended to enable students who experience unanticipated illness or injury to take a limited leave from their service responsibilities to recover and in the case of contagious illness to prevent spread to the Boston University community. Students whose illness or injury necessitates more than 15 days of leave should consider taking a leave of absence, following the [guidelines](#) established by Boston University.

C. Students are not permitted to use sick leave to schedule time away from what they consider undesirable academic or service responsibilities. In particular, time away from teaching responsibilities should generally be limited to unanticipated illnesses or injury.

D. Sick leaves are not permitted and will not be granted for anticipated or routine medical care that can be scheduled around teaching and research responsibilities. Routine appointments that need to be scheduled during service responsibilities because of limited appointment availability or urgent need must be scheduled in coordination with the student's primary advisor/mentor. This coordination will depend upon trust between students and faculty, since faculty may not ask students about the nature of their appointment.

E. This policy does not establish a formal process for tracking sick leave. We suggest that students and faculty each track leaves (perhaps retaining email exchanges). Should they prefer, schools/colleges may develop local policies and practices for approving or denying sick leave.

F. PhD students must inform the appropriate advisor(s)/ instructors(s)/ supervisor(s) in

writing (e.g. via email) in a timely way about their need for sick time.

G. Students who wish to take additional periods of time off beyond that for unanticipated illness or injury, paid or unpaid, must receive approval and are subject to funding agency restrictions. Again, following Boston University's leave of absence policy may be appropriate in some cases.

H. We wish to encourage students who are unwell to take sick leave. Generally, trusting students to only take leave when they are unwell is appropriate. That said, departments or programs may request a healthcare provider's note to certify a PhD student's unanticipated illness or injury. This should be coordinated with the Student Health Services. Departmental or program faculty and staff should not have direct access to students' private health information, including the reason for the sick leave.

I. If the need for sick-leave conflicts with time-sensitive teaching or research responsibilities, when possible, the PhD student should communicate this conflict to their advisor(s) in a timely fashion and, to the extent possible, help find a short-term replacement. Compensation for those that cover the responsibilities of a PhD student who is ill or injured, if any, are the responsibility of the school/ college in which the student is enrolled and/ or receives a stipend from and should be governed by the policies and procedures developed by the Schools/Colleges.

J. PhD students should not be required to make up days taken off because of illness or injury. Although students should be expected to make-up work where applicable, they should not be expected to make-up hours or days. Faculty and students should work together to create a flexible plan, adjusting priorities, expectations, and timelines to account for the sick days within students' extant time commitments.

K. Schools/Colleges should define and make transparent a process for resolution of situations in which the advisor(s)/supervisor(s)/mentor(s) do not approve a PhD student's sick leave and the student seeks to appeal that determination. In the event it is required, a final appeal may be made to the Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs.

L. Students who request sick leave in excess of the time allowed or request sick leave for purposes not related to medically certified illnesses may result in loss of stipend or program dismissal, subject to policies and procedures at the Schools/Colleges.

M. This policy should be communicated annually to all PhD students and faculty.

N. After two years, PhD students and faculty should be surveyed by the Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs to ascertain how well this policy is working. The Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs, along with Graduate Council and the Graduate Academic Programs and Policies committee of the University Council, should consider the results of this survey and determine whether revisions or amendments should be made to this policy.

4. Effective Date

The Sick Leave Policy for PhD Students takes effect immediately for the spring 2022 semester.

5. History

The Sick Leave Policy for PhD Students was drafted by the University Council Committee on Graduate Academic Programs & Policies, in consultation with a task force of faculty, staff, and PhD students appointed by the University Provost. It was approved by the University Council on 1/25/22.

6. Additional Consultative Bodies

See 5. History.

7. Responsible Parties

Schools/ colleges, departments/ programs, faculty advisors/mentors, PhD students, Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs.

END OF POLICY TEXT

Additional Resources Regarding This Policy

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Categories: Academics, Registration and Attendance Keywords: grad sick, grad student sick, grad student sick leave, graduate, graduate ick leave, graduate student, graduate student sick, graduate student sick leave, PhD, PhD sick, sick, sick leave PhD, Sick Leave Policy for PhD Students, student sick