

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL Los Angeles, CA

Leave of Absence and Return Policy

Administrative policy. Effective immediately.

Revision history: Formerly a part of the Academic Policies and Procedures; established as a standalone policy in September 2025.

Related policies: Student Health-Related Leave of Absence and Return Policy; Incomplete Grade Policy; Disability Accommodations Policy (Including Standards for the Study of Law); Student's Right to Cancel and Tuition Refund Policy; Federal Financial Aid Eligibility Policy; Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy; Return of Title IV Funds Policy; Attendance Policy; SCALE Program Policies; Student Records Policy – FERPA; Withdrawing from Southwestern; Student Honor Code; Code of Student Professionalism and Conduct; Length of Study for the J.D. Degree Policy (for students entering in or after August 2025); Length of Study for the J.D. Degree Policy (for students entering before August 2025); Student Complaint and Grievance Policy and Procedures (Including Complaints Implicating ABA Standards) (in development)

Related forms: Leave of Absence - Withdrawal Form; Request to Re-Enroll Form

Scheduled Review Date: June 2026 (Student Services Office)

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- A. **Overview and Scope**

Students are generally expected to complete their degree program without interruption. However, Southwestern Law School recognizes that students may face financial or personal circumstances that impact their ability to remain in school. This policy provides a path to pause studies when necessary and return following an approved leave of absence.

This policy outlines the standard and process for a student to request a voluntary leave of absence and the procedure for returning from such a leave.

The policy also describes the circumstances under which the school may impose a leave of absence due to consecutive absences and the process associated with that involuntary leave.

This policy applies to students in all degree programs, whether residential or online.

This policy does not apply to a student requesting a health-related leave related to their own health or pregnancy; for those situations, students should follow Southwestern's *Student Health-Related Leave of Absence and Return Policy*.

If a student is ineligible for a leave of absence or does not follow this policy and stops attending classes, the Student Services Office will address the matter under Section G.2 below (Leave of absence due to consecutive absences) or the *Administrative Withdrawal Policy*.

B. Requesting a Leave of Absence

A student may request a leave of absence after they have completed at least one full semester or, for SCALE students, at least Quarter 1. A student who does not meet this threshold may withdraw from Southwestern and reapply later, and proceed through the regular admissions process. There is no guarantee that a student who withdraws will be readmitted.

1. Leaves under the good-cause standard

When an eligible student requests a first leave of absence with the intent to return the next required term, Southwestern will evaluate the request using a *good-cause* standard. This type of leave typically lasts one full term (e.g., a semester or SCALE quarter), except in two cases: (a) a student who takes a leave of absence in the spring semester of their first year and wishes to return in the following spring semester to complete the first-year curriculum sequence must take a one-year leave; and (b) a SCALE student who intends to return to SCALE must take a one year leave (after SCALE Quarter 6, an earlier return is possible but will require the returning student to enroll in non-SCALE courses).

Generally, "good cause" exists when the student demonstrates a legitimate, time-limited need to interrupt studies that is common to the reasonable course of life and that cannot be accommodated while the student remains enrolled. Non-exhaustive examples of these circumstances include short-term caregiving responsibilities for an immediate family member; temporary jury or other government service; or unforeseen financial or personal hardships that can be resolved within one term. The student must provide documentation to support the requested leave. Students on academic probation are not eligible for a good-cause leave; those requests will be evaluated under the extraordinary-cause standard.

2. Leaves under the extraordinary-cause standard

Any request for (a) a subsequent leave of absence, (b) a leave that would extend the total interruption beyond one required term and does not fall into one of the two exceptions above, or (c) a leave sought by a student on academic probation will be evaluated under the *extraordinary-cause* standard. "Extraordinary cause" requires a showing of severe, unexpected, and continuing circumstances that make academic progress impracticable despite reasonable efforts to remain enrolled. Non-exhaustive examples include a catastrophic accident or disaster resulting in displacement; or a unique professional or educational opportunity of substantial and documented significance to the student's legal career that cannot be deferred. The petition must be accompanied by detailed corroboration (such as law-enforcement reports or official agency letters) and will be reviewed by the Associate Dean for Student Services in consultation with a Vice Dean. For students granted a leave under the extraordinary-cause standard, Southwestern

may impose conditions for their return, such as undergoing an academic skills assessment or developing a structured reintegration plan.

Decisions regarding leave requests are generally made within 5 to 7 business days after the Student Services Office receives the request for a leave of absence. The Associate Dean for Student Services' decision may be delayed if information needed to determine academic standing is unavailable.

A student involved in a disciplinary process, who is about to be referred for a disciplinary process, who is on academic probation, or who is facing academic disqualification may request a leave of absence. However, Southwestern will make an individualized determination about whether (a) the student will be granted a leave of absence and (b) the discipline or academic process should proceed or be tolled until the student's return.

An eligible student may request a leave of absence by completing (a) a meeting with the Associate Dean for Student Services and (b) the Leave of Absence - Withdrawal Form.

A student who was not in good academic standing at the start of a leave will continue under the same academic status upon return, with any prior academic plans/conditions still in effect.

Taking or being placed on a leave of absence from Southwestern does not prevent Southwestern from issuing an academic determination (e.g., Incomplete, Administrative Withdrawal), a grade, or any resulting academic determinations for a completed term or course.

Students may request a leave of absence at any time before they have completed 80% or more of a term, or, for a mostly asynchronous course, before they have completed 80% or more of the required asynchronous coursework. After a student has completed 80% of a term, or 80% of the required asynchronous coursework in a mostly asynchronous course, the Student Services Offices will instead consider granting an Incomplete in one or more courses under Southwestern's *Incomplete Grade Policy*. For an upcoming term, a student may submit a leave of absence request at any time before the term begins and until they have completed 80% of that term, or, for a mostly asynchronous course, 80% of the required asynchronous coursework.

To determine whether a student has completed 80% of a term or of the required asynchronous coursework in a mostly asynchronous course, Southwestern uses the instructional period in the official academic calendars published on the school's website. For the standard semester or quarter schedule, the instructional period begins on the first day of classes and continues through the last day of instruction, excluding Study Days and the final exam period. The completion percentage of the term is calculated by dividing the number of calendar days at the point when the student makes the leave request (or the day on which the student proposes to start the leave) by the total number of days in the instructional period. If that percentage is less than 80%, the student remains eligible to request a leave of absence. Once the 80% threshold is

reached, the student may instead request or be considered for an Incomplete in individual course(s) under the *Incomplete Grade Policy*.

C. Determination and Length

A leave of absence under the good-cause standard will be allowed in the discretion of the Associate Dean for Student Services so long as the leave does not exceed one academic term (unless it falls within one of the two exceptions in B.1 above) and does not prevent the student from graduating within the maximum time allowed for completing the JD. Degree (see the paragraph immediately below for more information on the maximum time allowed for completion of the J.D. degree). A leave of absence under the extraordinary-cause standard will be allowed at the discretion of the Associate Dean for Student Services, in consultation with the Vice Dean, so long as the leave does not exceed one academic year and does not prevent the student from graduating within the maximum time allowed for completion of the J.D. degree.

For students who entered prior to August 2025, the maximum period for completion is 84 months from the commencement of law study at Southwestern or at a law school from which transfer credit has been accepted. For students entering in or after August 2025, the maximum period for completion is 72 months from the commencement of law study at Southwestern or at a law school from which transfer credit has been accepted.

Unless the leave falls within one of the two exceptions in B.1 above, a leave of absence under the good-cause standard typically is limited to one full term (e.g., a semester or SCALE quarter), and an extraordinary-cause leave is required for a leave lasting up to one academic year. Although a leave of absence typically will not exceed one academic year, the Associate Dean for Student Services, in consultation with the Vice Dean, may extend the leave when the student provides sufficient documentation supporting the continuation.

If the Associate Dean for Student Services, in consultation with the Vice Dean when required under this policy, approves the leave of absence, the Associate Dean will notify the student and forward the leave form to the Registrar's Office for handling.

D. Additional Components of the Leave of Absence Process

A student who is taking a leave of absence must complete (i) an exit interview with the Student Services Office, (ii) a meeting with the Financial Aid Office to discuss the consequences of the leave on federal financial aid and satisfactory academic progress, and (iii) a meeting with the Accounting Office to discuss tuition payment consequences, if any.

E. Implications of a Leave of Absence

1. Association with Southwestern

Unless expressly permitted by the Associate Dean for Student Services, a student on leave will not be permitted to be on campus or participate in any Southwestern-sanctioned events or activities on or off campus, attend or

participate in any Southwestern class, participate in academic, co-curricular, or extracurricular activities, or on-campus employment.

A student on leave may request advance written permission from the Associate Dean for Student Services to use certain campus facilities or attend specific events if it supports their continued academic progress or well-being. The Associate Dean for Student Services has discretion to grant, grant in part, or deny the request.

A student on leave will retain access to their Southwestern email.

2. Services and student status

Students on leave typically retain their admitted student status; however, they are not registered and do not have the rights and privileges of registered students. For example, students on leave cannot access the Career Services Office, including Symplicity, individual career counseling, on-campus interviewing, and on- or off-campus Career Services Office events or programs. Students on leave will have access to BisonCares and, subject to eligibility and payment requirements, student health insurance. The Associate Dean for Student Services will address possible exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

3. Transcript notation

When a voluntary leave is granted, the Registrar will enter a "Leave of Absence" notation on the student's transcript. The student will receive a "W" on their academic transcript if the leave is taken after the add/drop period for any courses not yet completed when the leave is taken. If the leave occurs during the add/drop period, the student will be dropped from classes without any notation on the transcript indicating that they left. Thus, a leave will not affect the student's grade point average.

4. Tuition, financial aid, and scholarships

Federal financial aid eligibility may be impacted by leaves of over 180 days. Students with questions about how a leave of absence might affect federal financial aid should contact the Financial Aid Office.

A portion of the tuition paid by the student for courses not fulfilled during the term in which the leave occurs may be refunded under Southwestern's *Student's Right to Cancel and Tuition Refund Policy* and *Return of Title IV Funds Policy*, if applicable. Southwestern will send any refunds not required to be returned to the Department of Education to the student via direct deposit. Subject to the specific terms of the scholarship, if a student goes on leave, Southwestern will reinstate their scholarship upon their return to Southwestern, provided they remain eligible for it. A student on leave will not receive a class rank for the year of the leave and will not be considered for a Dean's Merit Scholarship.

Due to provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill, passed in July 2025, students who take or are placed on a leave of absence during the 2025–2026 academic year may be subject to new restrictions that did not apply previously.

- Voluntary leave: Students considering a leave should contact the Financial Aid Office in advance to discuss the potential impact of these restrictions.
- School-initiated leave: Students placed on a leave by the school must meet with the Financial Aid Office to review how the new federal loan rules apply to them. Completing this financial aid review is mandatory both when the leave begins and before the student may return.

5. Housing

Unless expressly permitted by the Associate Dean for Student Services, if the student resides in The Residences, Southwestern may terminate the lease according to the terms and conditions of the lease and provide notice to vacate to the student. Southwestern may also prohibit the student from visiting The Residences. Students may be eligible to receive a pro-rata refund of their housing charges. The Associate Dean for Student Services will consult with the Chief Operating Officer when considering exceptions to this section.

6. Incomplete grades

If granted, a leave of absence does not extend the period within which a student must clear an Incomplete grade unless explicitly extended by the Associate Dean for Student Services. Students should also consult the *Incomplete Grade Policy*.

7. Leadership positions

A student on leave is not eligible to participate in or hold a leadership position in a Southwestern student organization or Honors Program during the leave period.

8. Curriculum and graduation requirements

The curriculum and graduation requirements in effect at the time of the student's return from an approved leave of absence generally will apply. However, a change in the number of credit hours in a required course the student has already completed will not operate to the returning student's detriment. In addition, the Associate Dean for Student Services may grant the student a waiver if the change(s) that occurred as a result of the student's leave will extend their anticipated graduation date.

9. Other law schools

Unless expressly requested in the leave request and expressly granted by the Associate Dean for Student Services, no student may attend another law school while on a leave of absence.

F. Process for Returning from a Leave

A student returning from a leave of absence must complete and submit to the Student Services Office a Request to Re-Enroll Form at least one month before the first day of the semester, quarter, or term in which they are scheduled to return to Southwestern.

After a student notifies Southwestern of their intent to return, a member of the Student Services Office will contact the student to schedule a meeting to discuss the details of the planned return (e.g., reviewing academic progress, any requirement changes, academic advising, etc.).

As noted in Section B, for leaves granted under the extraordinary-cause standard, Southwestern retains discretion to impose conditions for the student's return.

Once a student is approved to return, they will be given access to register for classes; class options may be limited depending on when the student registers.

Any returning student who had approved disability accommodations will retain those accommodations, subject to the usual review process.

If the student does not plan to return to Southwestern, the student should notify the Associate Dean for Student Services at their earliest convenience. Any student who does not return following the expiration of their leave or after their return has been approved will be assumed to have permanently withdrawn from Southwestern. They will be readmitted only upon submitting a new entering student application for admission using regular admissions channels. There is no guarantee that the student will be readmitted.

A student who fails to enroll in any semester, quarter, or term and has not been granted a leave of absence will be deemed to have withdrawn from Southwestern.

G. Provisions Applicable to Specific Types of Leave

1. Leave of absence for students called to military service

Students seeking a leave of absence related to U.S. military or other national security service should contact the Associate Dean for Student Services to coordinate a formal leave from Southwestern.

The student must intend to return to Southwestern within the granted leave period, which typically should not exceed one calendar year. Under extenuating circumstances, the Associate Dean may grant an extension.

The student must attach a copy of the orders to report or proof of active service to the leave of absence request form.

For periods of less than 30 days, students should contact the Associate Dean for Student Services to determine if appropriate arrangements can be made or if a leave is necessary.

As required by federal law, Southwestern will promptly readmit students returning from military service with the same academic status they had when they left.

2. Leave of absence due to consecutive absences

To comply with Title IV requirements, Southwestern will place a student on a leave of absence if they are absent for 14 consecutive calendar days or fail to log into their online class and complete any academic work for 14 consecutive calendar days.

If a student has failed to (a) attend all classes or (b) log into their online class and complete any academic work for a seven-day period, the Student Services Office will make attempts to contact the student. If the student is unresponsive, once the student has been absent or inactive for 14 consecutive calendar days, the Student Services Office (or designee) will notify the student in writing that they are being placed on a leave of absence effective as of the fourteenth day after the last date of academic activity or attendance. The notice will include information on the impact of the leave on the student's financial aid and academic progress and will provide instructions for the student to contact the Student Services Office to discuss plans for return and to address any questions about the leave.

3. Leave of absence for students enrolled in the Online J.D. Program who temporarily move to a state where Southwestern is not enrolling students

Students seeking a leave of absence for a temporary move (i.e., less than one calendar year) to a state where Southwestern is not enrolling students should contact the Associate Dean for Student Services to coordinate a formal leave of absence from Southwestern.

The student must intend to return to Southwestern within the granted leave period, which typically should not exceed one calendar year. Under extenuating circumstances, the Associate Dean for Student Services may grant an extension.

Students with a longer or permanent change of residence should also contact the Student Services Office to review transfer opportunities and other options.

H. Recordkeeping

Documentation generated in connection with administering this policy will generally be kept in the official student file. At a minimum, a document reflecting the student's leave of absence and any return from the leave will be maintained in the official student file.

I. Policy Revisions

Southwestern expressly reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without prior notice.