



YALE COLLEGE COUNCIL

Recommendations for Improvement to
Withdrawal and Leave of Absence Policies

March 2014

Recommendations for Improvement to Withdrawal and Leave of Absence Policies

YALE COLLEGE COUNCIL MENTAL HEALTH TASK FORCE

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR REFORM:

1. Students who are not facing disciplinary action should not feel as though they are being punished.
2. To the extent possible, students taking time away from Yale should be made to feel in control of the process.

BIG IDEAS:

1. Many students are discouraged from taking leaves of absence because the option expires very early in the semester. Many students feel punished when choosing or being forced to withdraw. Whenever possible, students should be permitted to choose a voluntary leave of absence instead of involuntary leave. The terms “leave of absence” and “withdrawal” should apply only to students taking time away from Yale for non-disciplinary reasons.
2. Many students feel that when they take time off from Yale, they are unfairly cut off from resources, forced to spend more time away than needed, or required to complete unnecessary tasks for readmission. The terms of readmission for leaves of absence and withdrawals—whether voluntary or involuntary—should permit consideration of individual circumstance.
3. Many students express confusion about the terms of leave and withdrawal policies. Students are also unclear about the confidentiality of their patient records. Readmission procedures are opaque and not timely. Comprehensive information about withdrawal, leave of absence, patient confidentiality, and readmission should be easy to access and understand.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Whenever possible, students should be permitted to choose a voluntary leave of absence instead of involuntary leave. The terms “leave of absence” and “withdrawal” should apply only to students taking time away from Yale for non-disciplinary reasons.
 - 1.1. **Extension of Voluntary Leave Petition Deadline**
 - **Current policy:** Students may petition for a voluntary leave of absence until the tenth day of a semester. Students on a voluntary leave of absence may take one or two semesters off and can usually return to Yale following no more procedure than simply notifying their dean. After the tenth day, students may voluntarily withdraw. Students on voluntary withdrawal may be required to spend as many as two semesters away from Yale, not including the one in which they withdrew. To return to Yale, students on voluntary withdrawal must be readmitted.
 - **Proposed Modification:** Students should be permitted to take a voluntary leave of absence until midterm. After midterm students should be permitted to take a voluntary leave of absence with a minimum duration of the semester’s remainder and the following semester.
 - **Rationale:** Many students attempt to remain enrolled after the period for requesting a voluntary leave of absence expires because they do not want to stay away from Yale for as long as withdrawal policy stipulates. These students are often unable to perform at their full capacity, and the conditions that led them to consider time off may worsen. A longer period during which students could elect to take voluntary leave would permit students to make healthier decisions.
 - 1.2. **Distinction of Leave of Absence and Withdrawal vs. Rustication**
 - **Current policy:** Students taking time away from Yale may be on voluntary leave of absence, voluntary medical withdrawal, involuntary medical withdrawal, voluntary withdrawal for personal reasons, or involuntary withdrawal for disciplinary reasons.
 - **Proposed modification:** Students taking time away from Yale for non-disciplinary reasons should be on leave of absence or withdrawn. Students taking time away from Yale for disciplinary reasons should be considered rusticated. This classification leads to only four outcomes:

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1. Students may elect voluntary leave of absence.
 2. Students may elect voluntary withdrawal.
 3. Students may be involuntarily withdrawn.
 4. Students being disciplined may be rusticated.
- **Rationale:** Students report feeling punished when the time they take away from Yale is classified the same way as that of students being disciplined. In addition, students withdrawn for medical reasons are forced to disclose details about their medical history to potential employers, fellowships, or graduate programs viewing their transcripts in order to distinguish themselves from students who were disciplined.
2. The terms of readmission for leaves of absence and withdrawals—whether voluntary or involuntary—should permit consideration of individual circumstance.

2.1. Access to University Resources

- **Current policy:** Some students withdrawn for personal or medical reasons are considered not in good academic standing.
- **Proposed modification:** All students taking time away from Yale for non-disciplinary reasons should be permitted to petition for access to UCS resources, library resources, and fellowship funding.
- **Rationale:** Access to particular University resources may enhance certain students' capacity to be productive and healthy while taking time off.

2.2. Determination of Requirements for Return

- **Current policy:** Students withdrawn and some students on leave may only return to Yale if they fulfill a standard set of requirements. These typically include taking courses, finding part- or full-time employment, or seeking care for physical or psychiatric ailments.
- **Proposed modification:** Residential college Deans should determine a set of requirements for return, in consultation with students on voluntary leave of absence, tailored to the students' needs. Yale Health care providers may require that students on either voluntary or involuntary leave of absence seek physical or psychiatric care as a condition of their return. In many cases, documentation from healthcare providers should be the only requirement for return.

- **Rationale:** The Yale College Programs of Study mandates that students be “constructively occupied” while taking time away. This statement is vague and merits clarification specific to individual circumstance. Neither students nor Yale administrators benefit from a student fulfilling pro forma requirements that do not correspond to their fitness for enrollment.

2.3. Consideration of Students’ Financial Means

- **Current policy:** Students’ financial means are not considered in determination of requirements for readmission.
- **Proposed modification:** Consideration of students’ financial means should factor into requirements for return or readmission.
- **Rationale:** Required coursework and counseling are expensive and can have a disparate impact on low-income students’ chances for return or readmission.

2.4. Student Affiliate Coverage

- **Current policy:** Only students on voluntary leaves of absence may apply for Student Affiliate Coverage at Yale Health.
- **Proposed modification:** All students taking time away from Yale for non-disciplinary reasons should be eligible to apply for Student Affiliate Coverage at Yale Health.
- **Rationale:** Some students elect to remain near campus during their term of absence. Students may benefit from continuing with their local healthcare provider.

2.5. Readmission Notification Timeline

- **Current policy:** Students receive decisions about readmission only weeks or days before the start of the semester in which they hope to enroll.
- **Proposed modification:** Decisions about readmission or return should come at least one month in advance of the new semester.
- **Rationale:** Current policies burden returning students unnecessarily. Students report that it is psychologically taxing to await a late decision and financially burdensome to arrange last-minute travel. Additionally, students intending to live off-campus must sign leases far in advance of their readmission decision, a further financial burden.

3. Comprehensive information about withdrawal, leave of absence, patient confidentiality, and readmission should be easy to access and understand.

3.1. Information Consolidation

- **Current policy:** N/A
- **Proposed revision:** Information about leave of absence, withdrawal, readmission, and rebates for tuition, financial aid, room, board, and health care should all be on the same website.
- **Rationale:** Information about taking time away from Yale is currently housed across at least four locations, an unnecessary difficulty for students.

3.2 Medical Record Confidentiality

- **Current policy:** None available
- **Proposed revision:** Information about patient confidentiality should be available to students during their time away from Yale.
- **Rationale:** Students who submit their medical records for return or readmission are not made aware of who can access these records, or whether these parties are healthcare providers. An incoherent policy risks violations of medical privacy.

4. Miscellaneous

4.1. ID Card Retention

- **Current policy:** Students report they are asked to surrender their student IDs when withdrawing.
- **Proposed revision:** The ID cards of students taking time away from Yale for non-disciplinary reasons should not be confiscated.
- **Rationale:** Students report the policy is symbolically distressing. Students who graduate are permitted to keep their ID cards; deactivation should suffice in both scenarios.

4.2. More Time to Move Out

- **Current policy:** Some students report they were given only 24 hours to move out after being withdrawn.
- **Proposed revision:** Students taking time away from Yale for non-disciplinary reasons should have at least three days to move out.
- **Rationale:** Leaving Yale is stressful, exhausting, and expensive, especially for students who have limited financial means or who live far away. It can also be distressing for students who do not have enough time to explain their situation and say goodbye to their peers. More time to leave Yale would make the physical move-out easier and help students feel more in control of the process.