

Policy Number: 402

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

Effective Date: Summer 2006

Policy Statement:

Students at UTHealth Houston School of Public Health 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.”

Fall and Spring Semester Enrollment Requirement

All students enrolled in fall and spring semesters are subject to a three (3) semester credit hours per semester minimum. Dual degree students may be granted an exception to the minimum semester credit hour load requirement based on the needs of their programs. Students are not required to enroll in a semester credit hour minimum for the summer semester. Students completing a thesis or dissertation are required to enroll in the summer semester; see [Policy 401 Continuous Enrollment for Student Enrolled in Thesis or Dissertation Research](#) for more information. Students sponsored on F-1 visas should discuss additional enrollment requirements with their advisor at the Office of International Affairs.

Full-Time Status

A student is classified as “full-time” if enrolled in at least nine (9) semester credit hours during the Fall or Spring semesters, and at least six (6) 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.

Program Extensions

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 Houston School of Public Health in order to complete the degree program.

Semesters of Required Enrollment

Students are required to be enrolled during the following semesters:

- any semester in which the student is involved in a Practicum
 - the semester in which the student completes the degree requirements and applies for graduation
- Students completing a thesis or dissertation have additional enrollment requirements. See [Policy 401 Continuous Enrollment for Student Enrolled in Thesis or Dissertation Research](#) for more information.

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 (1) semester, a leave of absence (LOA) should be seriously considered in order to preserve continuing student status.

If the student is not granted a LOA and does not enroll for one calendar year (three (3) 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 for details regarding necessary application documents and procedures.

Leave of Absence (LOA)

Students who anticipate interrupting their degree program for more than two (2) semesters should consider requesting a LOA. Students who have an approved LOA 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 Director of Academic Affairs 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 (1) calendar year. In extraordinary circumstances, a second year may be granted. LOAs do not extend beyond two (2) 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 LOA, 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 (1) calendar year period (total of three (3) consecutive semesters). Once the program is discontinued, the student’s advisory committee is dissolved. Thus, students who wish to reenroll 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 School of Public Health students.

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

Related Policies, Forms and Information:

- [Policy 401 Continuous Enrollment for Student Enrolled in Thesis or Dissertation Research](#)

History:

- Approved by Academic Council: December 8, 2005
- Endorsed by Executive Council: December 15, 2005
- Updated by Academic Council: March 21, 2022

Responsible Office/Contact Information:

Office of Academic Affairs and Student Services
Office Phone: 713-500-9032
E-mail: SPHStudentServices@uth.tmc.edu