



Taking a Gap Year:
*Considerations and
Planning*

Office of Student Affairs

Why take a gap year(s) during medical school?

- Personal/Medical/Life Circumstances
- Personal or Professional Growth and Development
 - Dual Degree
 - Research
 - Service
 - Advocacy
 - Other

Considerations for taking a gap year?

- Is it necessary/advised?
- Do you want to do it? Are you excited about it?
- Does it support your mission/brand? And how ...
- Will the experience make me a more competitive residency applicant?
- Does it make sense right now?
- If is logistically feasible right now?
- How does it impact my schedule/timeline/graduation trajectory?
- Have I considered the pros/cons?
- How can I make the most out of the time?

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Most students will later share with us that the experience was worth while

How is a gap year perceived?

In general, gap years are:

- Supported by SOM
- Perceived positively by future residency programs
 - *especially if they fit your mission/brand*
 - * especially if you can speak eloquently about that time*
 - *time/gap must be explained*

Additional-degrees

- Students accepted into an approved dual-degree program

A leave from the traditional 4-year curriculum; but not technically a leave

In some scenarios (UMBC/College Park) student services shift to alternative campus

Fulfills FRCT scholarly requirements

DD requirements must be completed by Jan of graduating year

- Formal LOA for degrees obtained from external programs
 - A true leave is required
 - Activities may or may not fulfill FRCT requirements
 - Must complete full degree before your return

Leave of Absence (and other associated) Policy

- Leave of Absence Policy, [Link](#)

Students meet with OSA to initiate process

Leave must be approved by the Dean's Office

Leave must be explained in MSPE

Leave for Personal/Prof Development is taken after completion of clerkships

- The "Six Year Rule" states that students must graduate within six years of matriculation which includes leave time (but excluded formal participation in a dual degree program)

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Academic History: Extensions, Leaves, Gaps or Breaks:

“[Student] took an approved leave of absence to participate in a research fellowship from [DATE], returning to the curriculum on [DATE].”

Initiating any break from the curriculum (e.g. Gap/Leave)

- Step 1: Meet with OSA
 - * *If associated with research, Meet with OSR*
- Step 2: Written request for leave addressed to Dean (given to OSA)
- Step 3: Attend to and complete the [LOA Checklist](#); submit to OSA
 - **Contact Student Accounts to clear balances*
 - **Contact Financial Aid to discuss impact*
- Step 4: OSA will process approvals, status changes, drops

Timing

- Recommend starting process about 6 months before planned leave.
- Confirm plans within 8-12 weeks of planned leave

What does it mean to be on “Leave” – *elements of the checklist*

- You are on an approved leave from the medical school curriculum
- You are NOT a registered student and are not paying tuition/fees

Unable to access to campus services (student health, counseling, gym...)

Not eligible for student health, accident, or disability insurance

Not covered under SOM malpractice insurance

Cannot register for/take courses for credit at UMSOM / UMB

Not eligible for financial aid

Are there other options?

- Unscheduled block/blocks (clinical years)
- Research Elective* - 1-2 credits towards graduation in Adv Clinical Phase
Requires prior approval (6-8 weeks) from Dr. Carey/Course Director
- Decelerated Curriculum
Extends Graduation
Results in part-time student status
May incur additional tuition and fees

When to take leave and scheduling considerations

- Individual OSA consultation
- New/Spring term starts July 7, 2025
- Careful balance between maximizing gap experience, creating ideal schedule, and financial implications
- Recommend at least one Advanced Rotation before leave
- TAKE STEP 2 EARLY IN YOUR LEAVE!!!!

Advanced Clinical Phase				
Term	Block	Month	Notes	Sample Schedule
Spring	11	May	Advise: Clerkship/Elective	Elective # 1
	12	Jun	Start leave and take Step 2 <i>2-week vacation; no rotations</i>	Step 2 / OFF
Fall	1	Jul	Begin leave activities	One-year LOA
	2	Aug		
	3	Sep		
	4	Oct		
	5	Nov		
	6	Dec		
Spring	7	Jan	Early Return would incur additional tuition/fees	
	8	Feb		
	9	Mar		
	10	Apr		
	11	May		
	12/	Jun		
Fall	1	Jul	Return after 1 year leave	Sub I # 1
	2	Aug		Elective #2 (or Away)
	3	Sep		Elective #3 (Ambulatory)
	****RESIDENCY APPLICATIONS DUE ~ 9/25*****			
	4	Oct		Elective #4
	5	Nov		OFF
	6	Dec		OFF
Spring	7	Jan		Sub I # 2
	8	Feb		Elective # 5
	9	Mar		OFF
	10	Apr		TTR
	Graduation			Graduation

Schedule can be personalized:

- Outstanding clerkships completed block 11/12 before leave
- 1-2 pre-clerkship electives translates to additional "Off" months
- Most students use 1 month off for interviews

Graduation Requirements

- One SI or Elective in IM
- One SI or Elective is Ambulatory
- At least one Clinical in last semester

While you are on leave

- Check emails!

While on leave, you should routinely check your SOM email

Note you will likely receive emails from two class listservs (original/new)

Respond to important emails/expectations (e.g., clinical scheduling)

- Keep SOM up to date with your status through regular check ins

All - Routine check ins with OSA

Research - Routine check ins with OSR/Dr. Carey

Status checks - are you on track to meet your own goals?

What else should I be doing during my leave?

- Consider re-evaluating your mission/brand and identify activities to support
- Join a national medical society (or two!) and get involved
- Consider reengaging with service/volunteering
- Spend some time shadowing in your desired field (remember you do NOT have malpractice, so shadowing ONLY)
- Take a course that supports your interests

Returning from leave

- Notify OSA of your intention to return at least 8-weeks prior
Failure to do so may result in inability to register or withdrawal
- All students must attest to meeting technical standards prior to return
- May have additional requirements depending on circumstances of leave
- Student status, including class and graduation date, will be updated

Resources

- Renaissance Curriculum Graduation Requirements

<https://www.medschool.umaryland.edu/osa/handbook/school-policies/graduation-requirements/>

- Residency Handbook

<https://www.medschool.umaryland.edu/osa/residency-application-manual/>

- MedScope Class Page

<https://medscope.umaryland.edu/pg/cl/SOM2026>

- ****Be sure you are receiving listserve emails for new class**

Peer Ambassadors



Darrian McAfee (Neurosurgery)

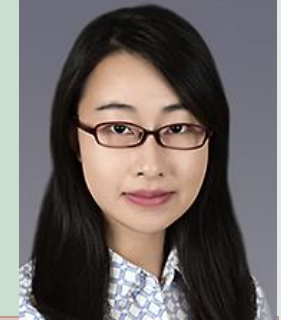
dmcafee1@som.umaryland.edu

"As part of the NIH Medical Scholars Research Program, I am conducting research in a lab focused on cellular biology and neuroscience. We use neurons, derived from CRISPR-edited stem cells, to investigate the molecular changes underpinning Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and Frontotemporal Dementia. My specific role involves using computer-automated design and Python coding to fully automate our optical pooled genetic screens."

Jenny Saito

ysaito@som.umaryland.edu

"I am conducting molecular and computational biology research in cutaneous oncology as a fellow in the NIH Medical Research Scholars Program (MRSP)."



Seray Er

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"I am a Sarnoff Fellowship recipient conducting regenerative medicine research in the lab of Dr. Sashank Reddy at The Johns Hopkins Hospital. My research focuses on understanding the molecular and cellular underpinnings of age-related regenerative decline using a wound-induced hair neogenesis (WIHN) mouse model."

Questions?