

# Taking a Leave of Absence: A Guide for Campus Leadership, Faculty, & Staff

*Commissioned by the Ruderman Family Foundation*

**SUPPORTING STUDENTS** TAKING A LEAVE OF ABSENCE



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*Developed in collaboration with*

**THE CENTER FOR PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION**

**THE RUDERMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION**

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## A Word From . . .

### ▶ **THE RUDERMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION**

The Ruderman Family Foundation is an internationally recognized organization that advocates for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in our society. The Foundation supports effective programs, innovative partnerships and a dynamic approach to philanthropy in advocating for and advancing the inclusion of people with disabilities throughout the United States and the world. The Ruderman Family Foundation believes that inclusion and understanding of all people is essential to a fair and flourishing community and imposes these values within its leadership and funding. Guided by our Jewish values, we advocate for and advance the inclusion of people with disabilities throughout our society; strengthen the relationship between Israel and the American Jewish Community; and model the practice of strategic philanthropy worldwide. We operate as a non-partisan strategic catalyst in cooperation with government, private sectors, civil society, and philanthropies.

### ▶ **THE CENTER FOR PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION**

Over the years, we have had the pleasure of working with hundreds of diverse, bright, talented students who are living with mental health challenges and substance use conditions including thought disorders, affective disorders, anxiety disorders, trauma, and addictions . We operate on the premise that all students thrive when their wellness and resiliency skills support their academic, social, and work lives . We believe in recovery from mental health and substance use conditions, and the power of peers, mentoring, collaboration, mutuality, and inclusive communities.

## I. Using this Guide



This guide is uniquely designed to provide **practical and evidence-based approaches and recommendations to staff, faculty, and college/university leadership so that they can provide a culture of caring and support to students who take a leave.**

The suggestions included in this Guide, and its supplemental tool, “Taking a Leave of Absence: A Guide for College Students”, are not specific to any college or university or program. They are transferrable to any institution of higher education, providing all members of campus- from clinicians and advisors to deans and faculty- with practical strategies to assist students in their decision-making around taking a leave of absence, as well as returning and thriving at their institutions.

***Research has shown a strong connection between mental health and academic success during college.***

**- EISENBERG, GOLBERSTEIN & HUNT (2009)**

## II. Critical Values that Support this Implementation Guide



Shared values provide a framework for living and learning at every institution of higher education. Values shape attitudes, behaviors, and ultimately, they result in outcomes. **The critical values of this implementation guide are:**

- **Student-Centeredness:** Higher education institutions respect students' whole-person experiences including their strengths, interests, goals, and challenges. They seek to have, and expect, the same social, academic, vocational, and experiential opportunities. Opportunities for learning and growth should be central to all policies, practices, and procedures.
- **Self-Determination:** Institutions of higher education support the self-determination of all students, equally those students who are actively enrolled in classes and students taking a leave of absence. Students, and their supports, have a right to choose their wellness goals and how they want to achieve those goals. Institutions should support students as they make informed decisions about taking a leave of absence and they should provide pathways that are equitable for return.
- **Institutional courage about student mental health:** Institutional betrayal can take the form of overt policies and practices such as discriminatory or different rules for students with mental health conditions. Institutional courage is an antidote and is critical to support the wellbeing of all students, as it sends the message to the entire community that mental health matters. Institutions with courage comply with the ADA and do not have differing policies for students with mental health conditions on a medical leave. They respond with empathy to all students and ensure leadership, faculty, and staff are educated about promoting mental health wellness at their schools. They use research to create policies that support student wellness, retention, and graduation.

### III. Leaves of Absence



Higher education in the United States serves as a critical gateway for young adults as it provides opportunities to build essential intellectual and interpersonal skills and to obtain the necessary credentials for roles in the workforce and in our communities. It is also a critical time in the development of a young adult's sense of self, purpose, and meaning in life. **Student mental health is an essential component of their overall wellness and is inextricably linked to their overall success on campuses.**

***The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) reported 75% of college students experienced significant distress.***

For many of these young adults, their college or university becomes their primary community as they live, learn, play and work on our campus environments. Their capacity to be successful will have lifelong consequences for their employment, income, and health (Douce & Keeling, 2014). The COVID-19 Pandemic that disrupted the lives of all Americans in 2020 shattered the sense of safety for many people and in particular for college students. Many students embark on their collegiate journey lacking critical collegiate resilience skills and often the opportunities and resources to build collegiate resilience. COVID-19, with all of its

significant disruptions and stressors, has proven to be an additional, significant challenge for student mental health and thriving.

Students are more depressed, lonelier, anxious, and have thoughts about suicide more than any other generation of students before them (American College Health Association, 2019). Studies have clearly found that mental health problems have a very strong and negative impact on academic performance, retention and graduation rates (Kitzrow, 2003, Eisenberg, et. al, 2009). Significant numbers of students are living with depression

and anxiety disorders, and substance use disorders and trying to balance academic, work, social, athletic, co-curricular, and extracurricular expectations. GPAs decline, students underperform, and many consider or eventually take a leave of absence from college. As you build a community understanding around your students' experiences and implement informed policies to support your students,

**consider the other common reasons why students take a leave of absence:**

- Physically and/or emotionally unwell or unstable
- Unable to manage the workload
- Academic demand is too high
- Rising stress or distress that limits productivity, sleep and/or wellness
- A need for increased care beyond what campus can provide
- Unable to access campus- or community-based services
- Time away from classes would be beneficial for personhood & wellness
- Caring for family/others/community
- Financial challenges and a need to work/provide
- Drawn to another calling (e.g. work, service, family)
- Leave is required by the university/college re: academic suspension or dismissal
- Leave is required by the university/college re: judicial or disciplinary suspension
- Tribal, community, and/or country responsibilities
- A lacking sense of belonging or feeling supported





## IV. Student's Rights



### **Central to advising, supporting, and policy implementation is the guiding legislature of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 (ADAAA),**

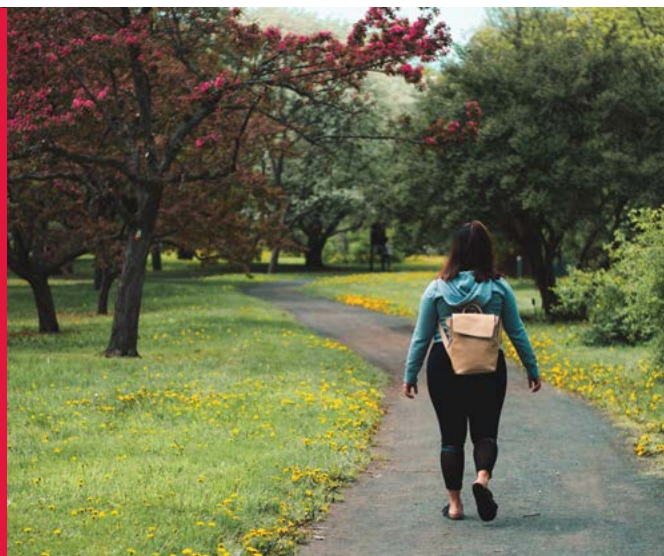
a federal anti-discrimination statute which provides civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities in the areas of employment, public accommodations, state and local government services, and telecommunications. The ADAAA was designed to remove barriers which prevent qualified individuals with disabilities from enjoying the same opportunities that are available to persons without disabilities. Similar protections are provided by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and these laws protect individuals with disabilities as well as ensure just equity and access.

Students with mental health conditions are protected under these laws against discrimination in higher education settings. They are afforded equitable treatment under these laws while on campus and how University policies are enacted. Students with any type of disability are to be treated the same as students without disabilities.

**Remind students at every decision-making juncture of their rights and the supports provided by the institution to promote and provide access to their rights.** In particular, if a student's medical

experience or condition is interfering with their ability to access living and learning opportunities equitably, it's critical to inform them of their right to protection and access under the law to receive reasonable, disability-related accommodations. These accommodations may include such things as extra time on exams or assignments, modifications in the methods of taking exams, notetakers, or the ability to move to part-time enrollment status. In some cases, these additional accommodations and supports can mitigate students' challenges and help them stay in school and thrive.

## V. Collegiate Wellness and Leaves



The same collegiate wellness skills and supports that are promoted to enrolled students are those we want to encourage students who take a leave of absence to build. We can use the acronym **PACE: People, Academics, Care, & Engagement** to remind ourselves and students of the four critical areas of skills and wellness to build on during a health-promoting leave of absence. We know from research these areas of wellbeing are essential to academic thriving and persistence.

- ▶ **PEOPLE:** health-promoting relationships with others
- ▶ **ACADEMICS:** classroom and executive functioning skills
- ▶ **CARE:** wellness practices and supports
- ▶ **ENGAGEMENT:** meaningful involvement in communities and stimulating activities

*In the spring of 2020, 25% of college students indicated they had had thoughts of suicide. Suicide has become a public health problem on our campuses and is now the second leading cause of death in college-aged youth (CDC, 2020).*

Complementary research indicates students' challenges commonly revolve around challenges with relationships, family, self-image, sleep, and academic responsibilities (ACHA, 2018). These challenges can be observed as declining academic performance and failure, excessive absences from classes and obligations, substance use, loneliness and isolation, changes in self-care and lack of self-care, extreme risky behaviors, inability to tolerate frustration and regulate emotions, hopelessness and despair.

While all students may exhibit one or more of these functional behaviors at some time, students who are distressed and at risk will often exhibit one or more of these indicators concurrently. Further, there is often community concern for these students even if they are not seeking or receiving health-promoting support. Many institutions implement regular meetings to explore opportunities for supporting these students; these meetings may include campus police, the Dean of Students office, judicial affairs, student health services, and faculty. The PACE acronym can guide these care teams' planning.

The hyper-focus on career preparation and the significant financial burden that students and families assume to achieve a higher education is no doubt, another factor in the mental health distress experienced by so many students. Even before COVID-19, an alarming 15 percent of graduate students and 18 percent of undergraduate students seriously considered attempting suicide in their lifetimes. Between 40 and 50 percent of these same students reported multiple episodes of serious suicidal thoughts, which suggests prior experience with suicidal ideation. A leave of absence can be a positive choice for students and their universities and colleges as a proactive strategy that will promote positive mental health, academic success and social wellbeing for students when they return to higher education.

## Leaves of Absences

**Knowing and understanding the classification of a student's leave is helpful to educate and empower students, families and faculty.**

If a student makes the decision to take a leave of absence, they are taking a voluntary leave. In some cases, the decision to take a leave of absence is made by the college or university, and these are called involuntary leaves. In general, an involuntary leave may be required of a student who is deemed by the college or university a threat to himself/herself/themselves (which cannot be mitigated if the student remains on campus) or a threat to others. Colleges and universities have designations for several types of leaves of absence. These are the general categories of leaves:

- **Personal Leave or Withdrawal** this leave is personal in nature and may be related to family, finances, health, work, community obligations, or other circumstances interrupting a student's ability to proceed with academics.
- **Medical Leave** is related to a specific physical or psychiatric condition. A leave under this category can be physical, psychiatric or a combination of these conditions.
- **Academic Suspension or Dismissal** this is an involuntary leave related to academic standing, specifically when a student has not achieved a required grade point average (GPA).
- **Judicial or Disciplinary Suspension or Dismissal** this is an involuntary leave made on the basis of a violation of a student's college's expectations or code of conduct.

## MEDICAL LEAVES OF ABSENCE FOR PSYCHIATRIC REASONS



Recent reviews of university policies and practices when students take a medical leave of absence for a psychiatric reason reveal that there is little uniformity or consistency across institutions of higher education. Students are often left to confusing, conflicting information and sometimes, discriminatory policies and practices that make a return to higher education difficult.

**A recent white paper by the Ruderman Family Foundation highlighted that many schools are taking a hard line towards students with serious mental health conditions who seek services, strongly encouraging or requiring them to take medical leaves (Heyman, 2019).**

According to the Bazelon Center for Mental Health law, “some schools lack comprehensive policies for responding to students with mental health issues or do so in discriminatory or punitive ways, requiring them to leave school or evicting them from college/university housing. Some charge students with disciplinary violations for suicidal gestures or thoughts. Such measures discourage students from seeking help. They isolate students from social and professional supports—friends and understanding counselors and teachers—at a time of crisis, increasing the risk of harm.” (Bazelon Center for Mental Health, 2017).

Institutions are often concerned about the risk of danger and their legal liability and believe that their responses are best for both the university and students with mental health conditions. Such policies and practices actually discourage students—not just the student with a mental health condition, but all others—from seeking help. By their very nature, they discourage students from seeking both social and professional help, which in turn increases the real risk of harm to the student and the liability of universities and colleges under the Americans with Disabilities Act (Bazelon Center for Mental Health, 2017).

## VI. Key Recommendations for Administration and Leadership



**This section of the guide is designed to provide campus administrators and leadership to support students who decide to take a leave of absence with equitable and just policies and procedures.**

“Taking A Leave of Absence: A Guide for College Students” is recommended to share with students who are considering or currently taking a leave of absence. As mentioned, students take a leave of absence for a variety of reasons, including financial demands, academic performance, family or personal circumstances. These students may also struggle with a mental health challenge that has or is impacting their academic performance and success. Requesting a leave of absence for mental health reasons is a difficult decision for a student to make and requires institutional support and advocacy. There exists significant prejudice towards mental health conditions in our society and on campuses which create barriers for students to seek help and support. It is critical for universities and colleges to ensure that leave of absence policies are student-centered, that they support student and community well-being, and that they promote the message that student mental health matters. Key recommendations and strategies, as well as suggestions for campus resources that can help provide support to students on leaves of absences, are on the following pages.

## PROMOTE STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH WELLBEING AS A KEY MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE

- Support the change of mission statements, vision and goals of your university/college to reflect and center a strong commitment to student mental health and wellbeing as integral to academic success.
- Support a return on investment (ROI) approach to the connection of mental health and academic success in strategic planning of fiscal and personnel resources. **The economic case is very strong: for every dollar spent on mental health initiatives on campus (whether that be treatment or prevention efforts), there is a doubling in the return on investment in terms of tuition dollars retained because of drop-outs averted.** Commit to an institution-wide, shared fiscal budget (a % of every department's budget) to fund mental health services, supports and initiatives across campus as mental health does not discriminate by major or area of study.
- The responsibility to support a mission of promoting an educational community that values student mental health is a shared approach that often involves the Office of the President, The Board of Trustees, Advisory groups and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion offices, etc.

## ASSESS LEAVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO ENSURE STUDENT-CENTEREDNESS AND ADA/AA COMPLIANCE

- Systematically review policies and procedures through the appointment of a steering or advisory committee that includes students, faculty, staff and general counsel. Active Minds provides excellent diagnostic tools to evaluate and score your schools policies and practices.
- Seek input through listening sessions from students who have taken a leave of absence to gain student and family perspectives and feedback, as well as faculty and staff insights to their experiences from a health, academic, social and financial lens.
- **Strategically examine policies for weaknesses and address barriers to successful leaves and returns. Demonstrate parity across all types of leaves of absences. Students taking voluntary leaves of absence for mental health reasons should not be held to higher standards than students leaving for any other reason.**

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- Consult with sister, affiliate, or consortium institutions to understand and learn about their leave policies and practices.
- Disseminate leave policies and support materials - including “Your Leave of Absence Guide”, to key stakeholders: students, parents, faculty, staff, offices of financial aid, housing, athletics, etc. Ensure that these materials are easy to find on the school’s website.
- **Invite university/college general counsel offices, offices of affirmative action and equal opportunity, and offices of access and disability to support, inform and amend institutional practices and policies.**

## **BUILD HEALTH-PROMOTING PRACTICES INTO POLICY**

### **CAMPUS-WIDE:**

- Educate campus personnel to know the law and the campus resources for assistance. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights on Title II of the ADA/AA, allows mandating involuntary leaves for students, only if they pose a “direct threat to self and others.”
- Engage students in **collaborative decision-making** around taking a leave of absence. Consider reasonable accommodations first that will allow the student to stay on campus and seek the treatment and support they might need.
- Ensure fiscal resources for counseling services to provide case management/coaching services/groups/wellness classes to students upon return from a leave to support a successful return. This investment from a staffing perspective, in a student’s successful return, promotes positive outcomes for both the student and the university/college.
- Make virtual academic, mental health, and social resources and communities available when students are not on campus, including students who are on leave. Develop pathways to access these resources as some students cannot access these types of resources while at home or in their communities.
- Share the responsibility of all tasks with a broad group of units and offices, which might include counseling and wellness offices, Dean of Students, Offices of Access and Disability, financial aid staff, registrars’ offices, immigration and international student offices, and faculty advisory committees.

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## **IN THE CLASSROOM:**

- Allow virtual learning and engagement from anywhere, including mental health programs and hospital settings. COVID-19 has demonstrated that virtual learning is doable and provides important engagement when students are not able to be on campus.
- Direct students to the “Taking a Leave of Absence: Guide for College Students” to help them build a health-promoting road map for their leave of absence at their own PACE.
- Encourage faculty to use pass/fail grading options to mitigate academic stress allowing students to stay on campus during a difficult period. Encourage faculty and staff to implement non-punitive options for students to finish coursework.
- Relax class attendance policy requirements and pivot to virtual attendance as a reasonable accommodation, to help a student stay on campus, just as institutions have pivoted toward distance learning during COVID-19.

## **POLICIES:**

- Assume a policy of individualized assessment with students (rather than a blanket policy) about the risks, consequences and behaviors that suggest a leave of absence.
- Consider providing access to online connections, supportive health resources and communities that are critical to a student’s wellness while on leave.
- Create equitable and just durations for LOA. Compliance to Title II of the ADAAA states that universities and colleges **may not** treat physical issues that result in a voluntary MLOA, **differently** than a psychiatric leave.



**Provide resources, support, programming, and outreach to students on leave of absence. Their leave is often accompanied by strong feelings of regret, shame, fear, and embarrassment. THEY NEED OUR SUPPORT.**

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- Develop and disseminate an accessible “Return from Leave Checklist” for students that clearly communicates policies related to academics, housing, tuition reimbursement and forgiveness, financial aid, loan deferment, repayment status, health insurance, visa status, class registration, and access to resources.
- Identify campus personnel whose responsibilities involve assisting students and families throughout the leave and return processes.
- Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their individualized readiness to return through a variety of experiences that include treatment, education, work and community service.
- Restructure blanket policies with pre-established outcomes for leaves of absence.
- State clearly in your literature, and make readily available in electronic and paper-based formats, the procedures, processes, timelines and deadlines students must follow to return from a leave successfully.



## VI. Key Recommendations for Behavioral Medicine and Counseling



This section of the guide is designed to provide counseling professionals who support students that are considering, taking or returning from a leave of absence with resources and guidance. It is a difficult decision for a student to make and requires thought, intention and commitment. Some students see their leave as an opportunity to engage in intensive care and treatment to build their wellness and resiliency. Other students use this time away to engage in meaningful work or life experiences to build skills and develop a greater purpose for returning to school.

**It is critical that students design their own leave of absence plan and commit to navigating their leave at their own PACE.** To aid students, we recommend using the acronym PACE: People, Academics Skills, Care and Engagement to emphasize the critical domains of skills and strategies students may find helpful in building their wellness and resiliency to return. Key strategies to consider are on the following pages.

## EXPLORE A LEAVE WITH STUDENTS WHO YOU NOTICE ARE STRUGGLING TO THRIVE

- Help students identify their feelings and reasons for a leave of absence.
- Encourage students to express their positive and negative feelings and reasons for taking a leave.
- Conduct a simple pro/con list of taking a leave with a student. Normalize a “stop out” or “pause” to build wellness and resiliency.



**Reframe students' shame and position about a leave of absence as a **decision of strength** to promote their wellness and ultimately their academic and vocational success.**

## PREPARE STUDENTS TO TAKE A LEAVE

- Provide students with a clear, concise checklist of steps they need to take to leave. Include housing, visa status issues, financial aid, academic steps and insurance access issues.
- Encourage students to use their academic advisors to discuss how a leave will affect their degree status and graduation date.
- Encourage and assist students to know the implications of their financial aid, housing contracts, visa status, etc., when they take a medical leave.
- Assist students in appeal processes for tuition and housing costs due to unexpected leaves.
- Help students build a wellness plan that may include treatment while on a leave. Work to ensure that treatment is culturally and identity relevant.
- Inquire about their financial and insurance resources to accomplish these goals.

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## PREPARE STUDENTS TO TAKE A LEAVE *continued*

- Utilize and share the **PACE framework** to build their plan while on leave: **People, Academics, Care and Engagement.**
- Encourage students to commit to the daily wellness strategies of sleep, nutrition and exercise/mindfulness in supporting positive mental health. Encourage them to build a wellness toolkit.
- Help students to build a daily structured routine while on leave that may include work, education, or community service into their plan.
- Encourage students to build social connections into their plan.
- Connect their wellness and resiliency to their goal of returning and finishing their college education.
- Ensure that students understand the health requirements needed to demonstrate to their universities/colleges that they are ready to successfully complete their studies.

## SHARE THESE RESOURCES TO GUIDE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES/SUPPORTS

- **Leave of Absence & Re-Entry Department or Contact:** Some schools have offices that may be available to support a student through the processes of leaving, staying well and connected during their leave, and returning. You may want to connect the student with this office or individual for support navigating the university or college's specific processes, policies, paperwork deadlines, and general expectations surrounding a leave and return from absence.
- **Access & Disability Services:** This office provides services and support to ensure that all students are able to access and participate in the living and learning opportunities at school. If the student needs classroom adjustments to support their learning or an advocate to co-navigate housing accommodations, you may want to connect the student with the disability & access office or coordinator.
- **Financial Assistance/Aid Office:** Leaves of absences and withdrawals often have financial consequences for students. It is critical to encourage the student to connect with this office to understand their options and obligations as they relates to their leave and their return.

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- **Registrar:** Some students find that taking a class during their leave of absence assists them to build a healthy structure and keep their academic skills sharp. Connect students to the registrar's office to see if there are online options they can avail while on leave or if credits from another institution will transfer when they return from their leave.
- **Ombuds Office:** Many colleges and universities have an Ombuds Office, which is an independent, impartial, informal problem-solving resource which maintains strict confidentiality and provides a safe place to have off-the-record conversations on issues related to life, work, or study. Talking to the Ombuds can be a good first step for students if they have a concern about their leave and/or their return.
- **Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Office:** Many institutions have an office that provides rapid, confidential, supportive and free-of-charge advocacy and assistance to students who have experienced sexual assault, physical assault, interpersonal violence, and other crimes. These offices can be helpful with referrals to community resources when students are on leave and for preparing for their return.
- **Academic Advisors:** A student's academic advisor is a great resource to ask about majors and classes that are impacted by a leave of absence. They can be very helpful when students are on leave and/or preparing for their return.
- **Dean of Students:** The Dean of Students office at colleges and universities is committed to student personal and academic growth. In their offices, there are staff committed to helping students when they take a leave of absence and when they plan to return to the University.



**Creating a culture of caring means helping students and families know there is no wrong door through which to enter. Any department or office is the right place to start the journey.**

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## ASSIST STUDENTS TO RETURN AND THRIVE

- Provide coaching services that provide “at the elbow” support to students with mental health conditions maintain their wellness. Coaching is a highly solution-focused approach to help empower students with all facets of their life on campus. Coaching services can be flexible, mobile/digital and brief encounters during the week. Coaching can be provided through counseling services, academic resource offices, peer support/coaching groups, athletic academic support offices, and Offices of Access and Disability Services.
- Utilize **the PACE framework** to build and maintain wellness once students return to campus: People, academics, care and engagement.
- Encourage students to commit to the daily wellness strategies of sleep, nutrition and exercise/mindfulness in supporting their positive mental health. Assist them in building a wellness toolkit for college.
- Encourage students to build a daily structured routine for courses, homework, social time and self-care time.
- Identify social and spiritual activities that are a match for students and encourage them to participate in them.
- Connect their wellness and resiliency to their goal of thriving, while they finish their college education.
- Connect students to peer support groups in mental health, academics and identity affiliations. Students are already listening to one another. This is a way to assist them to find peer support that is critical.
- Encourage continued use of telehealth services, campus therapy resources and/or local community resources. If referring students out to community clinicians, ensure they are able to utilize their campus insurance and be seen.
- Offer **wellness classes through first year programs, wellness offices, educational resource centers and counseling centers** that target the critical intersection of mental health, wellness, and academics. Also, provide therapeutic groups that build skills and create connections.

## VIII. Key Recommendations for Faculty and Staff



This section of the guide is designed to support faculty and staff with the language, resources, and suggestions to support students who are considering a leave of absence, on a leave of absence, or returning from a leave of absence for a mental health condition. Some students see their leave as an opportunity to engage in intensive care and treatment to build their wellness and resiliency. Other students use this time away to engage in meaningful work or life experiences to build skills and develop a greater purpose for returning to school. It is critical that students design their own leave of absence plan and commit to navigating their leave at their own **PACE. To aid students, we recommend using the acronym PACE: People, Academics, Care, and Engagement to emphasize the critical domains of skills and strategies students may find helpful in building their wellness and resiliency to return.** On the following pages are key strategies for faculty and staff.

## CREATE A CARING AND PRO-MENTAL HEALTH CULTURE IN LIVING, LEARNING & RECREATIONAL SPACES

- Utilize class syllabi to post campus mental health resources and statements of support for seeking help.
- Message the strong connection between academic success, social thriving and positive mental health on websites.
- Frame a leave of absence as a positive step for student wellbeing and academic success.

**“When I work with students thinking about taking a break in enrollment for any reason they are often reluctant because they don’t want to fall behind. And when they say behind they often don’t just mean school, but also in life. I have found it very helpful to reassure students that life is not a race. They think that if they don’t graduate with their class they will be behind for the rest of their lives. I do my best to convince them that that is simply not the case and stress that it’s the quality of their experiences that matter and not the amount or pace that they achieved them that matters. Taking time off can actually be an advantage in the long run.”**

- Help students who take a mid-semester leave make a plan to complete interrupted courses. Encourage departments and programs to take a non-punitive stance towards unfinished/incomplete work.
- Encourage students who are planning a leave to reach out to their academic advisor/s to discuss their leave and completion of their studies.

*continued on next page >*



**Encourage and support students to **commit to building wellness and resiliency** during a leave. Refer students to the complimentary guide **“Taking a Leave of Absence: Guide for College Students.”****

- Utilize the **PACE framework** to encourage students to build and maintain wellness while on leave: **People, academics, care and engagement.**
- Encourage students to commit to the daily wellness strategies of sleep, nutrition, and exercise/mindfulness. This foundation of resiliency will support their academic and social well-being when they return.
- Encourage students to build a daily structured routine for courses, homework, social time and self-care time.
- Advise students to enroll in an academic class or activity that will help maintain their academic skills.
- Encourage students to participate in social activities that are a match for them.



**For some students, it's important for them to really step away from the campus environment for a while and to disconnect from unhealthy social networks. Every situation is different, and **having a conversation with their advisors/ care team about how much “distance” would be healthy, can be beneficial.****

- Share your belief that students can recover and return successfully.
- Consider pathways and people who can reach to students while on leave.

## SHARE THESE RESOURCES TO GUIDE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES/SUPPORTS

As you read through the list of resources below, keep in mind the availability of such resources, as well as the title and function of departments, across colleges and universities will vary. For this reason, we advise readers to consider the various academic and Dean's Offices that may carry the responsibilities listed below.

These resources are often accessible on a limited basis to students who are on leave of absence. They are, however, often critical supports needed for a successful return to campus. It is recommended students investigate such resources and supports during a leave. The companion guide, "Taking a Leave of Absence: A Guide for College Students" further outlines useful campus-based resources for students to consider.

- **Leave of Absence & Re-Entry Department or Contact:** Some schools have offices that may be available to support a student through the processes of leaving, staying well and connected during their leave, and returning. You may want to connect the student with this office or individual for support navigating the university or college's specific processes, policies, paperwork deadlines, and general expectations surrounding a leave and return from absence.
- **Access & Disability Services:** This office provides services and support to ensure that all students are able to access and participate in the living and learning opportunities at school. If the student needs classroom adjustments to support their learning or an advocate to co-navigate housing accommodations, you may want to connect the student with the disability & access office or coordinator.
- **Financial Assistance/Aid Office:** Leaves of absences and withdrawals often have financial consequences for students. It is critical to encourage the student to connect with this office to understand their options and obligations as they relate to their return and their path to completion.
- **Registrar:** Some students find that taking fewer classes upon their return from their leave of absence helps them build a healthy structure and maintain their wellness. Connect students to the registrar's office to navigate adding or dropping classes.
- **Counseling Services:** Staff, psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical nurse specialists, licensed mental health clinicians and licensed clinical social workers may be available at the school to help students address any psychological or adjustment issues that arise in a university community. Colleges and universities that do not provide counseling services may have a referral coordinator who can connect students with community-based providers and resources. Some colleges and universities provide 24/7 telehealth services that may provide counseling options.
- **Ombuds Office:** Many colleges and universities have an Ombuds Office, which is an independent, impartial, informal problem-solving resource which maintains strict confidentiality and provides a safe place to have off-the-record conversations on issues related to life, work, or study. Talking to the Ombuds can be a good first step for students if they have a concern about their return.
- **Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Office:** Many institutions have an office that provides rapid, confidential, supportive and free-of-charge advocacy and assistance to students who have experienced sexual assault, physical assault, interpersonal violence, and other crimes. These offices can be helpful with services and referrals to community resources upon return.
- **Academic Advisors:** A student's academic advisor is a great resource to navigate majors and classes that were impacted by a leave of absence. They can be very helpful to students when they return in mapping out an academic path that maintains their wellness.

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