

Taking a Leave of Absence: A Guide for College Students

Commissioned by the Ruderman Family Foundation

TAKING A LEAVE AT YOUR OWN **PACE**



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Acknowledgement All language and strategies used throughout this guide are consistent with the Jed Foundation's practices and policies.

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TAKING A LEAVE AT YOUR OWN **PACE**

Developed in collaboration with

THE CENTER FOR PSYCHIATRIC REHABILITATION

THE RUDERMAN FAMILY FOUNDATION

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I hit a really hard time.

***College wasn't working, I wasn't
going to class, and I needed a
break. I'm not sure when I'm going
back or where I'll be going back
to, but for now I'm working on
getting myself ready and getting
good academic habits in place."***

- JOE C -

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I. Introduction

Guide Overview

This Leave of Absence Guide is designed to provide students like you, who are considering or taking a leave of absence, with skills-building opportunities and health-promoting guidance and suggestions for how to spend your time away from school. **This is *your* leave, and we are here to support you organize and this guide what you do during your leave *at your own PACE*.**

This guide is organized to help you understand the process for leaving and returning, navigate difficult conversations along the way, evaluate your readiness to return, and successfully return to school. You might work through this guide alone; you might also consider working through the guide with the support of friends, family, college personnel, or care providers.

To underscore the import of taking a leave at your own **PACE**, we'll use the acronym **PACE** as a tool to reinforce the four most valued and valuable steps to follow during the leave, **namely building and maintaining connections with **People**, exercising your **Academic** skills, accessing **Care** and supports, and **Engaging** in meaningful activities that bring you joy, wellness, and hope.**

Nurturing these four components in your life will foster a fulfilling and intentional leave of absence from school as well as build readiness to return.

Using the Guide

Taking a Leave of Absence from college - whether voluntary or involuntary - is often an incredibly difficult experience fraught with strong feelings of disappointment, confusion, shame, and fear. You might be sitting with these feelings now. That's normal!



Like most students, you likely enrolled in a postsecondary degree program expecting to follow the course requirements by semester as the school laid it out. The timeline, the graduating class you identify as a part of, and your "student" title change when you are on a leave of absence, and that's likely uncomfortable, even scary. For many students, this interruption means a new course completion plan, an experience that can easily escalate to worries that a student will never return to school or graduate. It may not feel like it right now, but there is a world of resources and support available to get you back on the track that is right for you. We're here to help you!

“

***Take your time, spend “me time”
to tend to your own needs. Your
mental health is important.”***

- JOSH W -

This guide is co-authored **BY STUDENTS FOR STUDENTS** just like you who have considered or taken a leave of absence, and their personal testimonies peppered throughout the guide serve to build understanding and normalcy around the common experience of having an interruption to

postsecondary education, the reasons why leaves occur, and the strong feelings that accompany the process. Perhaps, and most importantly, we hope the student anecdotes will inspire hope within you.

The critical skills- and supports-building ideas and resources suggested in this guide are not specific to any college or university or program; the guide is a tool for any undergraduate or graduate student who may be considering taking or on leave. This guide also has a [companion manual](#) for college and university administrators to inform their work around implementing student-centered leave policies and practices.

Built into every section of this guide is a checklist to help you target action steps you might want to take before, during, and/or after your leave of absence.

“

***School will always be there
when you're ready to return.
Take care of yourself first.”***

- HURY M -

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 emerging 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.



II. Understanding Leaves of Absence

Types of Leaves

Your college or university will likely have designations for the kind of leave of absence you're taking or considering. Knowing and understanding the classification is helpful, so you can complete the appropriate paperwork and action steps before, during, and upon returning from your leave as well as talk to others and access support along the way accordingly.

If you are making the decision to take a leave of absence, you are taking a "voluntary" leave. In some cases, the decision is made by your 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.

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, or other circumstances interrupting your ability to proceed with academics
- ▶ **Medical Leave** this leave is related to a specific medical condition or experience; this may or may not be related to your mental health
- ▶ **Academic Suspension or Dismissal** this is an involuntary leave related to your academic performance or progress made toward your degree, specifically when you have not achieved a required grade point average (GPA) or completed a required number of credits within a particular term
- ▶ **Judicial or Disciplinary Suspension or Dismissal** this is an involuntary leave made on the basis of a violation of your college's expectations or code of conduct

It is important for you to know what type of leave you're on, as that often informs the processes and paperwork involved in returning. Additionally, it is critical to know with whom at your school you will be expected to communicate, if anyone, during your leave. Your school's designated staff or faculty may be available to help you track deadlines, documentation, and resources to facilitate your successful return. *For example, you may need to complete a medical review many months before your desired re-enrollment date in order to be cleared and eligible to register by the start of the term.*

“

***A leave of absence is not a step back. It's
a pause, an opportunity to practice and
reflect on yourself without the pressure
of extra school work.”***

- SAM R -

Reasons for Taking a Leave

Often there are multiple reasons, not just one central reason, for taking a leave of absence. For example, you might be thinking or sharing with others that you're considering/taking a leave because you're struggling academically. Digging deeper, however, it might also be true that you don't feel socially connected or satisfied, or maybe you never thought the school was a good fit. Identifying the reasons for which you're taking/considering a leave can be helpful, as those reasons can be the road map to how you might want to spend your time during your leave.



You know you best, so if you think you need a break, then take a break."

- POOJA D -

REASON FOR LEAVE OF ABSENCE INVENTORY

Use the checklist to identify why you might be considering or are on a leave of absence. You feel:

- Physically and/or emotionally unwell or unstable**
- Unable to manage your course load**
- Academic demand is too high right now**
- Rising stress or distress that limits your 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 your personhood & wellness**
- Obligated to take care of family/others**
- Drawn to another calling (e.g. work, service, family)**
- Responsibility to care for members of family/tribe/community/other**
- Leave is required by the University/College because:**

- Other:**

- Other:**

How You Feel About Taking a Leave

It's critically important to pause and reflect on how you feel about taking a leave of absence. This awareness can be useful as you decide what to share and how to access the support you're looking for.



FEELINGS INVENTORY

Use the checklist to identify how you might be feeling about your leave of absence. You feel:

- Confident or optimistic:** you're making the right decision
- Confused or lost:** not sure what to do now
- Sad or sorrowful:** you're mourning the loss of your community and student role
- Embarrassed, ashamed:** everyone seems to be thriving but you
- Devastated:** you cannot believe this is happening to you
- Scared or worried:** your family/friends will be disappointed or angry
- Unsettled or terrified:** what if you don't return and finish your degree
- Emotionally numb:** there are so many feelings, you don't feel anything at all
- Mad or furious:** it's not fair/this shouldn't be happening to you
- Other:** _____
- Other:** _____

II **LET'S PAUSE HERE: YOU ARE NOT ALONE!** Leaves from higher education are common. Even though we short-hand many colleges as “four-year schools”, the National Center for Educational Statistics **reports** the majority of four-year degree programs are completed in more than four years. This makes sense, as life and family, environmental and global circumstances, like the COVID-19 pandemic, have the power to interfere with our academic trajectory. **Taking a leave of absence from college can be a health-promoting wellness strategy.** With the pressure of academic performance off, there is more time and emotional energy to practice self-care and build skills — and supports.

Communicating About Your Decision to Take a Leave

Now that you have examined why a leave of absence is a reasonable choice for you, and how you feel about it, we recommend you **reach out to trusted supports and advisors** from your personal support network and school to be gather all the information and support you need to make an informed decision.

TAKING A LEAVE OF ABSENCE CHECKLIST

Use the checklist to track who you are talking to about taking a leave. Consider some of the language provided as you enter into these conversations, and take notes on and save all the information they share. It will be useful later. In the order that makes the most sense to you, communicate your thoughts and feelings to your:

○ **Peer/friend/family member for support and guidance**

EXAMPLE: *"This is hard for me to say, but I'm considering taking a leave of absence from school this term. I'm really worried and hope we can talk about it."*

EXAMPLE: *"I'm not sure if will come as a surprise to you. I've been feeling overwhelmed in school and with schoolwork. Completing my coursework this term no longer feels like an option, and I'm strongly considering a leave of absence."*

○ **Professors to share your plan and explore alternatives (e.g. incomplete grades)**

EXAMPLE: *"I've appreciated our time together so far this term. Because of some personal matters, I'm considering taking a leave of absence. I hope we can explore any way I could earn credit for the work I've done so far."*

○ **Disability/Access Services Offices to explore alternatives (e.g. reduced course load)**

EXAMPLE: *"I'm feeling overwhelmed by my workload this term so much that I'm considering taking a leave of absence. I'm hopeful we can explore supports, resources, and accommodations to help me complete the term successfully."*

○ **Athletic coach or student-athlete advisor (e.g. eligibility to compete)**

EXAMPLE: *"As you know, I've been struggling to balance my coursework, competing, and my wellness this term, and I'm considering taking a leave of absence. I'm hopeful you can explain to me how that will impact my athletic scholarships and eligibility to compete."*

continued on next page >

- **Dean of Students to explore alternatives (e.g. adjustment to schedule)**
EXAMPLE: *"I'm feeling overwhelmed by my workload this term so much that I'm considering taking a leave of absence. I'm hopeful we can explore supports or adjustments to help me complete the term successfully."*
- **Academic advisor to understand the impact of a mid-semester withdrawal**
EXAMPLE: *"I'm considering taking a leave of absence for the term. Before I do I'm hopeful you can help me understand the impacts on my enrollment status, return to coursework, and grade point average."*
- **Family and/or financial assistance office to understand financial impact**
EXAMPLE: *"I'm considering taking a leave of absence for the term. Before I do I'm hopeful you can help me understand the impact on my current and future tuition, scholarship money, and scholarship eligibility."*
- **Therapist/counselor or college coach for support around wellness planning**
EXAMPLE: *"I'm considering taking a leave of absence for the term. I feel scared about talking to my family, friends, and classmates. I'm hopeful we can talk about what this process will be like to prepare me for the difficult conversations ahead."*
- **Tribal leader or spiritual advisor (e.g. Chief, Rabbi, Priest, etc.) who can offer support and guidance around community-specific experiences and expectations**
EXAMPLE: *"I know our community values education. I do too, and in order for me to continue my academic journey successfully, I think it's best to take a leave of absence to build my wellness and skills."*
- **Other:** _____
- **Other:** _____

NOTES

Take the time to identify what you want to say and to whom you want to start communicating about your leave.



LET'S PAUSE HERE: IT'S OK IF YOUR CONVERSATION WAS UNHELPFUL

You might have gone to a trusted friend, advisor, or family member and felt unheard or dismissed about your idea to take a leave. Remember, everyone will understand, advise, and empathize with your experience differently. If you did not feel helped or supported, try again with another trusted support or advisor you've identified.

Your Rights & Responsibilities

If the reason for your leave is due to a medical issue that is interfering with your ability to succeed, it's important to know that students with disabilities, including those related to mental health, have a right under the law to receive reasonable, disability-related accommodations. These

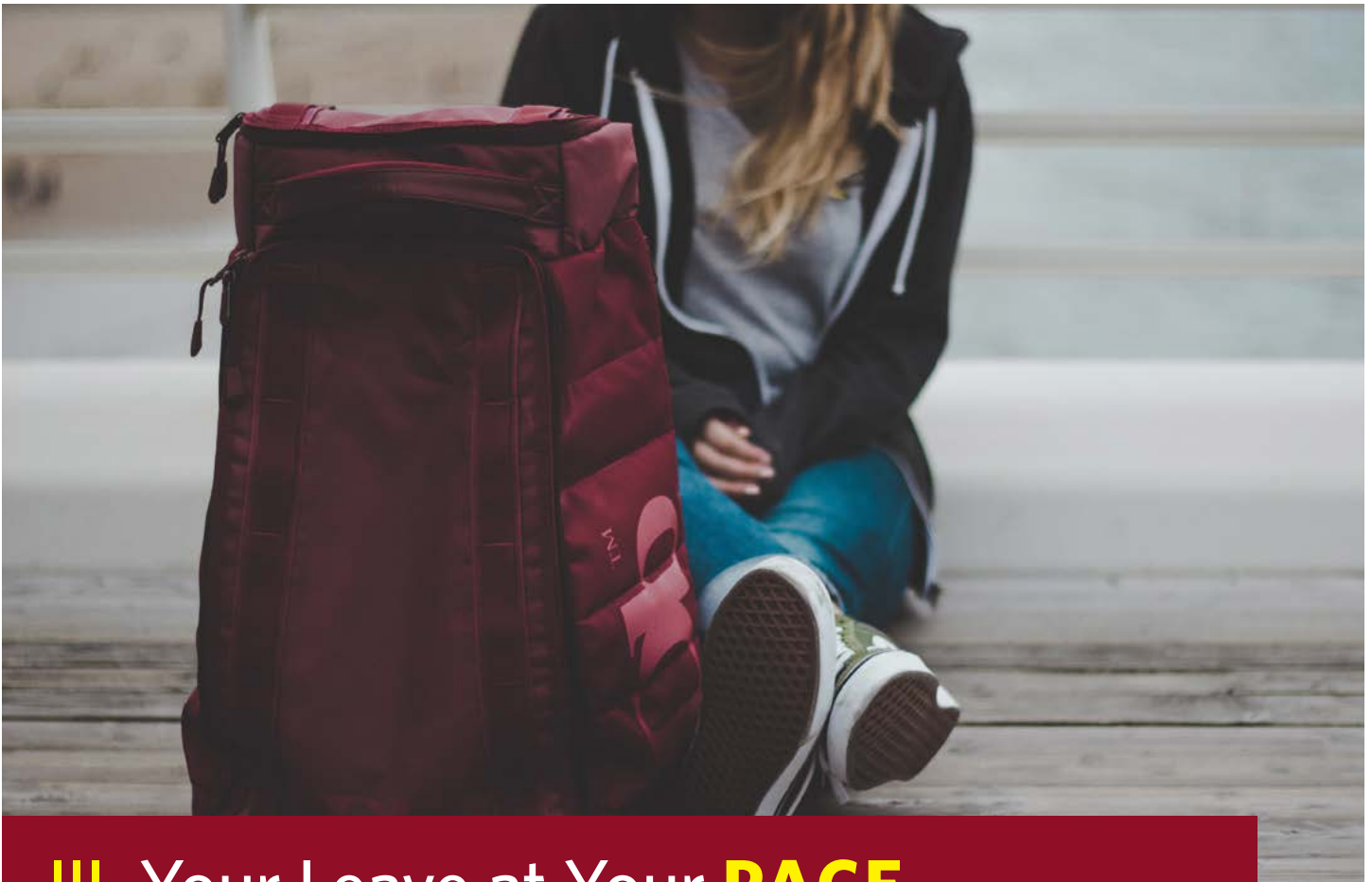
accommodations may include such things as extra time on exams or assignments, modifications in the methods of taking exams, notetakers, or the ability to move to part-time enrollment status. In order to determine your eligibility for accommodations, you will have to work with your school's disability and access services coordinator and will likely need to provide documentation about your disability and how it affects your schoolwork.

The **Americans with Disabilities Act** Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) is 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.



HELPFUL HINT: START WITH YOUR STORY!

When it comes to accessing reasonable accommodations, a great place to start is with your first-person account of your personal disability-related experiences. When you reach out to disability and access services, start with that, and its possible your school will accept provisional documentation and offer provisional accommodations to get you supported before any additional documentation may be required.



III. Your Leave at Your **PACE**

While leaves are common, the reasons for leaves and what your leave looks like is highly individualized. Remember, it's your life, your leave, and taking a leave at your own pace can be a health-promoting choice. To aid your journey, we've developed the acronym **PACE: People, Academics, Care, and Engagement** to emphasize the four critical areas of skills and wellness you will want to build and maintain during your leave.

- ▶ **PEOPLE:** health-promoting relationships with others
- ▶ **ACADEMICS:** classroom and executive functioning skills
- ▶ **CARE:** wellness practices and supports
- ▶ **ENGAGEMENT:** meaningful involvement in activities that bring you joy and hope

Your leave of absence at your own **PACE**. **P**eople, **A**cademics, **C**are & **E**ngagement

Let's start with P: People

PEOPLE: HEALTH-PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

This section is all about maintaining or building social connections and relationships during your leave of absence, which can be especially challenging. The strong feelings you identified earlier in this guide can be a barrier to connecting with others; often guilt, shame, and uncertainty can drive your actions of avoiding others on the chance that your leave or plans for the future come up in conversation. Additionally, visiting campus to connect with existing networks may be discouraged or restricted during your leave, or you may have moved and now live far from campus where visiting is not an option.

Still, getting and staying connected to people, including natural, campus-based supports, is critical for wellness, a sense of belonging, and ultimately a successful and smooth re-entry to campus. In this section, you will have an opportunity to examine your feelings about socializing and connecting, to inventory your existing connections and satisfaction with those connections, and set goals for making new connections (or reconnections). Let's start off with exploring how you feel about connecting with others.



“

Everyone's academic journey is their own. It's tough to think you're falling behind, but college isn't a race. Do what is best for you. No one is judging you for taking a leave of absence, even if you think they are.”

- RACHAEL C -

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS FEELINGS INVENTORY

Use the checklist to identify all the feelings you might have about connecting or networking with peers, family, classmates, etc. You feel:

- Confident or optimistic:** it's a good idea to get out and be around others
- Eager:** you finally have time to get connected and build social networks
- Stuck or unsure:** where do you meet people - everyone's away at school
- Tearful or depressed:** not in the mood to be around others
- Worried or anxious:** what if others ask about the leave
- Embarrassed:** you're not sure how to explain, or avoid explaining, why you're on leave
- Unintelligent and unconfident:** taking a leave feels somehow related to your intellect
- Heavy or crushed:** you don't feel like your usual "social" self
- Emotionally numb:** there are so many feelings, you don't feel anything at all
- Irritated or resentful:** you don't want to be around others who are doing well
- Other:** _____
- Other:** _____

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS INVENTORY


Your feelings about connecting, as well as your satisfaction with your current social connections, will likely drive your next steps socially. Now that you know how you feel about connecting with others, let's examine to whom you're currently connected, the level of connection you experience in that relationship, and your overall satisfaction with these relationships.

Take a moment to populate the social support map and later evaluate where on the map you'd like to experience some change. In the innermost circle is "YOU", and in the concentric circles around you are your social connections ordered by level of intimacy. In the second circle, list your closest and most trusted supports (e.g. parents/caregivers, friends). These supports might be the first you'd call with great news or perhaps in a time of great need. In the third circle, list good/close friends, including people with whom you enjoy socializing. They are healthy, helpful supports with whom you're less intimately connected. In the outermost layer, list professional, organizational, and institutional supports and resources (e.g. advisors, mentors, school supports) who contribute to your wellness, but with whom you are even less intimately connected. Outside of the concentric circles, list any unhealthy connections you might have. These connections are not part of your support system.



Examine the map and reflect on how you feel overall about the quality and quantity of the relationships you've identified. Where are you currently satisfied with your support network?

Examine the map and reflect on how you feel overall about the quality and quantity of the relationships you've identified. Where are you currently dissatisfied and would like to see change?

 **LET'S PAUSE HERE: CONSIDER SHARING YOUR MAP!** *Examining your social relationships and satisfaction is challenging and can bring up strong positive and negative emotions. You might want to share and discuss the work you've done so far in this Guide with someone on your social connections map for support and ideas for next steps.*

CONNECTING (OR RECONNECTING)

Let's consider some options for building your social network and meaningful relationships during your leave of absence. **There are different categories of relationships that invite or require varying levels of commitment, time investment, emotional energy and attention.** Consider first reflecting on what relationship category you'd like to focus your efforts.

“

To anyone going through a leave of absence, do whatever you can to keep yourself healthy, even if it means you have to leave your comfort zone.”

- E L E S H K -

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS CATEGORIES INVENTORY

Use the checklist to identify in which relationship categories you'd like to focus effort in building social connections.

- High school, grade school, and neighborhood friends:** you were close and it would be nice to reconnect
- College friends:** they'll understand you're on a leave and want to hang
- New friends:** you'd like to meet some new people
- Neighbors:** you could easily visit or meet up
- Family or family friends:** you value and feel connected to family
- College organization:** you can get connected now and stay connected when you return
- Local organization:** you want to be involved in local activities
- Potential partner:** you'd like to find a dating or romantic partner
- Spiritual or tribal leader:** they understand your community's values, experiences, and expectations
- Other:**

- Other:**



LET'S PAUSE HERE: IT'S YOUR STORY:

The details of your personal story, including the story of your leave of absence, are yours to share or not. Make the decision of what and how much to share with individuals in your new and existing relationships based on your comfort and need.

NOW TAKE A STEP AT YOUR OWN PACE

Using the priorities you established in the Social Connections Categories Inventory, explore the recommended steps, sources, and sites on the next page. Remember to use your existing resources and supports for help along the way.

High school, grade school, and neighborhood friends

- Search and reach out via social media (e.g. follow, friend, or private message)
- Email, phone, or text, "It's been a while...how are you?"
- Contact your high school alumni board
- Reach out to your high school guidance counselor for info/ideas

College friends

- Watch [this video](#), a reminder you're not alone in finding and connecting with your peers
- Join the [NITEO Activities](#) a range of free workshops, hangouts, workouts, & outings
- Reach out via email, phone, text or social media
- If it's available, connect in person at a campus-based or campus-adjacent location
- Invite a time to meet virtually (e.g. Zoom brunch)

Neighbors

- Explore [Meetup](#) to connect with local people with similar interests and goals
- Search local news sources for information about local gatherings (e.g. concerts, events)
- Join or start a local "walk & talk" with a neighbor(s)
- Host a coffee gathering, movie viewing, or game night

Spiritual or tribal leader or community members:

- Inquire about campus-based and local resources and affinity groups that align with your spiritual or tribal values
- Connect with your community leader or members of your community at an in-person service, ceremony, or meeting
- Reach out via phone or email

Family or family friends

- Suggest a lunch picnic, outing, or dinner
- Express interest in someone's work, and ask to learn more or shadow
- Host a game or trivia event (in person or virtually)

New friends

- Consider enrolling in one of the many College Mental Health Activities, like the [Healthy Relationships class at Boston University](#), to meet people and build skills for maintaining relationships with peers, friends, and more
- Download and create a Bumble BFF profile to meet people with shared values and interests
- Check out [NAMI Peer-to-Peer](#), an experiential program for people living with a mental illness who are interested in establishing and maintaining their wellness and recovery
- Join a [Skip the Small Talk](#) event to practice conversing & making meaningful connections

continued on next page >

College organization

- Contact leadership of a student organization and club re joining
- Invite an organization or club member to a cup of tea or coffee to learn more
- Explore the steps involved in initiating a group or club at your school

Local or online organization

- Search local news sources for information about events & gatherings (e.g. book clubs)
- Consider National and Community Services that match your skills, goals, and availability
- Search for “peer specialist training” opportunities and certification programs that support individuals with similar lived experiences
- Join mental health advocacy efforts like the [Jed Foundation](#)

Dating or romantic partner

- Attend a [One Love Relationship Round Up](#) or virtual workshop for authentic conversations about relationship wellness
- Share your dating goals with trusted family or peer who could make introductions
- Check out [The UnLonely Project](#) for tools, resources, and programs to get involved through creative expression

Your leave of absence at your own **PACE**. **P**eople, **A**cademics, **C**are & **E**ngagement

Let's examine A: Academics

ACADEMICS: CLASSROOM & EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS

In this section, we explore the intellectual stimulation and engagement you may need and crave

and which is critical to satisfy even when you step away from college coursework. Your leave of absence can be a time to build academic skills and strategies you felt were missing or lacking as well as a time to maintain the skills about which you felt good. These academic skills, or habits, can also help you in other areas of your life. Goal-setting, time management, note-taking, and meeting deadlines are helpful in school as well with work, relationships. Additionally, even on a leave of absence you may be able to continue your academic pursuits and make progress toward your degree. This section of the guide offers you activities and suggestions for developing your intellectual and thereby emotional wellness during your leave of absence. Take the Academic Skills Priorities Inventory to get started.

ACADEMIC SKILLS PRIORITIES INVENTORY

Use the checklist to identify the areas of academic skills you want to attend to during your leave. You'd like to find ways to build and maintain:

- Learning efficiently:** sustaining attention, building reading and/or writing fluency, etc.
- Managing time:** meeting deadlines, tracking and using time efficiently
- Organization:** keeping physical environment tidy, ordering electronic and paper materials
- Memory:** recalling what you've read or heard
- Understanding of content/information:** mastering knowledge in your major, etc.
- Engaging in academic discussions or writing:** participating to share thoughts and ideas
- Test-preparation and test-taking:** measuring and demonstrating knowledge
- Presenting:** sharing or disseminating knowledge to others
- Other:**

- Other:**



HELPFUL HINT: YOU ARE ON THE RIGHT TRACK!

Whether you choose one or all the areas of academic skills listed in the priorities inventory, you are on the right track. To get started, let's focus your energy on just one area. Once you've identified that one area move on to the next section for ideas to get started at your own PACE.



Having to step away from school greatly heightened my anxiety about academics. For a long time, I couldn't focus on all of the things from my short stint at college that I felt good about. I could only focus on how I had to step away and saw that as a failure. Time away heightened my anxiety and apprehension about academics even more."

- WYATT M -

NOW TAKE A STEP AT YOUR OWN PACE

Using the priorities you established in the Academic Skills Priorities Inventory, explore the recommended steps, sources, and sites below. Remember to use your existing resources and supports for help along the way.

Learning efficiently

- Learn more about how you learn by taking a brief [Learning Style Inventory](#)
- Apply a new learning strategy the next time you watch and/or listen to content, perhaps practicing with content from a free [Massive Open Online Course \(MOOC\)](#)
- Practice and build academic strategies with the individualized support of a [College Coach](#)
- Take a course as a non-matriculating student at an extension school or community college in your area or online

Managing time

- Explore tools to help you manage and track time: [Forest, Calm, Tomato Timer](#)
- Identify at least one activity or task you are responsible to complete daily
- Make time for fun and creativity in your [daily routine](#)
- Build and track your schedule with a trusted advisor or [executive functioning coach](#)
- Try [Google Calendar](#) for tracking daily tasks (e.g. laundry, hangouts, medication, etc.)

Organization

- Explore using [tools](#), color coding, and strategies that make organizing enjoyable
- Practice and build academic strategies with the individualized support of a [College Coach](#)
- Recruit a trusted support or advisor from your social network ([see page:14](#)) for help

Memory

- Download and use the [Lumosity](#) app to improve memory, attention, and flexibility
- Consider how to build your [interest and intention](#) when learning new information
- Practice [mnemonic devices](#) to remember facts, directions, and lists (e.g. groceries)

Understanding of content/information

- Refresh or build your knowledge in a subject area with a free MOOC, Massive Open, Online, Course through [Coursera](#) and [EdX](#)
- Consider auditing a course at your school, an extension school, or a local community college for practice learning at a fraction of the cost
- Search local or online news sources for information about free classes or workshops

continued on next page >

NOW TAKE A STEP AT YOUR OWN PACE *continued*

Engaging in academic discussions or writing

- Develop critical academic skills and wellness with peers in Boston University's free [LEAD BU](#) course - available in person and online
- Explore [Meetup](#) to connect with local people and engage in meaningful conversations with people who share your interests and goals

Test-preparation and test-taking

- Practice the [Feynman Technique](#) to explain or review something new you've learned
- Use the free assessments in online courses through [Coursera](#) and [EdX](#)

Presenting

- Enroll in a [Toastmasters](#) workshop to build communication and public speaking skills
- Practice building a PPT presentation on a topic about which you enjoy talking
- Use mealtime or a phone conversation to practice sharing your thoughts and opinions



TAKING A CLASS DURING YOUR LEAVE

Taking a class during your leave can be a great way to a) build and maintain skills, b) stay engaged in academia for personal satisfaction, c) fulfill your school's leave of absence requirements, and/or d) make progress toward your degree.

Your home university is the BEST source for course approval, so make sure you connect with your college advisor (yes, even on your leave!), registrar, or dean of students for approval to take a course and to decide which course to take. [CollegeTransfer](#) may also provide you an idea of what your institution might accept as transfer credit.

Deciding on the course(s) to take during your leave, you will want to consider:

- Start date and your readiness to manage course demands
- Cost & location
- Registering as a non-degree-seeking student process
- Course format & time of day course is offered
- Transferability of course back to your home institution

STAYING CONNECTED WITH YOUR SCHOOL

When you take a leave of absence, it's helpful to have someone at your school who can be a trusted counselor and point of contact through whom you can **maintain a connection and a sense of belonging**. This person, or people, can help you navigate the paperwork and processes involved in leaving and returning, and provide guidance on how to manage your time on your leave. If you want to stay connected and informed with your school during your leave, consider contacting the following individuals at your school:

- **Case manager** whose job it may be to orient you to options for support during your leave and process for returning
- **Counselor or counseling services** for recommendations for care and resources during your leave and upon your return
- **Peers, teammates, & roommates** for support and information about campus
- **Trusted faculty** for support and guidance for re-enrollment and future course/program choices
- **Dean of Students or Department Heads** for support and ideas/options for re-enrollment (e.g. adjusted course schedule)
- **Disability/Access Services** for support and ideas/options for re-enrollment (e.g. reduced course load)
- **Academic Advisor** for support finding/approving coursework/skills-building opportunities to complete during your leave and course load upon your return
- **Campus-based employers** for continued or future employment opportunities or suggestions and/or letters of recommendation
- **Trusted spiritual guide** for recommendations on how to find meaninging and purpose throughout your leave of absence and potential return



HELPFUL HINT: BE PERSISTENT! *It can be difficult to stay in contact with your school and receive the same level of attention and support from your school during a leave of absence. Stay persistent, and if you cannot get a response from one person on campus, consider turning to other departments and/or trusted advisors who can help you advocate.*

TRANSFERRING SCHOOLS

It's possible that one of the reasons why you found yourself on a leave of absence is the school where you previously studied is not a good fit for you. You may consider allotting time during your leave of absence to explore transferring to another college or university. We recommend the following inventory, exercises, and organizational tools on the next page to explore if transferring is the right decision for you.

COLLEGE TRANSFER INVENTORY

Use the following checklist to assess your satisfaction with the college or university from which you're currently on a leave of absence. Check the statements that are true for you, and consider sharing and discussing your findings with a trusted support or advisor. At my college/university, the:

- Number of people on campus/in classes is too big/small for me
- Pace of the academic workload is too fast/slow for me
- Academic supports and resources I'm looking for aren't available or valued
- Emotional supports and resources I'm looking for aren't available or valued
- Culture or vibe is not in line with my values or goals
- Faculty teach and connect with students in ways unfamiliar to/uncomfortable for me
- Student groups, organizations, & teams aren't available/don't match my interests/goals
- Major and/or minor I hope to study is not available
- My identity, background, or culture are not supported or represented
- Other: _____
- Other: _____



HELPFUL HINT: CREATE AND SHARE A TRANSFER SPREADSHEET! Just as you organized your thoughts, deadlines, and application materials when you applied to school, staying organized throughout the transfer process is helpful. Consider creating and sharing a spreadsheet with a coach, trusted advisor, or support that outlines prospective schools and all the facets of campus-life, programming, resources, and culture you find meaningful. The first column can be your "Ideal College" naming exactly what you're expecting out of your college experience across all the dimensions you find important.

Example spread sheet:

School	Cost	Location	Vibe	Major	Supports	App Due
<i>Ideal College</i>						

Other column titles might be: application materials, student groups/teams, environment, abroad options, work study options, faculty, etc.

Your leave of absence at your own **PACE**. **P**eople, **A**cademics, **C**are & **E**ngagement

Let's explore C: Care.

CARE: WELLNESS PRACTICES AND SUPPORTS

Finding and accessing care during your leave of absence is a highly individualized process.

How you define care is likely very unique to you and may consist of a broad range of services, supports, programs, and resources. Care may be clinical or non-clinical; it may enhance or promote health in single or multiple domains of wellness. Care may involve a variety of people, places, things and activities. We recommend you examine the areas of care you think could be helpful to explore, try out, or resume during your leave.

“

***Taking time off to take care
of your mental health is ok, and
having support and help from
others is MORE THAN OK.”***

- JOSH W -

CARE PRIORITIES INVENTORY

Use the checklist to identify resources you might explore during your leave.

- Information about wellness & wellbeing**
- Group support:** class, workshop, or club
- Tribal or spiritual guidance**
- Individual emotional support:** therapy, counseling, or psychopharmaceutical care
- Wellness coaching or mentoring**
- Physical activity:** support moving your body for wellness
- Sleep-related training and support**
- Diet-related wellness training and support** (e.g. eating, meals, shopping)
- Support around managing substance use/abuse**
- Intensive inpatient support/hospitalization**
- Supported housing and/or live-in treatment/care options**
- Other:**

- Other:**

NOW TAKE A STEP AT YOUR OWN PACE

Using the priorities you established in the Care Priorities Inventory, explore the recommended steps, sources, and sites below. Remember to use your existing resources and supports for help along the way.

Information about wellness & wellbeing

- [Pause to examine what wellness means to you](#)
- Enroll in the free [The Science of Well-being](#) course through Coursera
- Develop critical academic skills and wellness with peers in Boston University's free [LEAD BU](#) course - available in person and online

Group support: class, workshop, or club

- Use [NAMI](#) to connect with other young adults who live with a mental health condition
- Join [NITEO Activities](#), free workouts, hangouts, and outings in person and online
- Get connected with your local or school [Active Minds](#) chapter
- Try a therapeutic support group; search [Psychology Today](#) or [Good Therapy](#).

Individual emotional support: therapy, counseling, or psychopharmaceutical care

- Search potential providers based on your goals and needs through [Psychology Today](#)
- Find a provider that offers online treatment through [Better Help](#)
- Explore [Talk Space](#) for treatment and support plans uniquely for you
- Download [Ten Percent Happier](#) for access to free grounding meditations
- Explore the values of care with a trusted mentor, spiritual guide, tribal member

Wellness coaching or mentoring

- Learn more about [wellness coaching](#) and various models
- Meet with a [College Coach](#) or [Coach-Mentor](#) to explore the individualized, non-clinical support around managing wellness goals and practices
- Reach out to a trusted high school/college advisor, family member, or family friend for coffee/tea
- Reach out to a spiritual advisor, tribal leader, or community member for consultation or guidance
- Explore support meetings like [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- Consider [Collegiate Recovery Programs](#) that support sobriety and sober living

Physical activity: support moving your body for wellness

- Search local news and media sources for information about groups, clubs or teams (e.g. biking, walking, running, soccer)
- Conduct an online search for local studios, gyms, or wellness centers
- Search [Meetup](#) for opportunities to join local groups, teams, or clubs
- Consider online studio or gym membership options (e.g. [Yoga Collective](#))
- Try [meal planning](#) to save money and time and build in more health-promoting options

For support around sleep, diet, managing a substance use/abuse condition, intensive inpatient program options/hospitalization, or supported housing and/or live-in treatment/care options, we encourage you to connect with your current provider (e.g. therapist, psychiatrist, primary care physician, etc.) for specific, individualized recommendations.

COLLEGE COACHING

College coaching can be a helpful resource to build critical wellness skills and supports and manage your coursework and wellness across all eight domains: social, physical, environmental, spiritual, academic, financial, vocational, and emotional. During your leave, you might consider working with a college coach who can also support you upon your return to college. The following are some examples of programs to explore with your supports.

CMHP College Coaching college coaches provide highly individualized, person-centered support around building and maintaining wellness and making progress toward academic, social, and wellness goals

Springboard Momentum launch specialists are near-aged peers who support individuals build critical life skills and academic, health, and social success strategies

College Re-Entry Coaching one-on-one coaching models offers individuals support around building realistic exploratory and implementation plans for returning to college

Your leave of absence at your own **PACE**. **P**eople, **A**cademics, **C**are & **E**ngagement

Let's examine E: Engagement.

ENGAGEMENT: MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT

Being connected, or engaged, creates belonging as well as structure and routine that can promote your overall physical, emotional, intellectual, and social health. Keeping a routine while you're on leave is also excellent practice for keeping up with commitments, appointments, and communication you will need to manage when you return to school. In this section, you will have the opportunity to examine programs built for students in your position — considering or taking a leave of absence — your personal values, strengths and goals to get you thinking about ways to get engaged that are meaningful to you, explore ideas for ways to get engaged, and talk about your leave of absence in the relationships you're building. Let's get started with programming designed to support college students taking leaves of absence.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE PROGRAMMING

During your leave, you might consider enrolling in a more robust program designed for students who take a leave of absence. The following are some examples of programs to explore with your supports.

NITEO a Boston University-based program for young adults (18-24) on leave from college — available in Boston and online. Through academic instruction, college coaching, and peer-led activities, this program builds collegiate resilience for a successful return to college.



College Re-Entry at Fountain House in Manhattan, NY, this program is for college students (18-30) who withdraw from their studies due to mental health challenges. College Re-Entry helps students return to college and successfully reach their educational goals.

College Excel partnered with Central Oregon Community College in Bend, Oregon, this residential program offers coaching-based college support for traditional and non-traditional learners (18+) to build skills for college and beyond.

Edge is a co-educational residential collegiate community based in Chicago, Illinois. With the support of therapeutic and life coaching, this program helps college students build academic and social skills as well as holistic wellness for thriving.

Next Step associated with the Judge Baker Children’s Center, this program supports young adults (16-20) living with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger’s Syndrome, or a non-verbal learning disability build skills for college success and independent living.

Semester Off based in Wellesley, MA is a group-based, educational program for young adults (17-25) on a leave of absence from college. The program draws on Eastern and Western traditions as well as recent advances in mental health care to build academic, social and wellness skills.



PERSONALIZING ENGAGEMENT

The ways in which you find satisfaction in belonging to a group, organization, or community are highly individualized based on your personal values, strengths, and goals. In this section, explore and plan how you will find personal satisfaction getting engaged during your leave of absence.

VALUES, INTERESTS, & GOALS INVENTORY

You deserve to connect with others who share your values and interests and be involved in activities that align with your goals if you want to. Take a moment to reflect on and identify your priorities for getting involved.

Identify the TOP FIVE values you prioritize in an activity. In other words, if you are going to get involved in an activity, you want it to be (e.g. adventurous, challenging, resume-building):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Identify the TOP FIVE activities or ways you prefer to spend your time. In other words, if you could build an ideal day, in what activities would you participate (e.g. D&D, running, reading):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Identify the TOP FIVE goals or reasons for getting involved or engaged (e.g. University or College requirements, parent/family encouragement, feel a sense of belonging):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

AREAS OF CHALLENGE AND STRATEGIES

It's reasonable and real to face challenges as you take on new responsibilities and engage in new activities with new people.

In some cases, it will become easier with time and practice, and in some cases you may want to build strategies to help you navigate your way more effectively. Everything you're learning about yourself and how to manage your wellness when you engage in new and different activities, is valuable both for how you experience your leave of absence and also how it informs your eventual transition back to school. Use the space below to explore strategies and tools to help you pursue your goals of getting engaged and staying well.

Identify the TOP THREE challenges you anticipate encountering in a new activity:

EXAMPLES: *difficulty reading a social interaction and saying the wrong thing; avoiding the activity because it's scary and new*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Identify the TOP THREE strategies that have helped you successfully navigate a new activity:

EXAMPLES: *suggest or choose a social activity that involves little talking (e.g. movie); excusing yourself to the restroom for a mental break*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Identify the TOP THREE situations or activities to avoid because they are either unhealthy or triggering for you

EXAMPLES: *going to gatherings where you can anticipate there will be substances; taking on a full-time job or course load*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

NOW TAKE A STEP AT YOUR OWN PACE

Using the priorities you established in the Values, Goals, and Interests Inventory, as well as the section explore the recommended steps, sources, and sites below. Remember to use your existing resources and supports for help along the way.

Finding work

- Use the [My Career Story](#) toolkit to explore your interests and inspirations
- Connect with a [vocational rehabilitation](#) counselor for support navigating employment
- Get involved in [National and Community Service](#) that match your skill set, passion, and availability
- Use a platform like [LinkedIn](#) to connect or reconnect with potential employers, or browse profiles for ideas of how to build out your profile or resume
- Browse job opportunity search sites like [Indeed](#), [Glassdoor](#), or [ZipRecruiter](#)

Building relationships & social connections

- Join the [Healthy Relationships](#) class a free skills-building class focused on understanding, building, navigating, and maintaining health-promoting interpersonal connections
- Consider meeting and connecting with people — locally or virtually - who share your interests and goals through [Meetup](#)
- Download and use the [Bumble](#) app to search for and meet potential friends, dates, or employers

Maintaining and building academic stimulation and engagement

- Enroll in the free course at Boston University, [LEAD BU](#), to practice keeping a routine
- Practice the [Feynman Technique](#) to explain or review something new you've learned
- Use the free assessments in online courses through [Coursera](#) and [EdX](#)
- For more ideas, see Section A: Academic Skills in the manual (page: 18)



LET'S PAUSE HERE: IT'S OK IF THE FIRST TIME IS JUST OK!

There are lots of reasons why the first time you participate in an activity or try a new exercise you don't feel sparks or excellent about the effort or interaction. Make space for self-compassion and permission and stay open to trying again.



Everyone's academic journey is their own. It's tough to think you're falling behind, but college isn't a race. Do what is best for you. No one is judging you for taking a leave of absence, even if you think they are."

- RACHAEL C -

TALKING ABOUT YOUR LEAVE

You may find that socializing - even with family, trusted friends or supports - can bring on strong feelings of worry and anxiety. You might worry they'll want to talk about your leave or something you're not prepared or don't want to talk about. We recommend practicing what you'll say in different conversations remembering you get to decide how much and to whom you share. **Being prepared with what to share (and avoid) can bring relief.** Consider the suggested language below, and write your own thoughts, to prepare for these conversations in various social situations.



High school, grade school, and neighborhood friends

You could say: *"I started off at [college], but I'm not sure it's a fit for me right now. I'm taking some time away to decide."*

You might also say: _____

College Friends

You could say: *"I'm taking time off to see if returning to [college] is what I really want."*

You might also say: _____

New Friends

You could say: *"I'm a student at [college], and this semester I'm taking time to work on personal goals."*

You might also say: _____

continued on next page >

Neighbors

You could say: *"I was previously studying at [college], but the timing wasn't right. I took a side step to work on some self-care and build skills to feel better prepared to return."*

You might also say: _____

Family or Family Friends

You could say: *"You might have heard, I'm currently on a leave of absence from [college]. It's not what I planned, but I'm making use of the time away as best I'm able."*

You might also say: _____

Potential (Dating or Romantic) Partner

You could say: *"I feel fortunate I've had the opportunity to study at [college]. I'm also glad to be on a leave briefly to spend time on my personal goals."*

You might also say: _____

Current or Potential Work Colleague/Employer

You could say: *"I found my time at [college] valuable. I also value practical, hands-on experiences and skills-building opportunities, as I do/hope to working here."*

You might also say: _____



IV. Returning to School After a Leave

Transitioning Back to College

Returning to your College or University after a leave of absence, like any transition, can be fraught with emotions — excitement, joy, worry, anxiety.

Most often, students describe feeling all of these feelings. It's important to reflect on how you feel, as your feelings about your readiness are central to your next steps in how and when you re-engage in coursework. In this section, you will have an opportunity to examine and track your readiness to return to school, as well as explore resources to facilitate your transition and map out the logistics for your successful return.

Assessing Readiness to Return

Often your path to resuming classes is paved with many conversations and careful consideration. Consider using the spreadsheet below to organize your thoughts and feelings and ultimately evaluate your readiness to return to college. As you populate the template, consider each of the 8 domains of wellness (emotional, environmental, physical, spiritual, social, intellectual, financial, occupational) as a guide for areas to evaluate.



	Benefits/Pros	Drawbacks/Cons
<p>Returning to College [INSERT SEMESTER/YEAR]</p>		
<p>Not Returning to College [INSERT SEMESTER/YEAR]</p>		

HELPFUL HINT: THE OVERLAP IS INTENTIONAL! Using the readiness to return exercise (above) you will notice an overlap in the diagonal sections. For example, “benefits to returning” may seem quite similar to “drawbacks of not returning”. These prompts, however, are different and intentional and can facilitate in your thorough reflection and planning.

Tracking Readiness to Return

Deciding to return to college can be driven by family, social, financial, or institutional pressures or expectations. We recommend tracking your readiness to return as objectively as possible to build your confidence and drive away worries or negative thoughts about returning.

INDICATORS OF READINESS TRACKER

Use the space below to list the top 10 indicators - observable markers - of your readiness to return to college keeping in mind your return may be part-time.

EXAMPLE: *taking medication independently and regularly*

EXAMPLE: *managing a regular sleep schedule of at least 7 hours/night*

EXAMPLE: *working with a coach to track and manage daily responsibilities*

EXAMPLE: *engaging in activities that promote healthy living*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____



***School will always be there when you're ready
to return. Take care of yourself first."***

- HURY M -

INDICATORS OF NOT-YET-READY TRACKER

Use the space below to identify the top 10 indicators - observable markers - that you are not yet ready to return to college keeping in mind no single marker is reason alone to not return; not every area of wellness will be 100% upon a return.

EXAMPLE: *working on incomplete grades/coursework you want to finish before returning*

EXAMPLE: *haven't found key wellness supports (e.g. clinician, coach, tutor)*

EXAMPLE: *missing or lacking motivation, passion, or instinct the timing is right*

EXAMPLE: *I'm still using substances regularly*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____



LET'S PAUSE HERE: WHAT'S DIFFERENT OR CHANGING?

At any point during your leave, you may start to feel eager or even anxious for a return to the independence you experienced at school, your valued and familiar role as student, and/or your peer group, teammates, or loved ones on campus. It's important the decision to re-enroll in coursework is informed by indicators of your personal readiness that address the question, "What will be different to promote your overall wellbeing when you return?"

Deciding Part- Versus Full-Time Re-Enrollment

In considering a return from leave, it's important to know you may have options for returning as a full-time or part-time student.

Through your Disability and Access Services Office or Coordinator, you may be eligible to receive an accommodation that grants full-time student status (access to all benefits and financial aid) while taking a part-time course load. You might even be able to complete your degree while attending classes part-time. Your disability/access coordinator, your academic advisor, financial aid advisors, and members of your support team can help you understand your options.

PART-TIME VS FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT INVENTORY

Use the prompts below to guide your exploration of part-time enrollment as a feasible and health-promoting decision for you. Consider with:

Financial aid office/family

- the cost difference per semester/quarter (or class) part- versus full-time
- eligibility for the same amount of financial aid for part-time vs full-time students
- ability to pay for full-time college
- ability to earn money if attending part-time
- ability to maintain a work study job as a part-time student

Family/friends/supports

- the importance of finishing college within a certain timeframe
- feeling successful and proud enrolling part- versus full-time
- willingness to finish my degree at a pace that works individually, even if that means enrolling in school for longer

Athletic/organizational coach/leader

- eligibility to play/participate in activities/competitions if I'm part time
- the impact of scholarship money if enrolled part-time
- ability to hold leadership positions and/or qualify for awards if part-time

Housing department/family

- availability of on-campus housing as a part-time student
- need to pay for off-campus housing, if on-campus housing isn't available
- availability to live at home

Student health office

- the impact on accessing student health insurance as a part-time student
- access to university supports as a part- vs full-time student

Mapping Out the Return

You've been working hard at building your readiness to return to college. If you've made your way through this Guide, you've practiced finding and connecting with people and care who support your wellness. You've also found meaningful ways to develop and maintain your academic skills and engagement to promote belonging and satisfaction. **Now you've arrived at mapping out the logistics involved in your return.**

YOUR RETURN PLAN CHECKLIST:

Use these prompts to consider, organize, and plan for your successful return to school.

Re-entry documentation & meetings

- I have informed the point person for re-entry at my College/University
- I have submitted any necessary personal statements
- I have submitted any necessary medical information/documentation
- I have submitted any necessary letters of support
- If required, my re-entry interview is on (date/time): _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Housing

- My housing priorities include (e.g. single, sober living): _____

- I will be living in/at: _____
- I will be living with: _____
- If I'm moving, the move-in date is: _____
- It's important for me to share with my roommates: _____

- Other: _____
- Other: _____

continued on next page >

MAPPING OUT THE RETURN *continued*

Finances & environment

- Throughout the term, it's my responsibility to pay for: _____

- My monthly budget is: _____
- My weekly budget is: _____
- My meal plan is: _____
- If I want to grocery shop, I can go to: _____
- Campus and local pantries, food banks, and refrigerators are located at: _____
- Social security income is: _____
- Meal share programs at my school include: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Care & support

- My therapist/counselor is available to meet(day/time): _____
- When I need medication refilled, or medicine, I can go to: _____
- I will communicate with my parents/family/supports (day/time): _____
- My spiritual advisor or tribal leader is available to meet (day/time): _____
- My personal care practices for wellness include: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

continued on next page >

MAPPING OUT THE RETURN *continued*

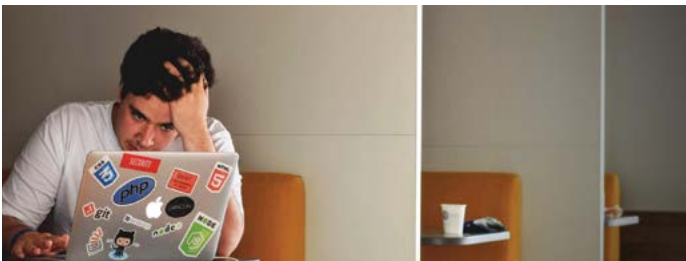
Academics & course enrollment

- My approved courses are: _____
- I have purchased my textbooks/materials (e.g. computer, printer, notebooks)
- I know when my classes meet
- I'm able to open university/college email
- I'm able to access necessary university/college platforms (e.g. Blackboard, Canvas)
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Support & resources

- I've submitted appropriate documentation to disability & access services
- My approved accommodations are: _____

- My point person in disability & access services is: _____
- I know how to access my approved accommodations
- My academic advisor is: _____
- I know I can access local or campus health services at (location/phone): _____
- I know how to access tutoring services
- My point person in disability & access services is: _____
- Other: _____
- Other: _____



HELPFUL HINT: USE YOUR SKILLS AND SUPPORTS TO STAY WELL WHILE YOU PLAN!

Build in activities and use the coping strategies you've built throughout the process. Call your therapist, have dinner with a friend, or journal. Take one day at a time and pay attention to what is working (and not working) for you.

Your Resources

The people, places, things and activities that kept you well during your leave of absence are supports you may want to access upon your return. Use the following checklist of common campus-based and campus-adjacent contacts, offices, and resources to connect with as you map your successful re-entry to school.

- **Leave of Absence & Re-Entry Department or Contact** This office or contact may be available to support you through the processes of leaving, staying well and connected during your leave, and returning. You may want to ask this office or individual for support navigating your 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 you are able to access and participate in the living and learning opportunities at your school. Whether you are looking for classroom adjustments to support your learning or an advocate to co-navigate housing accommodations, you may want to connect with the disability & access office or coordinator.
- **Counseling Services** Staff, psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical nurse specialists, licensed mental health clinicians and licensed clinical social workers may be available at your school to help you address any psychological or adjustment issues that arise in a university community. In addition to one-on-one appointments, counseling service centers may offer group counseling on topics such as depression, grief, anxiety, and more. Colleges and Universities that do not provide counseling services may have a referral coordinator who can connect you with community-based providers and resources.
- **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 if you have a concern and you don't know where to turn for help.
- **Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Office** Your institution may 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.
- **Academic Advisors** Your academic advisor is the person who helps you choose your major, your minor, and all of your classes along the path to graduation. They are also a great resource to ask about professors and classes that are a good fit for your learning style, in addition to fitting within your chosen major/minor They can also help you explore student groups and resources on campus. It's an excellent idea to schedule at least one meeting per semester with your academic advisor.

- **Active Minds** Active Minds is a leading non-profit organization impacting college students and mental health. Now on more than 800 campuses, they directly reach college students each year through campus awareness campaigns, events, advocacy, outreach, and more. Find your University's chapter here: <https://www.activeminds.org/programs/chapter-network/>
- **Student Groups & Activities** Part of enhancing your social wellness on campus involves finding YOUR people. Whether it's a running club, knitting group, or environmental protection group, your college has a group unique to your interests. Identify a few student groups, along with meeting times, to join before returning to campus.
- **Dean of Students** The Dean of Students office at your college is committed to your personal and academic growth. In their offices, you'll find staff committed to helping you acclimate to the University. They also sponsor student events and guide standards for student conduct.
- **Educational and Writing Support Center** Do you ever wish you could have someone read over a paper before you turn it in? Your campus offers educational and writing support for exactly that! Many support centers offer one-time or weekly appointments if you are looking for more consistent tutoring around writing, math, science, and many other subjects.
- **Work-Study & Campus-Based Work** Finding a part-time job at your college can be a productive way to spend free time, meet other students, and earn income. Your university has a Student Employment Office that will work with you to find opportunities both on and off campus. Similarly, Federal Work Study is awarded through your yearly FAFSA application (fafsa.ed.gov) and provides part-time jobs for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students with financial need. Federal Work-Study is available to full-time or part-time students.
- **Office Hours** Each of your instructors likely offers weekly office hours. This is an opportunity to ask for clarification around class content and assignments, as well as making a connection with your professor for future recommendations and support. Beyond the course content, instructors are also happy to discuss on-campus resources, your adjustment to campus, and more topics about you as a person. As Hamid Nawab, Professor at Boston University, describes his Office Hours philosophy: "Viewing every contact with every student as an opportunity to discover the strengths of that student."

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Everyone's academic journey is their own. It's tough to think you're falling behind, but college isn't a race. Do what is best for you. No one is judging you for taking a leave of absence, even if you think they are."

- RACHAEL C -

