

On-campus consultations available during leave of absence

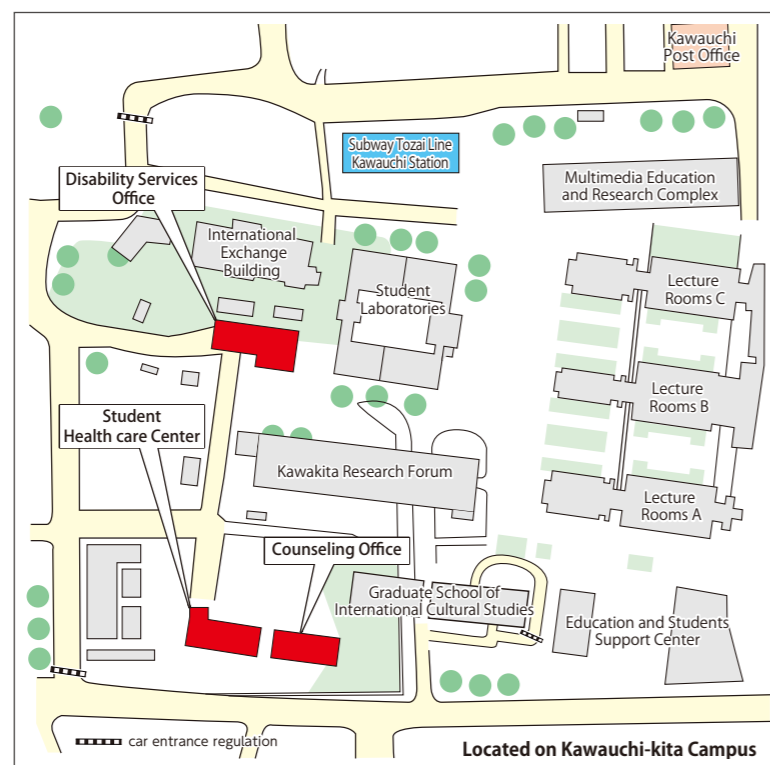
● Center for Counseling and Disability Services

Counseling Office ☎ 022-795-7833
Disability Services Office ☎ 022-795-7696
<http://www.ccds.ihe.tohoku.ac.jp/>

● Student Health Care Center

Mental health ☎ 022-795-7829
<https://www.health.ihe.tohoku.ac.jp/>

There are also consultation services provided by each faculty and graduate school.



Taking a leave of absence?

You may have this pamphlet in your hands because you are a student thinking of taking a temporary leave of absence from the university or because you know of such a student. You may be anxious and have many questions such as: “How can I take a temporary leave?” “What are the merits and demerits of taking a leave of absence?” “What can I do during my temporary leave?” “Would it be possible for me to return to university?”

This pamphlet will answer these questions.



TOHOKU
UNIVERSITY

Center for Counseling and Disability Services , Tohoku University

1 What is a Leave of Absence?

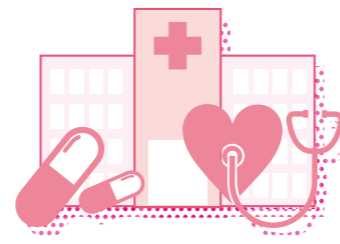
A “leave of absence” is when a currently enrolled student takes a leave from the university with permission. There are many reasons for taking a leave of absence.



financial reasons such as inability to pay tuition



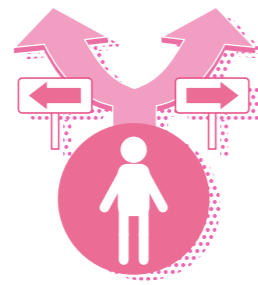
poor academic performance



treatment of illness and/or injury



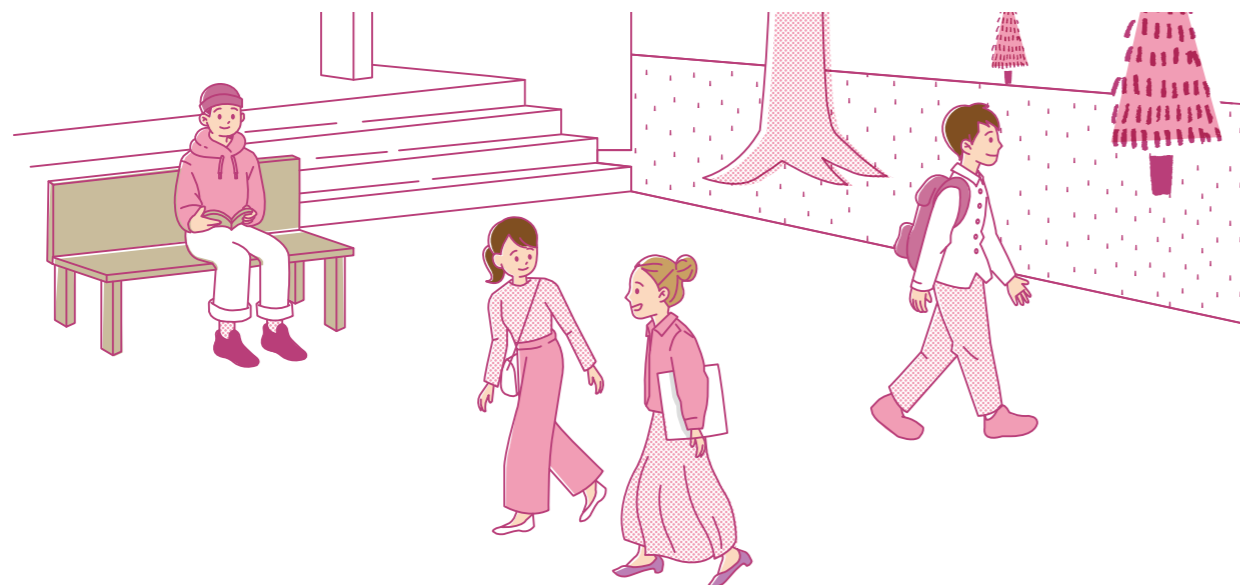
study abroad, internship



to consider one's career



mental health issues



2 Rules for taking a leave of absence and the maximum years of absence

If a student cannot attend classes for more than three months, one may request for a leave of absence by following the prescribed procedure^{*1}. The period of leave of absence differs amongst faculties/graduate schools. It should not exceed one year and may be extended beyond one year under exceptional circumstances. The leave of absence period should not exceed three years in total in the School of Medicine, the School of Dentistry, and the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, whereas it is only two years in total in other faculties. The leave of absence period is not included in the years of enrollment (which differs amongst faculties or graduate schools). The maximum allowable number of years of enrollment includes the period of school attendance and the period of leave of absence^{*2}.

General Provisions of Tohoku University for Undergraduates

Chapter 3 Leave of Absence

Article 18 If a student cannot attend classes for more than three consecutive months due to illnesses or accidents, the student may request a leave of absence by following the prescribed procedures.

2. The leave of absence period should not exceed one year but may be extended beyond a year under exceptional circumstances.
3. The leave of absence period should not exceed a total of two years in faculties other than School of Medicine, School of Dentistry, and Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences. It may be extended up to a maximum of two years under exceptional circumstances.
4. The leave of absence period should not exceed a total of three years in School of Medicine, School of Dentistry, and Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences. It may be extended up to a maximum of three years under exceptional circumstances.
5. Students may request for a return to university during one's leave of absence when circumstances change.

Article 19 The university may appoint a student to take a leave of absence when the student is found to be unfit to attend classes due to illnesses or other circumstances.

2. The university may appoint a student to return to university during one's leave of absence when circumstances change.

Article 20 When the leave of absence extends for more than three consecutive months, this period would not be counted towards the total enrollment period.

Note: Graduate students should refer to the “General Provisions of Tohoku University for Graduates”

^{*1} If you are an international student, please be sure to consult your department offices beforehand if you are considering of taking a leave of absence. Rules differ between international students and domestic students due to VISA regulations, etc.

^{*2} For example, if you are a student from the Faculty of Engineering, the maximum allowable number of years of enrollment is six years (the period of school attendance) plus two years (the period of leave of absence).

3 Merits and demerits for taking a leave of absence

Merits for taking a temporary leave

① You will have time to treat your illness and rest

You can concentrate on treating your illness (including mental illness) by taking a temporary leave. Depending on the illness, a long time may be needed for recovery, or it may be difficult to predict the time needed for recovery. Resting your body and mind is often the first step to recovery. It is essential to take sufficient rest and recover your body's balance for the following long life.

② You will be free from your distress

After taking a leave of absence, you will be temporarily free from the pressures of study and research, and have the mental freedom to think about your future. Then, you will have the time to choose your future path.



③ You will continue to have your student status

You will have your status as a Tohoku University student even when you are on your temporary leave. You may use the student counseling services and other support services, including the Center for Counseling and Disability Services, during your temporary leave the same as before.

④ You will have time to concentrate on activities other than your studies

Sometimes it may be difficult for you to maintain a balance between your studies, including attending classes, preparing for and reviewing lessons, doing research, and other activities you want to do. You may concentrate on other activities such as extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, volunteer activities, internships, long trips, and study things that interest you (studying to get qualifications, etc.) by taking a leave of absence.

⑤ You will be able to study abroad

Tohoku University has a system of studying at overseas partner universities without taking a leave of absence. However, suppose you want to study abroad outside the university system and achieve your goals where you want to for the time you desire; then, you can do so according to your desires and abilities, regardless of your grades, by taking a leave of absence.



⑥ You will be exempt from tuition fees during your leave of absence

You may be exempt from paying tuition fees during the leave of absence by following prescribed procedures within a fixed period, based on "Tohoku University Regulations concerning Exemption of Tuition, Postponement of Payment, and Monthly Tuition Payment." Please consult the educational affairs section of your faculty or graduate school early. Please note that you cannot apply for the tuition fees exemption if you take a leave of absence in the middle of the academic term.

Demerits for taking a temporary leave

① Your graduation will get delayed

If you take a leave of absence, you will graduate from the university later than your classmates. Your classmates will graduate and start working before you.

② Your financial burdens will increase

Although you may be exempt from paying tuition fees during the leave of absence, you will need extra living expenses because your graduation will be delayed. Moreover, if you choose to study abroad and do internships during your temporary leave, your costs will increase.

③ You may have feelings of guilt and impatience

Most students seem to be attending university every day. Therefore, students taking a leave of absence may feel that they deviated from the mainstream and may have feelings of guilt and impatience. Moreover, they may feel anxious of falling behind others.



④ Interactions with university friends may decrease

Because students taking a leave of absence will be doing different things from campus activities, their interactions with university friends may decrease. Some students become reluctant to contact old friends from their elementary, junior, or senior high school days because they may feel inferior to their friends due to the delay in graduating.



⑤ You will need to build new relationships after returning to university

Your classmates will graduate earlier than you, and you will need to interact with junior students during experiments and practical training. Some students may find it difficult to develop new relationships.

⑥ You will need to explain why you took leave at job interviews

When you are searching for a job, you may need to explain why you took a temporary leave. Taking a temporary leave may be an advantage if you can clearly explain the purposes and achievements of taking the temporary leave. On the other hand, it may become a disadvantage if your explanations are unsatisfactory.

4 Procedures for taking a leave of absence

Procedures and methods of taking a leave of absence differ slightly amongst faculties or graduate schools. Please consult the educational affairs section of your faculty/graduate school for details. You may get the “Request for Leave of Absence” form at the educational affairs section of your faculty/graduate school. On the form, the following will be needed: (1) parent/guardian’s signature, (2) reasons for taking a leave of absence (a medical certificate will be needed if you are taking a leave of absence for your illness), (3) supervisor’s comments (“Comments regarding Request for Leave of Absence”) and seal. You need to submit the form within the specified time to the specified place.

It is recommended to consult with your family, class teacher, class advisor, and/or supervisor in advance.

Consult your parents/guardians and proceed with the procedures for taking a leave of absence

(your parent/guardian’s signature is necessary on the “Request for Leave of Absence” form)



Consult a doctor or use the counseling office when you are troubled

(a medical certificate will be needed if you are taking a leave of absence for your illness)



Consult with your class teacher, class advisor, supervisor, etc.

(a comment from your supervisor, etc. is necessary on the “Request for Leave of Absence” form)

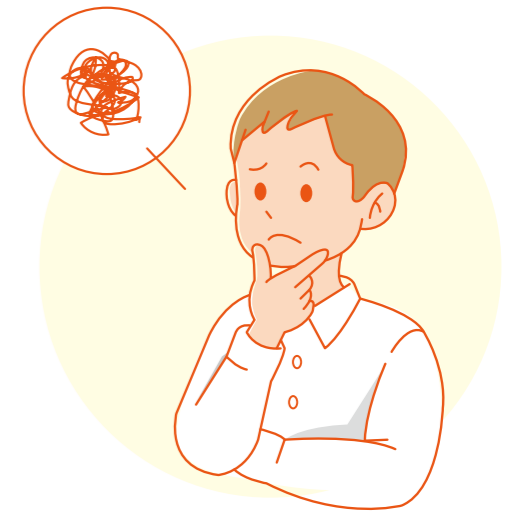


Submit the “Request for Leave of Absence” form within the time limit to the specified place



5 Behavioral and thought patterns of students considering a leave of absence or during their temporary leave

Some students take a leave of absence intentionally for studying abroad or for self-improvement. However, other students do so reluctantly because of reasons such as, “my research is not going well,” “I cannot keep up with my classes,” “I lost my motivation to study,” or “I have mental and physical problems.” Especially in the latter case, the following behaviors and thoughts may occur, and the problems may snowball into a larger problem. For example, you may feel guilty for taking a leave of absence and become mentally depressed. It is difficult to change the environment and people around you, but you can change your perspectives and behaviors. Check if you have any of the following perspectives or behaviors.



- I think that I’m distinctly inferior to other students
- I feel ashamed and dishonored of taking a leave of absence, and will try to hide it from my friends
- I do not reply to my friends’ messages when things start not going well
- I think I have to earn my credits all at once after returning to university
- I won’t give myself time to enjoy during my leave of absence
- I perceive things pessimistically, such as “It’s impossible,” “I’m done with life,” etc.
- I think, “I will try hard next semester,” or “I will do my best next year” when it is still early
- I have an ideal image of university life

6

An example of a student who took a leave of absence

Every person has different experiences. Below is only one example of a student that took a leave of absence. However, for those of you who are unsure of what to do and when to do it, please see for some suggestions.

[Before taking a leave of absence]

I entered the Faculty of ○○, ▲▲ Course following my high school teacher's advice based only on the deviation score. The classes were not interesting, and the class levels were too high for me to follow. Moreover, with the increase of the number of specialized subjects, I felt it would be difficult for me to graduate from my current affiliation. At the same time, there wasn't anything I was interested in doing. Because I am anxious about my future, days I cannot sleep are continuing. I wanted to take a leave of absence, find a field I was interested in, and retake the entrance exam or change faculty and/or course.



I visited the student counseling office to consult because I was anxious about how to reconstruct my life

Visited the Student Health Care Center (psychiatry)

Talked to my parents/guardians about the purpose of taking a leave of absence and received their approval

Consulted faculty teachers and followed procedures for submitting necessary documents

[During the leave of absence (Before return to university)]

I returned to my family home and rested. I gradually explored for future career paths. Initially, I didn't know what to do, but woke up at the same time every morning, scheduled something to do from the morning, and replied to messages from university friends as much as possible. I gradually expanded the scope of my activities, consulted with my high school teachers, and visited campus to find something I may be interested in doing. I decided to proceed to the field I was interested in when entering graduate school after a lot of searching on my own. I finally decided to return to university.



Continued counseling sessions at the student counseling office via phone

Visited a local hospital

Gradually explored future career paths with the support of my family

Kept in touch with university friends

Made plans for after returning to university (what courses to take at what time, etc.) through discussions with faculty teachers

Submitted documents necessary to return to university

[After returning to university]

I wanted to make up for the delay as soon as possible. However, I tried not to push myself hard following the advice of others. I was exhausted with the classes after the long absence, so it was good that I only took a few. I intend to restart club activities and part-time jobs after regaining my composure.



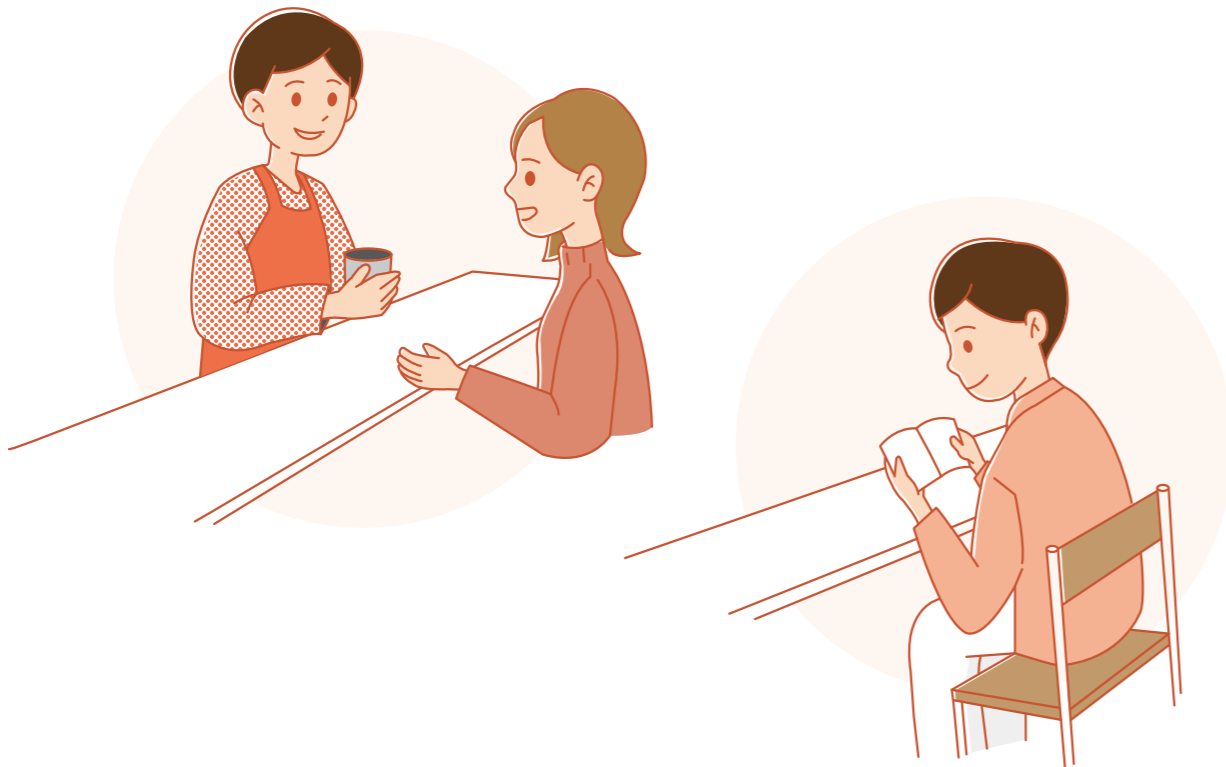
Continued counseling sessions at the student counseling office

Gradually returned to campus life with the support of people around me by asking questions about classes, etc.

7

Retuning to university: how to spend time during the leave of absence

Some students may be reassured after taking a leave of absence, while others may become depressed because they feel unworthy of being in such a situation. It is not uncommon for people to get caught up in the past and wonder why things happened the way they did. When we feel that our life is not going well, we feel as if the people around us are doing very well, and we can't help but feel that we don't want others to see what is not going well or what seems not good. However, there are many students who reconstruct their lives by accepting their current situations and taking action by thinking about what to do in a future-oriented manner. We hope you will think positively, not rush, and do what you can do step by step without becoming too pessimistic. If you stay home all day, your days and nights will easily get reversed. Be conscious of your everyday schedule and find places to go. It can be anything such as club activities, part-time jobs, volunteers, or hobbies (visiting libraries, spending time at a nearby café). Start with something you are comfortable with. If you are having problems with your studies, consult your supervisor or faculty/graduate school teachers and study (research) according to their advice. If you're taking a leave of absence due to your mental/physical unwellness, it may be practical to rest well at your family home. In addition, you may want to use consultation services on/off-campus, to recover your mental and physical health, and to prepare for returning to university.



8

If you know of a student considering a leave of absence: Things to keep in mind when interacting with such students

You may have been surprised when a student consulted you about taking a leave of absence. It is essential to listen carefully to such students, but at the same time, not overwhelm yourself. Students visiting the student counseling office often say, "I don't want to worry my parents/guardians," or "I'm afraid of how my parents/guardians and teachers will react when I consult them." Students tend to keep others away from themselves when they are not feeling well. Therefore, if a student consults you, keep in mind that the student is finally confiding you with many worries. Empathize with their worries and indicate that you are on their side. You do not have to give them a clever advice. They only want you to understand their situation.

Recently, there is an increasing number of consultations from family members and teachers. For example, "My son/daughter does not seem to be attending classes," "I was consulted about taking a leave of absence," "I am worried if mental health issues are involved." The Center for Counseling and Disability Services provides consultations on anything related to students enrolled at Tohoku University. Remote consultations via phone, video call, etc., are also available if you are too busy or live far away. Reasons for taking a leave of absence are diverse as described before. The understanding and support of people around the student are essential. If students are taking a leave of absence for problems related to their studies (research, classes), advice on how to study during their temporary leave may be possible. If students are taking a leave of absence for problems related to their mental health, it may be possible to refer the student to a medical institution if needed. Please use the counseling services when needed.

