

University of Illinois College of Medicine Information

and implications related to sitting for USMLE Step 1

Class of 2026

Introduction:

Students may only sit for USMLE Step 1 once they have successfully completed all of the requirements of the phase 1 curriculum through Block 8 part 1. Students are expected to sit for the USMLE Step 1 exam by March 23, 2024, prior to returning for part 2 of Block 8 (Synthesis) and Block 9 (Transition to Clerkships). Students who sit for the exam after March 23, 2024 will be considered to have deferred Step 1.

Due to the constraints of Phase 2 clerkship scheduling, if a student does not sit by March 23, 2024 they may not be registered for or begin core clerkships or Phase 2/3 electives on April 22, 2024. Students may not sit for the USMLE Step 1 exam during Block 8 part 2 or Block 9 if it requires them to miss scheduled class time. Please refer to procedure number two below for more information.

Deferral of Step 1 exam

Students who have deferred the USMLE Step 1 exam may register for up to six weeks of non-clinical electives during a single term. They may not register for additional non-clinical or clinical courses until they have taken the USMLE step 1 exam. If the student is currently registered and attending a course when they receive their failing USMLE Step 1 score, they may complete that course before stepping out of the curriculum. They may not register for additional clinical courses until they have taken the USMLE step 1 exam.

Deferring the USMLE Step 1 exam, and thereby deferring the start of Phase 2, should only be considered under *certain circumstances*. Deferring the Step 1 exam requires the approval of the appropriate campus Dean of Student Affairs or the appropriate campus Dean of Curriculum.

Deferrals should be considered for: a) low likelihood of passing the exam at the time of the planned Step 1 date, based on data including, the Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment (CBSSA) and NBME examinations given during Block 8 or during the dedicated study period, or b) extenuating personal circumstances.

Notes: a.) Students in the Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP) and other joint degree programs (MPH, MBA, MS) are expected to take the USMLE Step 1 exam by March 23, 2024 and then must complete Block 8 (Synthesis) part 2 prior to “stepping out” of the MD curriculum to pursue the other degree. The same is true for students taking a leave of absence for any reason immediately following Phase 1. The student will be required to take Block 9 (Transition to Clerkships) upon return to the curriculum. If the student is planning to return to the curriculum before Block 9 is offered again, it is recommended that they take Block 9 before stepping out.

Students applying for ADA accommodations with the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) for taking the USMLE Step 1 exam are advised to begin the accommodations

application process several months in advance because the application review process is very lengthy. Pending ADA accommodations decisions by the NBME do not entitle students to begin Phase 2 on schedule.

[APPS 2023-24](#)

Further registration for additional terms/courses is determined by College Policy.

Students are hereby advised of the following procedures related to deferring USMLE

Step 1

1. Students who achieve less than 2 SD below the class mean for any NBME exam during the in-seat portion of Block 8 part 1 will be required to have a meeting with an advisor, learning specialist, or Dean within student affairs or curricular affairs to develop an adjusted and approved Step 1 study plan.
2. Students whose CBSSA examination scores or other self-assessments are of concern, based upon guidelines by the NBME and/or the Office of Student Affairs will be notified that they are required to:
 - Work with their advisor or learning specialist to determine the optimal date to sit for Step 1. Students are advised to follow the “Key Elements of a Successful Study Plan” document, provided at the end of this document.
3. Prior to approving the study plan, the advisor or learning specialist will work with the student to assess whether the plan is being followed and working. Students should check with the advisor or learning specialist for advice on readiness.
4. Students who are concerned they are not making good progress toward sitting for USMLE Step 1 are encouraged to meet with a dean or student affairs/academic advisor to discuss all of the topics outlined in this document related to deferral of Step 1 and the effect of deferral on core clerkships and clinical electives. If after that meeting, the student still would like to defer, they must inform the appropriate campus deans. The request must fully outline the reason(s) the student is requesting the deferral.
5. Students who do not sit for Step 1 by March 23, 2024 must meet with the appropriate campus dean/academic advisor to discuss their academic progress toward sitting for the USMLE Step 1 exam and the likelihood that their promotion to Phase 2 will be delayed.
6. Core clerkship/clinical elective sites require that all additions or changes to students' schedules be done at least **four weeks** prior to the start of the rotation due to the constraints of Phase 2 scheduling. This four-week period is needed between sitting for USMLE Step 1 and starting core clerkships and/or the next clinical elective rotation. Students who are deferring will be scheduled into clerkships/electives based on availability; they are not guaranteed their originally planned rotation schedule.
7. Two-week availability: While four weeks is the standard time needed for courses to prepare for students, in rare instances a student might be allowed to register for a course within a shorter time frame, at the discretion of the campus and dependent on space available. Students must notify administration that they have sat and taken the Step 1 exam and are ready to be registered for core clerkships/clinical electives. Notification within

this timeframe is not a guarantee of the ability of the program to place a student in a given core clerkship/elective.

8. Students approved to defer taking USMLE Step 1 are nonetheless required to participate in all of the Block 8 (Synthesis) part 2 and Block 9 (Transition to Clerkships) course activities. The content and skills in Block 8 part 2 and Block 9 are in the curriculum only once per year, so a student intending to begin Phase 2 at any time during the 2024-2025 year must participate in all required dates. Block 8 part 2 and block 9 are time-intensive courses.
9. Any student who defers taking Step 1 is required to meet with their student affairs/academic advisor or learning specialist to design a study plan that must be approved by the designated student affairs staff/faculty/dean and must include the components of #2 above. A projected USMLE Step 1 exam date must be provided. Any changes to the student's approved Step 1 exam date must be reported to the student's academic advisor or learning specialist.
10. Failure to communicate promptly and reliably during the student's designated study period and/or failure to follow guidance by student affairs staff (i.e., academic skills specialists, advisors, leads, etc.) may result in a professionalism form pursuant to the [Student Academic Policies and Professional Standards](#) (APPS). See the APPS for additional details. Please review the 2023-2024 College of Medicine's policy on Sitting for Step 1 (Section IV.B.)
11. If a student does not register for any credit bearing course work during a single term, the deferral will constitute a Leave of Absence. For more information on Leaves of Absence, go here, see Section VIII of the APPS: [APPS 2023-24](#)
 - Such students will be required to make an official request for a Leave of Absence to the Office of Student Affairs for approval through the College Committee on Student Promotions.
 - If a student requires a leave of absence for the summer term of 2024, the LOA start date will be April 22, 2024.
 - Students will meet with their campus advising team to review the paperwork, financial aid, course registration and healthcare implications of a leave of absence.

Important Considerations for Deferring the USMLE Step 1 Exam

Core clerkship/clinical elective grades must be received by mid-September of Phase 3 in order to be included in the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE) and/or the College of Medicine transcript sent to the AAMC Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS). Any delay taking core clerkships may affect a student's MSPE quartile, eligibility for AOA, and graduating with honors.

In some cases, it will be necessary for students who do not begin a core clerkship during the summer session to have their projected graduation date changed to August or December of 2026. Such a change will defer participation in the residency match programs to the subsequent year.

Deferring the Step 1 exam may affect scheduling of the Step 2CK licensure exam. The ERAS application is available for download to programs on the last Wednesday in September. Students should be aware of this date in order to sit for Step 2 CK in time for a score to be returned and available in the ERAS application on that day.

Registration and Financial Aid:

The following are topics related to the deferred student's registration in the College of Medicine:

- Students are responsible to ensure that their registration is accurate and that it reflects all schedule changes that occur due to their Step 1 exam deferral. Any discrepancies must be reported by the student to the campus or college registrar.
- Any core clerkship or elective with a start date between April 22 and August 2, 2024 is considered a summer course.
- All students must be registered for a minimum of six credits in a term to be eligible to receive federal financial aid. Thus, if a deferred student's semester registration consists of less than six credits, the student is not eligible for financial aid, yet they are responsible for the tuition and fees for any hours for which they are registered, and may be required to pay back any dispersed monies. A leave of absence may also increase student loan debt.
- International students have different registration requirements that can impact their visa status and should consult with The Office of International Services (OIS).
- Any students who defer taking the Step 1 exam are strongly advised to meet with the College of Medicine Office of the Registrar and the College of Medicine Office of Financial Aid to discuss the implications of the deferral on their registration and eligibility for student financial aid.

Scheduling:

Students should not contact individual sites or coordinators to ask for a site assignment. They should work with the Office of Student Affairs and their academic advisors/learning specialists. Contacting core clerkship sites or coordinators in this context is considered unprofessional behavior and can result in a professionalism form pursuant to the professionalism policy. Students who defer Step 1 must still complete the requirements of the Phase 2 *Clinical Connections and Competencies* course and will need to complete all unfinished course requirements during their fourth year.

In most cases, students are not eligible to do “away” rotations at another medical school until all Phase 2 core clerkships have been taken and passed. Having Phase 3 status is the usual requirement for being a visiting student at another medical school.

Students are not eligible to start their required Sub-Internship or the Transition to Residency course until all Phase 2 core clerkships have been completed with a passing grade

The following are other topics related to deferring taking USMLE Step 1:

Per the College of Medicine’s *Time Limit for Completing the MD Degree* a maximum of four years are allowed to complete Phase 1 and pass USMLE Step 1. See [Student Academic Policies and Professional Standards](#) (Section II.A.) The four years begin on the first day of phase 1 Orientation.

Questions about any of the information in this document should be directed to your campus Dean of Student Affairs, Office of Student Affairs:

Chicago: (312) 996-2450: Claudia Boucher-Berry , Acting Assistant Dean of Student Affairs: claudiab@UIC.EDU,

Peoria (309) 671-8410: Eileen Doherty, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs epd@uic.edu.

Rockford (815) 395-0618: Stephanie Calato, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, srcalato@uic.edu,

Approved by the Offices of Curricular and Student Affairs 8/22/2023

Key Elements of a Successful Study Plan:

The following elements should be included in a study plan.

- A daily or weekly schedule that outlines study topics
- An overview of three resources that will be used for study
- A daily or weekly plan for questions and a plan to address incorrect questions/answers.
- Dates for practice tests/assessments - a minimum of 10-14 days apart at minimum
- Anticipated sit date
- Catch up time (recommend at least ½ to 1-day a week)
- Time off (recommend at least 1 day a week)
- Wellness plan (exercise, sleep, nutrition)
- Meet with staff member following self-assessment
- Meetings with staff are scheduled typically every other week
- Students must be in contact with a staff member on a monthly basis at minimum