Dartmouth
GEISEL SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Step 1 Policy

Summary of Purpose

Successfully passing USMLE Step 1 (Step 1) is an essential academic milestone and a requirement for graduation from the Geisel School of Medicine with an MD degree. This policy outlines the expectations, procedures, and supports for students preparing for and completing Step 1 in alignment with their medical education progression.

Scope and Applicability

This policy applies to all Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth MD students.

Definitions

USMLE Step 1 ("Step 1"). The first exam of the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) that assesses basic science knowledge.

Pre-clerkship Committee for Academic Advancement and Growth (PCAAG). Committee charged with longitudinally monitoring the academic performance of pre-clerkship (Phase 1) students.

Clerkship Committee for Academic Advancement and Growth (CCAAG). Committee charged with longitudinally monitoring the academic performance of clerkship (Phase 2 and 3) students.

Academic Progress Committee (APC). Committee charged to review the academic record for students who do not meet standards for advancement and promotion.

Policy Statement

1. Students must pass Step 1 to fulfill the academic requirements for the MD degree and graduate from Geisel.
2. The Geisel academic calendar provides a six-week dedicated study period at the end of

Phase 1 to prepare for Step 1.

3. Students that need to retest one or more Phase 1 assessments may utilize the dedicated study period to prepare for remediation exams and extend their Step 1 study period, if needed.
4. Students must take Step 1 by the last calendar day of Phase 1 unless otherwise approved.
5. Students may request an exception to the Step 1 test deadline due to extraordinary circumstances including but not limited to personal illness or accident, death in the immediate family, cancellation of testing site. Additionally, students may request an exception due to concerns about academic readiness for Step 1.
6. Students are required to complete a school-sponsored National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) self-assessment by December 1 of their second academic year.
7. Students who fail Step 1 are not permitted to start a clinical clerkship or clinical elective until they pass Step 1.
8. Students who receive a failing score report after beginning the first clinical clerkship or elective will be allowed to complete the clerkship or elective.
9. Students must take and pass Step 1 before matriculating into an approved Dartmouth dual-degree program including but not limited to the MD-MBA and MD-MPH. Geisel MD-PhD students must take and pass Step 1 before beginning their PhD coursework.
10. Students must take and pass Step 1 before beginning an academic scholar year (ASY).
11. Students who fail Step 1 on the second attempt will be placed on a leave of absence (LOA).
12. Geisel's Step 1 Policy is subject to USMLE rules regarding retakes and must adhere to them.

Procedure

1. Geisel will use professional expertise and data-driven analysis of students' academic histories including but not limited to Phase 1 assessment performance and NBME practice tests to identify students who would benefit from additional Step 1 study time and support. These students will be notified promptly, assigned a Phase 2 grid that begins with a six-week elective clerkship block, and will be required to enroll in a non-clinical elective approved by the PCAAG and the Assistant Dean for Core Clinical Curriculum (Phase 2).
2. Students may request an exception to the Step 1 test taking deadline by submitting a Step 1 Exception Request Form. Requests are reviewed by the PCAAG and the Assistant Dean for Core Clinical Curriculum (Phase 2), and this group reserves the right to approve, deny, or amend any request, as appropriate. An extension may require the postponement of the student's first clinical clerkship or clinical elective. Students granted an exception are required to adhere to the exception approval and remain subject to the Step 1 policy.
3. Students who have been approved for an extension and require additional Step 1 study time and support will be reviewed by CCAAG to consider options including but not limited to a leave of absence and/or a split Phase 2 schedule in order to provide the necessary time to study and take Step 1 before progression to clinical clerkships or clinical electives. Extended delays will be reported to the APC.
4. Students who fail Step 1 will enter a structured study period and are required to meet with designated staff/faculty in the offices of Academic Advising and Clinical Education, to

create a Step 1 remediation study plan. Students are required to adhere to the remediation study plan. The CCAAG will report all Step 1 failures and remediation study plans to the APC.

5. Students who meet any of the following conditions may be reviewed by the APC for separation from the MD program:
   a. Failing to sit for Step 1 by the last calendar day of Phase 1 without an approved exception.
   b. Failing Step 1 two or more times.
   c. Failing to adhere to remediation plan and/or approved exception plan.

LCME Standard

None.

Related Information: Documents, Policies, Links, Etc.

- Leave of Absence Policy
- Clinical Split Policy
- Status Change Form**:** https://geiselmed.dartmouth.edu/admin/registrar/

Policy Administration

Policy Number	UME-CNTRL-0001		
Reviewed By	Dean for Medical Education	**Effective Date:**	September 18, 2018
Approved By	Medical Education Committee	**Last Date Approved:**	July 16, 2025

Policy Contact Information

Associate Dean for Student Life
Geisel.Office.of.Student.Life@dartmouth.edu

History

Date	History
March 21, 2017	Policy was reviewed and revised. The Medical Education Committee approved the revisions on April 25, 2017.
September 18, 2018	Policy was reviewed and approved by the Medical Education Committee.
August 4, 2020	Policy revised to reflect change to required timing of exam completion and updates to the curriculum.
June 3, 2022	Policy was revised to include a background/rationale about the timing of USMLE Step 1 along with an outline and support structures for students seeking an alternative Step 1 timeline. The policy administration and contact information was changed from the Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. The Medical Education Committee approved the revision on June 15, 2022.
December 21, 2022	Policy revised to change Committee on Student Performance and Conduct (CSPC) reference to Academic Progress Committee (APC).
July 16, 2025	The Medical Education Committee approved the following revisions: 1. Students entering in AY 2025 and beyond are required to sit for USMLE Step 1 prior to starting the clinical stage of their training. Students who entered prior to AY 2025 are not subject to this policy revision. 2. Students who need additional preparation time will automatically be scheduled with a Phase 2 grid that starts with an elective. 3. Academic progression will be paused until the Step 1 policy requirements are met. 4. The APC will be automatically notified of any USMLE Step 1 failures, delays, and extended study plans.

Background

None.