Withdrawal or Leave of Absence

Office of Financial Aid

Life doesn't always go according to plan, and sometimes a student may need to step away from the College after the semester has already begun. Officially, a "withdrawal" or "leave of absence" occurs when a student drops all courses after the add/drop period. If you are considering this path, your first step is to visit the Student Success Center to follow official procedures.

Once a date is established, our office begins the process of "re-evaluating" your aid to determine how much you have earned based on your time on campus within 30 days of notification.

How Your Financial Aid is Earned

Financial aid is not a lump sum granted on day one; it is earned proportionally as you attend class. If you leave before completing 60% of the semester (roughly 8–9 weeks), we are required to return a portion of your funds to their sources.

- **Federal Aid (including PLUS Loans):** We use a specific federal formula: (Total days attended) ÷ (Total days in semester). If you attended only 10% of the term, you "earned" 10% of your federal grants and loans; the remaining 90% must be returned to the government. Once you pass the 60% mark, you are considered to have earned 100% of your federal aid.
- **Institutional Aid:** PC merit and need-based aid are prorated differently. We calculate what percentage of your total Cost of Attendance was covered by your original award. You keep that same percentage of your new, prorated bill. For example, let's say your original semester cost was $40,000 and you were awarded $20,000 in PC institutional aid. In this scenario, your aid covered 50% of your bill. If you withdraw early and the Bursar's Office prorates your tuition charges down to $10,000, your institutional aid is also adjusted to cover that same 50%. You would keep $5,000 of your PC aid to apply against those new charges.
- **Private Loans:** These are capped at your remaining unpaid balance. If you borrowed $10,000 but your final prorated bill is only $2,500, we must return the extra $7,500 to your lender.

Why You Still Might Owe a Bill

A common point of confusion is why a student might still owe Providence College money after withdrawing. This happens because the Bursar's Office (which handles your charges) and the Financial Aid Office (which handles your funding) use different clocks to calculate their adjustments.

While financial aid is earned day-by-day, the tuition bill is adjusted in "blocks" of time. For example, if you withdraw during the first week of the semester, the Bursar may refund 100% of your tuition. By the second week, that refund typically drops to 80%, followed by 60% in week three, and 40% in week four. Once you reach the fifth week of the semester, tuition is generally no longer refundable.

Because the tuition bill often "locks in" at 100% total cost by the fifth week, but your federal financial aid isn't fully "earned" until the ninth week (the 60% mark), a gap is created. In this scenario, you are being charged the full price for the semester, but the government is requiring us to send back a portion of your grants and loans. This is why the amount of aid you are allowed to keep is often less than the charges remaining on your bill, resulting in an unexpected balance due to the College.

Impact on Your Direct Loans

Leaving the College triggers the "Grace Period" for your student loans. Most loans give you six months before repayment begins. If you do not return to school at least half-time before that period ends, you will be required to start making payments. To stay in good standing, you must also complete Exit Counseling at studentaid.gov whenever you separate from the College.

Unofficial Withdrawals and the "50% Rule"

It is important to note that if a student stops attending classes without notifying the College, they are considered to have "unofficially withdrawn." For financial aid purposes, this is triggered if a student earns grades of F or WD in all of their courses at the end of the semester.

When an official withdrawal date isn't recorded, the federal government defaults to the midpoint of the semester as the separation date. In these cases, the "day-by-day" earning formula mentioned above does not apply; instead, the student's federal aid is automatically prorated to 50%. This often results in a significant balance due to the College, as half of all federal grants and loans must be returned immediately.

Protecting Your Future Eligibility

While a single withdrawal doesn't permanently disqualify you from receiving financial aid, it can impact your long-term eligibility. Federal and institutional aid are tied to Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), which measures both your GPA and your "pace"—the ratio of credits you complete versus the credits you attempt.

Because a withdrawal is technically an "attempted" credit that wasn't "completed," it can lower your pace. We encourage all students to review our Satisfactory Academic Progress handout to understand how a leave of absence fits into their long-term academic plan.

Planning Your Return

We look forward to welcoming you back when the time is right. To return, you must follow the re-admittance procedures through the Student Success Center. From a financial perspective, you must still meet the April 15th renewal deadline for returning students. Because funding is subject to availability, meeting this deadline is the best way to ensure your aid package is ready for your return, regardless of your prior award history.