

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Introduced by: Undergraduate Academic Council

Date: March 8, 2010

REVISIONS TO UNIVERSITY POLICIES ON STUDENT ABSENCES

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

- 1) That the following revisions to the University's policies on medical excuses for student absences be adopted for inclusion in the *Undergraduate Bulletin* beginning with the 2010-2011 edition.
- 2) That this policy take effect for the Fall 2010 semester.
- 3) That this proposal be forwarded to President George M. Philip for approval.

Rationale:

Under existing practice, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education provides "absence notes" to students' instructors documenting that the absence has been for a legitimate reason, e.g., illness, death in the family, required appointment, and so on. While the Office of the Vice Provost is comfortable providing notes to students who are able to provide appropriate documentation, such as medical documentation for short-term illnesses, the office does not feel qualified to determine appropriate lengths of absences for longer-term absences, such as those caused by chronic illnesses. Further, in recent years, the number of requests received by the office has steadily increased [1526 in the 2007-2008 academic year, 1783 in the 2008-2009 academic year, and 1192 for the current academic year (as of 2/17/10)] for both long-term absences, and shorter-term absences. In many cases, these letters are being written for students with documentation that could have been readily reviewed by their instructors (i.e., there is no sensitive issue that the student wishes to keep confidential), who, although free to exercise their own discretion, are instead directing students to request a note from the Office of the Vice Provost.

This proposal would place the onus for determining the appropriateness of long-term illness absence requests (defined as an absence due to illness exceeding two weeks in duration) on the University Health Center and provide faculty with some guidance in using their own discretion to excuse student absences of less than one week in duration. In cases of students needing a make-up exam, the Office of the Vice Provost will continue to review documentation, as requested. Additionally, this proposal amends the existing "Minimum Contents of a Class Syllabus" policy to encourage faculty to include an absence policy in their syllabi.

Attendance and Timely Compliance with Course Requirements

Students are expected to attend all classes and all examinations and to complete all course requirements on time. Faculty have the prerogative of developing an attendance policy whereby attendance and/or participation is part of the grade. As noted in the following section, "Syllabus Requirement," instructors are obliged to announce and interpret all course requirements, including specific attendance policies, to their classes at the beginning of the term; an instructor may modify this or other requirements in the syllabus but "must give notice in class of any modification" and must do so "in a timely fashion." This policy also applies to courses that are less than a standard semester in length. In courses that are less than a standard semester in length, the appropriateness of the duration of the excused absence will be determined on a prorated basis consistent with the length of the course in question.

Students will not be excused from a class or an examination or completion of an assignment by the stated deadline except for emergencies, required appointments or other comparable situations. Students who miss a class period, a final or other examination, or other obligations for a course (fieldwork, required attendance at a concert, etc.) must notify the instructor or the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education of the reason for their absence and must do so in a timely fashion.

The Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will only provide letters to instructors asking that students with compelling reasons be granted consideration in completing their work when students have missed an exam or assignment deadline or when the absence exceeds one calendar week. Faculty are expected to use their best judgment when students have appropriate documentation for legitimate absences and not rely on the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education for substantiation when it is not necessary.

If the student foresees a time conflict in advance that will prevent attendance at a class or examination or completion of an assignment, the student is expected to bring this to the attention of the instructor or the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education as soon as the conflict is noted. In the case of an unforeseen event, the student is expected to notify the instructor or the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education within one week of the requested period of absence.

This timeliness is important since if the reason cited by the student is not considered a sufficient excuse, the student will need to know this as soon as possible. Even if the reason warrants granting the excuse, a student's delay in contacting the instructor or the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education may make it more difficult for the University to assist the student with acceptable options for making up the work that was missed.

Although University officials will consider each student's request on its own merits and not attempt to define ahead of time the validity of all the possible reasons a student might give for missing a class or an examination, there are three types of reasons for which excuses will generally be granted: (a) illness, tragedy, or other personal emergency; (b) foreseeable time conflicts resulting from required appointments; and (c) religious observance. It shall be the student's responsibility to provide sufficient documentation to support any request. (In this context, it should be noted that fraudulent excuses are considered violations of academic integrity and are grounds for academic or disciplinary penalties)

a. Illness, Tragedy and Emergencies: If the cause is documented hospitalization or other significant medical reason, a tragic or traumatic experience, or other personal emergency, the student should contact his or her professor or the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (LC 30) as soon as the student is able to do so. In general, students are expected to provide appropriate documentation. In cases where absences exceed one calendar week, the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will review the documentation and, if appropriate, notify the instructor(s) involved of this fact and of the date(s) for which the student has been excused. An instructor in this case may not penalize the student academically for the absence and is expected to provide reasonable assistance to the student concerning instruction and assignments that were missed. If an examination was missed, the instructor must administer a make-up examination or offer an alternative mutually agreeable to the instructor and the student. Any conflicts between student and faculty in accepting the alternative may be presented for resolution to the Chair of the department in which the course is offered.

Written notes from the University Health Center will only be provided to students in instances where absence due to documentable illness exceeds one calendar week in duration. There will be no provision for notes in instances where an illness-related absence is less than one calendar week in duration, except in cases where the student has missed an exam or significant course deadline due to their absence. In these situations the UAlbany Health center Medical Excuse policy will be strictly adhered to. In cases where the student has an illness-related absence extending beyond two calendar weeks in duration, the absence must be reviewed and approved by the University Health Center, then brought to the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. The Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will not accept requests for absence notes submitted more than one calendar week after the requested period of absence.

b. Compelling Time Conflicts: If the cause of the absence is a major academic conference at which the student has a significant participation, a field trip in another course, or some other compelling time conflict, the student must notify the professor involved as soon as possible, providing verification of the conflict. When a student clearly would have been able to notify the instructor well in advance of the conflict, the student is required to do so. If an excuse is granted, the instructor is expected to provide, if at all possible, an alternative by which the student will not be penalized as a result of the conflict. Any conflicts between student and faculty in accepting the alternative may be presented for resolution to the Chair of the department in which the course is offered. The Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education will not accept requests for absence notes submitted more than one calendar week after the requested period of absence.

c. Athletic Events: If the cause of the absence is a varsity athletic contest, i.e., a University-sponsored team competition (excluding practice sessions and intra-squad games), the student should provide the instructor with a note from the Office of Student Athlete Support Services (Department of Athletics and Recreation) listing all scheduled competitions by the last day to add a course. If a student-athlete has provided this documentation in a timely manner, the instructor may not penalize the student academically for these absences and is expected to provide reasonable assistance to the student concerning instruction and assignments that were missed. It is the responsibility of the student to notify instructors of changes to such schedules prior to the date of the event; such changes will be supported with appropriate documentation from the Office of Student Athlete Support Services. If an examination was missed, the instructor must administer a make-up examination or offer an alternative mutually agreeable to the instructor and the student. Any

conflicts between student and faculty in accepting the alternative may be presented for resolution to the Chair of the department in which the course is offered.

d. Religious Observance: Absences for religious observance are covered by Section 224-a. of the Education Law: "Students unable because of religious beliefs to register or attend classes on certain days."

1. No person shall be expelled from or be refused admission as a student to an institution of higher education for the reason that he or she is unable, because of his or her religious beliefs, to register or attend classes or to participate in any examination, study, or work requirement on a particular day or days.
2. Any student in an institution of higher education who is unable, because of his or her religious beliefs, to attend classes on a particular day or days shall, because of such absence on the particular day or days, be excused from any examination or any study or work requirements.
3. It shall be the responsibility of the faculty and of the administrative officials of each institution of higher education to make available to each student who is absent from school, because of his religious beliefs, an equivalent opportunity to register for classes or make up any examination, study, or work requirements which he or she may have missed because of such absence on any particular day or days. No fees of any kind shall be charged by the institution for making available to the said student such equivalent opportunity.
4. If registration, classes, examinations, study, or work requirements are held on Friday after four o'clock post meridian or on Saturday, similar or makeup classes, examinations, study or work requirements or opportunity to register shall be made available on other days, where it is possible and practicable to do so. No special fees shall be charged for these classes, examinations, study or work requirements or registration held on other days.
5. In effectuating the provisions of this section, it shall be the duty of the faculty and of the administrative officials of each institution of higher education to exercise the fullest measure of good faith. No adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student because of his availing himself of the provisions of this section.
6. Any student who is aggrieved by the alleged failure of any faculty or administrative official to comply in good faith with the provisions of this section shall be entitled to maintain an action or proceeding in the supreme court of the county in which such institution of higher education is located for the enforcement of his rights under this section.
- 6-a. It shall be the responsibility of the administrative officials of each institution of higher education to give written notice to students of their rights under this section, informing them that each student who is absent from school, because of his or her religious beliefs, must be given an equivalent opportunity to register for classes or make up any examination, study or work requirements which he or she may have missed because of such absence on any particular day or days. No fees of any kind shall be charged by the institution for making available to such student such equivalent opportunity.
7. As used in this section, the term "institution of higher education" shall mean any institution of higher education, recognized and approved by the regents of the University of the state of New York, which provides a course of study leading to the granting of a post-secondary degree or diploma. Such term shall not include any institution which is operated, supervised or controlled by a church or by a religious or denominational organization whose educational programs are principally designed for the purpose of training ministers or other religious functionaries or for the purpose of propagating religious doctrines. As used in this section, the term "religious belief" shall mean beliefs associated with any corporation organized and operated

exclusively for religious purposes, which is not disqualified for tax exemption under section 501 of the United States Code.

As amended by Laws of 1992, chapter 278

Syllabus Requirement

The instructor of every section of an undergraduate class at the University at Albany shall provide each student in the section a printed or web-published copy of the syllabus for that section distributed during the first week of the class (preferably on the first regularly scheduled day the section meets). This syllabus must contain at least the information defined below. Each instructor retains the right to modify the syllabus and give notice in class of any modifications in a timely fashion. Students are responsible to apprise themselves of such notices. This requirement became effective with the Fall 2002 semester.

Minimum Contents of a Class Syllabus:

- Catalog number and title of the course.
- Term and class number of the section.
- Location(s) and meeting times of the section.
- Instructor's name and title.
- If applicable, name(s) of teaching assistants in the class.
- Instructor's contact information (e.g., e-mail address, office phone number, office location, fax).
- Instructor's office hours.
- Course description, overview and objective(s).
- If applicable, General Education category/categories met by the course and how the course fulfills those General Education objectives.
- Prerequisites of the course. The instructor should specifically indicate those prerequisites that are critical to success in the class and that are enforceable.
- Grading scheme: whether the course is A-E or S/U graded and overall method by which grades will be determined ("weights" of exams, class participation, etc.)
- Instructors who do not intend to use the full A-E grading scale, including pluses and minuses, must include the scale that will be employed on the syllabus.
- Course requirements, including but not limited to: required textbooks; other required materials, purchases; fees when applicable; projected date and time of class exams, papers, projects, midterm, and final; attendance policies for the class; general paper, project, and test requirements; requirement of Internet for course work, when applicable.
- Safety policies, when applicable.
- Absence policies, including, where possible, a link to the University's Medical Excuse Policy (http://www.albany.edu/health_center/HealthInfo/Medical%20Excuse%20Policy.doc)

The course syllabus may also include such additional information as the instructor deems appropriate or necessary.

Academic integrity: “While it is strongly recommended that faculty specify in their syllabi information about academic integrity, as well as a description of the possible responses to violations, claims of ignorance, unintentional error, or personal or academic pressures are not sufficient reasons for violations of academic integrity. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the standards and behaving accordingly, and UAlbany faculty are responsible for teaching, modeling and upholding them. Anything less undermines the worth and value of our intellectual work, and the reputation and credibility of the University at Albany degree.” (University’s *Standards of Academic Integrity Policy*)