Introduced by: Undergraduate Academic Council

Date: October 9, 2003

REVISIONS IN POLICIES GOVERNING EXCUSES FROM UNDERGRADUATE CLASSES, EXAMS, AND TIMELY COMPLETION OF ASSIGNMENTS

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

1. The University Senate approve the attached revisions proposed by the Undergraduate Academic Council.

2. The bill be referred to the President for approval.

RATIONALE

In accordance with New York State Education Law section 224-a, excuses must be granted for absences from class, for absences from examinations, and for the failure to complete by the assigned deadline "any study or work requirements" if the student is able to demonstrate that religious observance interfered with attending the class or exam or completing the assignment when it was due. Similar provisions have been adopted by the University Senate to handle a student's "significant participation" in "a major academic conference… a varsity athletic contest," etc. These regulations are all fully described in the bulletin.

In contrast, for medical and other "compelling" emergencies, comparable redress is described only for absences from examinations. Moreover, the entire set of policies, including those relating to religious observance, fall within the "Attendance" section of the bulletin.

The Dean of Undergraduate has noted that the University's practice goes well beyond the narrow policy. A hospitalization, serious illness, personal
tragedy or other documented trauma that keeps a student from attending a class or taking an examination may also convincingly prevent the student from attending an assigned theatrical performance, completing a paper by the stated deadline, or meeting some other requirement within a class. Undergraduate Studies, when presented with documentation of a sufficiently compelling circumstance, appropriately issues excuses for students, asking the faculty to assist the student by extending a deadline or coming up with an alternative for an assignment or not penalizing the student for a missed class. The UAC agrees that this is appropriate and should continue, but notes that it is not covered by the letter of the current policy.

Therefore, the Council proposes that the section be titled "Attendance and Timely Compliance with Course Requirements" and that the University formally grant the same consideration given to students with compelling foreseeable time conflicts and religious observances to students whose failure to complete a requirement of a course derives from medical problems and other personal emergencies, tragedies or traumas.

At the same time, the UAC revised the policy to emphasize the responsibilities of the student in duly notifying campus officials of the problem and in providing credible evidence of the issue itself and, where relevant, its impact on the individual student. At times the reason for granting an excuse may be highly personal or confidential, and it is natural for a student to go directly to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies to seek an excuse that would cover several classes. However, in revising the policy, the Council also wished to emphasize that an individual faculty member, when confronted with compelling evidence warranting an excuse, is not compelled to have that excuse "validated" by Undergraduate Studies.

The revision contains the previous proviso that, when the faculty member and student do not mutually agree on an alternative to the missed work, resolution should be sought from the Chair of the department in which the course is offered.