

Suggestions for Faculty with Students Experiencing Medical Concerns  
Updated 7/16/2020

**Preface:**

Student Health and Support (“SHS”) frequently works with students that are experiencing a medical concern, which can often impact the student’s ability to successfully attend classes, submit assignments on-time, and meet class competencies. Faculty may feel unsure how to support a student that is experiencing difficulty while still adhering to the class expectations and curriculum as outlined in the course syllabus.

**Typical Medical Concerns:**

Students that are experiencing medical concerns can present in many ways. Here are some concerns that are commonly seen within SHS:

- Hospitalization for medical illness
- Hospitalization for psychiatric illness
- Increase in symptoms associated with chronic medical illness
- Mental health concerns
- Short-term illness or injury

**SHS Resources for Students and Faculty:**

Students and faculty are encouraged to read and adhere to the “Return from Medical Care Guidelines” to better understand procedures and recommendations to facilitate a student’s successful transition back to the College as a result of medical concerns. Student Relations staff can help students understand these guidelines so that the student can make appropriate plans and make an informed decision when needing to miss classes due to medical concerns.

Students are encouraged to contact Student Relations when experiencing a medical concern that may interfere with classes. Student Relations can assist with academic planning, reviewing treatment plans, and ensuring that students have the appropriate on and off-campus resources to succeed. Faculty are welcome to consult with Student Relations should a student medical concern arise.

Students are encouraged to register temporary and permanent disabilities with the Services for Students with Disabilities office to receive accommodations when appropriate. Faculty that have received an accommodation letter from the Services for Students with Disabilities office are required to adhere to any accommodation listed in the official letter provided. Questions regarding how to provide the accommodations should be addressed directly with the Services for Students with Disabilities office.

**Faculty Considerations:**

Students frequently feel trepidatious to ask an instructor for consideration for attendance and assignments when they have experienced a medical concern. Faculty are encouraged to:

- Provide empathetic listening

- Utilize reflections to demonstrate understanding (example: “I hear you say...” or “Let me make sure I understand. You are saying...”)
- Foster a non-judgmental environment through open communication
- Validate the student’s concerns
- Recognize that the student may feel nervous when speaking with you
- Respect the student’s privacy when discussing medical concerns or absences with the student
  - Offer a private space to converse
  - Refrain from discussing concerns or absences during the class session
  - When sending email, carefully consider the recipients and content of communications
- Structure conversations as supportive rather than punitive
  - Inform the student of your ability to help
  - Avoid blaming the student in your conversation
  - Assume the legitimacy of the student’s concern but encourage the student to work with SHS to provide appropriate medical documentation

**Course Considerations:**

Students and faculty often feel uncertain of how to proceed when a medical concern interferes with a student’s academics. Faculty have discretion in providing consideration for attendance and assignments, but please keep the following in mind:

- Determine if the student’s absences and/or lack of participation are significant barriers to the student displaying competency in the course
  - SHS encourages flexibility as appropriate in excusing a student from class or providing students with additional time on assignments
  - If a student’s absences impede their ability to demonstrate competency in your course, suggest alternative academic options such as completing a Petition for Exception for a medical withdrawal
  - Enforce your attendance and grading policies via your syllabus, but allow for the possibility to provide consideration for students with mitigating circumstances
  - Consult with your department chair and Student Relations as necessary to make an informed decision on offering academic allowances
- Familiarize yourself with academic options to help students that may need to withdraw or request an incomplete
  - Discuss options with Student Relations, College Advising, and/or your department chair
  - Review the current academic catalogue to ensure up-to-date academic policies
- Assist the student with problem-solving
  - Educate yourself on campus resources so that you can offer them to students
  - Develop the student’s capacity to manage challenges (problem-solving is an important educational experience)
  - Understand that students may not currently have the life experience to address their concerns without guidance

**Conclusion:**

A medical concern may be extraordinarily challenging for a student. Please remember that students want to succeed in your class. Instructors have an important role in assisting a student who is experiencing medical difficulty and facilitating the student's academic achievement.