

**University of Washington**  
**Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning**

December 5, 2019  
10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
Mary Gates Hall 136

**Meeting Synopsis:**

1. Call to order
  2. Review of the minutes from November 7, 2019
  3. Announcements
  4. Medical excuse notes Class C resolution – Chris Laws, Faculty Council on Student Affairs chair
  5. Distance learning updates and Class B legislation – Lynn Dietrich
  6. Religious accommodations update
  7. Zoom pro license Class C resolution
  8. Good of the order
  9. Adjourn
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**1. Call to order**

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m.

**2. Review of the minutes from November 7, 2019**

The minutes from November 7, 2019 were approved as written.

**3. Announcements**

Halverson, the chair, invited members to share announcements.

Timea Tihanyi shared that the Teaching Evaluation task force met last week. During the winter quarter the task force will conduct a listening tour and town halls. In the spring, the task force will reach out to relevant faculty councils to report findings and seek additional feedback. The chair requested that Tihanyi present to the council initial findings at the end of the winter quarter.

Sean Gehrke shared that his office is currently analyzing some findings from the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey, and requested to present at a future FCTL meeting.

**4. Medical excuse notes Class C resolution – Chris Laws, Faculty Council on Student Affairs chair**

Chris Laws, Faculty Council on Student Affairs (FCSA) Chair, attended the council and presented a Class C resolution and supporting materials regarding the use of medical excuse notes (Exhibits 1-3).

A member asked if the self-verification form (Exhibit 3) would be required in place of a medical excuse note. Laws responded that the form is intended to serve as an example/tool for faculty and would not be required.

Members offered edits to the Class C resolution (Exhibit 1) and the self-verification form (Exhibit 3).

The council voted to endorse the resolution.

## **5. Distance learning updates and Class B legislation – Lynn Dietrich**

Lynn Dietrich presented draft Class B legislation regarding distance learning updates (Exhibit 4).

Members recommended noting how many DL students have graduated, how many waivers the University Registrar receives, and how many colleges offer DL courses.

Dietrich will share the current draft with the Faculty Council on Academic Standards and seek additional feedback. Dietrich will present a final draft at a future FCTL meeting.

## **6. Religious accommodations update**

The chair shared four questions that the University Registrar has regarding religious accommodations and a University calendar that lists specific holidays.

1. Should we continue to host, curate, and offer up this calendar knowing that faculty are looking at it when dates come in as part of the Religious Accommodations Request process?
2. Should we allow any suggested holidays to be included? We have requests waiting now for Juneteenth, Wiccan holidays, and Kwanzaa and we are not sure if we are to include whatever has been suggested or not.
3. Should we instead publish a link to a generic holidays calendar alongside our University calendars with no reference to the Religious Accommodations Policy and Procedure as a point of service for faculty and staff?
4. Should we continue to send this out to faculty each Autumn and by doing so do we run the risk of aligning that messaging with the Religious Accommodations policy and procedures?

The chair asked for feedback from the council. Members felt that the current calendar was not comprehensive and did not consider cultural observations. Another member recommended removing the holidays from the calendar and retitling it as the “University Closure” calendar. A religious calendar might be tied to the religious accommodations policy. The member recommended citing Washington states’ calendar. Laws shared that FCSA felt similarly and did see value in linking to a more comprehensive calendar to help faculty members plan their courses.

Additionally, the chair shared that the University Registrar requested feedback from faculty and students regarding their experiences with the policy thus far. The chair will share faculty feedback at a future meeting.

## **7. Zoom pro license Class C resolution**

Due to time constraints, the council will address this topic at the next meeting.

## **8. Good of the order**

Nothing was stated.

## 9. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

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*Minutes by Lauren Hatchett, lehatch@uw.edu, council analyst*

**Present:**       **Faculty Code Section 21-61 A:** Thomas Halverson (chair), Timea Tihanyi, Fred Bookstein  
**Faculty Code Section 21-61 B:** Judith Howard, Deepa Banerjee  
**President's designee:** LeAnne Jones Wiles  
**Guests:** Katie Malcolm, Chris Laws, Sean Gehrke, Tom Lewis, Sam Akeyo, Alec Stancin

**Absent:**       **Faculty Code Section 21-61 A:** Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges, Sri Devi Duvvuri, Kristin Gustafson, Kathleen Peterson  
**Faculty Code Section 21-61 B:** Brady Rainey

### Exhibits

Exhibit 1 – Class C Resolution - Medical Excuse Notes - 2019.shorter.v1.docx  
Exhibit 2 – FCTL.mednotes.120519.pptx  
Exhibit 3 – UW.MedicalAbsence.Self-Verification.MoreDepth.docx  
Exhibit 4 – Class B Distance Learning v.2.docx

## **RESOLUTION ADDRESSING STUDENT ABSENCES DUE TO SHORT-TERM MEDICAL REASONS AND THE USE OF “MEDICAL EXCUSE NOTES” BY FACULTY – Chris Laws, Chair FCSA**

### **BACKGROUND**

Current UW policies regarding student absences for short-term illnesses allow instructors to require that students provide “medical excuse notes” – documents from a medical provider attesting to the severity of a short-term illness and the need for a student to be absent from class as a result. Unfortunately, a curricular strategy of routinely requiring students to obtain medical excuse notes provides little or no value and has unintended, adverse consequences for the student, the University, and medical providers. Medical providers want to help students with their health needs, but students who visit a medical provider purely to obtain a document regarding illness have been pressured into entering into a costly and potentially risky provider-patient relationship without a true medical need.

Faculty Senate and ASUW leadership, in conjunction with colleagues at Hall Health, have identified several key areas of concern:

- 1) Hall Health Access and Resources — Hall Health is often (over) filled to capacity. Students who don’t really want to be a patient are diminishing access for those who do have a medical need to seek care and wish to be seen. The generation of excuse notes is a wasteful use of expensive and limited health care staff time and resources. Estimates from Hall Health suggest as much as \$250,000 annually is spent attending to some 2,500 note requests, and that visits for such requests represent approximately 5% of total student visits.
- 2) Financial Burdens and Inequities – Students who are uninsured/underinsured, including low income students, DACA students, and minority students are at a financial disadvantage when seeking medical care. Policies that require a student to seek care for an administrative reason place a financial burden on these students and affect students in extremely unequal ways.
- 3) Student Safety — Students who see a provider to get a note have a specific objective: get the note. There is pressure to make sure that the symptoms are described in such a way that the provider will generate a note. Exaggeration of symptoms leads to testing or procedures that have risk, and patients may be harmed as a result. The risk/benefit ratio in these cases is extreme.
- 4) Unrealistic expectation of provider-patient relationship — Lacking omniscience, a provider must rely on the patient’s description of the symptoms. Sometimes this is after the illness has already resolved. Providers are trained to be advocates for their patients and so a note will be generated almost 100% of the time. Thus, requiring a student to obtain a medical excuse note has no value as an actual check on student behavior.
- 5) Education — The academic relationship between instructors and students belongs in the class room. Instructors are in the best position to judge academic performance by students. Further, as students develop and prepare for their careers later in life, they should experience an environment that reflects the realities that will be experienced after graduation. Hall Health in particular wants to promote responsible self-care for minor ailments and health concerns, an important educational component that encourages self- reliance and resilience.

Given these serious concerns, Faculty Senate and ASUW leadership have begun efforts to discourage requests for medical excuse notes by instructors. Of note is that limiting routine medical excuse notes would not have any bearing on documentation needed for disability, hardship, or other significant circumstances (including medical conditions) requiring longer term absences from the University; nor would such limitations prevent instructors from requiring students to justify the unavoidable nature of an absence, or require that instructors develop new accommodations.

Nevertheless, changing faculty use of medical excuse notes will have meaningful impacts on virtually every classroom across campus, and Faculty Senate and ASUW leadership have agreed that achieving these goals will require broad discussion of the impact of the use of medical excuse notes and the reasons to change current practices, along with development and dissemination of best practices guidelines that both protect students and maintain instructor rights and authority, and clear communication of guidelines to students and to current and future instructors.

With these issues in mind, and in the interest of supporting faculty efforts to strongly discourage the use of medical excuse notes, we offer the following Class C resolution.

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WHEREAS existing UW policy (SGP, Chapter 112) states that students who are “absent from any examination or class activity through sickness or other cause judged by the instructor to be unavoidable shall be given an opportunity to take a rescheduled examination or perform work judged by the instructor to be the equivalent”; and

WHEREAS thousands of UW students are asked annually by instructors to provide documentation from a medical provider to justify the “unavoidable” nature of short-term illnesses; and

WHEREAS students who seek support from medical care providers purely to obtain such documents at the request of an instructor have been pressured into entering into a provider-patient relationship without necessarily possessing an immediate medical need; and

WHEREAS providers in most cases of short-term illness must rely on patient descriptions of the symptoms of an illness that has already resolved itself, with no existing physical evidence or symptoms for the provider to evaluate; and

WHEREAS students who see a provider to get a medical excuse note experience pressure to describe their symptoms in such a way that the provider generates a note, resulting in exaggeration of symptoms and possible testing or procedures that may be costly and physically harmful; and

WHEREAS providers are trained to be advocates for their patients, and as a practical matter generate medical excuse notes on request almost 100% of the time, resulting in no meaningful check on student behavior; and

WHEREAS many UW students turn to the student-supported Hall Health Center to acquire medical excuse notes, diminishing access for those who have more pressing medical needs to seek care and resulting in a wasteful use of expensive and limited health care staff time and resources; and

WHEREAS students who are uninsured/underinsured, including low income students, DACA students, and minority students are at a financial disadvantage when seeking medical care, so that instructor

policies requiring students to seek medical care for administrative reasons place a meaningful financial burden on these students, and affect students in extremely unequal, undesirable, and ultimately unjust ways; and

WHEREAS requiring medical or legal documentation of absence places a burden on instructors, in that the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) imposes legal requirements upon those who possess the medical information of others; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate endorses a timely revision of Chapter 112 of the UW's Student Governance and Policies to prohibit members of the faculty from requiring medical or legal documentation from a student in determining whether or not to grant accommodations for student absences due to short-term medical causes, and the development of guidance and curricular support to strengthen student-faculty communication concerning student absences, to ensure the academic integrity of student work, and to promote the health and well-being of all UW students.

Signators

Chris Laws, Chair FCSA

Thomas Halverson, Chair FCTL

### Medical Excuse Note – FCAS/FCTL Class C Resolution

Last spring, our councils worked together to produce a Class C resolution regarding the use of medical excuse notes. That resolution supported the recommendations of a 2018 FCAS/FCSA working group: that UW should adopt a binding policy with specific language that explicitly disallows faculty from requesting medical excuse notes from students for short-term absences, similar to that in use at WSU.

Like that at WSU, it should be designed to allow faculty to ask students for some information about the medical need for an excused absence, while specifically preventing a demand for a written excuse from a health care professional.

Of particular concern is the possibility of a model similar to UO, OSU, and USC, wherein medical excuse notes are expressly allowed, but the on-campus student health centers specifically do not provide such notes.

“Other Absences. Students must sometimes miss class meetings, examinations, or other academic obligations affecting their grades due to personal circumstances. It is the responsibility of the student to provide a written explanation for the absence to the instructor as soon as it is reasonable to do so. ***When possible, students should provide appropriate documentation for their absence but instructors cannot require written excuses from health care professionals.***”

As long as such absences are not excessive, ***it is recommended, but not required, that the instructor provide and document reasonable arrangements.*** Determinations regarding the acceptance of an absence are the discretion of the instructor based on the attendance policy as stated in the class syllabus.

Students who attempt to gain advantage through abuse of this policy (e.g., by providing an instructor with false information) may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for disciplinary action.”

From the WSU General Catalog (***emphasis added***),  
<https://www.catalog.wsu.edu/General/AcademicRegulations/ListBy/72>

### **Medical Excuse Note – Updates**

Our resolutions was discussed at length last spring with Senate leadership and they suggested changes, most notably shortening the preamble. In addition, we have simplified the “Be it resolved” clauses into a single clause that specifically calls for changes to policy (Class B legislation) that will prohibit the use of medical excuse notes, along with the development of support for students and faculty in implementing such a policy.

Also, over the summer a new policy accommodating student absences due to religious observances was put into place, mandated by state law following lobbying by (among others) UW students. ASUW has passed a bill this year asking that accommodations for student absences due to medical reasons no longer require medical excuse notes, and is considering going to the legislature again if no action is taken soon.

### **Religious Accommodations and the UW Calendar of Holidays and Religious Observances**

As you know, the WA state legislature passed a law in 2019 requiring universities like ours to have in place a process to provide Religious Accommodations to students who request them within the first two weeks of any given course. All religious beliefs are held equal by this law, and universities are not allowed to discriminate between religions in providing accommodations.

The Office of the University Registrar has raised concerns about how faculty and students may be using the UW’s “Calendar of Holidays and Religious Observances” (which is maintained by that office) in thinking about Religious Accommodations:

<https://www.washington.edu/students/reg/religcal.html>



## EXAMPLE: UW “Calendar of Holidays and Religious Observances”, Winter 2018

Holiday or Observance	Religious Group	Dates	Additional Notes
<b>New Year's Day</b>		<b>Jan. 1, 2018</b>	<b>Class not in session</b>
Lunar New Year		Feb. 16, 2018	
Orthodox Christmas	Christian Orthodox	Jan. 7, 2018	May include observance on Jan. 8, 2018
<b>Martin Luther King Day</b>		<b>Jan. 15, 2018</b>	<b>Class not in session</b>
Maha Shivaratri	Hindu	Feb. 13, 2018	
Ash Wednesday	Christian	Feb. 14, 2018	
Beginning of Lent	Christian	Feb. 14, 2018	
<b>President's Day</b>		<b>Feb. 19, 2018</b>	<b>Class not in session</b>
*Purim	Jewish	Mar. 1, 2018	
Holi	Hindu	Mar. 2-3, 2018	
Ramanavami	Hindu	Mar. 25, 2018	

The Office of the University Registrar has requested feedback from the Faculty Senate on whether or not this such a calendar should be managed, and if so, how. There are four specific and interrelated questions we've been asked to consider:

1. Should we continue to host, curate, and offer up this calendar knowing that faculty are looking at it when dates come in as part of the Religious Accommodations Request process?
2. Should we allow any suggested holidays to be included? We have requests waiting now for Juneteenth, Wiccan holidays, and Kwanzaa and we are not sure if we are to include whatever has been suggested or not.
3. Should we instead publish a link to a generic holidays calendar alongside our University calendars with no reference to the Religious Accommodations Policy and Procedure as a point of service for faculty and staff?
4. Should we continue to send this out to faculty each Autumn and by doing so do we run the risk of aligning that messaging with the Religious Accommodations policy and procedures?"

**DRAFT -- University of Washington Absence from Class Self-Verification Form – MORE DEPTH VERSION****Statement of Absence from Class Self-Verification Form (Please fill out one form per class/course)**

If you are forced to be absent from an examination or class activity due to an illness or health-related reasons, please contact your instructor *as soon as possible*. While your instructor is *not* obligated to allow you to make up a missed examination or class activity, the University of Washington's Student Governance Policy (Chapter 112, Section 1B) does allow for rescheduled or equivalent work to be assigned to you if your instructor judges your absence to have been unavoidable due to illness. The form below should be used for self-verification of an absence due to an illness or health-related issue, and to begin a dialogue with your instructor.

1. Student Name (First, Last): \_\_\_\_\_
2. UW Student ID: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Department and Course: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Name of Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Date(s) of Absence (MM/DD/YY): \_\_\_\_\_
6. Brief Statement of Reason for Absence: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

By submitting this form, I certify that my absence(s) on the dates listed above were due to an illness or health-related reason, and that I understand the following:

- a) That my instructor is not obligated to provide an opportunity to make up a missed examination or class activity;
- b) That if any of the statements I have provided here are found to be false, I subject myself to disciplinary action for Academic and Behavioral Misconduct under the University of Washington's Student Governance Policies (SGP Chapter 209, Sections 7C2, 7D3a, and 7D3e).

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Class B Legislation  
 Student Governance and Policies  
 Scholastic Regulations  
 Chapter 114; Section 1 (Depth Requirements) and Chapter 115; Section 1 (Course-Numbering System)**

**Background and Rationale**

The Faculty Councils on Teaching and Learning and Academic Standards recommend amending Scholastic Regulations Chapter 115 (Course-Numbering System) based on the following findings:

- **Residency requirement language**
- The original statute was written in 2001, when the University offered 92 distance learning courses. There were concerns about the efficacy and rigor of online learning and additional course review was established to maintain teaching and learning standards. Since that time, the University has developed a number of robust online courses at the graduate and undergraduate level, offering 919 distance learning courses in AY 2018-19. The success of these courses and the continued growth of distance learning makes the additional scrutiny unnecessarily burdensome at the University level. Rather, individual schools and colleges should make their own determination about whether or not the renewal process is necessary for the distance learning courses they offer.

**Chapter 114  
 Degrees, Graduation, and Commencement**

**1. Depth Requirements**

**B. Residence Requirement**

To be recommended for a first or subsequent Bachelor's degree, a student must complete 45 of his or her final 60 credits as a matriculated student in residence at the University of Washington campus where the degree is to be earned. Exceptions to this rule are as follows:

- 1) Of the 45 resident credits required for a UW undergraduate degree, no more than 10 credits may be waived by the dean of the college or school awarding the degree and only on a case-by-case basis.
- 2) ~~A unit desiring to develop a provisional undergraduate distance learning degree may petition the college or school and the Faculty Council on Academic Standards for a waiver of the 45-credit resident requirement and/or the 90-credit course limit. Such petitions should identify the reasons why the offering needs to waive the requirement,~~

~~based on audience, access, or unit academic mission, describe the relationship of the new program to existing degrees, justify the methods of content delivery, and describe the goals and oversight needed to meet institutional standards. If the petition is approved, the degree may be implemented with a repetition of the above mentioned review required in the sixth year for continuance. Undergraduate distance-learning courses at the University of Washington meet the residency requirement.~~

*S-B 92, May 1964; S-B 105, March 1969; S-B 151, January 21, 1991; S-B 167, November 26, 2001; S-B 173, April 6, 2007: all with Presidential approval.*

## **Chapter 115**

### **Courses**

#### **1. Course-Numbering System**

##### **I. DL Courses**

- 8) ~~In addition to the initial review, DL courses must be reviewed in the third year by the appropriate curriculum review committees of the school or college. It is the responsibility of the home school or college to determine the necessity of and procedure for additional review of DL courses after the courses have been approved.~~

*S-B 43, October 1949 with Presidential approval; HB, 1950; S-B 92, May 1964 with Presidential approval; S-C 180, October 1968; AI, November 1968; S-B 167, November 26, 2001 with Presidential approval; AI, February 9, 2006; S-B 173, April 6, 2007 with Presidential approval; AI, February 9, 2015; RC, October 27, 2017.*