

University of Washington
Faculty Council on Teaching and Learning
April 11, 2019
10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Suzzallo 5th Floor Conference Room East

Meeting Synopsis

1. Call to order
 2. Review of the minutes from March 14, 2019
 3. Update: medical excuse notes – Chris Laws
 4. Subcommittee reports
 - a. *Goals and Principles of Learning Analytics at the UW*
 - b. *Diversity and Equity Informed Pedagogies*
 - c. *Evaluation of Instruction for Improvement of Teaching: Course Evaluations*
 - d. *Educational Policies/Procedures around Teaching and Learning*
 5. Good of the order
 6. Adjourn
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1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 10:35 a.m.

2. Review of the minutes from March 14, 2019

The minutes from March 14, 2019 were approved as written.

3. Update: medical excuse notes – Chris Laws

Chris Laws, Faculty Council on Student Affairs (FCSA) chair, attended the council and provided an update on a Class C resolution regarding use of medical excuse notes. He shared the current draft of the resolution (Exhibit 1) and summarized the issue for the council. Laws also shared an example from Washington State University’s policy on medical excuse notes (Exhibit 2).

A member asked if Laws if he had insight to department level drop policy for students who do not attend the first week of class. Laws was not aware of this policy, but another member responded that this is a policy that is determined by departments.

Members asked about persistent/excessive absences. Laws referenced the WSU’s policy that states that students may be referred for student conduct violations and that “excessive” would be determined by the instructor.

After Laws left the meeting a member asked if short term absence were defined in the policy. The chair noted that he would discuss that question with Laws. Another member commented that a future policy should be sensitive to student parents whose children may become sick.

The council voted to endorse FCSA’s Class C resolution.

4. Subcommittee reports

a. *Goals and Principles of Learning Analytics at the UW*

Tom Lewis reported that his team is working with data from students who were placed on academic probation. His team is attempting to extrapolate predictive factors that may inform future models.

The principles will become public in the following weeks.

b. *Diversity and Equity Informed Pedagogies*

No updates at this time. Amanda Hornby reported that the subcommittee will meet next week.

c. *Evaluation of Instruction for Improvement of Teaching: Course Evaluations*

Timea Tihanyi summarized the subcommittee's report (Exhibit 3). Sri Devi also noted that students reported they want to provide feedback after they receive their grade, not before.

Angelia Miranda also commented that students want opportunities to provide feedback when certain events (e.g. tests, discussions, etc.) take place during the quarter.

Jason Johnson commented that on May 16 other institutions who have changed their course evaluation practices will be on campus. They will work with the University in an open forum to provide insight and answer questions.

d. *Educational Policies/Procedures around Teaching and Learning*

No updates at this time.

5. Good of the order

Lewis requested that FCTL invite Erik Hofer, Associate Vice President for Academic Services and Deputy Chief Information Officer in UW Information Technology (UW-IT), to the next meeting to comment on the council's previous discussions regarding accessibility and Zoom licensing.

6. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

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

Present: **Faculty:** Thomas Halverson (chair), Fred Bookstein, Timea Tihanyi, Sri Devi Duvvuri, Mark Zachry
Ex-officio reps: Judith Howard, Angelia Miranda, Amanda Hornby
President's designee: LeAnne Jones Wiles
Guests: Jason Johnson, Katie Malcolm, Tom Lewis

Absent: **Faculty:** Kathleen Peterson, David Goldstein, Amy Howells,
Laurianne Mullinax, David Masuda
Ex-officio reps: Maria Zontine

Exhibits

Exhibit 1 – Medical Excuse Note Bill -- FacSen.v2 Revised 04.02.19.docx
Exhibit 2 – Links for FCTL 4-11.docx
Exhibit 3 – Subcommittee_CourseEvaluations_April2019_report.pdf

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 are advisory in nature and do not specifically address “medical excuse notes” – documents from a professional 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. The UW’s Student Governance and Policies, Chapter 112, Section 1B addresses the issue most directly: “A student 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.” However, the lack of more explicit guidance on this important and routine student-faculty interaction is in practice problematic and leads to a disparate set of approaches across campus and inequitable outcomes across student populations – including extensive use of medical excuse notes among some members of the faculty.

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 professional 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 faculty and students belongs in the class room. Faculty 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 pursuing a more explicit and restricted medical excuse note policy that promotes access, encourages appropriate use of limited resources, promotes patient safety, does not place an unfair financial burden on students, and is in alignment with a holistic educational experience. Of note is that restricting 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 restrictions prevent faculty from requiring students to be accountable for the unavoidable nature of an absence, or require that faculty develop new accommodations.** Faculty who are currently asking for medical excuse notes are already making accommodations for students who *do* provide them – a policy that prohibited the use of such notes would simply extend those pre-existing accommodations to students without the intermediary and problematic role of a health care provider.

Implementation of such a policy will have meaningful impacts on virtually every classroom across campus, and Faculty Senate and ASUW leadership have identified several key areas that should be addressed to assure the success of a restrictive medical excuse note policy:

- 1) Communication of policies to students;
- 2) Protecting students who are asked to provide notes;
- 3) Communication of policies to current and future faculty;
- 4) Development of best practices guidelines;
- 5) Gaming;
- 6) Disproportionate faculty burden;
- 7) Additional workload;
- 8) Faculty rights and authority.

With these issues in mind, and in the interest of supporting faculty efforts to change these policies, we offer the following Class C resolution.

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 faculty members to provide documentation from a medical professional 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 a faculty member 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 faculty 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 faculty, in that the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) imposes legal requirements upon those who possess the medical information of others,

BE IT RESOLVED that instructors are *strongly discouraged* from requiring **professional** 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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate endorses a timely revision of Chapter 112 of the UW’s Student Governance and Policies to specifically address the use of such documentation from medical professionals by faculty, along with the development of guidance and curricular support to strengthen student-faculty communication concerning student absences, ensure the academic integrity of student work, and promote the health and well-being of all UW students.

Signators

Chris Laws, Chair FCSA

Thomas Halverson, Chair FCTL

DRAFT

<https://cougarhealth.wsu.edu/medical-clinic/downloadable-forms/>

<https://www.catalog.wsu.edu/General/AcademicRegulations/Search/both/Absences>

<https://cougarhealth.wsu.edu/documents/2018/05/absence-excuse-letter.pdf/>

Subcommittee for Evaluation of Instruction for Improvement of Teaching Performance and Student Learning

Members:

Timea Tihanyi <timea@uw.edu> (chair)
Jason Johnson <jej@uw.edu>
David Goldstein <davidgs@uw.edu>
Sri Devi Duvvuri <duvvuris@uw.edu>
Angelia Miranda <asuwbdua@uw.edu>

Subcommittee Report for April 2019 FCTL meeting

April 10th: Consultation with Student/ASUW representatives

Guest: Gabby Rivera, asuwbdcrcr@uw.edu Director of Community Relations, ASUW
Sri Devi, David, Timea

Relevant resources

Course evaluation comment form:

<https://depts.washington.edu/assessmt/pdfs/forms/comment.pdf>

Course evaluation forms:

<https://www.washington.edu/assessment/course-evaluations/forms/>

Student course evaluation catalog (CEC):

<https://www.washington.edu/assessment/course-evaluations/cec/>

ratemyprofessors.com

Meeting Questions

What are the biggest issues from your perspective about student course evals?

How do your instructors communicate to you/your class about the process, value, and benefit of course evaluations?

How do you use the results of these evals? Or, or as a student in what form do you see the direct value of doing course evaluations?

What questions, if any, do you pay more attention/ spend more time on answering?

What questions, if any, seem irrelevant to your experience with learning in this class?

What questions are not being asked that should be asked?

What other forms would you consider valuable for giving feedback to your instructor / on your instructor's teaching?

What other forms do you not consider valuable for giving feedback to your instructor / on your instructor's teaching?

Anything else you'd like to share?

*Gabby noted that the information shared today with the subcommittee has originated from discussion around this topic at ASUW board meetings, and from prior informal discussions with ASUW community groups.

Findings

Biggest single issue of concerns for students is the lack of follow-through. Perception of a lack of transparency about the purpose and use of course evaluations. "No sense of closure" Students "don't feel empowered" or feedback receiving recognition, acknowledgement of feedback either positive or negative.

Students would like to have a forum for open discussion about the course.

Course evaluation catalogue (not used for choosing courses/instructors, often not known about)
Peer to peer, word of mouth referral of instruction/instructors. (by freshmen: ratemyprofessors.com - note, this site emphasizes a description of experience with the instructor, no middle ground)

Students feel pressure to fill out course evaluations. Many faculty incentivizes participation with extra credit. Here too, we noted that the middle ground opinion is often missing. Students who are unhappy with some experience or those who are extremely satisfied are more likely to fill out a course evaluation than those who are neutral.

The biggest student concern is the expected grade. "What is the probability of getting a good grade." This is the sole thing that underlines both the choice of the instructor/course and the rating of instruction in course evaluations.

On issues with the forms/questions on course evaluation forms"

Form is long (several pages in the online version) Questions seem repetitive.

Administered before the final exam is given (final grade is available).

For courses with TA's there are 2 course evaluations to fill out. TA's often get evaluation similar to that of the main instructor (students are not in the position to differentiate).

Most relevant part: Comment sheet (positive/negative experience - explain)

Most relevant q's on form: Relative to other courses / hours put into it / projected grade