

Memo

To: Senate Undergraduate Council
From: Undergraduate Operations Committee
Date: June 1, 2009
Re: Accommodation Due to Illness

Background

The Undergraduate Operations Committee has been directed to implement recommendations 29-32¹ in the report *Toward a Level Playing Field: Enhancing Academic Integrity at the University of Waterloo*. Compelling anecdotal evidence indicates that claiming illness has become a strategy by many students to obtain relief from deadlines or postpone examinations or midterm tests. Indeed, producing a 'doctor's note' or verification of illness form is seen as an automatic way to postpone academic obligations. Those who meet obligations on time and persevere at midterm and final examination time charge that abuse of the current practices related to illness creates an uneven playing field.

The Undergraduate Operations Committee, in partnership with Health Services, has undertaken a review of the current UW Verification of Illness Form with a view to releasing a new version on October 1, 2009. It has also examined recommendations 29-32.

Regarding recommendation 29, the Committee, in partnership with Health Services, is updating the UW *Verification of Illness Form* and agrees that, in most cases, it should be the only acceptable medical documentation.

The committee has concluded that it is impractical to create "a central authority" within academic units as specified in recommendation 30. Some Faculties are monitoring requests for accommodation and could be used as a model for units that want to establish consistency of oversight.

The following motion addresses many of the underlying issues addressed in these recommendations, particularly recommendation 32.

¹ **Recommendation 29:** In the interest of ensuring clarity and consistency of information, the only acceptable medical documentation should be the UW VIF. Students may print off the online version of the VIF and request their own physician complete it.

Recommendation 30: In order to promote consistency and relieve instructors of the burden of making their own judgement on medical assessments, those academic exemptions and accommodations that require medical documentation should be determined by a central authority within the academic unit offering the course (e.g., Chair, Graduate Chair, Undergraduate Chair, Undergraduate Committee). Students requesting deferrals of course requirements for medical or similar reasons should be required to register this request formally by filling in a standard UW form.

Recommendation 31: The UW Final Examination Regulations should be reviewed to clarify the section regarding Standard Practices with Respect to Illness to make them more rigorous (e.g., institute a definite deadline, rather than using the phrase "as soon as possible").

Recommendation 32: For situations when medical reasons arise, UW should develop institutional guidelines regarding if, when and how the missed assignments and/or examinations can be completed.

Motion: That the section “Standard Practices with Respect to Illness” in the *Examination Regulations and Related Matters* document be renamed and changed as follows:

Accommodation Due to Illness

From time to time students become ill or have ongoing medical conditions that prevent them from meeting academic obligations. The University is committed to assisting students who are ill and has established the following policy, which is fair and practical.

Documentation

Students in on-campus courses who are ill and unable to meet assignment due dates or write a term test or final examination should seek medical treatment and provide confirmation of the illness to the instructor(s) within 48 hours by submitting a completed UW Verification of Illness Form to support requests for accommodation due to illness. Students in distance education courses must also provide confirmation of the illness but submit it to the Distance Education Office. The UW *Verification of Illness Form* is normally the only acceptable medical documentation and is available on line at:

http://www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html

Students who consult their physician or use the services of an off-campus walk-in clinic must provide this form to the attending physician for completion; doctors’ notes and forms created by the physician or clinic are normally not acceptable. Although not compelled to do so, instructors may accept medical documentation that contains the same information specified on the UW *Verification of Illness Form*. Health Services charges a \$10 fee for completing the University of Waterloo *Verification of Illness Form*, which is not covered by OHIP/UHIP. Fees for this service levied by off-campus practitioners are the student’s responsibility.

Management of Requests for Accommodation Due to Illness

Adjustment of due dates or deferrals of term tests or final examinations are not automatic upon the presentation of suitable medical verification. Instructors will use this documentation among all information available to them when determining whether accommodation is warranted.

A student who becomes ill during the writing of an examination and is unable to continue should ensure, before leaving the site of the examination, that the proctor in charge is notified of the situation. In addition, the student must notify the course instructor and supply the medical documentation specified above within 48 hours after the missed or partially completed examination.

If a student completes an examination, even though he/she is ill, the grade obtained in the course will normally stand. Subsequent petitions for an exception to academic regulations on the grounds of illness may be considered if accompanied by the documentation specified above. The student’s department or Faculty may take the illness into consideration, and possibly alter academic standing, but the grade will not normally be altered.

False claims of illness and/or the submission of false supporting medical documentation constitute an academic offence that will result in disciplinary action under Policy # 71.

Accommodation

Where instructors grant accommodation, the following university-wide practice normally applies:

Missed due dates: Normally, the weighting of the missed assignment is added to the final examination weighting or spread over the remaining assignments. Assignment due dates are not extended. It might be impractical to apply this in all courses, particularly in project-based or thesis courses where submissions must be made. Instructors may use their discretion in these cases and allow an extension.

Term tests: Normally, the weighting of the missed test is added to the final examination weighting or spread over the remaining tests. Term tests are not deferred.

Final Examinations: A deferred final examination is written the next time that the course is taught. Although not compelled to do so, instructors may use their discretion to schedule make-up examinations at a mutually agreed upon date and time earlier than specified. Students in Faculties/schools that advance students from term to term by cohort may have to schedule make-up examinations earlier than specified when deferred examinations are granted.