



Office of the Provost and Academic Affairs

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www.siena.edu

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Dear Colleagues.

We are writing to clarify some policies regarding student medical leave and notification to faculty. Based on a review of such policies at other institutions, the policy has been updated. *The Student Handbook* says this:

Medical Leave of Absence Policy: Medical Leave is an authorized absence from the College for medical or psychological reasons. During medical leave, students cannot attend classes and are required to stay off campus. Students on medical leave are expected to focus on the evaluation, treatment and/or management of the illness or condition which necessitated the leave. Siena College Health Services coordinates all medical leaves for students under their care/purview and for any physical health related conditions. Siena College Counseling Center coordinates medical leaves for students who will be absent for mental health/psychological reasons. The two offices (Health Services or Counseling Center) will submit a recommendation to the Dean of Students Office and **a medical leave will be initiated if the student will be absent for five (5) or more days**. The Dean's Office will inform required faculty and administrators via email. Details of the absence are not released to faculty members or administrators in order to maintain confidentiality of the student's private medical information. Students are expected to contact their professors regarding any missed assignments.

The Student Handbook can be found at:

<https://www.siena.edu/files/resources/siena-life-student-handbook.pdf>

If a student indicates they are or have been ill for a period shorter than 5 days, the Health Center will NOT provide a notice for faculty. The staff in the health center simply do not have the ability to verify student visits for these shorter durations as it detracts from their ability to see students who need their attention. However, if a student went to the Health Center for treatment, they do have access to the visit report on the student health portal and can show it to you.

Faculty need to state their class attendance policies as clearly as possible in syllabi to manage their enforcement of them. If you distinguish between excused and unexcused absences you need to specify parameters of both and what documentation you

need. Among other things, students may assume that if they provide a visit report, then the absence must be excused, so syllabi should address this.

We encourage you to be compassionate and clear with students that you do not want them to attend class if they are ill, and certainly to be accommodating when a student does have the documented medical leave. In the case of approved medical leave, faculty do not have discretion over whether to offer accommodations, but faculty may determine the method of accommodation. If requests are reasonable and allow a student to meet student learning goals for the class, faculty are obligated to assist. If you have questions about what accommodations are reasonable, please consult with your dean before agreeing to such arrangements with a student.

Regarding the category of “excused absences” we encourage faculty to consider their individual course policy carefully. It seems that many faculty don’t make that distinction, not wanting to be in the business of judging what falls in which category.

We strongly encourage you to think about adjusting your policy to not differentiate excused from unexcused absences. If you do differentiate them, please include a statement in your syllabus that clearly defines what an excused absence means. For example, does it mean an additional absence under the stated absence policy with the same rules, no penalty for missed work, extended deadlines for assignments, the ability to take make-up quizzes, or no points taken off for exceeding the permitted number of absences?

The college does not define “excused absences”. There are policies and procedures for athletes attending athletic contests, but not other matters.

We think it would be useful to have a discussion, perhaps in the format of a COTFD panel, where faculty can share their policies and approaches and give each other insight into how they handle these situations.

Best regards,

Dean Rashmi Assudani, Dean John Cummings, Dean Chris Farnan, and Provost Maggie Madden