8th Authorized Absence Category

REPORT FOR THE UNIVERSITY SENATE

University Senate Committee: Academic Policies Committee

Brief History of Issue - why the issue is being considered:

The Authorized Absence Policy (FASRP, Part III, Article 6, Section B, p. 133) or
https://www.uwec.edu/files/4586/FASRP.pdf is used to guide and illustrate the absences that fall under one of the seven categories recognized as authorized absences by the university. The pandemic has called attention to challenges faced by student caregivers that have always been present but not widely acknowledged. As an institution and as instructors, we must recognize that to be successful in recruiting, retaining, and nurturing a diverse body of students, we need to use every tool at our disposal, including the authorized absences policy. Including authorized absence language that addresses the experiences of our student caregivers allows these students to see themselves in the policy and provides a more inclusive and supportive environment. The recently passed “Authorized Absences” lists seven authorized absences, not including the issue stated above. The Caregiving Task Force request to add an 8th authorized absence category for “Caregiving”.

Change:

Existing Language:

Authorized Absences (US 10/21)
Absences that fall under one of the following categories are considered authorized: (1) participation in an approved field trip listed in the catalogue as a requirement for a course in which the student is enrolled; or (2) participation in an authorized extra-curricular activity on the regularly approved calendar of university events [such absences are reported by the dean to each department at least 48 hours in advance of the trip or event]; or (3) Labor Day employment; or (4) active military service; or (5) accommodation of students’ religious beliefs [see Accommodation of Students’ Religious Beliefs Policy below]; or (6) illness, injury, or emergency of such severity as to prevent the student from being able to attend class; or (7) being summoned to court or requested to appear in court or having to serve on jury duty. A student should communicate directly with the instructor when an absence falls under one of the approved seven categories. Instructors have discretion regarding requests for absences that do not fall under one of the approved seven categories. (US 4/13)
Original Proposed Language from the Caregiving Taskforce:

**Authorized Absences (US 10/21)**
Absences that fall under one of the following categories are considered authorized: (1) participation in an approved field trip listed in the catalogue as a requirement for a course in which the student is enrolled; or (2) participation in an authorized extra-curricular activity on the regularly approved calendar of university events [such absences are reported by the dean to each department at least 48 hours in advance of the trip or event]; or (3) Labor Day employment; or (4) active military service; or (5) accommodation of students’ religious beliefs [see Accommodation of Students’ Religious Beliefs Policy below]; or (6) illness, injury, or emergency of such severity as to prevent the student from being able to attend class; or (7) being summoned to court or requested to appear in court or having to serve on jury duty; or (8) caregiving, parenting, and pregnancy obligations of such a necessary, unavoidable, or critical nature as to prevent the student from being able to attend class. A student should communicate directly with the instructor when an absence falls under one of the approved eight categories. Instructors have discretion regarding requests for absences that do not fall under one of the approved eight categories. (US 4/13, 11/21)

Proposed Amended Language that APC Approved

**Authorized Absences (US 10/21)**
Absences that fall under one of the following categories are considered authorized: (1) participation in an approved field trip listed in the catalogue as a requirement for a course in which the student is enrolled; or (2) participation in an authorized extra-curricular activity on the regularly approved calendar of university events [such absences are reported by the dean to each department at least 48 hours in advance of the trip or event]; or (3) Labor Day employment; or (4) active military service; or (5) accommodation of students’ religious beliefs [see Accommodation of Students’ Religious Beliefs Policy below]; or (6) illness, injury, or emergency of such severity as to prevent the student from being able to attend class; or (7) being summoned to court or requested to appear in court or having to serve on jury duty; or (8) caregiving, parenting, and pregnancy obligations of such an unavoidable, or critical nature as to prevent the student from being able to attend class. A student should communicate directly with the instructor when an absence falls under one of the approved eight categories. Instructors have discretion regarding requests for absences that do not fall under one of the approved eight categories. (US 4/13, 11/21)
Points Discussed by Committee:

1. In initial proposal by the Caregiving Task Force, they referred to the UW-Madison Women’s & Gender Studies Consortium “WGSC Statement with Caregiving Recommendations” and “Caregiving Task Force Progress Report, Fall 2020”. Neither of these documents included language pertaining to the “Caregiving” of pets. Address the inclusion of pets in the proposed usage of the 8th “Authorized Absence” category (Pets are dependents. Students should be given the opportunity to provide quality care to all dependents—human or not).
2. An authorized absence category already exists for emergencies and excessive cases (#6) (Caregiving deserves its own category, especially making pregnancy more visible)
3. What is the operational definition of “Caregiving”? Don’t want parameters on what a caregiver is (e.g., Is a roommate if there is no one else available?). Definition of “caregiver” should be broad, similar to “family”. Look holistically at students for definition?
4. Any statistics of students who have encountered an unsympathetic professor? Is there really a need for this addition? Policy inclusion would allow for students to advocate for themselves.
5. Uncertainty with the scope of the additional authorized absence category.
6. Ambiguity in the wording. Are students or faculty interpreting it? Could be taken advantage of. Who determines if it’s unavoidable or critical? Is it a conversation between faculty/student or can students determine it’s necessary and their needs must be met?
7. Proposed 8th category addresses the EDI mission of the university?
8. Does pregnancy need to be included since it’s protected under Title IX?
9. What are other UW systems school doing? (UW-Oshkosh has a statement & University of Wyoming, both are more specific than UWEC proposed language)
10. Proposed language may not change what faculty are already doing.
11. Students are developing a sense of professional responsibility/obligation. Guidance during the developmental period, related to what is an acceptable absence, is appropriate.
12. Faculty have flexibility to manage caregiving needs; students do not have the same flexibility without a policy in place.
13. Motion was made and passed to amend the proposal from the Caregiving Task Force to read: (8) caregiving, parenting, and pregnancy obligations of such an unavoidable, or critical nature as to prevent the student from being able to attend class.
14. Motion was made and failed to amend the current amended motion to the proposal from the Caregiving Task Force to read: (6) illness, injury, emergency, unavoidable obligation, or extenuating circumstance pertaining to the student or because of their role as a caregiver, of such severity as to prevent the student from being able to attend class.
15. Some APC members who supported the motion wanted it to move forward to full University Senate.

Pros of Recommendation:

Ambiguity in proposed category language allows for flexibility in use by both students and faculty/instructor.

May provide clarity for students who don’t see themselves or their situation included in the existing 7 authorized absence categories. Students may not know or understand Title IX, so we cannot assume they know about protected populations/situations.
Proposed language mirrors the language in item #6, which specifies illness, injury, or emergency preventing class attendance for the individual. Interactions between faculty and students in the proposed category are likely to be similar to those related to absences under category #6 (i.e., opening a conversation).

Proposed language in a separate category places value on the role of caregivers and provides a solid policy for students to identify situations which may be excused. Some areas of caregiving are unavoidable but may be an illness, injury, or emergency, thus the wording as a separate category is necessary. The emphasis on EDI at UWEC supports adding caregiving as its own category.

Cons of Recommendation:

Ambiguity in the proposed category language may allow for some misinterpretation of its utilization by some students and does not provide faculty/instructor with clear guidelines of what is permissible under the category.

May elicit undue obligations onto students (e.g., roommates) who might be subjected to the “Caregiving” responsibility by their peer(s). Policies also create unintended consequences and situations that weren’t what the policy was established for.

Technology/Human Resource Impact:

None

Committee Recommendation:

The committee approved the above-mentioned change to the Authorized Absence Policy (FASRP, Part III, Article 6, Section B, p. 133) to add an 8th authorized absence category for “Caregiving”.
MOTION FOR THE UNIVERSITY SENATE

The University Senate Committee: Academic Policies Committee

by a vote of 6 for to 3 against and 1 abstention on November 16, 2021 (Date)

Recommends that:
Change to the Authorized Absence Policy (FASRP, Part III, Article 6, Section B, p. 133) to add an 8th authorized absence category for “Caregiving”, starting 2021-2022 AY:

Authorized Absences (US 10/21)
Absences that fall under one of the following categories are considered authorized: (1) participation in an approved field trip listed in the catalogue as a requirement for a course in which the student is enrolled; or (2) participation in an authorized extra-curricular activity on the regularly approved calendar of university events [such absences are reported by the dean to each department at least 48 hours in advance of the trip or event]; or (3) Labor Day employment; or (4) active military service; or (5) accommodation of students’ religious beliefs [see Accommodation of Students’ Religious Beliefs Policy below]; or (6) illness, injury, or emergency of such severity as to prevent the student from being able to attend class; or (7) being summoned to court or requested to appear in court or having to serve on jury duty; or (8) caregiving, parenting, and pregnancy obligations of such an unavoidable, or critical nature as to prevent the student from being able to attend class. A student should communicate directly with the instructor when an absence falls under one of the approved eight categories. Instructors have discretion regarding requests for absences that do not fall under one of the approved eight categories. (US 4/13, 11/21)

Implementation Date: 21/22 catalog

Signed: ____________________________________________
        Chair of the Committee

Send to: University Senate Office