




Andrea C. Wade, Ph.D.
Provost and Vice President, Academic Services

MEMORANDUM

TO: Teaching Faculty

FROM: Andrea C. Wade, Provost and Vice President, Academic Services 

DATE: June 30, 2017

RE: Faculty-Initiated Withdrawals

You may have heard from your Senators that I recently sent a memo to the Faculty Senate regarding a decision to suspend the practice of processing faculty-initiated withdrawals for the fall 2017 semester. I wanted to take this opportunity to share additional information about this decision and address some of the questions I have been asked regarding this decision. I also wanted to share an update about additional short-term measures we are taking as a result of input and dialogue with the Faculty Senate.

Why has this decision been made?

We have some evidence, previously shared in a college-wide forum and in the Daily Tribune, which suggests that this practice is potentially harmful to some students and has impacted various student populations disproportionately. Additionally, the practice is not standardized across the College so that a student who misses the same number of class meetings in one course may be withdrawn by one faculty member but not another. The financial aid and academic standing implications for students can be significant, and faculty do not know, nor should they be responsible for anticipating, what those implications are for individual students. Continuing a practice that puts an individual faculty member and the institution at risk, if it is not in the best interest of the student, is not something we want to do.

Why is this decision being made now?

We know that this practice harms some of our students, so instead of continuing to do so, we want to pause the practice for the fall while we determine what is in the best interest of our students. We recognize that the intention of faculty is to help students, but that in some cases, the result is that students are unable to continue their studies due to financial holds on student accounts. Therefore, we are obligated to make a change, in this case, that change is to suspend the practice while we conduct further study.

What about existing Faculty Senate resolutions regarding faculty-initiated withdrawals?

We are committed to the shared governance process at the college. To that end, we have engaged with members of the Faculty Senate and various offices across the college to develop a temporary stopgap solution for the fall. However, we believe it is in the best interest of our students to suspend portions of Faculty Senate resolutions regarding faculty-initiated withdrawals for the fall semester.

What about students who would have been withdrawn for attendance who now stay in class and are disruptive to the learning environment?

I understand the concern that faculty have regarding students who are disruptive in class. My understanding is that the faculty-initiated withdrawal has sometimes been used to remove these students from class. However, that was never the intended purpose of faculty-initiated withdrawal. We have always had a conduct process for addressing student behavioral issues. The process outlined in the Faculty Guide to Student Misconduct (available online and provided annually to department chairs) is what faculty should be following to address behavioral concerns in the classroom. This process was developed collaboratively with Academic Services and Student Services with input from department chairs and deans and supported by the Faculty Senate.

Can I still use classroom attendance as part of a student's grade?

Yes. You have the freedom to determine your grading policies in conjunction with relevant Student Learning Outcomes. If a student's participation in class and/or attendance is part of the grading in your course, just specify that on your course information sheet.

Can students still withdraw themselves?

Yes.

If I know a student is not going to be successful, can I recommend that he or she withdraw?

Faculty can and should provide information to students about their academic progress in a course, including their likelihood of success in the course, based on their progress in the course to that point. In discussing withdrawals, be sure to recommend that students obtain information about the potential impact of withdrawing on Satisfactory Academic Progress and financial aid eligibility before withdrawing from a course.

Have students been consulted about this change?

SGA has talked as a body about faculty-initiated withdrawals several times over the last academic year. They have expressed frustration when students who are doing well in classes are withdrawn for attendance and when students have been withdrawn for missing classes when their professor has missed just as many. They have not been informed specifically of the suspension of the policy for fall 2017 as it has just been decided and announced. Student representatives will be asked to serve on the ad hoc committee so that their perspectives can be considered as part of any longer-term decisions.

What will be happening in the fall?

I will be working with the Faculty Senate this summer to establish a committee and a charge. The group will examine the practice, gather more data, address the questions raised by faculty at the open forum, and make recommendations by the end of the fall term. Any reinstatement of the practice would be informed by the findings and recommendations of the ad hoc committee and supported by the crafting of a student-centered policy on withdrawals that takes into account the diverse needs of our students.

On June 29, I met with representatives of the Faculty Senate, Registration and Records, and Financial Aid to receive and discuss their recommendations of some stopgap measures to institute for the fall while a committee works on a long-term process. Their request had three parts:

1. Add language to course information sheets that alerts students to the impact of withdrawing on SAP and Financial Aid.
2. Leverage Starfish more aggressively by raising flags to intervene with students at the point where they start to have attendance issues. Follow-up with students to find out what is keeping the student from attending, reconnect student and instructor, and/or assist students with withdrawing themselves, if that is the best option for the student.
3. For students who stop attending and are not responsive/reachable through #2, create a process to collect attendance information from faculty and administratively withdraw students who do not attend at all during the 2 weeks at the 60% point of the semester, which is a significant cut-off date for the student to receive all eligible financial aid. This would be a consistent college-wide process, rather than relying on individual faculty decisions.

Because these recommendations are so recent, we are working through the details and determining the feasibility of implementing these measures for fall, and we will continue to communicate progress to the campus.

What should I write in my Course Information Sheet?

We are recommending that the following statement be included:

“Regular class attendance is one of the most important contributing factors to your academic success. Missing classes may have an academic consequence as outlined in your course syllabus. In addition, failure to attend class may impact scholarships, grants, loans, veteran affairs status, satisfactory academic progress (SAP), participation on athletic teams, eligibility to live in campus housing, and, most significantly, financial aid assistance. If a student determines that he/she will be unable to complete courses in which he/she is currently enrolled, it is the student’s responsibility to initiate procedures leading to a formal withdrawal (“W”) in order to avoid a failing (“F”) grade. Students who need assistance in completing this process may contact the Registration and Records Office.”

If we are able to institute request #3, described above, we will also recommend language to communicate this to students at that time.

Is there anything else I should know?

Just that the heart of this decision is to protect students, faculty, and the institution. We know this practice can have significant repercussions for students, so we need to be mindful about how we move forward. We have several potential options to be explored by the fall 2017 ad hoc committee, including two census dates with two corresponding disbursements of financial aid and online attendance to increase proactive interventions of students having attendance problems.