

Message to Faculty regarding Classes and Influenza Type A H1N1

New information is inserted in red with the date of insertion or change.

Pandemic Influenza Type A H1N1 has been in the news since last spring, and it is almost certain that there will be a high incidence this fall on college campuses, in workplaces, in pre-college schools, and elsewhere. Since it has not disappeared over the summer as the typical seasonal flu does, we may well start to see the effects now that students have returned to campus. The Emergency Management Team and Student Health Services are working to provide general information about this illness and how to limit its spread. The goal now is to mitigate the impact by spreading it out so there isn't an extremely high absentee rate at any one time and so that the vaccine arrives before the full onslaught of the flu on campus. The exclusion of ill individuals from public, school and group activities is one of the most important public health measures that can be taken. However, that is extremely difficult with faculty, staff and students on a college campus.

In anticipation of an immediate or significant impact and in recognition of the importance of guarding public health, the following message offers some guidance to faculty for dealing with classes and the flu. Nothing about alternate ways to continue teaching is mandatory, but it does provide options. The information about absences is also not mandatory *at this time*, though some of it may become official policy if the seriousness of the situation warrants or voluntary action isn't working.

Considerations for Faculty

1. Think about ways to aid students in keeping up with your course goals or assignments even if they cannot come to class or go to the library.
2. Consider adding a supplement to your syllabus explaining how you expect to continue the class. Spell out in advance that the pandemic flu may result in deviation from the regular syllabus, especially as it affects anything having to do with grades.
3. Remember that students may be in self-imposed isolation so they don't spread the virus, and they may be too ill to study effectively.
4. Be prepared to answer student inquiries about making up work. In case there are too many requests for individual accommodations, have a plan in mind that is feasible even with large numbers of requests. Treat all students equitably.
5. Be sure you have good contact information for all students (accurate mailing addresses if students remain on campus; off-campus addresses if not on campus); cell phone numbers; telephone numbers; e-mail addresses; other----but
6. Remember that HIPAA (medical) and FERPA privacy laws still apply.
7. Both students and faculty with families will likely be absent due to the illness of family members in addition to their own illness.
8. Be sure you have access to your own course materials, even if you cannot come to campus.
9. Set up the technological options in advance of actually needing them.

10. Emphasize to students the importance of putting public health and self-isolation above their fear of missing class, and then make it possible for them to do so.

Options to Consider for Continuation of Classes or Learning

If classes continue but students are absent due to illness---

Each faculty member may determine how to best accomplish the goals of the class in a manner that is effective and efficient for themselves and the students. In some cases, this may be a departmental or team decision. No one approach will be appropriate for all.

Several electronic approaches are available:

1. PeopleServer, which hosts web pages for faculty members

PeopleServer can be used to disseminate *nonconfidential* information to students (e.g. lecture notes, assignments, study guides). However, it must NOT be used for any confidential data or information, since it is easily accessed, even if password-protected.

IT provides further guidance and directions for basic use of its technologies at

<http://it.cofc.edu>

2. e-Reserves, managed by James Williams in Addlestone Library

This site stringently observes copyright laws, but enables a faculty member to make cleared materials available to a class.

3. Web-CT is a multi-faceted learning management system, providing a secure platform for posting grades, testing, assignments to be graded, etc. Extended additional use by faculty and students at large, however, is limited due to current storage space levels already at 80% of capacity, no IT staff available to provide training, and reduced IT support staff to trouble-shoot problems. Its website is <http://www.cofc.edu/~webct>

4. Blogs, on the CofC blog server, provide two-way communication. They can't be used for confidential information, but could permit a form of discussion. In addition, content/handouts can be attached if in PDF.

5. Technologically savvy faculty can record the audio for posting on iTunes. Such materials become open-access.

6. e-mail on Edisto can be used for communication between student and faculty member. While assignments can be e-mailed, the file sizes must be limited [to 2 mb] to avoid crashing the system. From off-campus, faculty may only send their messages by Outlook Web Access or properly configured mobile devices or VPN access.

7. Various open-source tools and social networks are available, but the CofC staff cannot provide any assistance. Under no circumstances can any confidential or FERPA-protected data be used with this type of software.

8. Google Apps for Education is not yet approved for use on our campus. You will be notified if/when it becomes an option.

Additional options include:

9. Insuring flexibility or leniency in deadlines for assignments for ill students
10. Provision of lecture notes, Power Point slides, or audio recording of lecture electronically or by hard copy as appropriate
11. Encouraging students to pair with a “flu friend,” a healthy friend or classmate who delivers goods (e.g. food) or assignments to/from their sick friend (while practicing good sanitation to avoid disseminating the virus).
12. Use of the U.S. mail and/or campus mail for submission of assignments, for returning graded papers, or for other suitable activities.
13. Administration of take-home tests or finals in place of, or as make-ups for, in-class tests or finals.
14. Substitution of an alternate assignment for a test if that can be done without sacrificing rigor.
15. Forgiving one test and basing a grade on the remainder of tests and other assignments, if that doesn't compromise the course.
16. Uncoupling of some lecture and lab courses which are normally required to be corequisites. [For example, if the lecture can be completed by remote methods, but the lab cannot be taught in that way, it would permit at least some of the semester to be captured.]
17. Running a series of make-up labs, activity classes, studio classes, etc., later in the term, assuming the peak of the pandemic has passed
18. Scheduling by the College of a formal make-up exam period after the first of the year if there are large numbers of influenza absences.

If class meetings are discontinued for a time due to extremely high absentee rates, and depending on the length of time and when during the term this occurs

All of the above, plus

Readjustment of the academic year calendar as announced by Academic Affairs

If a faculty member is too ill to meet class(es)

Substitution by a healthy colleague (keeping in mind that several faculty in one department may be ill simultaneously)

Assigning alternate assignments outside of class or having someone do alternate activities in class (e.g. video)

Rearrangement of the syllabus to adapt to your missed time

Teaching of class by remote means if instructor isn't too ill to work from home and has a mechanism for doing so.

If the final exam period is disrupted due to pandemic flu or public health advisories, further guidance will be issued. Options range from relying on the above methods, to issuing grades of Incomplete, to following the lead of some institutions "down under" and scheduling a final exam period after the December break.

ABSENCES

The issue of student absences from class is a difficult one to address. I'm sure most faculty have experience with students who miss too many classes or those who frivolously take their "three excused absences" without thinking ahead to the day they really will need them or even think they *must* take them. However, depending on the pattern of this year's influenza, there are likely to be a far higher number of students than usual who really need their days off because they feel sick and because of the public health guidance that one should self-isolate until 24 hours of a normal temperature without the use of fever-suppressing medication. The flu absences won't negate the need for a student's other legitimate absences. It is in everyone's best interest to encourage students to stay in isolation as advised; therefore, attendance policies which encourage this are important.

Student Absences

It is possible that sick persons will be advised by public health officials or student health services *not* to see a medical professional in person to avoid them congregating with others or overwhelming clinics, emergency rooms and doctor's offices, **although as of this date (10-2-2009) there has been no official notice. As medical services lack sufficient time or staff to deal with medical excuses, students will need to self-report directly to their professors via e-mail or telephone. They should not visit in person since this defeats the goal of limiting spread of the disease. As a faculty member, you can promote this by assuring your classes that you will accept self-reports.**

Health Services has been reporting that, fortunately, most students are ill for no more than 3-4 days. However, we also have documented cases of people being quite sick for 7 to 10 days (added 10-2-2009). Faculty should be aware that Health Services is telling students who are prescribed an antiviral medication because a roommate has the H1N1 flu that they should remain isolated for 24 hours (added 9-7-2009). An **MUSC Flu Symptom Evaluation Tool** now has a link on the **College of Charleston H1N1 flu page** (added 10-2-2009).

Students should not be dropped from classes, assigned a WA grade for excess absences due to influenza, or have flu absences "count against" their attendance record. You may also experience an increased number of requests for late Withdrawals, as students realize they are too far behind to catch up in all classes.

At the beginning of a semester, please do not be too hasty to drop a student from class for nonattendance. While it is important to have accurate class rolls, during fall semester we had students unable to travel to campus before classes began due to being quarantined overseas or because they are too ill to travel to campus before classes begin. The same situation is possible for spring semester (revised 10-1-2009).

Faculty Absences

Faculty experiencing flu symptoms should also follow the CDC self-isolation guidelines and should NOT be present in their classrooms, labs, studios or offices during their illness and until 24 hours after running a normal temperature without fever-reducing medication. Faculty should alert their department chair or other appropriate person in the department as soon as possible to inform them of his/her absence and/or determine if someone can substitute in class. Human Resources will issue additional information about employee absences as needed.

I wish everyone a healthy semester.

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