Withdrawal under Extenuating Circumstances

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I. PRINCIPLES

Fairness and Equity
Students are responsible for knowing the rules and regulations pertaining to their program of study by using the SFU resources available to them. However, the University recognizes that from time to time circumstances arise that make it difficult to complete an academic program. The dominant principles governing the Withdrawal under extenuating circumstances (WE) process are fairness and equity. The university is prepared to help students who experience unexpected and uncontrollable events that seriously threaten their academic obligations. But in doing so, the University must be careful not to disadvantage students who continue their studies when faced with similar circumstances. The University has the sole discretion to approve WE applications.

II. DEFINITIONS

Withdrawal requests may be complete or selective, in-semester or retroactive.

1. Complete Withdrawal
Since the reasons for a WE request are likely to have a pervasive influence on a student's academic performance, they will typically affect all the courses in which a student is enrolled. For this reason, most WE requests are for complete withdrawal from all courses in a term.

2. Selective Withdrawal
Occasionally, however, circumstances may be such that not all courses are affected, in which case the request is for selective withdrawal. Students applying for a selective withdrawal must specify the reasons why one course is affected, but another is not.

3. Timely Withdrawal
Normally, a withdrawal request of courses in progress is considered timely under extenuating circumstances provisions if the request is made prior to the deadline (April 30, August 31, December 31)

4. Retroactive Withdrawal
Occasionally, circumstances may not allow a timely withdrawal application, in which case procedures for retroactive withdrawal under extenuating circumstances may be used.
III. CRITERIA

It is not possible to lay down clear rules specifying precisely how WE applications will be assessed because the reasons for such requests are so varied. However, the following criteria are stated in a manner intended to help students determine whether they are eligible to apply for a withdrawal under extenuating circumstances.

a. Medical Grounds
Students have grounds for a WE request if they suffer a medical condition during the term which so impairs their ability to study that course requirements cannot be satisfied. Hospitalization for a week or more is almost certain to be regarded as sufficient evidence, while a short bout of the flu is likely to be insufficient. Students should seek counseling or advising assistance early in the term, so they can adjust their academic schedules if necessary. Withdrawal requests arising from failure to manage academic priorities will not be accepted as reasons for a WE.

b. Employment Grounds
Students have grounds for a WE request if they experience an unexpected change in conditions of employment that is so disrupting that course requirements cannot be completed. Sudden increases in employment hours interfering with studies is likely to be sufficient evidence for a withdrawal, while a requirement to work occasional overtime is most likely to be insufficient.

c. Compassionate Grounds
Students have grounds for a WE request if they have a traumatic experience that renders them unfit to complete course requirements during the term. The death of an immediate family member may be regarded as sufficient reason.

d. Other Grounds
Most WE applications are based on medical, compassionate, or employment related circumstances. However, other types of overwhelming personal difficulties such as divorce or family commitments may also be considered with the appropriate explanation and supporting documents.

IV. GUIDELINES

The University has the sole discretion to approve WE applications. Normally, applications will be denied for students who apply more than once for the same reason, apply for a retroactive WE more than five years from the date of application or have an academic dishonesty incident report filed for the course.

Poor Academic Performance
Although most students requesting a WE have experienced academic difficulties in the course in question, the fear of a poor grade is not, in and of itself, acceptable as a basis for granting withdrawal. The assessment of a WE request is based on the nature and severity of the reasons for the poor performance. It is important for students requesting a selective withdrawal to keep this point in mind, particularly where performance is weak in the course from which withdrawal is sought and noticeably stronger in courses in which the student wishes to stay enrolled. The
following examples, in and of themselves, will not be considered as a basis for granting a withdrawal:

- Students experiencing language difficulties
- Students having academic difficulties in the course in question
- Administrative error in enrolling or withdrawing from a course
- Academic standing
- Repeat course limitations
- Careless academic planning
- Students having a conflict with their instructor
- Scheduling of course assignments
- Grading practices

Students having problems because of these issues should speak to their instructor or an advisor in the department offering the course.

Documentation
An appeal for withdrawal requires a high standard of documentation that must accompany each application. Retroactive appeals must include for example a complete record of graded course activities, their dates and their weighting with respect to the final grades of each course to ensure that students are not able to unfairly benefit from selective erasure of poor grades. It may be necessary for the Manager, Student Academic Appeals to verify the validity of any documents submitted.

Some examples of required documents include:

- An ICBC or a Police Report for motor vehicle accidents or crimes committed resulting in victim services;
- Employment letters presented appropriately on business letterhead;
- Illnesses that are overseas must be presented on proper hospital or medical reports normally available from a hospital or doctor’s office.
- All compassionate withdrawals must include a copy of the death certificate, prayer card or obituary (proof of relationship may be required).

All documents must be presented in English and must be certified.

1. Medical Documentation
Students with a medical condition severe enough to warrant a WE request must have consulted with a medical practitioner and must document that consultation. A medical explanation documented on the SFU Health Care Provider Statement form (http://students.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/students/pdf/hcpsfWE.pdf) must be attached to the WE application form. Students who did not see a doctor at the time of the accident or illness and cannot provide evidence to back up the explanation will not be awarded a withdrawal. A note on a prescription pad is not adequate documentation. Health care providers need to present the information that is requested on the form. Please see http://students.sfu.ca/health/healthclinics/sicknotes.html for further information on sick notes.

2. Employment Documentation
Students appealing on employment grounds must submit a letter outlining details about the employment circumstance from their employer. The letter must include information about the
nature of the employment change, its date of onset and duration. This must be presented on
business letterhead, dated and signed.

3. Compassionate Grounds Documentation
For students applying for a WE on compassionate grounds, such as the death of a loved one,
evidence of the loss must be provided. For example, an obituary, death certificate and/or prayer
card must be submitted.

4. Personal Letter
WE applicants must write a clear and concise letter (no longer than two pages double-spaced or
one page single-spaced and typed) stating the reason for why they are applying to withdraw.
There should be a direct link between information presented in the cover letter and the
supporting documents. A chronological list of relevant events is helpful when reviewing all
requests. A vague cover letter accompanied by weak supporting documents or none at all will
delay the outcome or result in a denied decision.

V. PROCEDURES

a. Students who are considering a WE application, or require clarification about any of the rules,
regulations and deadline dates in the academic calendar regarding withdrawals should consult
with an academic advisor in Student Services, located in Maggie Benston, or speak to a
department advisor from the faculty in which they are enrolled. Since these rules, regulations
and deadlines dates are an important component of a university program, students should know
them.

b. Once a decision is made to pursue a WE application, the package of information should be
submitted to the Manager, Student Academic Appeals in Student and Academic Services. Each
WE package includes: the WE Application Form, a personal letter outlining the extenuating
circumstances and how it is affecting their academic studies and all supporting documents to
back up the information in the personal letter.

c. Most WE applications are adjudicated by the Manager, Student Academic Appeals. However,
when appropriate, the Manager, Student Academic Appeals, will forward WE requests to the
Dean’s office of the student’s faculty. It is the student’s responsibility to provide a clear
explanation on why they are applying for this withdrawal and providing all necessary documents
to back up an explanation so that the Faculty can make a fair assessment of the request being
made.

d. Most WE applications will be adjudicated within two weeks of submitting supporting
documents. If supporting documents are delayed or not received, then no decision can be made
on the withdrawal application and the applicant risks receiving a denied decision or having it
returned unprocessed. Those WE applications referred to the Faculty for decisions will take
longer to adjudicate.

Once a decision is made on a WE application, the Manager, Student Academic Appeals will
change the withdrawal under extenuating circumstances (WE) notation and notify the student by
email. The notation “WE” will be placed on a student record in lieu of a course grade. Please note that students are responsible to ensure their academic statuses are up to date by checking their student records on the Student Information System (SIMS).

e. If the WE request is referred to the relevant Faculty Dean's office, a decision based on the information presented will be communicated to the Manager, Student Academic Appeals, who will notify the student and place the WE notation on the student’s record.

f. Requests submitted after the term deadline (last day of class), or requests relating to a course taken in a previous term, are referred to as "retroactive". Retroactive WE applications follow the procedures above for "in-semester" requests. Requests that are for terms more than five years from the date of application will not be considered.

VI. APPEALS
Students whose WE applications are denied and feel they have grounds for appealing a WE decision should refer to the Senate Appeals Board web for detailed information.
http://students.sfu.ca/appeals/senate.html

Approved SCUS April 2013