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## MEMORANDUM

<b>ATTENTION:</b>	Senate
<b>FROM:</b>	Elizabeth Elle, Vice-Chair, Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies
<b>RE:</b>	Academic Concessions (SCUS 23-62)
<b>DATE:</b>	June 2, 2023

*Elizabeth Elle*

Action undertaken by SCUS on June 1, 2023, gives rise to the following recommendations:

### Motion

That Senate approve the proposed calendar entry for Academic Concessions, effective Fall 2023.



OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR  
Student Services

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**MEMORANDUM**

ATTENTION	SCUS	DATE	2023 May 23
FROM	Tom Nault Registrar and Executive Director, Student Enrolment		
RE:	Academic Concessions		

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**Motions:**

Motion 1: That SCUS approve and recommend to Senate that the proposed calendar entry on Academic Concessions effective Fall 2023.

**Overview and Background**

During the pandemic SFU removed the requirement for students to present a medical note for illnesses of a short duration, that is illnesses that last under five days. This step was taken to reduce the burden on the medical system during the pandemic. Instructors could require a student to complete an Academic Concession Self-Declaration Form. The intent of this form to ensure students understood that falsely claiming academic concession would be considered a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.

Feedback from Academic Units indicated that the move away from requiring medical notes for short-term illness was largely successful but there were some instances of abuse. One of the identified challenges was that student request academic concessions directly from their instructor and there is no way to monitor if a student is potentially taking advantage of the self-declaration process. Further, there were some students who claimed they were ill through the self-declare process to get an extension when they may not have been ill.

The medical community has identified several challenges in requiring medical notes for illnesses of a short duration. These include increase physician workload to see patients who would not regularly see a physician for a minor illness, potential exposing other patients at the physician's office to viral illnesses or the student seeing a physician after their symptoms have resolved. The attached letter from Dr. Ressler, medical director of SFUs Health and Counselling Services, more eloquently described the challenges of requiring medical notes for short term illnesses.

## **Decision**

Given SFU's experience over the past two years of not requiring medical notes for illness of a short duration it is recommend that SFU permanently adopt a policy that does not require medical notes for illnesses of a short duration. Proposed calendar language is identified below. Further, that SFU develop an online system for students to complete the self-declaration and that the result be monitored to identify trends and potential misuse of the system.

## **Proposed Calendar Language**

### **Academic Concessions**

Academic concessions are granted when unexpected situations or circumstances prevent students from participating in course-related activities, which could include missing a class, completing graded work or exams.

Situations or circumstances that may call for an academic concession include illness, accident, family situation, and similar unanticipated changes in personal responsibilities that create a conflict, or warrant particular compassion.

Concessions are only granted at the discretion of individual instructors and/or in accordance with established departmental or Faculty policies and procedures. Students should always speak to their instructor as a first step.

Students are required to complete the Academic Concession Form when seeking Academic Concessions from their instructor. Students are not required to present medical documentation when seeking an Academic Concession for minor or short-term illnesses, (that is illnesses expected to less five days or less). Instructors can request medical documentation for students missing a final examination or an assessment worth more than 20% of the final course grade. Instructors must make clear in the course syllabus instances when students must present medical documentation. An instructor may request documentation in addition to the Academic Concession form if they believe a student has misused the Academic Concession process. Students are reminded that filing false Academic Concession requests is a violation of the Student Academic Integrity Policy.

May 10, 2023

Re: Sick Notes

Dear Senate,

It is the position of those at SFU Health and Counselling services, as well as our local public health agencies, to discontinue the requirements for sick notes for casual illnesses.

Sick notes place an unnecessary burden on the already overburdened health care system. Students seeking sick notes -- who otherwise wouldn't see a doctor -- end up in physician's offices, walk-in clinics, and emergency department waiting rooms. There, they may spread germs to vulnerable individuals such as pregnant women, immunocompromised patients, cancer patients, and babies.

In most cases, the best remedy for students with an isolated illness (such as a gastrointestinal virus, COVID-19, influenza, or a common cold) is to stay home, rest, and drink fluids. Visiting a doctor's office or an emergency room for a medical note does not support their recovery. It may indeed cause them harm if they are further exposed while visiting.

Sometimes, students without any clinical reason to see a physician seek a sick note after they have recovered from their illness, so physicians issue a note based on trust. These "self reported" illnesses can be assessed by employers and professors without the physician visit. A sick note adds no additional value.

Students seeking sick notes reduce access for others who need to see a medical professional, and increase the amount of paperwork that health care providers already do, which directly impacts student care.

Thank you for your consideration in discontinuing the need for sick notes for casual illness, and please feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



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W Vicky Ressler, MD, CCFP  
Medical Director of SFU Health and Counselling Services