

## **5 Special Consideration Due to Illness and Misadventure**

### **5.1 Introduction**

**5.1.1** Assessments are designed to provide feedback on performance or to establish that students have achieved an adequate standard to proceed or to graduate. The University's assessment system is designed to ensure that conditions are fair to all students, as consistent as possible and that individual students are not disadvantaged by adverse personal circumstances beyond their control or by the activities of other students.

**5.1.2** Generally, serious illness or misadventure will be taken into account when considering a student's performance in a course or unit of study. There is, however, a clear distinction between longstanding illness or difficulties which prevent students from attending classes or completing required work or which seriously interfere with their capacity to study for long periods and short-term illness or misadventure that may prevent a well-prepared student from sitting for an examination or completing a particular assessment.

### **5.2 Principles for dealing with cases of special consideration**

The University's approach to cases of special consideration should be:

**5.2.1** Equitable;

**5.2.2** Consistent;

**5.2.3** Procedurally fair;

**5.2.4** Timely

**5.2.5** Effective; and

**5.2.6** Consistent with the University's privacy policy.

### **5.3 Responsibilities**

#### **5.3.1 Responsibilities of the University**

The University has a responsibility and obligation to:

**5.3.1.1** ensure that its policies on special consideration are publicised to all academic staff and students;

**5.3.1.2** ensure that its policies on special consideration are implemented and applied consistently across all faculties;

**5.3.1.3** promote best practice in considering applications for special consideration;

**5.3.1.4** ensure that fair and well-publicised procedures are applied for the consideration of any cases where students are applying for special consideration.

#### **5.3.2 Responsibility of faculties**

The faculties have a responsibility and obligation to:

**5.3.2.1** develop procedures for considering applications of special consideration which ensure:

- 5.3.2.1.1 timeliness of consideration of applications of special consideration;
  - 5.3.2.1.2 fair consideration of applications of special consideration;
  - 5.3.2.1.3 accurate reporting of how an academic judgment was formed;
  - 5.3.2.1.4 respect for privacy; and
  - 5.3.2.1.5 that all parties are informed of their rights and responsibilities in relation to the application of special consideration.
- 5.3.2.2 ensure consistent application of University policies and faculty procedures both at a faculty and department level;
- 5.3.2.3 Each faculty has a responsibility to ensure that there are clear and appropriate processes in place, consistent with the University's policies, so that students are treated fairly and equitably. These processes should be published and displayed on faculty websites and noticeboards in plain English. Faculties have a particular responsibility to ensure that policies and practices are applied consistently throughout the faculty.
- 5.3.2.4 Each faculty has a responsibility to ensure that two or more academic staff are involved in reaching an academic judgment regarding a student's special consideration application and that the process of determining that academic judgment is recorded in detail.

### **5.3.3 Responsibility of Students**

Students who, through serious illness or misadventure, are unable to complete an assessment, may apply for special consideration. Students have a responsibility and an obligation to:

- 5.3.3.1 act in accordance with the principles of special consideration as set out in this Resolution;
- 5.3.3.2 become familiar with University policy and faculty procedures relating to special consideration;
- 5.3.3.3 provide the relevant information to their faculty offices as soon as practicable and certainly within one week from the end of the appropriate semester so that an academic judgment of the circumstances and severity of their experiences can be made; and
- 5.3.3.4 act honestly when applying for special consideration.

## **5.4 Serious illness or misadventure**

- 5.4.1 It should be noted that only well-attested serious illness or misadventure during a semester or occurring at the time of an examination will warrant special consideration for academic performance. Occasional brief or trivial illness would not normally be regarded as sufficient to explain an absence or a poor performance and students are discouraged from submitting certificates for

absences totalling less than one week, although frequently recurrent short absences would need documentation. While it is important to ask for a medical certificate for serious illness of longer than a few days duration at the time of the first visit, there is no need to submit it unless the illness becomes prolonged or further frequent absences are required. The exact nature of misadventure will vary, but serious illness or death of a close family member, particularly at the time of the examinations, would clearly warrant consideration. Special Consideration will NOT be given in the following instances:

- 5.4.1.1 occasional brief or trivial illness of a one or two week duration that occur one week or more before an assessment is due or an examination undertaken;
- 5.4.1.2 workloads from other units of study, disciplines and faculties, except where the request for special consideration is made within the first three weeks of semester
- 5.4.1.3 employment where the request for special consideration is made less than four weeks before the date of the assessment;
- 5.4.1.4 illnesses and misadventures that have prevented students from acquiring a Pass level of knowledge/skills (including all illnesses/misadventures resulting in the student missing six weeks or more of lectures or tutorials);
- 5.4.1.5 adequate standards of documentation and processes have not been met;
- 5.4.1.6 requests for extensions for assignments made after the assignment is due or an assessment has taken place (except where the circumstances prevented earlier provision; no special consideration requests shall be processed if submitted more than one week after the assessment);
- 5.4.1.7 the performance of the student was equivalent or superior to that demonstrated in other assessments in the unit of study; and they pertain to planned commitments, such as elective surgery, holiday or work, where the student could reasonably be expected to have scheduled the commitment or their studies to not adversely affect their studies;
- 5.4.1.8 computer-related problems, except where a police report is provided indicating that burglary or calamity has resulted in the loss of both a computer *and* backups from the students' place of residence (NB: it is assumed that students keep regular back-ups of their work, so theft of a laptop is not grounds for special consideration).
- 5.4.1.9 Jury Service, Military Service, National Sporting, religious or cultural commitments and other unforeseen events are not dealt with under this policy as they are not instances of illness or misadventure. A separate policy regarding such matters is currently under development.

Students who, because of serious illness or misadventure, are prevented from attending classes for prolonged periods should seek an interview with the relevant Sub-Dean. Even if they do not exceed any specified permitted period of absence, they may need to consider whether their best academic interests are served by discontinuing with permission from the course until they are able to resume their studies effectively. International students may need to seek advice regarding visa requirements prior to making any changes to enrolments. Assistance can be sought from the International Office.

## **5.5 Procedures**

Faculty procedures should include:

- 5.5.1** a clear statement about the requirements to provide documentation and where information should be sent or handed in;
- 5.5.2** an indication of the use to which medical and other certificates will be put and an indication of when it is appropriate to submit a Professional Practitioner Certificate (see later);
- 5.5.3** although it is impossible to outline the possible range, an indication of the seriousness of circumstances that would lead to decisions to allow latitude in handing in assignments or requirements for normally compulsory work;
- 5.5.4** in all cases, consistent penalties need be indicated for failure to complete an assignment or for late submission in the absence of an explanation accepted by the faculty;
- 5.5.5** possible arrangements for late submission of assignments when evidence of serious illness or misadventure is provided either beforehand or after the due date, including dates beyond which they would not be considered (e.g. after return of work to other students);
- 5.5.6** if attested absences have occurred, whether marks are aggregated and averaged;
- 5.5.7** in the case of serious illness necessitating a substantial absence from classes, the maximum period of absence beyond which the student's work could not be considered completed must be indicated. The period will differ given that faculties may require regular attendance at activities considered essential for successfully completing the program or course (practical classes, clinical work, excursions, group work);
- 5.5.8** when marks are awarded for ongoing attendance or participation, an indication should be made of the way in which absence will be handled (both that without adequate excuse and that due to attested serious illness or misadventure);
- 5.5.9** any means to make up work missed or to complete assignments not submitted during a prolonged period of serious illness or misadventure must be indicated;
- 5.5.10** a process of appeal to the faculty against a decision needs to be established and publicised so that appeals can be dealt with rapidly;

**5.5.11** consistent advice should be given to students who become seriously ill or experience misadventure during the examination period or on the day of the examination (e.g. whether they are best advised to sit if at all possible even if special arrangements are needed - for example through the Health Service - or whether it is considered more appropriate to resit at a later date);

**5.5.12** the means of requesting special consideration in relation to the period of the annual examinations must be specified;

**5.5.13** arrangements for students who fail to sit examinations at the end of first semester or at the annual examinations when evidence of serious illness or misadventure is accepted need to be made clear. For fairness, any retest should be similar to the style of the original examination.

## **5.6 Privacy and Record Keeping**

The faculty office must retain all special consideration applications and associated documentation for the specific period (see below). Students should be notified promptly if the documentation is inadequate or if the circumstances are not considered sufficiently serious as to warrant leniency.

The records related to applications for Special Consideration contain sensitive personal information, which must be managed in accordance with the University's Privacy Policy and Privacy Management Plan. Access to the information must be limited to those staff who require it in order to carry out their responsibilities. Special Consideration records must be stored securely in a manner that prevents unauthorised access. If sent through the internal mail Special Consideration records must be in sealed envelopes. Special Consideration records must be retained for a minimum of 12 months after last action, and then destroyed in a manner that ensures privacy is not breached. In addition, the proper destruction of Special Consideration records must be appropriately documented by Archives and Records Management Services. Further information on privacy issues may be obtained from [www.usyd.edu.au/arms/privacy](http://www.usyd.edu.au/arms/privacy) and questions regarding proper storage, management and eventual destruction of the records should be directed to [disposal@rms.usyd.edu.au](mailto:disposal@rms.usyd.edu.au).

Statistics should be maintained by the faculty office of the total number of special consideration applications submitted, the number of applications that were accepted and the number that were rejected.

## **5.7 Documentation**

**5.7.1 Professional Practitioner Certificate** is supplied with the special consideration form and should be completed by a registered medical practitioner, or counsellor for a student whose work during a teaching period or whose performance in an assessment task, including examinations, has been affected by illness or misadventure. Certificates signed by family members are not acceptable.

The Professional Practitioner Certificate includes;

5.7.1.1 dates of consultation;

5.7.1.2 an evaluation by the practitioner, psychologist etc. as to the severity, duration and effect on the student's ability to attend classes, learn or complete assessment requirements;

- 5.7.1.3 a description of the nature and seriousness of the student's problems, within the limits of confidentiality, so that an academic assessment can be made of the possible effects of the illness or accident on the student's performance;
- 5.7.1.4 any other relevant information relating to the student's illness, trauma etc.;
- 5.7.1.5 any other documentation that may be relevant; and
- 5.7.1.6 the practitioner authorises the University to contact them to confirm the authenticity of the certificate.

**5.7.2 Other documentation** will depend on the nature of the misadventure, but it should be provided to support the student's account of the circumstances and indicate the likely duration and the effect of the problem on the student's performance.

**5.7.3** The above information is to be publicised in handbooks and displayed in appropriate notice boards and websites. Where substantial absence has been documented during a semester, faculties should establish mechanisms to review each case to ensure that each student has been treated consistently by relevant departments.

## **5.8 *Aegrotat* and posthumous awards**

In exceptional circumstances involving serious illness or death, award of *aegrotat* and posthumous degrees and diplomas may be made. In this circumstance, the Dean, acting on behalf of the Faculty, would then authorise the Registrar to certify that the conditions for the award of the degree or diploma had been met.