

Thank you for your interest in the class excuse protocol at Illinois State University. Student Health Services does not routinely provide medical documentation of illnesses. We are happy to provide you with the following explanation and to discuss with you any questions you may have about it.

Prior to the implementation of this protocol, we received hundreds of requests from students to provide documentation of medical visits. The students generally asked for documentation even before they had discussed their illness with their professors. Many students made appointments with physicians for the express purpose of obtaining a written note; they would not otherwise have needed a doctor's evaluation (e.g., for simple colds, a typical migraine headache, etc.). This caused an undue burden on our staff since each of these requests required time from receptionists, physicians, and nursing personnel.

In addition, we discovered that practitioners often had difficulty making assessments regarding the appropriateness of giving an excuse. For example, some students with simple colds would request a medical excuse while others with similar illnesses appeared to be able to remain in class and perform well. Student Health Services is not in a position to judge motives of patients in an attempt to determine whether any given request for an excuse is valid. Documentation may be provided for prolonged illnesses (mono, influenza, appendicitis, etc.). See <http://deanofstudents.illinoisstate.edu/contact/absence/> for further information and guidelines. Minor health problems will not be verified at all.

Finally, SHS staff is committed to teach appropriate health care utilization. The practice of providing medical excuses seems to send mixed messages to students about the proper use of health care resources.

Below is an additional document that provides a medical perspective on student illness that may be helpful to you in evaluating a student's request for special academic treatment. We hope this is useful for you. Please contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Christina Nulty, MD
Director
Student Health Services

Medical Perspective on Student Illness ISU Student Health Services

The following information provides a medical perspective on how students deal with the effect of illness on academics. The clinicians at Student Health Services (SHS) hope it will be useful to faculty in evaluating student requests for special academic treatment.

1. While there are a few exceptions, we find that students want to be cooperative about complying with professors' expectations of them. In fact, they are often willing to sacrifice their rights to medical confidentiality in order to convince an instructor they were legitimately ill. We encourage faculty to assume that a student is being honest about the need for their special requests, unless you have a concrete reason to doubt it.
2. Not all people are equally equipped to function optimally when ill, even when the illness is minor. One student experiencing a headache may perform adequately on an exam while another may feel compromised and ask, quite legitimately, for an opportunity to make up the exam.
3. Today's students contend with a variety of personal or social problems that may contribute to or be exacerbated by other illnesses. For example, medical problems such as anxiety disorders, depression, panic disorders, attention deficit disorders and issues of abuse are abundant. Such conditions may be exacerbated by other illnesses such as simple upper respiratory infections or by stresses such as project deadlines. In an effort to salvage their dignity or protect their right to keep such conditions confidential, students are more likely to explain that "I had a bad cold" than to say, "I have an anxiety disorder and my bad cold made me have a panic attack."
4. Although college students generally are a healthy population, many students have chronic illnesses and their academic pursuits may be disrupted frequently. Faculty may become suspicious of these students' motives because the students may ask repeatedly for special arrangements. It can be helpful in such cases to encourage the student to be as open as possible in sharing with you how their condition has been affecting their studies. Together, you might be able to reach a mutual agreement about special arrangements. SHS clinicians are always willing to discuss with faculty how a specific condition could influence a student's academic performance if the student has signed a release of records for the provider to talk to the professor regarding their diagnosis and treatment recommendations and need to possibly miss class.

January, 1999
Reviewed September, 2004
Revised, November, 2005
Revised, November, 2008
Reviewed, September, 2012
Revised, August, 2014
Revised, January 2017
Revised November, 2018