

Cornell University
Student Assembly

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Type of Action:	Recommendation
Status/Result:	New Business

S.A. Resolution #52
Amending Leave of Absence Policies

ABSTRACT: The resolution aims to call Cornell to amend its leave of absence policies in order to better accommodate the mental health well being of the student body.

Sponsored by: Arsen Omurzakov '22, Katherine Gorton '24, Alexa Slyman '22, Samuel Zverev '21, Carlo Castillo '22, Jay Doshi '23

Whereas, the Sophie Fund, an Ithaca non-profit advocating for youth mental health, identified that leaves of absence are often when a student's mental health is most vulnerable and "entail an often unexpected, abrupt, and painful loss of a structured environment that includes a support network of friends, professors, university staff, roommates and other fellow students, campus organizations, cultural and athletic facilities, and school medical providers."

Whereas, the Ruderman Family Foundation, a Boston based philanthropy advocating for and advancing the inclusion of people with disabilities released a report in 2018 on Cornell University mental health policies, with Cornell receiving an overall grade of a D-.

Whereas, several policies specifically pertaining to leaves of absence contributed to the score received by Cornell and were marked as problematic:

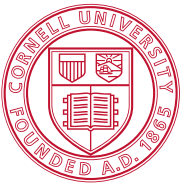
- Cornell policy states, "When there is an actual or the threat of a community disruption, Cornell University may place a student on an involuntary leave of absence."
- Cornell students may not initiate a health leave of absence after the last day of classes.

Whereas, additional Cornell policy asserts, "If a student submits a health leave of absence request after the published deadline to drop classes, the student will receive the "course withdrawal" notation (W) for any courses that have not been completed."

Whereas, when there is not a threat to the safety of others, behaviors that are disruptive that result from a disability should not result in exclusion.

Whereas, courts have ruled that discrimination on the basis of disability-caused behavior is the same thing as discrimination on the basis of disability, which is illegal.

Whereas, final exam week is one of the most academically strenuous times of the semester and students should be free to initiate a health leave of absence then.



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Whereas, including course withdrawals (W's) on students' transcripts burdens them with additional stress, shame, and challenge when seeking career opportunities that those seeking a health leave should not be penalized for.

Whereas, at our peer Ivy institutions, many of these problematic policies are not in place.

Be it therefore resolved, Cornell removes language about community disruption as to why it may place a student on a leave of absence.

Be it further resolved, Cornell allows students to initiate a leave of absence after the last day of classes;

Be it finally resolved, Cornell refrains from notating W's on students' transcripts right away when seeking a leave of absence after the published drop deadline and instead notates an incomplete, with an option for the student to complete their work at a later time period if they are able.

Respectfully Submitted,

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(Reviewed by: Student Health Advisory Committee, 05/11/2021)