

Dear Teaching Faculty,

Welcome to the 2009 fall semester and thank you, in advance, for the excellent instruction you provide to our students.

I realize that you are often called upon to interact with students regarding many non-academic matters. I am writing today to discuss one of those issues: H1N1 flu and its impact on our teaching and learning. I encourage you to be creative and understanding with respect to absences. This fall will be an unusual one in terms of absences – the students' and potentially yours. You may be teaching a fall-only course or a course that is a prerequisite for a spring course. If you drop students for lack of attendance, the consequences for the student are far reaching. This is always true, but particularly when so much illness is expected. Please be reasonable and respectful and a bit more willing to seek solutions other than withdrawal.

As teaching faculty, you make statements concerning absenteeism in your course information sheets. Those attendance policies are likely related to your course outcomes. This fall, like other terms, students will be absent from your courses. Since there is no readily available H1N1 vaccine at this point in time, it is expected that the incidence of this illness will be approximately twice that of a normal flu season. In addition, the age groups expected to be most affected are 5 – 24-year-olds. As a result, it is likely that you will be responding to more students in regard to their absenteeism for themselves and their families.

The following is guidance related to the fall flu season:

- Remind your students that they should “save” their absences. The normal course of seasonal or H1N1 flu will result in a 5-7 day absence (or a calendar week). If you have a MWF class and permit 3 absences in your course information sheet, that is equivalent to a calendar week. If your course meets once a week on Saturdays, one absence would equate to one calendar week. An allowance for one calendar week will not, however, accommodate additional absences for another reason so students should be very careful and use their absences wisely. A further issue is the possibility that students who are parents will need to stay home with sick children who are not permitted to attend school and/or childcare.
- Do not ask students to seek medical care or to obtain documentation of illness. Communities are asking persons who are ill to stay home and seek medical care only when there are elevated concerns. We are not medical professionals. If students have questions about whether or not to seek medical attention, please encourage them to contact their physician or the MCC Health Services Department. That being said, you are encouraged to keep copies of the information communicated by Health Services to share with students.
- Consider options to communicate remotely with students who are out. Class email distribution lists are available in Outlook. You also may want to consider posting some

class materials to the M:drive or web. Some creative thinking in advance will allow students to achieve the course learning outcomes when absences increase.

- Contact the department as early as possible if you will be out ill. Class cancellation is not the first option. We cancel class only when the department is unable to find a substitute on short notice.
- Create and share “lesson plans” that could be shared with a teaching substitute. Know your possible substitutes and communicate various options to these faculty if you are out.
- We do not now have proscriptive guidance from Monroe County about levels of absence that might trigger closings. It’s possible that SUNY could issue mandates or guidance about student retention in class because of flu. We’ll keep you informed as more information becomes available.

Here is a sample statement that you can communicate to your students in your course information sheet or otherwise:

Fall 2009 brings flu season and this year it is expected to bring the H1N1 variant. I encourage you to take notice of the preventive measures that have been communicated to all students at the college. I support the request that students, faculty and staff stay home when they are ill. In this class, I typically allow for up to three absences. As a result, I encourage you to be present every day. If you do become ill, you will still have those days to cover illness-related absences. I also ask that you each take the contact information for two of your classmates, so that you can share notes and information you may miss while absent.

Attached you will find general guidance from our Health Services Department as well as the communication that will be sent to our students.

Sincerely,

Janet J. Glocker, Ph.D.
Vice President, Academic Services