



May 15, 2018

RE: University of Toronto Mandatory Leave of Absence Policy

Dear Vice Provost Students Office,

We, the Scarborough Campus Students' Union (SCSU), are dedicated to representing the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (UTSC) population of over 12,000 students. The SCSU is committed to ensuring quality experiences in higher education, and advocates for the general best interests of UTSC students. This statement is a response to the University of Toronto's University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy.

We recognize the attempt to revise this policy, and adhere to the recommendations provided by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC). This was administered by opening up consultations, from April 26, 2018 to May 16, 2018. However, we have grave concerns regarding the current version of the policy, the revision process, the consultations timeline, and inequitable nature of the policy itself.

The current version of the policy neglects the vital role of medical professionals in assessing the individual student's health condition. Thus, the proposed policy allows for these important assessments and decisions to be made by the administration who do not have the necessary training in human rights or risk assessment for such judgments. As outlined by the OHRC, this is problematic because it discredits the importance of medical expertise in a policy rooted in perceived good health.

There is a consistent lack of due process within the policy that undermines its intention. The policy does nothing to require the Vice Provost's office to utilize medical professionals in its invocation. Medical verification and expertise must be necessary when mandating a student to leave their studies for an extended period of time. As stated by the OHRC, "Ultimately, the decision to exclude a student from school due to alleged health and safety risk without sufficient objective evidence, and without meeting the undue hardship standard set out in the *Code*, may constitute discrimination." In accordance with this idea, there is a significant double standard faced by the student, when they intend to 'return to studies' but are first forced to provide verification before the safety of return. The requirements regarding who is needed to provide verification and who isn't, explicitly display the hierarchy and inequity within the university.

Furthermore, this policy neglects to acknowledge how students will be affected outside of the parameters of their education. There is no guarantee of a students' access to resources including, but not limited to, campus healthcare services, emergency housing, and work-study positions. Access to healthcare, housing, and employment are key social determinants of health which can be jeopardized by the implementation and invocation of this policy. The lack of



guaranteed access to healthcare services further marginalizes students with physical and mental health concerns and cements the barrier of access to return to studies.

The process through which consultations have occurred failed to engage the majority of the student population. The consultations page itself is not easily accessible to students due to its lack of visibility. Thus, many students have remained unaware of the ongoing open online feedback. In addition, there have been no opportunities for in-person consultations that would allow students to receive clarification and express their concerns regarding the policy. Ample and efficient consultation provided in the current time frame allotted is disproportionate to the large demographic that this policy will affect. Additionally, there were technical difficulties that hindered the ability of students to review the revisions, which made it inaccessible to submit consultations until the last week of the timeframe.

As student representatives, our leading priority are the students we serve and their best interest. We do not believe that this policy will provide the students at UTSC with a safe and inclusive educational experience. Our hope is that the university continues to prioritize the mental health of students with a change in direction toward policies that adopt more equitable approaches. We ask that the university acknowledges the risk of harm that this policy poses towards the rights of students who struggle with their mental health. We ask that the university's administration and policies prioritize their students. We demand that the consultation timeframe be extended to November 2018 to ensure that the process and policy itself be inclusive, accessible, sufficient and reflective of students' needs.

The SCSU is a safe space where student concerns, health, and well-being are of the utmost importance and treated with the utmost respect. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to visit us at SL108, or email Ayaan Abdulle at academics@scsu.ca and/or Hana Syed at external@scsu.ca.

Consultation link (Deadline is May 16th):

<https://wp.provost.utoronto.ca/consultations-students-utoronto-ca/student-consultation/consultation-on-on-proposed-university-mandated-leave-of-absence-policy/>

Revised Policy:

<http://wp.provost.utoronto.ca/consultations-students-utoronto-ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2018/04/Proposed-University-Mandated-Leave-of-Absence-Policy-Posted.pdf>

OHRC Response:

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/re-university-mandated-leave-absence-policy-%C2%ADraises-human-rights-concerns>

In solidarity,

Scarborough Campus Students' Union