

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

October 29, 2022

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Steering Committee

FROM: Teresa K. Woodruff, Ph.D., Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs 

SUBJECT: Consideration of Presence and Absence Policies

In a recent meeting with the Associated Students of Michigan State University (ASMSU), student leaders requested a review of university presence and absence policies. The ASMSU Assembly passed the following bills:

57-51: Advocate for Teaching Faculty to Allow at Least Two Mental Health Days as Excused Absences in University Classes

58-62: Advocate for the Creation of a Mental Health Absence Policy Recommendation for Instructors

58-92: Advocate to Amend MSU's Grief Absence Policy to Better Support Students

I recommend the University Committee on Undergraduate Education (UCUE) review existing policies and consider enhancements to best support MSU students with regard to these matters.

Attachments



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PROVOST**

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**ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION**

BILL NO. 57-51

INTRODUCED BY: Grondin (CAL)

SECONDED BY: Kovach (JMC)

A BILL TO: Advocate for Teaching Faculty to Allow at Least Two Mental Health Days as Excused Absences in University Classes

THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ENACT:

WHEREAS, According to the Preamble of the Constitution of the Associated Students of Michigan State University, our organization was created to “promote the health and wellness of undergraduate Spartans,” as well as to “represent the undergraduate student body and act in its interest;”¹ and,

WHEREAS, Mental health has become a mainstay of students on university campuses, with 57.7% of students having felt “overwhelming anxiety” in the past year due to school and 11% of college students being formally diagnosed with anxiety;² and,

WHEREAS, 60.5% of students have reported experiencing loneliness, one of the most common symptoms of depression, likely heightened by online learning and other negative factors linked to COVID-19;³ and,

WHEREAS, *The American Institute of Stress* states that 77% of Americans regularly experience physical symptoms incited by stress and stress has also been known to worsen the symptoms of pre-existing health conditions;^{4 5} and,

WHEREAS, College students are finding an extreme increase of burnout, in one study 91% of respondents stated that having an unmanageable amount of stress or frustration negatively impacted the quality of their work, burnout can also negatively affect personal relationships, quality of learning, self efficacy, and perceived teacher emotional support has been found to decrease burnout rates amongst students^{6 7}; and,

¹ <https://asmsu.msu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ASMSU-Manual-Rev-4-19.pdf>

² <https://whattobecome.com/blog/college-student-mental-health-statistics/>

³ <https://whattobecome.com/blog/college-student-mental-health-statistics/>

⁴ <https://www.stress.org/stress-research>

⁵ <https://www.cedars-sinai.org/blog/is-stress-making-you-sicker.html>

⁶ <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/burnout-survey.html#>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3872283/>

WHEREAS, In a survey conducted by the *National Alliance on Mental Illness*, it was discovered that about two-thirds (64%) of college students in the United States who dropped out, did so due to mental disorders;⁸ and,

WHEREAS, The second leading cause of death among college students in the United States is suicide⁹ and half of all college students report having had suicidal thoughts;¹⁰ and,

WHEREAS, Several states have passed or written legislation allowing students to take mental health days off, including but not limited to, Colorado, California, Washington, Oregon, Florida, New York, Utah, Minnesota, and Virginia;^{11 12 13 14} and,

WHEREAS, *The American Psychological Association* cites research that shows breaks from school or work decreases burnout, increases engagement, and restores energy;¹⁵
¹⁶and,

WHEREAS, Allowing mental health to be cited as an excused absence can greatly reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness, stigma which “can lead to feelings of shame and self-consciousness” and “can negatively impact help-seeking as well as early detection and prevention;”¹⁷ therefore be it further,

RESOLVED, The Associated Students of Michigan State University shall advocate at either Faculty Senate or University Council for teaching faculty to build in a certain number of mental health days (no less than two) into their attendance policies, to be used as excused absences, with no questions asked.

INTRODUCED ON _____

⁸ <https://whattobecome.com/blog/college-student-mental-health-statistics/>

⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4535338/>

¹⁰ <https://www.safecolleges.com/suicide-second-highest-cause-of-death-among-college-students/>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/28/california-students-mental-health-days-bill>

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/health/oregon-mental-health-days.html>

¹³ <https://www.whsv.com/content/news/General-Assembly-passes-bill-allowing-excused-mental-health-days-for-students-568412731.html>

¹⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/schools-now-letting-youths-stay-home-sick-for-mental-health-days/2019/10/21/15df339a-e93b-11e9-85c0-85a098e47b37_story.html

¹⁵ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/01/break#:~:text=In%20a%20follow%20Dup%2C%20Sonntag,their%20levels%20of%20burnout%20decreased.&text=%E2%80%9CEspecially%20if%20employees%20feel%20burnout,longer%20break%2C%E2%80%9D%20Sianoja%20says.>

¹⁶ <https://news.illinois.edu/view/6367/205427>

¹⁷ <https://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit/i-want-be-mental-health-advocate/fight-stigma-and-support-mental-health>

REFERRED TO Academic COMMITTEE ON 12.03.2020

SPECIAL ACTION TAKEN _____ DATE _____

COMMITTEE ACTION X Voice Majority 12.03.2020

PASSED FAILED VOTE DATE

FINAL ACTION TAKEN X Voice Majority 12.10.2020

PASSED FAILED VOTE DATE

Abii-tah chungong bih

PRESIDENT : Abii-Tah Chungong Bih

VPIA: Nora Teagan

**ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION**

BILL NO. 58-62

INTRODUCED BY: Pandya (JMC)

SECONDED BY: Kapale (Eng)

CONTRIBUTORS: A. Iturralde (VPAA)

A RESOLUTION TO: Advocate for the Creation of a Mental Health Absence Policy Recommendation for Instructors

THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ENACT:

WHEREAS, The Associated Students of Michigan State University was founded in order to “promote the health and wellness of undergraduate Spartans;”¹ and,

WHEREAS, Michigan State University already features institutional mental health care through their CAPS and Psychiatric Care programs, while stating in their website that the greatest obstacles to academic success are often health-related, and that “*We help students minimize those obstacles and maximize student success*”;² and,

WHEREAS, National statistics show that over 1/3rd third of college students experience depression, anxiety, and eating concerns³. Additionally, 32% have experienced struggles with self-harm or suicide ideaiton⁴; and,

WHEREAS, These mental health concerns represent higher concentrations in BIPOC and members of the LBGTQIA+ community, ranging from 15%-37%⁵; and,

WHEREAS, Studies from the Archives of General Psychiatry show that “*psychiatric disorders interfere with college attendance and reduce the likelihood of successful college completion*”⁶, and further studies show that 50% of mental illnesses begin by the age of 14⁷; and,

WHEREAS, Mental health days have been shown to reduce symptoms of burnout, stress, and anxiety for students⁸; and,

¹[ASMSU Manual](#)

²[MSU Student Health and Wellness](#)

³[Mental Health Trends, Strategies, and Resources, Nov. 2017](#)

⁴[Ibid.](#)

⁵[Mental Health America, BIPOC Mental Health](#)

⁶[Mental Health of College Students and Their Non-College-Attending Peers Results From the National Epidemiologic Study on Alcohol and Related Conditions, Jan. 2009](#)

⁷[National Alliance on Mental Health, Warning Signs of Mental Illness](#)

⁸[Garden State Treatment Center, Benefits of Taking a Mental Health Day](#)

WHEREAS, Several states, including the states of Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Nevada, Oregon, and Virginia passed legislation mandating that mental health days are an acceptable excuse for an absence⁹; and,

WHEREAS, Michigan State University currently has no standard policy for faculty to explicitly accept mental health days as a valid excuse of absence in the syllabi, leaving them to vary in what they will and will not accept; and,

WHEREAS, Without an explicit statement in syllabi about mental health days, students will be left to make judgment calls that assume a professor's rules about them, and may make decisions that negatively impact their mental health due to this; and,

WHEREAS, Per Bill 57-51,¹⁰ ASMSU has already committed ourselves to the stance that a certain number of absences caused due to mental health should be considered as excused absences. This was advocated to University Council and Faculty Senate, but that was the extent of the bill's reach; therefore be it,

RESOLVED, The Associated Students of Michigan State University shall advocate to all relevant parties, including the Office of the Provost, to create a mental health absence policy that recommends to instructors to excuse students from classes due to reasons in regard to mental health.

INTRODUCED ON 01.27.2022

REFERRED TO Policy COMMITTEE ON 01.27.2022

SPECIAL ACTION TAKEN _____ DATE _____

COMMITTEE ACTION	<u>X</u>		Voice Majority	<u>01.27.2022</u>
	PASSED	FAILED	VOTE	DATE

FINAL ACTION TAKEN	<u>X</u>		Voice Majority	<u>02.03.2022</u>
	PASSED	FAILED	VOTE	DATE



PRESIDENT: Georgia Frost



VPIA: Jordan Kovach

⁹ [States Are Now Accepting "Mental Health Day" as a Valid Reason for Missing School. Sep. 2021](#)

¹⁰ [57-51](#)

**ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION**

BILL NO. 58-92

INTRODUCED BY: Singh (Broad)

SECONDED BY: Dudley (CANR)

CONTRIBUTORS: Pandya (JMC)

A RESOLUTION TO: Advocate to Amend MSU's Grief Absence Policy to Better Support Students

THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ENACT:

WHEREAS, ASMSU's Constitution enlists part of ASMSU's duty to "promote the health and wellness of undergraduate students"¹; and,

WHEREAS, Bereavement policies, especially during and post- COVID-19, have become incredibly important to the well-being of students experiencing grief; and,

WHEREAS, MSU's current bereavement policy states that students must inform their Dean or a designated trustee "no later than one week" from initial knowledge of the situation and students must submit verification deemed appropriate "as specified by the Associate Dean"²; and,

WHEREAS, Students may not be willing to speak about the impacts of a grief-inducing circumstance until after a week and may not be able to provide "appropriate"³ verification determined solely by the administrator; and,

WHEREAS, MSU's Grief Absence Policy also only relates to the death of a family member or "a similar tragedy"⁴; and,

WHEREAS, Several other events can occur that can induce grief that may make completing academic obligations difficult, including but not limited to: divorce, dismissal from dependent work, change in the health of a loved one, change in living conditions, abuse, pregnancy, heartbreak, and the addition of another adult in the family;⁵ and,

WHEREAS, UCUE's endorsement of the Grief Absence Policy states that "many factors can impact a student's academic success", and states that grief-inducing moments can

¹[ASMSU Constitution](#)

²[Grief Absence Policy](#)

³[Grief Absence Policy](#)

⁴[Grief Absence Policy](#)

⁵[Several types of grief](#)

impact a student’s mental capabilities, specifically pointing to the loss of a family member⁶; and,

WHEREAS, Students should be able to discuss with the deans of their college if they ever feel a grief-inducing event has limited their ability to complete their academic responsibilities; therefore be it,

RESOLVED, ASMSU will advocate for the adjustment of MSU’s Grief Absence Policy to create more time for students reporting issues, broaden the scope of what qualifies as “grief” to be determined between the student and the Associate Dean, and for both the student and the Associate Dean to have a role in qualifying what will count as appropriate verification in a specific circumstance.

INTRODUCED ON 03.24.2022

REFERRED TO Academic **COMMITTEE ON** 03.24.2022

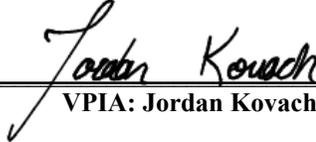
SPECIAL ACTION TAKEN Tabled in Full **DATE** 03.31.2022

COMMITTEE ACTION	<u> X </u>	Voice Majority	<u> 03.31.2022 </u>
	PASSED	FAILED	VOTE
			DATE

FINAL ACTION TAKEN	<u> X </u>	Voice Majority	<u> 04.07.2022 </u>
	PASSED	FAILED	VOTE
			DATE



PRESIDENT: Georgia Frost



VPIA: Jordan Kovach

⁶[UCUE Discussion of Grief Absence](#)