

Suspension of studies and leave of absence policy

Proposer: Ewan Jobe, Welfare Committee

Seconders: Amelia Winter Estabrook, Welfare Committee; Stuart Lamont, Welfare Committee; Andrea Hernández, Welfare Committee; Kendall Smith, Welfare Officer; Alya Altareef, Welfare Committee; Noémie Pirus-Hassid, Welfare Committee; Rachel Ball, Welfare Committee; Laura Smith, Welfare Committee, Nathan Bircham, Welfare Committee

Council notes:

1. That there are various reasons why someone may wish to end or postpone their studies, and that doing so can be a perfectly legitimate choice in the right circumstances.
2. That, at the same time, termination of studies can represent a failure of the university system to properly support students through their studies.
3. That for at risk individuals, leaving university can sometimes represent a decline in mental health and can itself be a difficult transition into life outside of university.
4. That the experience of individuals who have terminated or suspended their studies has in some cases left people feeling completely cut off from the institution and the support services that the AUSA and the university offers.
5. That when fee paying students terminate their studies, they may have to continue paying tuition fees for the remainder of the semester.
6. That international students can face particular issues with suspension of studies when the university offers no official status for taking a leave of absence, where some student loan programmes can require repayments within a certain period of time following the end of studies.

Council believes:

1. That students thinking about planning on suspending or terminating their studies should be supported as far as possible.
2. That students should retain support from, contact with and access to AUSA and university services and resources indefinitely following suspension of studies, with efforts being made to help individuals to eventually return to university if that is what they wish to do.
3. That the university has a duty of care to students that does not end as soon as an individual informs the university that they intend to suspend their studies.

Council resolves:

1. To mandate the sabbatical officer team to push for changes in how the university deals with suspension of studies.

2. To allow students to continue to access AUSA's services indefinitely, and to ensure that students are made aware of this at time of suspension of studies.
3. To petition the university to do the same with its own support services, especially with regards to the counselling service in the interests of making the transition to mental health support services outside of university as smooth as possible.
4. To ask that personal tutors continue to have contact with tutees who are not currently studying but have not completed their degree, to seek regular updates and offer advice in the interests of helping to identify the most at-risk individuals.
5. To promote measures that seek to ensure that suspension or termination of studies is minimised and only used as a last resort. This includes ensuring that university study is an appropriate choice for all those who come here, and that students are supported throughout their study as far as possible; before any issues get to the point where suspension of studies is the only option.