

## **Guidelines and Practices Regarding Medical Leaves for Mental and Physical Health Concerns**

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

**1) By way of context, how many students are served by the Counseling Service (CS) and Health Center (HC) each year?**

Typically, 48% of students visit the Health Center every year, and 30 percent of our students receive mental health treatment in a given year. It is estimated that by graduation – approximately 40-50% of students will have consulted with the Counseling Services team. Wait time for an appointment is on average 2-3 days to see a clinician and around 7 days to see a psychiatrist. Emergencies are addressed the same day of contact.

**2) How many students take a medical leave of absence per year?**

Over the last five years on average, 20 medical leaves of absences were taken: 18 medical leaves were taken per year for mental health reasons and 2 health leaves were utilized. Nearly all leaves were taken voluntarily.

**3) How is the medical leave of absence initiated?**

A medical leave can be initiated by a student, a member of the Dean of Students staff, or a member of the Health or Counseling team. The conversation of whether the student should consider a medical leave of absence begins as a conversation, usually as one option among several options. The student needs to agree with a voluntary leave of absence and needs to be evaluated by an on-campus or off-campus clinician to make certain this is the right step for them. The criterion for taking the medical leave is usually threefold:

- a) A student is unable to complete their academic work due to a mental or physical health challenge (e.g. concussion, eating disorder, long term health issue, substance abuse or addiction, depression; burnout, disabling anxiety; grief and loss; undiagnosed learning disability, etc.).
- b) A student realizes that taking time to get a more intensive treatment is the best course of action for easing or resolving an ongoing mental health or medical issue that has been pervasive and life disrupting.
- c) A student has been hospitalized for a major mental health or medical diagnosis and will need time to stabilize and adjust to a medical regimen for long term regulation.

**4) What is the purpose of an evaluation with an on-campus or off-campus clinician?**

An evaluation by a mental or physical health professional is necessary to help assess whether a leave is beneficial and needed. The consultation will also allow the student to understand why a leave might be the next logical step, answer questions, or clarify any uncertainties about the decision to leave. Based on the medical provider's assessment, a treatment plan will be developed for the student while spending time away from the College. This plan spells out the important next steps for the student to take to ease the mental or physical health challenge. This will be written specifically with the student in mind based on the diagnostic picture and necessary treatment protocols. If needed, the clinician will assist the student with referrals for health providers at home.

**5) How does the Office of the Dean of Students assist with medical leaves?**

The Office of the Dean of Students administratively handles all students going on a medical leave of absence. While medical information is confidential and only shared with the Health Center or Counseling Center, the student's dean will be a key resource for students in planning for the medical leave and support for the student while away and on their return to campus. The Dean will explain the academic ramifications related to the medical leave including how the student can re-configure a graduation plan if necessary and what will be needed for readmission when the student is ready to return to campus. With permission, the Dean also speaks directly with parents or the family regarding the need for the medical leave and a plan to return to campus.

**6) Are students ever asked to take an involuntary medical leave?**

It is exceedingly rare for a student to be compelled to leave campus for a health reason. This has happened once in the past decade. The purpose of an involuntary medical leave is to protect the student and the community in the event a student is facing a serious mental health or medical condition for which they refuse treatment that is causing significant decompensation in their ability to function.

**7) How are students readmitted to Bowdoin after a medical leave? How does the readmission process work?**

All students who have taken a medical leave of absence will be contacted by their respective Dean prior to the Readmission Committee (RC) in December and June to:

- a) Explain what materials are required for readmission
- b) Provide the timetable for submitting materials
- c) Encourage contact if there are any questions

Ultimately, students will need to write a letter of readmission to the RC explaining why they left Bowdoin, what they have done for their health and wellness while away from the college, and what they believe are steps for success when they return to Bowdoin. Along with the letter written by the student, the student will need to have their home health providers submit letters of support regarding readiness to return. (Please see letter to mental health provider regarding documentation) These letters are kept confidential by Counseling Services and Health Services and only a brief verbal summary is shared with the Readmission Committee. Often the Director of Counseling Services or the Director of Health Services will follow up with specific questions that might not be addressed in the letter and for this reason; the student will need to give permission so that there can be communication between their home provider and the applicable Director.

### **8) Are most students readmitted?**

Bowdoin expects all student to be readmitted. However, the Readmission Committee firmly believes in the importance of student readiness to return. Over the years, it has become clear that students returning prematurely, before they have truly resolved their concerns, can be a far worse outcome than asking them to take an additional semester off to consolidate treatment gains and feel more stable. A student's readiness to return considers both the evaluation of the home health provider(s) and an overview by Bowdoin Health and/or Counseling offices. Furthermore, if a student has not followed the stipulated health plan as outlined in their medical leave letter, they are unlikely to be readmitted. If a student has any questions about their treatment plan and their ability to accomplish its objectives, the student should communicate with the Director of Counseling or Health Center to discuss these issues.

### **9) What supports are available for students upon their return?**

Bowdoin is eager to have our students return and to be both happy and successful in their time remaining at Bowdoin. Toward this end, the following resources are available to students:

- a) [The Office of the Dean of Students](#)
- b) [Office of Residential Life](#)
- c) [Baldwin Center for Learning and Teaching](#)
- d) [Center for Multicultural Life](#)
- e) [Counseling Service and Wellness Programs Health Center](#)
- f) [Health Services](#)
- g) [Office of Student Aid](#)
- h) [Rachel Lord Center for Religious and Spiritual Life](#)
- i) [Student Accessibility Office](#)
- j) [Sexuality, Women, and Gender Center \(SWAG\)](#)