

**To:** Shared Governance Council

**From:** Dr. John B. Cook, President

**Action:** **Approval – Revised Withdrawal Policy (Operational)**

**Date:** March 5, 2024

**Next Steps:** To be shared with STCC Board of Trustee on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2024

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In accordance with the formal enabling vote by the STCC Board of Trustees (June 27, 2022) regarding shared governance, including clarification of a process by which “high-level” recommendations regarding institutional and operational policy are reviewed, the Shared Governance Council (SGC) has reached consensus regarding a revision to the policy on Course Withdrawals.

I am pleased to provide endorsement of this policy, which was submitted for SGC review after diligence by the All-Unit Congress. The formalization of this operational policy is approved; no action is needed by Trustees, and implementation will occur starting Summer Semester 2024.

**The approved revision to the Withdrawal Policy now removes the following sections:**

~~ADMINISTRATIVE WITHDRAWAL FROM A COURSE BY FACULTY FOR EXCESSIVE ABSENCES~~

~~Individual members of the college faculty set their own classroom attendance policies, which can be found on the course syllabi, and faculty have the right to withdraw students who fail to comply with their attendance policies. A final course grade of “W” will be recorded on the student’s transcript and will not be calculated into the GPA, but is considered when calculations of attempted and completed credits are made in the financial aid awarding process.~~

~~ADMINISTRATIVE DROP OR WITHDRAWAL FROM A COURSE BY THE REGISTRAR FOR EXCESSIVE ABSENCES AT MIDTERM~~

~~The Registrar of the College may administratively drop or withdraw students for excessive absences if, at midterm of a 14 week Fall or Spring semester, a failing midterm grade is reported and the faculty member also reports that the student has not attended classes since the end of the fifth week of the semester.~~

**The approved revision to the Withdrawal Policy will now include the following elements, with language to be finalized by Academic Affairs as part of implementation:**

Students seeking a withdrawal must utilize ARIES, and will be managed consistent with other elements of the “Course Withdrawals and Drops” policy, including but not limited to payment/billing situations, medical leave/circumstances, as well as students called to active military duty. Notifying an instructor of the desire to seek a withdrawal, or ceasing to attend class, does not constitute official withdrawal. Withdrawals will not be processed after the last day to withdraw per the academic calendar. Extenuating circumstances occurring after the deadline will be considered, and students should direct those to their respective School Dean. Other Withdrawal considerations, including the impact on financial aid, apply. Students are encouraged to seek assistance from Student Financial Services, the Registrar, and associated supports.

**Background:**

With appreciation for committee work and diligence conducted by the All-Unit Congress, efforts to examine the withdrawal of students by faculty due to attendance was revisited. Within the Student Handbook, “Registration Information and Policies” includes a section on Course Withdrawals and Drops. STCC operational policy allowed for the issuing of an administrative withdrawal of a student by a faculty member for excessive absences.

Particularly given evidence of systemic inequity in Massachusetts and across the country, such a withdrawal allowance is now highly unusual in public higher education. To this point, data reviewed by STCC stakeholders (faculty, staff, administrators) indicated that students of color were disproportionately issued a withdrawal for excessive absences. There is also a good deal of legacy understanding by faculty and staff regarding this policy, often surrounding the topics of financial aid and classroom culture. As a counterpoint, the withdrawing of students *will* impact financial aid because of SAP (Satisfactory Academic Progress; a federal threshold), and there are a host of related consequences including proration of aid that can impact living expenses. There is also the potential to inadvertently impact benefits for those STCC students serving in the military, who have legal protections when deployed. When withdrawn for lack of attendance, it is not uncommon for students to be faced with a significant financial burden as the result. In addition, withdrawals due to absence can cause students to wait on applying to certain degrees (e.g. competitive healthcare programs at STCC); they may also be left with the consequence of an outstanding balance, which impedes retention for subsequent semesters. Regarding classroom culture, the Student Code of Conduct already has a clear set of graduated sanctions for behavioral concerns, and there is no evidence of widespread class disruption from faculty/student conversations regarding attendance/participation.

Best practices include the opportunity for a given student to remain enrolled, with the appropriate grade issued once all assignments and assessments have been completed for that course. Related, with approximately 50% of STCC course sections online, notions of class “attendance” in 2024, along with backing from educational psychology research, have helped evolve collective understanding at STCC of teaching and learning.

Aligned with the STCC mission and Strategic Plan, this revision is a good example of how policies can help lay the groundwork for a more student-centered culture. Fundamentally, with more time to resolve participation challenges, faculty with students now have a mechanism for sustained engagement to achieve success.

Implementation will begin with Summer Semester 2024, and clear protocols will be shared with faculty. This process was also discussed during the February MACER (Management/Association Committee on Employee Relations) meeting. STCC Chairs/Coordinators in particular, and in accordance with their leadership roles, will be asked to help facilitate dissemination and discussion of the following points:

STCC faculty are no longer able to withdraw a given student for excessive absences;

STCC faculty, particularly those not bound by program accreditation requirements, are invited to revisit the pedagogy of participation, as opposed to attendance;

The impetus for seeking a withdrawal now lives with the student, and that initiation is done via ARIES;

Faculty are invited to utilize their syllabi to describe for students the resources (e.g. Advisor, Success Coach, as well as various Student Affairs and Academic Affairs offices) available for withdrawal consultation.

The new STCC Strategic Plan (**Momentum: 2023 – 2028**) includes a Student Experience Statement that describes a personalized journey where students receive holistic support and resources. The college also make a commitment to equity that includes the goal of clearing the path to student success. This policy revision is aligned to our strategic plan and goals.