

## **Proposal to review the University policy regarding grief related absences.**

During the previous academic year (2010-2011) ASMSU was approached by students who had lost a loved one or family member while attending classes at MSU. For these students attending the funeral required that they miss an exam (or assignment) and when they approached their professors and asked if they could be excused to go to the funeral they were told that if they went it would not be excused and that they would not be allowed to make it up any work missed.

These students appealed their professors' decision to the department and college levels but were told that the professors' decisions were final. Additionally, the grieving mother of a student who had died at MSU tried to similarly help persuade the professor, department, and college to allow one of these students to make up missed work but was also refused. In the end, these students chose to attend the funeral failed their class as a result (their assignments were required to pass the course). Since ASMSU was made aware of this situation they have found that other students have had similar experiences.

Upon reviewing the current University policies regarding grief and bereavement related absences ASMSU asks that the University Committee on Undergraduate Studies consider this topic (through a work group or subcommittee) and recommend revisions to university policy or process to make it more accommodating of students who find themselves in this situation.

Rationale for the reviewing the policy:

Academic success is not solely based upon a student's presence in the class room. Many factors beyond low academic ability, work ethic, and motivation can impact a student's academic performance. We recognize that students have responsibilities to their wellbeing and family which extend outside of the classroom, and that these responsibilities are integral to their future success, both academically and as well-rounded individuals.

Furthermore, situations where students are required by instructors to choose between these obligations and their class work constitute an unreasonable burden and often negatively impact students' academic performance, whether they attend the class or not.

We recognize that flexible policies are to the benefit of both students and instructors. Many universities, not limited to those in the Big Ten, have thoroughly researched and implemented policies which allow affected students to make-up missed work while holding them accountable and not burdening faculty.

The opportunity to be excused due to the death of a loved one is a social and professional expectation which is also granted to both faculty and staff at Michigan State University. As stated in the Faculty Handbook, faculty are "provide[d] up to three days paid time off work to attend the funeral or memorial services [of immediate family] and...one day paid time off work will be allowed in the case of death of an uncle, aunt, nephew, or niece of either the faculty/academic staff member or the faculty/academic staff member's spouse/Other Eligible Individual (OEI)." This creates the appearance of a double standard between the rights and expectations for faculty/staff and those of students. Furthermore it also generates a mentality among students that their relationships with others are being marginalized.