

# Faculty Guide to the CII

## Working with Students with Chronic Illness

CII students come to SNL-CII because they are not able to handle, or fear they will not be able to handle, the traditional college structure. Our goal is to provide them with an environment in which they can devote their limited energies to their studies. We do this by reducing bureaucratic requirements, providing alternative routes to success, offering validation (believing what they say about their limitations), and providing a compassionate ear.

Students with chronic illness who meet the requirements for disability status are entitled to accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. These accommodations should enable them to complete course work on a par with their classmates. Students with chronic illness typically need assistance with term interruptions for relapses, hospitalizations, or medication changes. Most of the time, this means that they need extra time to complete their assignments. On occasion, they may need an alternative assignment (as when a student is not physically able to handle a field trip). But perhaps more important than the actual accommodation is the attitude with which the student is addressed: respect and sensitivity are key.

Students with chronic illness often carry heavy burdens: illness not only drains their energy and interrupts their lives, but it adds time-consuming activities such as medical visits, medications (obtaining and taking), and layers of bureaucratic wrangling (SSI, SSDI, insurance, vocational rehabilitation, etc.). Relapses may reduce them to a situation where they must focus for a time only upon feeding and caring for themselves. There may be literally no time or energy available even for a phone call or an email to an instructor. Relapses may lead to a sense of emotional overload as well. If the instructor can provide information in a clear and comprehensive way, it can mean a lot to an ill student. Often prioritizing can help a student who feels overwhelmed. It might help to remember what you feel like when you have the flu and worry about all the work you are not getting done.

Students with chronic illness may also have cognitive difficulties (slow processing of conversation, for example), which may make them seem uninvolved or uncomprehending. They may feel too ill to keep up with social niceties or be too embarrassed to go into detail about their needs. They may be in physical distress and need to end a conversation quickly to go lie down or find a bathroom. They may be emotionally devastated to find that their physical condition is worsening. And even when the student seems to have everything under control, a sudden downturn can dismantle all their supports and leave them scrambling.

Almost all students with chronic illness have been insulted in one way or another. They are often

- disbelieved and treated as a malingerer (chronic illness tends to be invisible; the very sick may look perfectly healthy; waxing and waning symptoms add to the problem)
- handed unsolicited and amateur medical advice
- run roughshod over (well, if you can't keep up, you have no business being here)
- pitied or treated as children
- patronized or given unwanted psychological or spiritual advice
- offered examples of other people who have done great things despite illness (which often has the effect of making the person feel even more like a failure because he or she cannot do it)

They may be fearful that the same will happen again.

It is important instead to treat students as you would a respected colleague— as someone intelligent, honest, fully capable of handling his or her life, and aware of what he/she needs medically, spiritually, and socially – just temporarily prevented from handling too much. Taking a respectful and compassionate attitude, asking what the student needs academically, offering suggestions as to possible ways to handle the problem, and being as specific as possible about what the student should do can help. Putting accommodation decisions in writing is important so that the student (and you) can refer to them later.

#### Disclosure and Informing Others

While it has been the experience of CII staff that it is often beneficial for faculty to be aware of a student's illness and accommodations before their class together begins so that everyone involved may think ahead about how to reasonably work together to accommodate relapses, sudden absences, etc., it is important to respect each student's choices and decisions regarding disclosure of his or her illness. Unless they are requesting specific accommodations for which disclosure is necessary, students are not required to mention to anyone outside of the CII staff that they have a chronic illness or that they are a part of the CII. A student's health status is regarded as a private matter.

#### Emergencies

Students who require assistance in the event of an emergency are responsible for notifying their professors. A form for this purpose is available at [http://oso.depaul.edu/downloads/Tenant\\_Disability\\_Questionnaire.doc](http://oso.depaul.edu/downloads/Tenant_Disability_Questionnaire.doc)

#### Accommodations Policies

The most frequent issues facing instructors are absences and late work due to illness. The following information about dealing with term interruptions is taken from the CII Student Handbook. The language is directed at the student, but is relevant to the instructor as well. The Guidelines that follow are offered as a way of letting students know what is regarded as a responsible way to manage their illness.

## Term Interruptions

A particular issue for CII students involves interruptions due to hospitalizations, relapses, medication changes, etc. The following are all possible reasonable accommodations for dealing with term interruptions<sup>1</sup>:

Please note that these accommodations *must be requested by the student and that they may not be available in all circumstances*. If you are too ill to seek one of these accommodations, please contact the CII Advisor or ask your authorized support person to contact the CII advisor on your behalf as soon as it becomes apparent that such an accommodation might be needed.

1. **Extra time.** If requested, instructors may allow you extra time to complete work. You may also ask instructors to help you prioritize your work. (You will still be expected to complete all course requirements.)
2. **Incomplete grade.** Incomplete grades are at the discretion of the instructor and given only when a student has completed most of the course. They are not available if the student has attended only a few classes or done a minimal amount of work. To request an incomplete, the student must complete a Request for Incomplete (found at Current Undergraduate/Forms) before the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> week of class and send it to the instructor. The course work must then be completed within two terms or the IN grade will automatically change to an F. Your instructor will note what work remains to be done on the Narrative Assessment. A copy of the Assessment should be provided to the CII Advisor so that he or she can assist in follow up. *CII students may request an incomplete based on less than the usual amount of work completed* if they complete the CII Request for Exception form and forward it to the CII Advisor. The form may be found at the end of this handbook. If despite the intercession of the CII Advisor, the incomplete is still disallowed, there is no appeal from that decision.
3. **R grade.** An R (Research) is given only where a student is engaged in certain LL classes (other than L7), Advanced Project, Research Seminar, or Externship, usually when he or she has not been able to complete the final research paper. Students who receive an R grade have one year to complete the work. Again, an R is given at the discretion of the instructor.
4. **Other options.** The most difficult situation arises if a student is hospitalized, experiences a relapse, or has a medication change after completing significant work but before an IN or R is reasonable. In this case, you and your instructor may consider the following options:
  - a. Dropping the course prior to the drop deadline (usually one week to ten days after the course begins – see the academic calendar at <http://snl.depaul.edu>). In most cases, you are entitled to a 100% refund of tuition. After that, refunds are not typically given. You may withdraw on your own up to the date specified in the academic calendar by going to Campus Connect and following the instructions there. Ceasing to attend class or failing to pay tuition will result in an FX or F grade, not a W.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the SNL Policies and Procedures Guide at <http://snl.depaul.edu/current/policies.asp> and the Academic Resource Center Handbook at [oaa.depaul.edu](http://oaa.depaul.edu) for more detail and requirements and procedures in each of the options. Note that University policies take precedence over SNL policies.

Note that a W grade cannot be assigned by an instructor; it is only recorded when you officially withdraw from the course.

- b. Withdrawal plus ILP<sup>2</sup>. If you are a fully admitted, degree seeking student who has passed Foundations you may be eligible for Withdrawal plus ILP. When considering this option both the CII Advisor and the instructor must be informed and approve. This option permits you to use the work you have already completed as the basis for an ILP and thus potentially get credit for the competencies for which you enrolled in the course. This option is similar to an incomplete but does not tie the instructor to an extended ongoing relationship nor put you in danger of receiving an F for failure to complete the course. However, it does leave you with a W on your record, and, if you do not succeed in completing the ILP, you will lose the work done. Drop the course as described in (a) and then submit your work to the ILP review committee.
- c. Exceptions. Any exceptions to these rules are handled by the Exceptions Committee which will review a student's written application for an exception and make a determination. Exceptions are granted only in very specific and rare circumstances. Contact the CII Advisor to find out if your situation might qualify for an exception. If you choose to pursue an exception, you should complete a CII Request for Exception (form at the end of this handbook) and submit it by fax or letter (not email) to the CII Advisor. The CII Advisor will forward the request to the SNL Exceptions Committee. The CII Advisor may attach any additional explanations he or she feels are necessary. There is no appeal to the outcome of this decision.

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Please also note that the CII Director and the SNL Exceptions committee must approve all CII exceptions. Whether or not any Exceptions will be granted will be heavily dependent upon whether or not you have followed the guidelines below.

## **Guidelines for Academic Success**

1. Register early for classes and start them on time; work ahead if possible. You will be less likely to fall behind, and you will have time to evaluate your ability to do the work in time to meet the drop date if that becomes necessary. In some cases, an instructor may allow you to begin early if you request the syllabus from him/her.
2. If you fall behind early on, drop the course before the course drop date (posted on the DePaul website under Academics at <http://oaa.depaul.edu/what/calendar.jsp>). Experience has shown that no matter how good their intentions, students who get behind at the beginning of the term usually do not catch up or do well in the course. Therefore, if you are not fully on top of the work as the drop date

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<sup>2</sup> An ILP or Independent Learning Pursuit is a way to demonstrate competency outside of regular coursework by individually documenting college level learning. See the link to Independent Learning Pursuits at <http://snl.depaul.edu/current/policies.asp>.

- approaches, you should withdraw immediately (you can do this on your own on Campus Connect).
3. Notify the Instructor and the CII Advisor if you are unable to participate in the class for a period of several days. DO NOT let more than a week go by before consulting with either the instructor or the CII Advisor. Experience has also shown that students who get significantly behind in the middle of the course usually do not catch up.
  4. Take only as many courses as you will be able to handle. There is no point in signing up for a lot of hours and falling behind in all of them. Better to pay for one course on your own and complete it successfully than to fail several and have to return your financial aid. It would be the exception for a student with a chronic illness to handle school full-time, particularly when just beginning at SNL. It may take a term or two before you know how much you can handle.
  5. Once the drop date has passed, make every effort to do enough work in the course to qualify for an incomplete. What is enough work is up to the individual instructor, but at least 70% of the work is a guide. If you are not sure at the end of the first week that you will be able to do that much work, drop early as in #2 above. Once you pass that drop date, it is better to turn in work that is not your best in order to stay in the course for long enough to merit an incomplete. Instructors will help you prioritize the work if you contact them as soon as a problem arises. Please note that all requests for an IN in which you request special treatment due to CII membership (e.g. when less work has been completed) must go through the CII staff and be presented jointly by the student and a CII staff member.
  6. Avoid accumulating more than one or two incompletes. Going back later to finish a class may be impossible if the instructor has left SNL or other factors have intervened. Also, developing a poor completion ratio will adversely affect your financial aid and your ability to continue in the program. Register for fewer classes in the future, and take a term off to complete incomplete courses if necessary. Note that if they are not completed within two terms, they will turn to an F.
  7. Take a term off to handle health issues if necessary. Graduating in four or five years instead of two or three will not matter in the long run. Losing your health, building unnecessary debt, and accumulating lengthy administrative problems *will* matter

If you are not granted an exception, you may still withdraw without reimbursement, assuming there is time left in the term for this option.

### Documentation

The CII staff is more than willing to help instructors manage the administrative aspects of following up on uncompleted work. However, it is important that at the end of the term the instructor send the CII Advisor written documentation clearly specifying

1. what work needs to be completed
2. what work has been completed and the grade(s) given for it.

**Questions**

Contact Paula Kravitz at [pkravitz@depaul.edu](mailto:pkravitz@depaul.edu) or at 312-362-5591 if you have any questions.