

A Method to Streamline Management of Excused Absences

Chris Klimas, BA; Shannon Tucker, MS, CPHIMS; Andrew Coop, PhD; Cherokee Layson-Wolf, PharmD, BCACP, FAPhA
University of Maryland School of Pharmacy

Background

The University of Maryland School of Pharmacy has long had a policy regarding student absences. Implementation of the excused absence policy has historically been the responsibility of individual instructors. With no central tracking of absence data, it was difficult to assess the impact of student absences both on a programmatic and individual basis across the School's two campuses.

Objectives

- Assess absences requested by students and the reasons given for them.
- Ensure that policies related to student absences are enforced consistently.

Methods

A policy was enacted creating a centralized process in which students submit excused absence requests to the Offices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The two offices decided to track data related to requests in a dedicated web-based system instead of email or paper records.

View the policy:



Process

A web-based form and associated tracking system was created to manage absence requests. The form prompts the student for the dates and reason for the absence, courses and types of academic activities that will be missed, and any supporting documentation or further explanation.

Once submitted, an email notification that contains only the student name and dates of possible absence is sent to instructors of the affected courses. The associate deans of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs are able to post comments seen only by them regarding each request in the system. They may also choose to request additional information, such as supporting documentation, from the student.

Once a decision is made, the system sends an email notification to the student as well as all instructors whose courses are affected. This information is also used within Academic Affairs to assist with makeup assessments and to verify that all students who completed a computer-based assessment uploaded their submission.

The system also allows exportation of data for reporting aggregate data, such as type of request and length of absence. It also can help identify students who may be inappropriately using requested absences.

Workflow

1 A PharmD student completes and submits the web-based form.

The screenshot shows the 'PORTAL / EXCUSED ABSENCE REQUESTS' form. It includes sections for 'Excused Absence Request', 'Dates and Courses', 'Reason for Absence', and 'What happens when you submit this request?'. The form prompts the user to provide details about the absence, including dates, courses, and reasons, and to upload supporting documentation.

2 An email notification is sent to course instructors and administrative staff.

John Smith has made an official request regarding an absence taking place on 2/1/18 that affects Spring 2018 PHAR 548 - Abilities Lab 4. The Associate Deans of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs will review this request and make a decision in the near future. When a decision is made, you will receive a separate notification with the result. You do not need to take any action at this time.

3 An email notification is sent to the associate deans of Student and Academic Affairs.

John Smith has submitted an excused absence request that is ready for review.

You may view at it:

<reviewer url>

4 The associate deans review the request and make a decision.

The screenshot shows the 'PORTAL / EXCUSED ABSENCE REQUESTS' interface for review. It displays details for a request submitted by John Smith, including the course affected (PHAR 548 - Abilities Lab 4), the dates of absence (2/1/2018-2/2/2018), and the reason for absence (Medical Procedures, Outdoors, Work, or Accident). It also shows a table of 'Courses Affected' and 'Internal Review' status.

5 An email notification is sent to course instructors and administrative staff.

The Associate Deans of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs have decided that the absence John Smith requested for 2/1/18 should be considered excused. John Smith has been notified separately via email regarding this decision. The student should be in touch with you if they are missing required activities such as required classes and assessments (eg. exams, practicals, quizzes, etc) to arrange a make up. If you or the student have any questions regarding this, please contact the Associate Deans directly.

Please retain this email for future reference.

6 An email notification is sent to the PharmD student who made the request.

The absence you requested for 2/1/18 has been ruled excused by the Associate Deans of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. The course managers of the courses you indicated were affected have been notified separately via email regarding this decision. It is your responsibility to contact your course managers regarding missing required activities such as required classes and assessments (eg. exams, practicals, quizzes, etc) to arrange approved make-ups.

If you have any questions, please contact the Associate Deans directly.

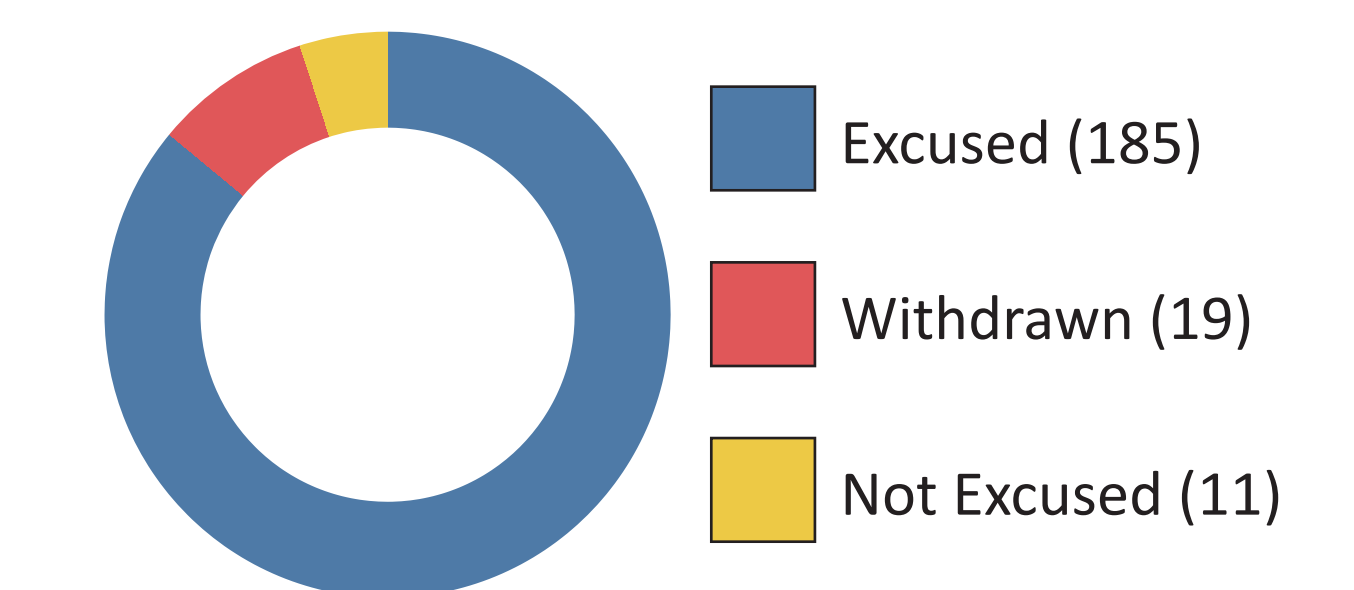
Please retain this email for future reference.

Spring 2018 Semester Usage

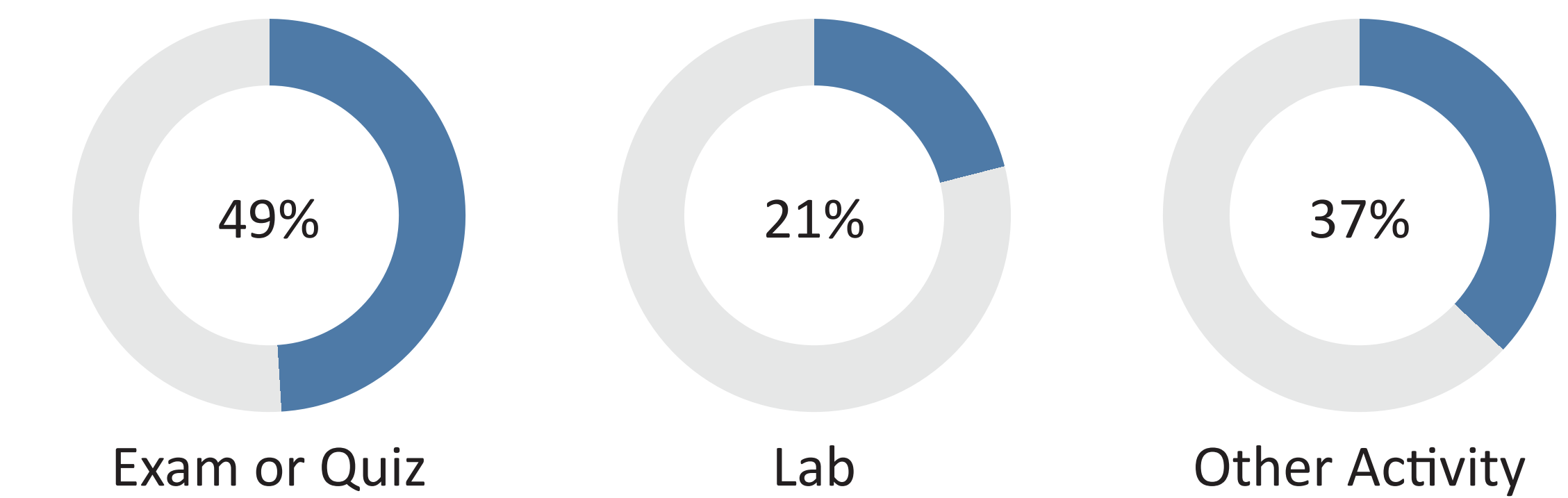
215 requests made by 155 students (24.8% of all PharmD students)

Length of Request	Number of Requests
1 day	153
2-4 days	46
5-10 days	10
10+ days	6

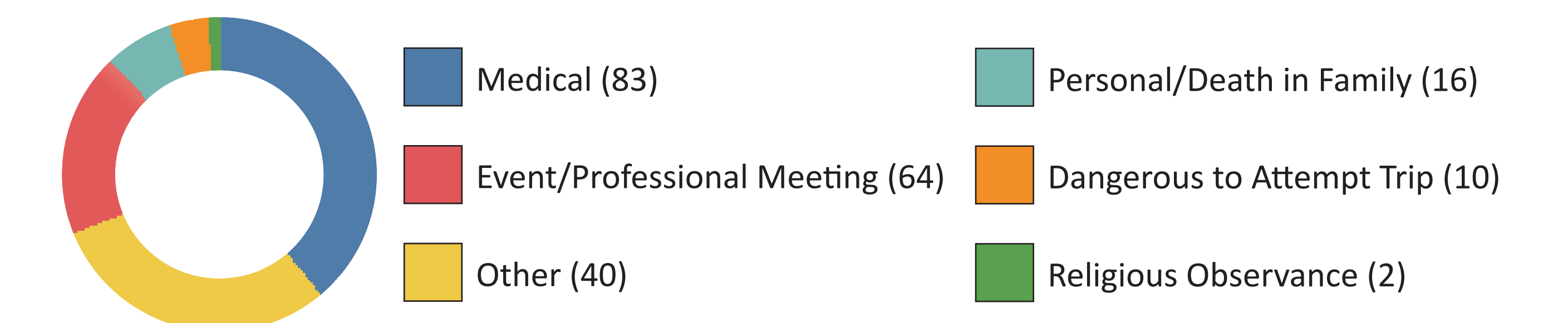
What decision was made regarding each request?



What graded activities did students miss?



Why did students request an absence?



Conclusions

Centralizing excused absence request handling in an administrative office can be accomplished with a relatively low amount of initial effort. In addition to increasing aggregate analytic capabilities as outlined above, recording the history of student requests in a dedicated space improves institutional memory.

Future Directions

- A large percentage of absence requests did not fit under any predetermined category; we are exploring how to better characterize these.
- Improve responsiveness to students at risk of academic difficulty and cases where a long-term leave of absence may better support academic progression.
- Better support career development and job-seeking activities by evaluating student attendance of professional organization meetings.