

CAPS and ARS Syllabi Statements Proposal

April 20th, 2018 | 1:20 PM | Carr 200B | Educational Policy Committee

September 28th, 2018 | 9:00 AM | Carr 200B | Educational Policy Committee

November 9th, 2018 | 3:00 PM | Kerr Hall 1001 | Faculty Council

Drafted by Emma Caponigro and Raleigh Cury, previous Student Safety and Wellness Committee Members and current Co-Directors of the Mental Health Task Force

Introduction:

Our committee began working on reforming course withdrawal practices in November of 2017. We partnered with the Assistant Dean in the Office of the Dean of Students, Dawna Jones, to put on a Stakeholders Meeting that included the Director and Associate Director of Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), the Dean of Advising in Academic Advising, the Accessibility Resources Coordinator from Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS), and representatives from Mental Health Ambassadors and the Undergraduate Student Government. After that, we began meeting with individual actors such as the Directors of CAPS, ARS, and the Office of Undergraduate Curricula, and the Interim Associate Director from Undergraduate Retention. We have drafted our proposal based on the feedback we have received and the additional information we have learned from the relevant actors throughout this process.

From these meetings, we realized that in order to improve practices surrounding late course withdrawals, it would be most effective to proactively help students gain access to more resources, such as ARS and CAPS, and to destigmatize the use of these resources. This would ensure that students' needs are met as early as possible. Additionally, we think publicizing these resources earlier and more frequently will be beneficial to all students.

Our vision:

We want students to understand exactly what services ARS and CAPS provide, and for whom. The definition of a student who is eligible for ARS accommodations is significantly broader than most students imagine, and ARS itself provides far more in terms of accommodations than just separate-setting or additional time on exams. Additionally, we want students to understand that CAPS is here to help any and all students, albeit in different capacities depending on the amount of support needed and the length of time it will be needed.

Proposal mechanics:

- A. Include information about CAPS on class syllabi
 - a. Will encourage professors to talk about mental health resources
 - b. Will destigmatize the use of mental health resources

- i. Educating others, having open dialogue, being inclusive, and normalizing professional help are all ways to reduce stigma, according to numerous studies.
 - 1. [U.N.I.T.E. End Stigma](#)
 - 2. [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
 - 3. [Shatter the Stigma Mend the Mind](#)
- c. Many students encounter hardships during their collegiate experiences. CAPS is primarily supposed to function as a short-term solution, which would be beneficial to any student who needs temporary support. We want to underscore this point, as well as clear up misconceptions that CAPS cannot help students who need long-term support; at the very least, CAPS can refer students to counselors off campus and help students figure out means of transportation to get to these appointments. Essentially, we want our statement to make it clear that CAPS is for anyone and everyone who might need its services in any capacity.
- d. The idea is to have this separate from the ARS blurb so that they are easily distinguishable, but have them next to each other so that they will be easy to access and remember at a later date.
- e. Our statement would read as follows:
 - i. **Counseling and Psychological Services:** CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: caps.unc.edu or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

B. Include information on syllabi about ARS services and accommodations

- a. Currently it is “strongly recommended” for faculty to include information about ARS on class syllabi; however, it is not enforced. It has been this way for at least 8 years since the current director of ARS, Tiffany Bailey, began working here.
- b. Even if syllabi do contain this information, it is often inconsistent between departments in terms of what the blurb states.
- c. In a meeting with Tiffany Bailey, Director of ARS, she told us that there is a legal obligation of the institution to provide accessibility services, as dictated by the American Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. While we know faculty are aware of this information, including information about ARS on class syllabi would support the promulgation of these resources.
- d. Providing uniform information about ARS on syllabi will alert a larger portion of the student body about ARS services, which will consequently motivate them to “identify” (the term used by ARS to describe students applying for

accommodations) earlier. Earlier identification will be beneficial for both students and ARS staff because students will be able to immediately access resources, and ARS will not be pressured to approve accommodations quickly. This will also be beneficial for students because ARS does not make retroactive accommodations.

- i. Here is the breakdown of the usage of university offices by 595 students on academic probation or warning during the Fall semester of the 2017-2018 academic year who took a self-assessment survey:
 1. Academic Advising – 467 students
 2. Campus Health Services – 201 students
 3. Faculty Office Hours – 166 students
 4. Undergraduate Retention – 152 students
 5. The Learning Center – 151 students
 6. *Counseling & Psychological Services* – 130 students
 7. Office of Scholarships & Student Aid - 123 students
 8. *Accessibility Resources and Service* - 46 students
 - a. This year, 1,386 students are identified with ARS. This number has increased exponentially since Tiffany Bailey became the Director of ARS.
- ii. *CAPS and ARS are university offices that are underutilized by students on academic probation.*
- e. The ARS-made suggested syllabus statement can found here:
<https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>
- f. Our shortened statement would read as follows:
 - i. **Accessibility Resources & Service:** UNC-Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health struggles, chronic medical conditions, temporary disability, or pregnancy complications, all of which can impair student success. See the ARS website for contact and registration information: <https://ars.unc.edu/about-ars/contact-us>

What incorporating information about CAPS and ARS into course syllabi would look like for professors:

When we spoke to the Director of Undergraduate Curricula, Nick Seidentop, he told us about the new faculty orientation in August. This policy change could be discussed at the orientation, where new professors and instructors could learn about how to present information about ARS and CAPS. In addition, all new syllabi that are approved each year and the 10% that are audited each semester would receive recommendations that they include these informational blurbs by the Office of Undergraduate Curricula, which would help institutionalize this practice. Additionally, including this information on class syllabi will set a standard into place that

professors and instructors can and should reference these resources for their students, especially since it will make the lives of professors easier if students are going to CAPS and ARS instead of professors for additional support.

We understand that professors' first and foremost duty is to teach students, which is why we think that they should be able to direct students to resources that will enable them to have the support and accommodations they need to be as successful as possible. Therefore, we believe including ARS and CAPS information on class syllabi will be beneficial to the aforementioned organizations, students, and professors.

Student Feedback:

We reached out to students to see what they thought about our proposal and what feedback they might have. We received an overwhelming amount of support, as well as several ideas we had not considered much throughout our process. One of these points was in regards to first generation students and the other was in regards to the importance of getting the assistance of professionally trained adults when needed.

The point about first-generation students spoke to the general need for more support and guidance upon arriving at college. For example, one student spoke to us about a friend who was a first-generation student. This first-generation student began college by performing poorly on two exams before she realized she qualified for testing accommodations, something neither she nor anyone or her family had any familiarity with. If ARS information had been included on her syllabi and addressed on FDOC, she may have come to this realization sooner. Although this is a situation faced by many students (not registering for ARS immediately and performing poorly on tests as a result), we think it is especially important to consider the impact on first-generation students because they cannot look to their immediate family for support guidance in a way that their more privileged counterparts can, which puts them in a disadvantaged position.

Our second point derived from several student bringing up the lack of awareness about CAPS and ARS resources for all students, and how knowledge of them would make processes like withdrawing from courses if necessary significantly easier. One in particular mentioned that they essentially had to convince their academic advisor that they needed to medically underload. Afterwards, she got in contact with CAPS and ARS who were much more helpful and accommodating towards her needs, and thus made her semester and the process she underwent in order to medically underload much easier. Another student told us about how she had a professor who continually harassed her about her mental health and would not honor her accommodations until an ARS representative got involved. We believe this shows the importance and value in involving professionally trained adults for academic support.

Based on this feedback, we found our proposal to be validated and affirmed by many UNC students, who additionally were able to add to the discussion and open our eyes to other groups of students who can stand to be benefitted by the policy change we are proposing.

Faculty Feedback:

We reached out to the chairs of many different academic departments to gather feedback and support for our proposal. As a result, we received a large amount of support and have listed the supporting faculty at the bottom of this proposal. Some faculty have agreed to begin implementing these syllabi changes in their departments in the Fall. One faculty member replied, “I’m on the Coordinating Committee for the General Education Curriculum Revision and this is very much in line with some of the things we are trying to do to promote Mental, as well as Lifetime, Fitness.” Another faculty member brought up the concern that there are more campus resources for mental health than CAPS and that putting CAPS information on course syllabi could flood CAPS. We discussed this with Dr. O’Barr, and he replied that CAPS is here to support the mental health of all students, and if CAPS starts to receive more students, they can expand to meet students’ needs. Another faculty member brought up that this is a band aid solution for mental health on campus. While including information about CAPS and ARS on class syllabi will not solve all mental health concerns, it is a step in the right direction to help increase awareness and decrease the stigma of mental health illnesses.

Conclusion:

Including CAPS and ARS information on syllabi is a proactive measure that will better equip UNC students to navigate the university. It will inform more students about campus resources available to them, help to destigmatize ARS and CAPS, and start the conversation about disabilities and mental health in classrooms. Ultimately, this measure will help to ensure the success of more students at UNC-Chapel Hill by encouraging the use of ARS resources should a student qualify and promoting the usage of CAPS to support mental health should the need arise.

Faculty Support:

Below is a list of faculty that have read and support this proposal.

Stephen R Hooper (Professor, Associate Dean and Chair, Department of Allied Health Sciences)

Kevin Jeffay (Professor and Chair, Department of Computer Science)

Adam Versenyi (Professor and Chair, Department of Dramatic Art)

Jeffrey S Johnson (Professor and Chair, Department of Chemistry)

W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Professor and Chair, Department of History)

Jonathan M. Hess (Professor and Chair, Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures)

Mary Floyd-Wilson (Professor and Chair, Department of English and Comparative Literature)

Paul T. Roberge (Professor and Chair, Department of Linguistics)

Donna B Gilleskie (Professor and Chair, Department of Economics)

Darin A Padua (Professor and Chair, Department of Exercise and Sport Science)

Patricia L. Sullivan (Associate Professor and DUS, Department of Public Policy)

Jeff Summerlin-Long (Teaching Assistant Professor, Department of Public Policy)

Morris Weinberger, PhD (Vergil N. Slee Distinguished Professor and Chair, Department of Health Policy and Management)

Wendell Gilland (Associate Professor and Associate Dean of the Undergraduate Business Program at UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School)

Anna Millar (Director of the Undergraduate Business Program at UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School)

Georgette Dent (Associate Dean for Student Affairs at UNC School of Medicine)

Kelly Hogan (Associate Dean of Instructional Innovation and QEP Director)