LEAVE OF ABSENCE PRACTICES & POLICIES: PROMOTING PARITY & POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

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Historical Context: A Decade Ago

- **2012**: NAMI College Event
- **2014**: Niteo Launches at BU
- **2016**: LEAD Launches at BU
- **2013**: Sidney Baer Foundation Grant
- **2015**: CMHEP Established
- **2017**: Peer Mentoring Program Launched
The Momentum Continues

2018: LEAD BHCC, LEAD MSU
2020: Ruderman Family Foundation Partnership
2022: Technical Assistance/Consultation

2019: LEAD Wentworth, LEAD Springboard
2021: Leave Guides Launch
2023 & Beyond
Leave Guide to Support Students

• Interactive, co-authored and edited to capture a range of experiences and needs
• Emphasis on defining, finding, and accessing PACE
• Accessible for and customizable for any institution of higher education
• Designed to complement other services and operate independently as needed
Leave Guide to Support Leadership, Faculty, & Staff

• Developed based on decades of student, staff- and faculty input; co-edited to capture a range of campus climates, realities, strengths, and limitations

• Emphasis on establishing key community members and practices to support the development of leave of absence resources

• Accessible for and customizable for any institution of higher education
Non-Negotiable Principles & Values

- **Personhood**: acknowledgement of individual experiences, feelings, goals, and needs
- **Equity**: full access free from bias
- **Inclusion**: involvement for those who might otherwise be marginalized
- **Choice**: agency to decide and engage in line with values
Before a Leave

- Engage students in collaborative decision-making about taking a leave; help students identify options
- Train & support staff/faculty to engage students in conversations about leaves
- Provide accessible “learn-from-anywhere” options, especially mental health program and hospital settings, to avoid leaves and interruptions
- Demonstrate parity across all types of leaves of absence
More to Consider Before a Leave

- Provide clear, concise checklist of steps needed to return
- **Use empowering, choice-oriented language in policies with a clear commitment to student health & wellbeing**
- Inform and evaluate policies using diagnostic tools, student input, and consultation with affiliate, “sister”, & consortium colleges/universities
- Invite offices of general counsel, affirmative action and equal opportunity, and access and disability to strategically examine policies for weaknesses and barriers
- Streamline “request to leave” process & paperwork
During the Leave

• Ensure fiscal resources at your college/university for programming to support students on leave

• Establish a case manager/management team to oversee student & family outreach, engagement, & assistance

• **Provide virtual & in-person academic, mental health, & social opportunities that promote health-promoting leaves [PACE: People, Academics, Care, & Engagement]**

• Expand access to campus resources during a period of leave

• Direct students to “Taking a Leave of Absence: Guide for College Students
More to Consider During the Leave

- Create equitable leave durations for LOA that do not discriminate between leave categories
- Offer workshops or “how to” videos that support and inform students on leave about managing wellness, accessing resources and supports, and returning
- Shift the culture of taking leaves with meaningful messaging and campaigns (e.g. “Once a tiger, always a tiger.”)
- Increase “length of leave” and leave options for international students
Returning from Leaves

• Develop & disseminate an accessible “Return from Leave Checklist” for students

• Post clear guidance around procedures, processes, timelines and deadlines students must follow to return from a leave successfully

• Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their individualized readiness to return through a variety of experiences
More to Consider Re Return from Leaves

- Facilitate peer mentoring and social support for students returning by students who’ve taken a leave
- Elevate and celebrate student stories that demonstrate successful returns
- Provide coaching and workshops (e.g. LEAD BU) that support reintegration and retention and foster authentic belonging
- Allow for reduced course loads in the first semester returning
Let’s Collaborate!

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