

Flu Policy

Faculty of Computer Science
September, 2009

This policy has been developed in response to the potential impact that the H1N1 flu virus may have on the Dalhousie Faculty of Computer Science community, and is intended to augment the policy that has been adopted by the Dalhousie University administration. Dalhousie will attempt to abide by the academic regulations currently in place, hopefully preventing the extension of the academic term.

Dalhousie University has created a website containing information about the H1N1 flu virus, and information as it pertains to the university community. That website can be viewed at:

www.flu.dal.ca

For students, staff and faculty within the Faculty of Computer Science, this document will outline some of the expectations and steps to be taken within the Faculty should the H1N1 flu result in absenteeism.

General Expectations

The university anticipates that the absenteeism rate of the university community, resulting from H1N1, may be as high as 20-30% at any one time throughout the flu season. The flu season typically begins in November and lasts throughout April, with most cases occurring between the months of December and March. The absenteeism is expected to occur in waves throughout this time frame.

The current public health advice is that most people who get the HINI virus will experience uncomfortable, tiring respiratory symptoms for about 3 to 4 days. The website (<http://www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/cdpc/h1n1-influenza.asp>) states: *“Nova Scotians with H1N1 will no longer have to stay at home for seven days. As of August 20, Nova Scotians are being advised to stay home and minimize contact with others until they are: symptom-free, feeling well and able to resume normal day-to-day activities...”*

The seasonal flu vaccination made available each year by health care providers will not protect against the H1N1 virus. A second vaccination, specifically targeted for H1N1, is being developed and it is anticipated that it will be available to the public in November, 2009.

Dalhousie University has a large student population that is from outside the Halifax Regional Municipality. For this reason, many will not have local doctors they can visit should they fall ill. The health clinic at the university has made accommodations to deal with a large number of patients who could potentially be diagnosed with H1N1, minimizing the exposure to other visitors to the clinic.

Although most absenteeism will be a direct result of people who have been made ill due to the flu, indirect results will be anticipated. Some people will not wish to come to campus for fear of becoming ill, and will choose to stay away. Others will not be able to come because they will need to stay home and take care of ill family members. Others may need to stay home should their day care workers become ill, resulting in closure of daycare facilities. Regardless of the reason for the absence, Dalhousie University expects that academic accommodation will be given to all students who are absent.

In addition, the policy of requiring a doctor's certification of illness will be waived. Some doctor offices are actually urging those people who suspect they have the H1N1 virus to stay away in order to prevent spreading the illness to other patients in their waiting rooms. Given the potential high numbers of people who may get this flu, Dalhousie deems it unrealistic to demand that each person visit their doctor.

Dalhousie also recognizes that not all academic programs have the same requirements nor are they delivered in the same manner. Delivery of material is very diverse, and it will left to the discretion of the various departments and Faculties of how best to implement alternative delivery methods of the course material. It is important to keep in mind that the effects of the flu on individuals will vary; some cases will be so mild that people may not be aware they have it while others will be profoundly affected and may require hospitalization. Therefore, alternate delivery methods should keep this in mind.

Classes

Dalhousie University will make all attempts to avoid cancellation of classes and prolonging the term. Instructors are required to be prepared to make changes to their courses to accommodate any disruptions. It may become necessary to adapt the delivery of course material, as well as the related academic procedures related to assignments, test, grades, etc.

Instructors are asked to ensure that students are made aware of the potential for change within the course resulting from the H1N1 flu virus. A statement should be included in the course syllabus of material to this effect. The recent message from the Vice President of Academic, sent by email on September 3, 2009, contains the Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Advisory that should be included in the syllabus. The advisory states:

Pandemic H1N1 Influenza Advisory in relation to Academic Continuity

In the event of an escalation of the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus, the University may need to authorize Academic Units to change elements of class schedules and/or evaluation plans as outlined in course syllabi. Any change is intended to support the primary goal of reducing the risk of spreading a pandemic influenza among students, faculty and staff.

Although it is difficult to predict the severity of the pandemic, the University is committed to minimizing the impact on student's academic progress. Therefore, every effort will be made to provide students with options for continued learning and for continued fair evaluations.

Changes may include but are not limited to:

- *Adjustments to course assignments;*
- *Changes to the dates of exams;*
- *Arrangements for alternative evaluations for students affected by H1N1 influenza virus;*
- *Adjustments to work terms;*
- *Modification of marks awarded for participation;*
- *Adjustments to attendance policies.*

Any alternative plan made in individual courses may be superseded by University-wide or Government measures to reduce the spread of the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus.

It is also recommended that the course website, should one exist, be updated regularly to ensure that students are made aware of any changes in course content, deadlines, etc.

For those faculty members who incorporate a class participation component into the final mark, please be aware that this may need adjustment. It is suggested that the instructor develop an alternative policy on participation that does not impact the final grade, such as additional assignments or tests. Please ensure that you are aware of the academic regulation that relates the method of assessment for a class. This regulation, 16.1 in the Academic calendar, states in part "...Changes to the outline which affect assessment components, the weight of individual assessment components, or examination requirements with a value of ten percent or more must have the approval of at least two-thirds of enrolled students in order to be valid." Please note that depending on the severity of the pandemic, the Dalhousie University administration may modify this policy. If the administration does modify any of their policies, the university community will be notified.

Some flexibility will be required to address assignment submissions. Depending on the student's severity of the illness, they may have limited or no access to the appropriate computer facilities should electronic submissions be the norm for the course.

Students Who Become Ill

Should a student, who is enrolled in a program offered by the Faculty of Computer Science¹ become ill with the H1N1 virus, they should call the Faculty and give their name, banner number and their anticipated return to class. The number to call is:

494-2093

This line can be called 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Once the message is received, administrative personnel will look up the student's schedule. They will notify the instructors in those classes offered by the Faculty of Computer Science that the student is taking, letting the instructor know that the student will not be attending class, and give the instructor the anticipated date of return. This will help the instructors in determining deadlines for assignments and projects, facilitate the dates of tests and midterms, and assist in determining what adjustments, if any, are required. It remains the student's responsibility to report any absence to instructors of courses not offered by the Faculty of Computer Science.

Upon return to class, it is the student's responsibility to ensure they catch up on any material that they missed. They should contact their instructor about any missed deadlines and/or material, and be prepared to make up the assignments and/or tests. Some courses may also have a class website, and the student should ensure that this is consulted as well for any updates.

Should a Computer Science student also be employed at the university in some capacity (such as a TA, help desk personnel, student security guard, etc.), they should also contact their immediate supervisor in addition to the phone number listed above.

Class Instructors Who Become Ill

Instructors of courses offered by the Faculty of Computer Science who become ill should contact the Dean's office to notify the Dean and the Associate Dean Academic of their absence. The number to call is:

494-1199

¹ The academic programs include those students registered in a Bachelor of Computer Science, Bachelor of Informatics, Bachelor of Science with a major in Computer Science, Master of Electronic Commerce, Master of Computational Biology and BioInformatics, Master of Health Informatics, Master of Applied Computer Science, Master of Computer Science and a PhD program in Computer Science.

It is important to relay not only your expected date of return, but also what contingency plan(s) you have implemented to ensure continuity of your classes.

It is the intent of Dalhousie University to prevent, to the best of their ability, the cancellation of classes. Faculty members are expected to develop contingency plans should they themselves become ill. With this in mind, some suggestions are:

- arrange a back up instructor
- arrange to have your TA give the class
- assign some additional assignments/reading /projects for students to work on in your absence
- depending on the severity of the illness, some may prefer to utilize technology, such as Skype, to give distance delivery of their class (NOTE: if you intend to utilize technology as one of your contingency options, the technical support staff should be made aware of this early in the term so they are alerted to the potential need for their services).

It will be up to the individual Faculty member to determine what alternative delivery method should be implemented in their course to minimize disruption of delivery of course content to the student body. It should be noted that due to the limited resources, the Faculty will be able to support only limited distance delivery methods – currently only Skype and Blackboard Learning System (BLS) are under considerations.

Further information for instructors can be found in the document entitled “Flu Policy – Instructors Addendum”.

Non-Teaching Personnel

For staff and non-teaching faculty members, absences as a result of the flu should be reported to the Dean’s office at 494-1199.

The reason for this requirement is that the Faculty will be expected to report the number of absences resulting from the flu to the administration. The purpose is to aid the President’s office in determining how wide spread the effect of the pandemic is within the university community. It is vital that the President’s office have an accurate picture of the impact the pandemic on the university community in order to assist them in determining what further action, if any, should be taken to protect the health of those at Dalhousie University.