

Kwantlen Counselling Services Present . . .

Compassionate Withdrawal

What is Compassionate Withdrawal?

Kwantlen's Policy C34 (Compassionate Withdrawal) states that when students experience long-term medical or emotional problems or other serious issues in their lives that make it virtually impossible for them to complete their studies *and* they have missed the normal deadline for withdrawal from their classes, they may request a complete withdrawal on compassionate grounds "without academic penalty". This means receiving a grade of W for the courses from which they are withdrawing - rather than the alternative, which is usually a failing grade. W's are not calculated into a student's Kwantlen GPA and thus, do not affect it, so applying for CW may be a much better option when the criteria can be met. However, depending on the seriousness of the situation, students who are considering applying for CW may want to exhaust other possibilities first. One reason to consider other options first is that, generally, you must request CW from all of your courses.

Possible Alternatives to Compassionate Withdrawal

For students whose problems are shorter-term, an extension on assignments or exams may be more appropriate. This can sometimes be arranged informally with instructors. It's a good idea for students to let their instructors know if they are having difficulties and to discuss options. Sometimes, students can arrange an "Incomplete Grade Contract" with an instructor, which allows them to complete their course requirements after the end of the semester (usually within two to four weeks, but sometimes longer). This is a formal arrangement at the instructor's discretion (depending on whether the instructor thinks it is feasible). See Policy C20 (Student Evaluation and Grading) for more information on "I" contracts. If neither short-term extensions nor "I" contracts are appropriate, as a last resort, a student may wish to apply for CW. However, there are important things to know before doing so.

10 Things to Know Before Applying for Compassionate Withdrawal

1. **There is no guarantee that your request for CW will be granted.** Enrolment and Registrar Services (ERS, also known as Admissions) will look at your unique situation and make a decision based on the information available.
2. **You cannot apply for CW before the withdrawal deadline** (the half-way point in the semester). If you know before the deadline that you need to withdraw for compassionate reasons, you can simply withdraw online. There is no advantage to applying for CW before the deadline, because the outcome will be the same: W's on your transcript. If you are concerned about W's appearing on your transcript (for example, if you plan to transfer to another institution), you can supply the other institution with documentation similar to what is described below.

3. **Your letter and documentation will be held in confidence** by ERS. Rest assured that the personal information you provide in your appeal will not be available to anybody else without your consent and will not "follow you" to another school should you transfer elsewhere. You can submit your letter in a sealed envelope, marked "Private and Confidential", to ensure that only the Administrator responsible for making this decision will see it.
4. Even when circumstances have occurred through no fault of your own, **you probably won't get any portion of your tuition fees back**. Applying for a tuition refund is a separate process and requires you to submit a Variance form. For more information on refunds, see Policy C39 (Refunds of Tuition and Other Fees).
5. If you are currently receiving student loans and/or grants, **withdrawing from your courses can affect your standing with the BC Student Assistance Program**. Not only can CW have an impact on your future student loan and grant eligibility, you may also be expected to immediately begin repaying funds already borrowed. You can appeal this by providing the BC Student Assistance Program with documentation similar to what is described below. We urge you to contact Financial Awards at Kwantlen to discuss this aspect of CW.
6. **Usually, you must have been in good academic standing at the time the problem developed**. This means you should have been passing your courses; otherwise, it is expected you would have withdrawn prior to the withdrawal deadline. If you were already failing, ERS will be unlikely to grant CW. However, depending on the nature of your problem, you may be able to proceed with CW by including a sound rationale in your letter and providing supporting documentation to explain why you chose to remain in courses you were failing.
7. **Generally, you must apply for CW from all of your courses**. However, in certain circumstances, a partial withdrawal (ie, from some, but not all, of your courses) may be granted. In this situation, you must provide documentation (usually from your doctor) to show why this is a reasonable idea. You must have sound reasons to ask for a withdrawal from only some of your courses: the fact that you are currently failing one course but passing another is not viewed as a sound reason.
8. **You must apply for a CW as soon as possible after making your decision to withdraw**. Policy C34 states that "a request for Compassionate Withdrawal must be submitted to ERS within twenty (20) working days of the matter giving rise to the withdrawal". If you wait much longer than this, you will have to explain why. "I didn't know there was such a thing as Compassionate Withdrawal" is not an adequate explanation, as it is your responsibility to be familiar with Kwantlen's policies. If you can argue that the situation made it impossible for you to launch the appeal earlier (eg, you were out of the country or so incapacitated that taking action was impossible), you can proceed, but be sure to include this information in your letter (see below).
9. **You must be able to provide documentation**. This most often takes the form of a letter from a medical doctor or, less frequently, a psychologist or counsellor to whom you went for help at the time your problem developed. However, it can also come from other sources that are objective, credible and verifiable. See below for more information.
10. Finally, and (arguably) most importantly, once you have determined that you are no longer able to attend classes, **you must not attempt any more coursework**. Some students think that they should try their best on their final exams and assignments, no matter what is happening in their lives. Sometimes, family members even pressure them to do so. They tell themselves that, if things don't turn out well, they can later apply for CW. This is not the case. This kind of reasoning is seen by ERS as 'hedging your bets' and is almost never

accepted. Presumably the events that are prompting you to seek CW are a significant impediment to continuing with your studies, and therefore you will have little choice in the matter of whether to attempt to complete coursework or not.

Steps to Applying for a Compassionate Withdrawal

1. As soon as you have determined that you cannot continue with your courses and therefore must apply for CW, **stop attending classes and inform your instructors** that you are withdrawing for compassionate reasons. Do not hand in any further assignments or write any more exams or quizzes.
2. **Fill out the front of the appeal form** available at the ERS office on any Kwantlen campus.
3. **Ask all of your instructors to complete the reverse side of the appeal form.** The form asks them to comment on your attendance and performance to date. You can leave a voice mail message for them, email them, go to their office during office hours, or speak to them before or after class. If you try several times to contact them but don't hear back from them, or if they are unwilling to fill out the form, it is important to document your attempts to contact them in your letter to ERS (see the next step). If you cannot physically meet with them to have them complete the form, you can let them know what information is required (from the back of the form) and ask them to email the information directly to ERS.
4. **Write a letter**, addressed to Enrolment and Registrar Services. Include the following information:
 - what you are requesting (in this case, Compassionate Withdrawal);
 - what happened in your life, in as much detail as you think is necessary and appropriate for ERS to understand your situation; and
 - what the impact of the situation was on your studies.

Remember, if you are applying retroactively (ie, after the semester in question has ended), or if you are applying for partial CW (ie, from only some of your courses), your letter must address this.

5. **Obtain supporting documentation**, as described above. Usually, this takes the form of a letter from your physician. (A letter, on letterhead, is preferable to a note on a prescription pad.) Policy C34 says that a letter from your doctor should include the following information:
 - dates during which you were under your doctor's care for the particular problem;
 - dates on which you were seen by your doctor for the particular problem;
 - a statement regarding the seriousness of your problem (without compromising the confidentiality of your medical records); and
 - a statement outlining the actual or potential impact of the condition on your ability to complete your courses.

If you are applying for partial CW (ie, a reduction in your course load) the letter from your doctor should address this fact and provide a medical rationale. As mentioned above, ERS will also accept documentation from a psychologist, counsellor or other mental health professional to whom you went for help at the time your problem developed. In addition, documentation can come from other sources. Past examples have included:

- letters from a funeral home and/or copies of death certificates;
- copies of plane or bus tickets;
- copies of newspaper articles;

- copies of police reports or file numbers;
- letters from responsible adults familiar with the situation. (One resourceful student obtained a letter from a parent's Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, who verified that the parent had 'fallen off the wagon', causing a great deal of distress and chaos in the student's life.)

Be aware that ERS reserves the right to request additional supporting documentation and/or to verify the documentation submitted by contacting the individual who has provided it.

6. **Hand in the form, letter and documentation** to the ERS office on any Kwantlen campus. You will receive a decision from ERS, in the form of a letter mailed to your home, within 20 working days.

What if Your Request for Compassionate Withdrawal is Denied?

If ERS denies your request for CW, you will be notified in writing and will be provided with instructions on how to pursue the matter further if you believe your circumstances have not been considered fairly. If you decide to do so, you must request this in writing and submit your letter to the ERS office on any Kwantlen campus. Your request will be reviewed by the Registrar or another designated Administrator, who will contact you after having reviewed your file. You may wish to consult with a Kwantlen Counsellor before proceeding with this second stage.

What Happens When You Want to Return to Your Studies?

If you miss more than one semester of studies due to the circumstances surrounding your CW appeal, you should contact ERS regarding registration and re-admission information well in advance of returning to your studies.

How a Counsellor Can Help with Compassionate Withdrawal

Kwantlen's Counsellors are very familiar with the CW policy and procedures and often guide students through the process. Consider talking to a Counsellor if:

- you are confused about any information in this handout and/or the many exceptions to the rule that exist when it comes to CW;
- you are uncertain whether CW would be a good choice in your situation;
- you are distressed or overwhelmed at the thought of applying for CW;
- you still need help with the underlying problem and would like support and guidance in dealing with it;
- your request for CW has been denied or you have chosen not to apply for it but you would like to discuss the implications of your grades and explore some ways to improve your GPA;
- your request for CW has been denied and you would like more information about the second stage of the appeal.

If you would like to discuss CW further in a confidential appointment with a Counsellor, please contact Counselling Services to arrange one:

Langley - 604.599.3213 • Cloverdale - 604.598.6044
Richmond - 604.599.2600 • Surrey - 604.599.2044

This information on Compassionate Withdrawal is also available online at:

www.kwantlen.ca/counselling/academic/compassionate_withdrawal.html