Fontbonne University Return to Learn Guidelines for Instructors

What is a concussion?

A concussion, or mild traumatic brain injury, is the result of a blow or jolt to the head. This causes the brain to bump into the side of the skull. Contrary to belief, the brain is not a solid organ. Made up of adipose tissue, water, vessels, and neurons, the brain is actually somewhat soft. This makes it prone to injury. When the brain hits the inside of the skull, neurons are disrupted and the tissue is damaged. **This damage is not outwardly noticeable but can have serious ramifications.** Simply put, a concussion is a bruising of the brain.

Every person responds to a concussion differently, and not everyone will experience the same symptoms. **It is important to remember that even though the student may appear fine externally, they may be struggling with symptoms.** Symptoms of a concussion can vary widely between individuals and even in injuries.

Classroom complications

Returning to learn after a concussion is a process and is different for every individual. This is similar to returning to an activity after a muscle strain. Any mental or cognitive activity will put strain on the brain and may cause a reappearance of symptoms or symptoms worsening. The student can demonstrate a variety of symptoms, particularly increased difficulty with concentration and attention. Some other signs to watch for may include:

- Memory issues, such as an inability to retain information just learned
- Extended time needed to complete a task
- Changes in personality, such as being overly emotional or irritable
- Fatigue and sleep disruption
- Light and noise sensitivity, which could mean difficulty with screens
- Headaches, nausea, dizziness, and other physical symptoms

Most of the time, a concussion will not severely limit a student’s academic ability. However, sometimes the concentration, focus, and engagement of academics can worsen these symptoms or cause them to reappear. If the student has any mental health conditions or learning disabilities, concussion recovery may take longer.

Return to Learn at Fontbonne University

A student with a suspected concussion should be seen initially by his/her primary care physician, the campus nurse or by the athletic training staff to confirm the injury. Any academic accommodations needed should be made through the Academic and Disabilities Resource Coordinator, Ms. Regina Wade Johnson.

Please note, student athletes may not return to physical activity **before** being fully cleared to return to the classroom by an athletic trainer or physician.

Adapted and reprinted with permission from Seton Hall University’s Faculty Athletic Representative
Strategies for faculty

- Be flexible with adjustments to the student’s schedule
- Allow another student to take notes for the individual or allow lectures to be recorded
- Consider allowing extensions for tests or assignments
- Set reasonable expectations
- Understand that computer screens, TVs, and phones may cause symptoms to worsen, so these should be avoided.

If you are concerned about a student’s behavior, whether regarding possible concussion symptoms or other issues, please fill out the Early Alert Form https://fontbonne.wufoo.com/forms/early-alert-referral-form/. Via the Early Alert process, the appropriate departments will be notified and thus the student will be able to receive the assistance he/she needs.