Introduction
This memo is intended to familiarize the reader with the YCC’s recommendations for better standardizing Dean’s Excuses by defining boundaries and clarifying language. Given that the language offered by the YCDO is (perhaps intentionally) vague, the YCC wants to guarantee that a fundamental academic tool, the Dean’s Excuse, is a fair and equal experience for all Yalies.

Background
While the exact language between deans about what, in their eyes, qualifies for a Dean’s Excuse varies, there is one thing that remains consistent across each college’s website: that mental health is not a part of the discussion among things that explicitly qualify/do n’t qualify students for a Dean’s Excuse. Please find below a few examples:

“If you are too ill to work, your first priority is to get immediate medical attention. Your health should be your main concern, not your schoolwork. Please inform me about your condition as soon as you are able (an email is fine), and then after you’ve seen your doctor or have been released from the hospital, and once you are no longer contagious, see me to reschedule the work you missed.” -- Morse website

“Incapacitating illness (NB: this does not mean a bad cold, fatigue, lack of sleep, etc., but an illness that seriously disrupts one’s ability to attend class and complete assignments)” -- Branford website

“By definition, an incapacitating illness requires immediate medical attention. Your health should be your first priority. After you’ve seen someone at Yale Health, come see Dean Hill as soon as possible to reschedule the work you missed. Timeliness matters: No dean feels very comfortable with the proposition of retroactively awarding a Dean’s Excuse.” -- Benjamin Franklin website

Data Analysis (See Appendix for first semester survey results)
Furthermore, data from our first semester survey show that mental health issues in regards to Dean’s Excuses disproportionately affects marginalized populations on campus, including the LGBTQ+, low-income and first generation populations at Yale.

The Yale College Council believes that the lack of mental health in the discussion of what qualifies for a Dean’s Excuse leads students to believe that mental health issues don’t qualify for a Dean’s Excuse. Any examples given don’t discuss common mental health problems, such as an anxiety attack. This leads students to pursue Dean’s Excuses for debilitating mental health reasons at lower rates than they should.
Recommendations

The YCC’s recommendations include:

1) Encourage residential college Deans to more openly discuss mental health in the context of a Dean’s Excuse
2) The YCDO should offer some sort of official guidance for common mental health questions in the same way that seems to be offered for non-mental health illnesses
3) Create an environment that says “we know that, at times, academics and mental health can butt heads, and when they do it’s okay to signal that one isn’t okay”
4) Encourage professors to discuss their policies regarding extensions, etc. for students who suffer from mental illnesses

Progress

● Met with Dean Schenker, 11/27

Challenges

● Battling a seeming administrative barrier that this is not an issue that directly affects many students
● Crafting language in the bylaws that would make this viable
● Potential abuse due to the subjective nature of mental health concerns

Next Steps

● Planning meetings with members of the committee taking a look at the standardization of Dean’s excuses to take place in the Spring of 2019
Notes on Athletes’ Policy
The current policy on Dean’s excuses for varsity athletes allows students to get an excuse when an “away” game coincides with an examination. For instance, if a student is not going to be physically on Yale’s campus at the time of a midterm, the Residential College Dean can provide a Dean’s excuse. This is limited to only the time the students are off-campus. Immediately when students arrive back on campus, this policy is void. Varsity athletes have raised the concern that sometimes their travel times may not directly conflict with an examination, but it poses a severe and undue burden on the students which can impact their performance. For instance, many varsity teams who have to travel to different states will return at late hours of the evening (e.g., after 12am). I hope to expand the policy so that students who arrive back on campus “X” hours before an examination are also entitled to a Dean’s Excuse. For example, students who arrive back from an “away” game at 3am should be excused from a 9am exam.