

**Course Attendance or Engagement Policy Discussion Brief**  
**Approved by Undergraduate Council**  
**4-14-22**

**Background**

In Spring of 2021, the University Senate passed a policy requiring that a syllabus be provided to students in all undergraduate courses. As part of that deliberation, there was an extensive discussion on attendance policies and what instructors can and cannot do in terms of student absences. There was not widespread agreement, and the Senate referred the topic to the Undergraduate Council for further discussion and possible legislation.

Note: "Instructor" in this document refers to Instructor of Record which includes both faculty and GEs.

**Areas of Concern**

- Lack of clarity on what is required and what is allowed or not allowed. For instance, anecdotally, some instructors believe they are required to accommodate all student-athlete absences. In fact, there is a process those students should follow, and faculty have some discretion. In addition, instructors should absolutely not provide accommodations to student-athletes that they would not provide other students. Another example has to do with requiring documentation of illness. There are some limitations that instructors should be aware of but no university-level prohibition.
- There are many "university-sponsored events" that involve students who are not student-athletes. The university does not currently offer the same guidance or consideration for these that it does for student-athletes.
- The concept of "excused and unexcused" is often relied on without clear parameters or guidance. There is no university-level policy or definition related to this.
- There is a question as to whether instructors have either the bandwidth or capability to "verify" student reasons for absences. This calls into question whether verification, except in a few select instances, is viable or equitable. What counts as verification? Given the ability to easily fake verification, what is its value? Should instructors be spending time on this? Without verification, instructors are left to judge the veracity of student reasons. This is obviously problematic and potentially inequitable as instructors really have no good way to know when students are being truthful.
- The power differential between faculty and students means faculty asking students for information is not a neutral act. In addition, there are other offices on campus empowered to independently review information for cases that fall outside the norm. This occurs through AEC, the petition process run by faculty committees, and the Dean of Students. These processes and the policy proposed below provide protection for faculty by taking them out of the adjudication process.

Because of the concerns cited above, the Undergraduate Council has determined that while no policy is perfect, a "no excuse" attendance and engagement policy provides a more level playing field for students and faculty. The policy proposed removes the need for any

verification of student absences, and acknowledges that life happens, students make choices, and sometimes they'll miss class or turn in late work. What happens next should be clear and apply equally to all students. The proposed policy below also acknowledges that some students will face situations that go beyond the "normal" day-to-day flux and there are options for those students. Finally, it's worth noting that instructors are not required to have course policies that require attendance and/or penalize absences or late work – this is at the discretion of the instructor. Instructors should carefully consider the pedagogical purpose of any attendance or engagement requirements and make that clear to students.

### **Proposed Undergraduate Course Attendance or Engagement Policy**

1. Every undergraduate course syllabus shall outline any requirements for attendance, how absences affect grades and the conditions under which coursework can be made up. For courses that have engagement requirements rather than attendance requirements, such as ASYNC WEB or performance-based courses, syllabi shall outline requirements for engagement, what constitutes lack of engagement and if and how missed engagement opportunities can be made up. Instructors have discretion to determine how many absences or how much "lack of engagement" is reasonable for their course before grades are impacted and how makeup assignments count toward grades (e.g. partial or full credit?). Instructors are encouraged to develop attendance or engagement policies that give students some room for unexpected events over the course of the term.
2. Every course syllabus shall outline how to handle work turned in after deadlines. Faculty have discretion to determine which, if any, assignments can be turned in late or made up, and what the consequences are as pedagogically appropriate for the course.
3. University policies governing course absences supersede course-level policies. The university policies on [religious accommodation](#) and [accessible education](#) are two to be particularly aware of. These both require students to provide documentation that the student may miss class under these policies. Other university policies that touch on attendance are listed later in this document.
4. University-sponsored events are considered verifiable, legitimate reasons for participating students to miss class. Most often this is associated with students involved in athletic events but not always. When students miss class for university-sponsored activities, faculty are strongly encouraged to make pedagogically sound and justifiable modifications that will enable the students to be successful in the course where possible. However, this request has limits and conditions:
  - Students who participate in university-sponsored activities that might cause them to miss class are responsible for providing documentation signed by a university employee verifying their participation in the activity and listing the dates that they might miss class. This should be done during week one of the term. Instructors can then determine if appropriate modifications can be made to coursework or due dates

- In classes with substantial class participation, project or lab work, appropriate modifications may not be possible. In those instances, the student should be informed that the course is not a good fit in a term with significant absences. Under no circumstances should the instructor offer a modification that is pedagogically unsound or that would be unavailable to other students.
5. Except for the legitimate and verifiable reasons for absences referenced in 3 and 4, instructors shall not ask for reasons for absences and shall not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences since there is no equitable way to confirm the veracity of student-provided reasons or documentation outside the university context. Course absence policies should be reason-neutral (NEED EXAMPLES). Faculty are not required to provide make-up opportunities, but make-up opportunities need to be available to all students equally.
  6. Except for the documentation referenced in 3 and 4, instructors shall not ask students for documentation for absences.
  7. Course attendance and engagement policies are meant to address common student absences or late work over the course of a term. Instructors should be aware of how to advise students who experience extraordinary circumstances that cause extensive absences or late work. For instance:
    - Dean of Students “[Emergency Academic Notification](#)” – Instructors can advise students to engage in the Dean of Students Emergency Academic Notification process. This provides the student assistance in notifying instructors and enlisting their help with courses.
    - [Withdrawal and Grade Change dates and processes](#) – In some cases, the best option is for a student to withdraw or change their grading option while they manage their situation. See this [advising page](#) on options for students in terms of withdrawal and grade changes
    - [Incomplete](#) – If an unexpected situation happens toward the end of the term, an Incomplete may be appropriate.
    - [Student Petitions](#) – students also have petition options after the term if they were unable to make changes during the term due to their situation.

## University Policies and Guidance that Reference Absences and Attendance

### 1. Religious Accommodations

The university's Discrimination policy (<https://policies.uoregon.edu/discrimination-0>) in Section GG states "Any student who, because of religious beliefs, is unable to attend classes on a particular day shall be excused from attendance requirements and from any examination or other assignment on that day. The student shall make up the examination or other assignment missed because of the absence."

This policy is operationalized through the "Student Religious Accommodation Request" process found on the University Registrar website (<https://registrar.uoregon.edu/calendars/religious-observances>). The Office of the Provost website provides a syllabus statement on this subject here: <https://provost.uoregon.edu/syllabus-guidelines>.

### 2. "Mandatory" Attendance

The only university-level policy on mandatory attendance is the "Mandatory First Class Attendance Policy" which states:

"Academic departments may designate courses (not individual sections) as "Mandatory First Class Attendance", which requires enrolled students to attend the first official meeting, as indicated in the UO Class Schedule, of designated courses. Attendance will be taken at the first official meeting of all courses with this designation. These courses are identified in the Class Schedule.

Enrolled students who do not attend the first official meeting of these courses will be dropped from the course." (see the following for more: <https://registrar.uoregon.edu/current-students/registering-for-classes#mandatory-first-class-attendance-policy>)

### 3. Absences Related to University-Sponsored Athletic Events

Despite a common misconception, instructors are not required to "excuse" all student-athlete absences and/or provide special accommodations for them.

The governing rule here pertains to "Academic Extra Benefits" which, under NCAA rules, is "substantial assistance or the granting of an exception that is not generally available to an institution's students, which results in the certification of a student-athlete's eligibility to participate in intercollegiate athletics or receive financial aid." In lay terms, the Office of the Provost has communicated the following "bright line", "**Student-athletes may not be given special treatment simply because they are student-athletes.** Student-athletes can only receive accommodations that are the same or similar as accommodations offered to other students.

In addition, under "Student-athlete travel and class attendance/participation" it states that "faculty are strongly encouraged to make pedagogically sound and justifiable accommodations

that will enable student-athletes to be successful in the classroom” and that “In classes with substantial class participation, project or lab work, appropriate accommodations may not be possible. In those instances, the student- athlete should be informed that the course is not a good fit in a term with significant travel. Under no circumstances should the instructor offer an accommodation that is pedagogically unsound or that would be unavailable to other students.” (See <https://provost.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct-and-academic-extra-benefits-involving-faculty-student-athletes-3>)

Finally, in terms of post-season contests, the communication from the Office of the Provost states that these are “university-sponsored events” and as such, provide a legitimate excuse for student participants to be absent from regularly scheduled final exams.” It also provides some options that “faculty are authorized to use” to accommodate make-up exams. The use of the term “legitimate excuse” here pertains only to final exams. (See <https://provost.uoregon.edu/post-season-contests>)

In addition, students who are not student-athletes also participate in these events. They should provide the same documentation for expected absences at university-sponsored events and be afforded similar consideration from faculty.

#### **4. Dean of Students “Emergency Academic Notification”**

Students who have extended absences due to crisis, serious injury or illness can follow a process with the Dean of Students to have an “Emergency Academic Notification” email sent to instructors. Instructors can help students that are unable to attend classes for an extended time due to a crisis, serious illness or injury, or hospitalization by including a link to the Dean of Students “Emergency Academic Notification” process: <https://dos.uoregon.edu/dos-faq> and by proactively reaching out to students if the Instructor is concerned and wishes to offer help. Information on signs of student crisis and ways faculty can help are located here <https://dos.uoregon.edu/assisting-students-concern>. For students who follow this process, the Office of the Dean of Students will notify the student’s faculty members by email that the student is experiencing an emergency and steps the faculty member can take.

#### **5. Accessible Education Center (AEC) Accommodations**

In some cases, students can be approved through AEC for flexibility in attendance and/or assignment deadlines. The AEC website states:

“Students with disabilities are approved for flexibility in attendance and/or assignment deadlines when strong medical documentation warrants the accommodation(s). These accommodations provide students opportunities to demonstrate mastery of course knowledge, even when disability limits their ability to attend class and/or meet deadlines. Accommodations are not intended to sacrifice essential course goals or to place an undue burden on instructors. Rather, these accommodations ask instructors to:

- understand when grade penalties for class absences and/or missed assignment deadlines may be inappropriate for students with disabilities

- consider alternative assignment formats to allow all students to demonstrate course knowledge”

See <https://aec.uoregon.edu/guidance-flexibility-attendance-and-assignment-deadlines> for more information.

## 6. Students on Active Military Service

The Office of the Provost offers guidance for accommodating students on active duty military service (see <https://provost.uoregon.edu/accommodating-students-active-duty-military-service>).

This is in alignment with the Military Duty Refund Policy which states:

“Any student service member or National Guard member with orders to report for active military duty may withdraw at any time during the term and receive a full refund. If sufficient course work has been accomplished and the instructor feels justified, the instructor may either grant credit for the course work completed and assign a grade or arrange for the student to take an incomplete. In either of these cases, no refund will be given. The student may use a combination of these options.” See more here: <https://registrar.uoregon.edu/current-students/veterans/called-active-duty>