

Flexible Attendance

Guide for Faculty

Background

Flexible attendance is an accommodation that is recommended most often in cases where students have chronic health or unpredictable, episodic conditions that may cause them to be absent more often than their peers. A student eligible for this accommodation should not be penalized for absences within reasonable limits beyond what the course attendance policy allows (e.g., If other students lose participation points for being absent, a student granted the relaxation of class attendance policy will be exempt from losing points and allowed to make up missed work). Disability Resources for Students (DRS) acknowledges that a student's performance on assignments and exams may be impacted by absences and instructors should grade them on their actual performance; however, a student with this accommodation should not lose points simply for being absent. Also, students with this accommodation should not be asked to bring a doctor's note unless missed classes are due to a doctor's appointment or hospitalization. Most often, students who are approved for this accommodation have been living with the condition for an extended period of time and require self-care, rather than a doctor's appointment.

While flexible attendance is approved on a case-by-case basis by DRS and depends on each student's individual circumstances, the degree of relaxation is decided by faculty, in consultation with DRS, on a course-by-course basis. The nature of the course determines the extent of flexibility with absences. Because professors are the content experts, they are best situated to analyze their courses to determine the extent to which flexibility with attendance can be granted. DRS provides this guide as a resource for instructors to assist faculty with this course analysis. It is highly recommended that professors keep a written copy of any course analysis.

Clarification of Terms

1. **Nature of the course** means fundamental learning objectives and how those objectives are achieved by the student.
2. Occasional question and answer interactions that occur during lecture-style courses do not constitute **significant interaction**.
3. **Significant loss to the educational experience** means that there is a substantial negative impact.
4. **Significant discussion** means that the majority of learning is derived from extensive sharing of thoughts and ideas among faculty and students.
5. **Plan for Absence Form** refers to a form that students and instructors can use to develop a plan for missed exams, how to submit homework in case of an absence on the due date, how the instructor would like to be notified of an absence, etc. This form is currently in development.

Course Analysis

The following tool is provided to assist with discerning the extent to which flexibility with attendance is reasonable. Please choose one of the following descriptors to answer each of the questions below:

- **Very Little:** This is a lecture-style course, where students read the text-book, listen to lectures and take notes, complete out-of-class assignments, and take quizzes/exams.
- **Some:** This course is mainly lecture, but may involve some in-class discussion, student presentation, field trip or other hands-on experience that is important to the course objectives.
- **About Half:** Half of this course is lecture and half is experiential or discussion-style and/or a good portion of the learning is based on knowledge of concepts previously taught in the course.
- **Most:** Most of the class is experiential, involves in-class group work and/or discussion and/or builds on previously learned concepts.
- **All:** This descriptor is reserved for lab-style courses, practicums and internships.

1. Is there a significant classroom interaction between the instructor and students (e.g., **significant discussion**, observation and feedback on performance provided, etc.)?

Circle one: **Very Little** **Some** **About Half** **Most** **All**

2. Is there a significant classroom interaction among students (e.g., peer review, discussion, in-class group work, etc.)?

Circle one: **Very Little** **Some** **About Half** **Most** **All**

3. Do student contributions constitute a significant component of the learning process (e.g., regular student presentations, discussions, group work, etc.)

Circle one: **Very Little** **Some** **About Half** **Most** **All**

4. Does the fundamental **nature of the course** rely upon student participation as an essential method for learning (i.e., labs, internships, hands-on experiences)?

Circle one: **Very Little** **Some** **About Half** **Most** **All**

5. To what degree does a student's absence constitute a **significant loss to the educational experience** of other students in the class?

Circle one: **Very Little** **Some** **About Half** **Most** **All**

6. To what degree does course material build on concepts previously taught (e.g., math courses where advanced problem solving depends on knowledge of basic math concepts taught earlier)?

Circle one: **Very Little**

Some

About Half

Most

All

DRC Recommendations

The information below is general guidance offered in the absence of specific knowledge about your course. If you have questions, I would encourage you to contact the DRC after you've completed your analysis.

- If all of your answers to the questions in the course analysis section fall into the “very little” or “some” categories, you should exercise a great deal of leniency. Limits of leniency should be determined by student performance in the class. Students should be advised according to their performance.
- If some of your answers to the questions in the course analysis section fall into the “about half” category, leniency is recommended when it does not interfere with learning objectives. Extent of leniency may be based on a combination of which experiences are missed, whether or not those experiences can be learned at an alternative time or through an alternative assignment, and student performance. Certain experiences may be weighted more heavily than others.
- If any of your answers to the questions in the course analysis section fall into the “most” or “all” categories, DRC recommends some, but minimal leniency. Consideration should be given to whether or not students have the opportunity to make up missed experiences in other sections or through alternative assignments.
- If at some point, concerns arise about the student's performance, you should meet with the student to discuss remaining options. Student options may include dropping the course by the drop date, working with their adviser to do a late drop after the deadline, but prior to the end of the semester, or taking an incomplete in the course.

Limits on Flexible Attendance

While faculty are encouraged to be flexible, there are limits to this accommodation. Please see the guidance below:

- **Re-Teaching:** While it is reasonable to go over some of the missed materials with students during office hours or by appointment, faculty are not expected to re-teach the course to students who cannot attend the lectures.
- **Remodeling:** Professors are not expected to reconstruct courses entirely. For example, a course that is a lecture-style course, does not need to be reconstructed as an independent study or an on-line course.
- **Course Rigor:** Professors should not lower course standards or make courses easier for students who cannot attend.

Other Factors to Consider

- Some courses involve both lecture-style delivery and in-class activities that require student participation. You might consider if the absent student could participate in an alternate activity that would meet the same learning objectives. If you plan alternative activities for the student in advance, then you will be prepared should the student need that option.

- Any course description that students consult prior to registration should convey the nature of the course so that students have a clear understanding of expectations when choosing courses each semester.
- Information in the course syllabus should convey the nature of the course so that students have a clear understanding of course expectations, learning objectives and how those learning objectives will be achieved and should include classroom practices and policies regarding attendance and how attendance factors into the final grade.

Recommended Communications & Documentation

It is often difficult to give students an exact number of how many absences will impact their educational experience up front. Therefore, regular communication with the student regarding absences and progress is recommended. At the very least, the DRS recommends an initial meeting to develop a plan for absences, a follow-up meeting or email communication if a student is nearing a critical point with absences, and then a final meeting or email once the student has reached a point at which their educational experience is compromised.

Initial Meeting

During the initial meeting, faculty should discuss the nature of the course, the limits of absence leniency (if any), and a plan for absences. Faculty and students may use **the Plan for Absence Form** (currently in development) to facilitate a plan for absences. It is also advisable to discuss an overall plan for communication with regard to absences and student progress throughout the semester.

Follow-Up Meeting/Email Communication

This meeting may only need to occur if the student has missed several classes and there is a concern about them missing additional classes. During this meeting, it would be important to express concerns, discuss any missing or future assignments/exams, discuss current grade, discuss future class dates of specific importance, gauge student's feelings about course progress and set limits if necessary. A face-to-face meeting is preferred, but an email or phone discussion will suffice.

Final Meeting

This meeting is only necessary if the student is in danger of not being able to complete the course with a passing grade and it is believed that absences have contributed to this. This may happen after the last day to drop classes. In this case, faculty may refer the student to their adviser to engage the process for a retroactive withdrawal and may also wish to write a letter on the student's behalf.

Documentation

After each of the above meetings with the student, consider emailing the student a summary of what was discussed. This will serve as documentation for both you and the student and can help to ensure all parties are clear as to what occurred.