

DASS Guidelines for Implementing Flexible Attendance Accommodations

Generally students are expected to follow established classroom attendance policies. However, some disabilities are episodic in nature, resulting in a student having to miss class for medical concerns related to their disability. DASS encourages faculty to be flexible with the attendance policy in these instances; however, you are not required to alter any essential functions of the course. These guidelines are designed to:

1. Assist faculty and students in assessing how to implement this accommodation; and
2. Outline legal guidelines, the implementation process, responsibilities of the parties and common scenarios.

Process for implementing this accommodation

1. DASS determines that the accommodation is reasonable based on a thorough review of all file elements. We explain to the student the limits of this accommodation and provide support for faculty and students.
2. The student initiates the conversation with the faculty member early in the semester. This private discussion is a required element of the accommodation grant. In instances where students delay in presenting and discussing their accommodation letter, faculty are not expected to provide any retroactive accommodations. Faculty may still benefit, however, from receiving this information from the student at any point in the semester.
3. The professor should assess the impact of attendance on class and determine what accommodations can be made. There are some classes where this accommodation is not appropriate, such as classes where student learning is assessed almost solely in the classroom or when allowing an absence would place an undue burden on the professor. The ***Flexible Attendance Agreement*** document should guide this discussion between student and faculty member.

Responsibilities of student, professor and DASS

Student Responsibilities:

(1) Initiate conversation with faculty as early as possible. Complete the ***Flexible Attendance Agreement*** while meeting with your professor. Be clear in all communications. Understand that not all classes can offer flexible attendance. DO NOT just hand your accommodation letter to faculty and expect the accommodation. A private conversation must occur in order to implement this accommodation.

(2) Complete all coursework. When you miss class, notify your professor immediately. This accommodation does not mean you receive automatic deadline extensions for work due on the day of your absence. You should work to still turn in your work via email. If you do not turn in an assignment or miss a quiz or exam, it is your responsibility to contact your professor to verify if you will be allowed to make up the work.

(3) Notify your DASS Coordinator if your absences are becoming excessive.

Professor Responsibilities:

(1) Be available to discuss the accommodation with your student.

(2) Determine how essential attendance is to your course. If, through a deliberative consideration of the bullet points provided on the reverse, it is determined that attendance is an essential requirement, this accommodation may not be appropriate for your class. Involve others in your department (department chair, etc.) in this deliberation.

(3) Be very clear in your expectations when you meet with the student. Use the items listed on the ***Flexible Attendance Agreement*** to guide these expectations and your discussion with the student.

(4) If absences become excessive, discuss this first with the student. Feel free to contact DASS to help address this concern. If make up exams are provided, these should not be more difficult in nature than the original exam.

DASS Responsibilities:

(1) Review request and approve the accommodation when appropriate.

(2) Meet with student to provide accommodation letter, Guidelines, Student Responsibilities and ***Flexible Attendance Agreement***.

(3) Provide support to faculty and student when questions or difficulties arise.

Legal guidelines and factors for considering flexible attendance accommodations

Although it is not mandated by law that faculty members change their attendance policy for students with disabilities, there is the expectation that modifications in attendance policies will be provided when such changes do not fundamentally alter the curriculum. It is likely that courses with heavy participation may have much less flexibility in altering their attendance policy, such as labs, practicums, and studio art courses. Legal guidelines do suggest you

- (1) inform students of your attendance policy;
- (2) meet with students who wish to discuss the attendance policy, and
- (3) explain why you will or will not adjust your attendance policy and rationale(s) for this decision.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) offers the following guidelines in determining whether attendance is an essential aspect of the course:

** Are there classroom interactions between the instructor and student, and among students?*

- *Do student contributions constitute a significant component of the learning process?*
- *Does the fundamental nature of the course rely upon student participation as an essential method for learning?*
- *To what degree does a student's failure to attend constitute a significant loss to the educational experience of other students in the class?*
- *What do the course description and syllabus say?*
- *Which method is used to calculate the final grade?*
- *What are the classroom practices and policies regarding attendance?*

Each institution is legally required to consider whether any policy or procedure in place is discriminatory on the basis of a disability and alter it if it is found to be discriminatory. Willingness to consider the possibility is legally required. Whether this leads to a decision to modify attendance should only come from a thorough discussion based on numerous factors particular to each course and faculty member. **This accommodation does not sanction unlimited absences.** If the faculty member believes the absences are becoming excessive, please contact DASS to discuss the matter. Note that students are given a set of responsibilities to follow regarding this accommodation.

Common scenarios

1. Professor allows 3 absences and then students' grades drop by a letter grade. A student with flexible attendance may be allowed 6 absences and 24 hours to make up any work missed.
2. In a foreign language course, a student is told at the start of the semester that the professor cannot allow much flexibility regarding attendance due to classroom interactions. The professor keeps the student's accommodation in mind. Student is hospitalized for a week at the end of the semester and cannot complete a presentation. Professor allows the student to make the presentation up with only the professor as this does not essentially alter the course objectives.
3. Professor gives clicker points for attendance. Professor allows student to respond to questions via email. However, student must contact professor and answer questions within 24 hours of missed class.
4. Student and professor agree that student can miss class more often than classmates as long as all of the work is completed by the end of the semester. However, it is nearing the end of the semester and student has not turned in assignments, has not been in contact with the professor, and has not attended class. In this case, the professor would not be expected to extend deadlines as student has not taken responsibility for maintaining communication and is not completing coursework.