

# Student Attendance Considerations

Class attendance is – and should be – expected of all students; however, COVID-19 has caused us to think more critically about student absences. While faculty prerogatives in the structure of their classes remains paramount, individual conduct can have adverse effects on the overall community during times of communicable disease outbreaks. With this in mind, this document was compiled to suggest some options you may consider.

## Requirements for Spring 2022

Faculty may not require documentation from University Health Center (UHC), Virginia Department of Health (VDH) or a doctor's office for absences due to COVID. We are strongly encouraging everyone to quarantine if exposed and isolate if they are sick. Those students will not have doctor's notes but are doing as we asked and should not be penalized.

Faculty may not require students to submit proof of COVID testing, as they constitute personal, confidential medical records. The UHC offers a [Self-Care Note](#), which you can require for your students who must miss class. Students could indicate under "Other" that they have tested positive for COVID-19, or they may decline to disclose symptoms or their COVID-19 diagnosis.

As a condition of the Honor Code, students are required to tell the truth about their absences or face an Honor Code violation.

We are expecting students and employees to make decisions due to known exposures and/or positive tests, neither of which require outside documentation. In addition, part of the UHC's role on campus is to educate students on the appropriate use of health care. Most illnesses can be treated with [self-care](#) and do not require a medical appointment. The UHC medical team needs to focus on taking care of those who require a medical visit. Providing notes creates a situation where students schedule medical appointments only for a note and not because they need medical care, a misuse of medical resources that takes up appointments from those who really need them.

There are specific circumstances where an entire class may be required to test and prove negative status for a common purpose, such as students traveling for study abroad. If you have questions about your class, speak with your academic unit head.

Students may choose to work with the [Dean of Students](#) for extended absences unrelated to COVID.

## Rationale

- ❑ In keeping with Faculty Handbook section III.A.17, Attendance Policy, "Instructors must provide an attendance policy for each course. The attendance policy must state any mandatory, unrepeatable components of the course, and the expected procedure for requesting and obtaining approval for scheduled absences."
- ❑ Students diagnosed off campus must notify the [University Health Center via their self-report website](#) on their own.
- ❑ The [University Health Center](#) will *not* provide notes about a student's medical condition, only that they made an appointment at the Health Center. Any student can make an appointment for any reason; therefore, this is not a reliable indication of illness.
- ❑ As a condition of the [Honor Code](#), students are required to tell the truth about their absences or face an HonorCode violation.
- ❑ For students who have missed too much class to fulfill the learning objectives, you have the option of assigning a grade of Incomplete rather than just a "W," "WP," or "WF."

## Attendance Considerations

Prior to creating your syllabi, we recommend you consider these ideas:

- ❑ When practical, structure classes so that a grade for attendance is not used as an assessment of student performance.
- ❑ Be mindful that some students may miss several classes if they are in quarantine or isolation as the result of COVID exposure or a positive COVID test. All students, faculty and staff are strongly encouraged to follow [CDC guidelines related to quarantine or isolation](#), as staying away from others is in the best interest of our university community's health.

- ❑ Clearly articulate the course elements that must be done in class and cannot be made up. Please exercise the utmost flexibility in considering what may constitute suitable make up work for missed classes, assignments and/or assessments.
- ❑ Determine in advance how to handle groupwork when a student is absent.
- ❑ Consider, prior to the beginning of classes, how much missed work is too much to reasonably be made up and communicate that information to students at the first class meeting.
- ❑ Consider alternative assignments and/or assessments to meet course objectives if absences due to illness occur.

### Attendance Recommendations

The Faculty Handbook also states, “Faculty shall make reasonable adjustments for students who are ill, have family emergencies or serve as duly authorized representatives of the university at some event. It is the responsibility of the faculty member to determine whether or not an adjustment is reasonable for the course. Any class activity which cannot be excused must be noted in the class syllabus.”

In keeping with this ideal, we recommend that when practical and not in direct contravention of the learning objectives of the class, during deadly infectious disease outbreaks such as COVID-19, *no grade penalty be assessed* directly for students being absent from class. Note that this recommendation does not affect the way assignments, other class obligations or assessments are evaluated; it asks that an additional penalty for an absence not be assigned.

We also have these recommendations:

- ❑ Faculty are urged to take a lenient and forgiving approach to self-reported student absences.
- ❑ For your safety and that of your students, urge students who are ill to remain at home and not attend face-to-face classes. Keep in mind that students may be under quarantine through no fault of their own and should be accommodated as much as is practical, including options for make-up work, assignment of an incomplete grade, or a course withdrawal.
- ❑ Faculty may not require documentation from University Health Center (UHC), Virginia Department of Health (VDH) or a doctor's office for absences due to COVID. Faculty may not require students to submit proof of COVID testing, as they constitute personal, confidential medical records. Again, as a condition of the Honor Code, students are required to tell the truth about their absences or face an Honor Code violation.
- ❑ To receive an excused absence, students should be asked to report the reason for their absence, preferably by email and ideally prior to the absence. If it is not possible to contact you prior to the absence, then the student should make contact within 72 hours of said absence.
- ❑ Consider reported absences that demonstrate health or personal hardship as an excused absence. Note that you have wide discretion in assigning make-up work.
- ❑ **The Dean of Students office will not provide documentation for students who are in isolation or quarantine due to COVID in Spring 2022.** Notifying you regarding absences is the responsibility of the student. Please note that this a different process than has been used in the past.
- ❑ For other types of extended absences for which the student is working with the Dean of Students, the DoS will send a letter directly to the instructor.
- ❑ Be mindful that students may withdraw from all their classes. Students should work with the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), who will provide them with documentation share with you.
- ❑ All considerations regarding accommodating attendance apply only if the student is proactively communicating with you.

## Sample Syllabus Attendance Language

As you develop your syllabus language to describe your attendance policy, here are some samples that have been adapted in response to COVID-19 to get you started.

### *Sample 1: Create a New Attendance Section in Your Syllabus*

#### **Attendance**

You are expected to attend all classes during their meeting times. To be successful in this course, attendance is critical for you to perform well. However, performance will not be assessed based on a record of attendance, so no grade penalty will be assessed directly for absences. If you are ill, please do not attend class in person. You are expected to report the reason for your absence (e.g., health-related, family emergency, or any other reason) by email prior to the absence. If that is not possible, you must make contact within 72 hours of the absence. Your proactive communication is required! As a condition of the Honor Code, you are required to be honest about any absence or face an Honor Code violation. Therefore, no documentation is required to prove your reason for absence.

Missed work can be made up by [insert method or 'as described below' and indicate process]. There are some assignments, group activities, and/or assessments that cannot be made up in the event of an absence (as noted in the syllabus). In these cases, there may be a grade penalty or an alternative assignment or assessment may be given. Please note that accommodations will be made for religious observances or lawfully required events, such as jury duty. If you miss too much class time due to unexpected health-related or other circumstances, an incomplete or class withdrawal option can be considered depending on the situation.

### *Sample 2: Revise Your Old Attendance Section*

Before COVID Version	After COVID Version
<p>Since the course is case based, class participation is evaluated carefully. Please take class participation seriously. Please be on time to class. Please bring your name card to class as it is what I will use to check attendance and please sit with your group. Missing a class FOR ANY REASON after the first will adversely affect your participation grade.</p> <p>Therefore, if you are going to be absent, you do not have to send me emails or call me telling me you are going to be absent and why. Unlike many classes, your reasons for being absent are your own. I want you getting ready for the classes that you are going to attend rather than exerting effort explaining away the one(s) you didn't.</p>	<p>Since the course is case based, class participation is evaluated carefully. Please take class participation seriously. Please be on time to class. Please bring your name card to class as it is what I will use to check attendance and please sit, socially distanced, with your group.</p> <p>If you are sick or under quarantine obviously you should not come to class. I will take it on your honor if you are sick; there is no need to provide documentation. If you are going to miss more than two classes we do need to identify suitable make up work, such as commenting in advance via email on cases/assignments or making substantive comments on <i>Wall Street Journal</i> articles and sending me a link to your comment that I may in turn share with your classmates.</p> <p>If you are going to miss something that involves working with your group, e.g. your case facilitation, you need to work with them in a professional manner, e.g. do substantial work for them outside of class, so they are satisfied with your contribution. If they are happy, I am happy. If they are not happy, we may need to explore an incomplete or reduced grade for this portion of the class.</p> <p>Similarly, for tests, if you miss a test because you are sick you may also elect an incomplete. Don't be intimidated by an incomplete, it just means you do the work next semester. (You don't have to pay to take the class again.)</p>