

Academic Affairs Policy #16

Attendance and Excused Absences

Date of Current Version: August 2024

Responsible Officer: Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

1. PURPOSE

This policy provides guidance to faculty and students on excused absences and attendance in credit-bearing classes.

2. AUTHORITY

The Board of Visitors is given the authority to establish policies for the university. This power is delegated to the President in areas in which the Board has not established policy. See Code of Virginia sections 23.1-1602; 23.1-1301. The establishment of policies and procedures concerning the Division of Academic Affairs has been delegated by the President to the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs (Provost).

3. DEFINITIONS

Active Military Service

Military service performed by a member of the Virginia National Guard, the Virginia State Guard, federally funded state active service, or federal active service.

Business Day

Days the university is open for business, typically Monday through Friday, 12 months of the year, excluding university holidays and closures. A day with an unscheduled partial closure, such as delayed opening or early closure, is not a business day.

Class Attendance Policy

The rules and guidelines structuring attendance expectations that are developed by each faculty member for each class under the guidance of this policy.

Credit-bearing Class

A course for which a student earns credit and that is reflected on their James Madison University transcript.

Excused Absence

An absence that is not subject to academic penalty, as listed in section 5.1.

Faculty

The instructor of record in a credit-bearing class at the university.

Mandatory and/or Unrepeatable Course Component

An element or activity of the course that provides at least a partial basis for a student's final course grade, but that cannot be replicated due to its uniqueness (e.g., a performance) or logistics (e.g., a lab).

Official University Function

An event or activity sponsored by the university, as well as on campus events and activities sponsored by a student or employee organization.

Student

A person enrolled in one or more credit-bearing courses at the university.

University Recognized Academic Function

An activity or event sponsored or encouraged by an academic unit within the university that enriches students' education experience.

4. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all credit-bearing courses, regardless of academic level (e.g., first year, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate) or career (degree seeking or continuing education).

This policy does not apply to absences that are ODS-approved or Title IX Office-approved accommodations; those absences are addressed by other policies including University Policies 1302 and 1331.

5. POLICY

In addition to classroom-based learning, the university acknowledges that participation in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities are an integral part of students' educational experience. Although students are expected to attend class sessions, there are legitimate circumstances that may cause students to be absent from class or are unable to attend a scheduled class activity. Faculty must excuse absences and provide equitable and reasonable adjustments to graded assessments under the conditions listed in section 5.1. At their discretion, faculty may grant excused absences without the conditions listed below having been met.

5.1 Absence Categories**5.1.a. Excused Absences Required by Applicable Laws**

Faculty must grant excused absences in accordance with applicable laws. Where permissible, confirmation may be provided to the faculty by the Dean of Students or the student directly. Excused absences required by applicable laws include but are not limited to the following:

- i. Court-imposed legal obligations, such as subpoenas or jury duty
- ii. Religious observances (Faculty may not require documentation or question students' sincerely held religious beliefs.)
- iii. Active military service

5.1.b. Excused Absences for Official University Functions

Faculty must grant excused absences for official university functions that the student is required to attend, provided the faculty member receives proper confirmation prior to the absence.

- i. Absences for NCAA athletic events require confirmation from the Athletic Director or their designee. The Athletic Director or their designee shall provide notice of confirmation directly to the faculty.
- ii. Excused absences for all other official university events require confirmation from the Office of Student Academic Success and Enrollment Management, which is responsible for receiving and vetting documentation for excused absence requests.

5.1.c. Excused Absences for University Recognized Academic Functions

Faculty must grant excused absences for university recognized academic functions that the student is required to attend, provided the faculty member receives confirmation from the dean or academic unit head (AUH) sponsoring or requiring the event prior to the absence.

5.1.d. All Other Absences

- i. Medical Need. Faculty must grant excused absences for students who experience an illness and/or medical need, pursuant to the terms specified in their syllabus. Students are not required to disclose the underlying medical circumstance and faculty are not permitted to request such information.
- ii. Self-Care Note. Faculty may, but are not required to, grant excused absences upon receipt of a Self-Care Note. The University Health Center and the Dean of Students Office encourages students to provide faculty with Self-Care Notes in order to prevent the spread of illness to others. The Self-Care note is a communication tool for a student. Faculty may not require students to further disclose their medical circumstances to the faculty member. The Self-Care Note and additional information are found on the University Health Center website.
- iii. In all other instances, and provided the university is open, excused absences are entirely at the discretion of the faculty.

5.2 Faculty Determination and Student Appeals

5.2.a. Faculty Determination

Faculty must make a determination on excused absence requests and notify the student (using JMU (James Madison University) email or the learning management system) within 5 business days of receiving confirmation from the appropriate authority identified in section 5.1.

5.2.b. Appeals

If a student believes that they have been academically penalized for an excused absence or that a faculty member has denied an excused absence in error, the student should first consult with the faculty member.

i. Appeal to the AUH

If this consultation does not provide resolution, the student may make a written appeal to the AUH for the course. Student written appeals to the AUH must be submitted within 10 business days of the faculty member's alleged error. The AUH shall make a determination on the appeal and notify the student and faculty member within 10 business days of receiving the appeal. Extensions are permissible at the mutual agreement of the faculty member and student or at the discretion of the dean of the college in which the course is taught.

ii. Appeal to the Dean

The student or the faculty member who disagrees with the decision of the AUH may make a final written appeal to the dean of the college in which the course is taught. The dean's decision is not subject to appeal. Final written appeals to the dean must be made within 10 business days of the AUH's appeal decision. Extensions are permissible at the mutual agreement of the faculty member and student or at the discretion of the dean of the college in which the course is taught.

6. PROCEDURES

6.1 Faculty

Faculty are responsible for providing an attendance policy for each course. The attendance policy must state any mandatory and/or unrepeatable components of the course and the procedures for notifying faculty of expected excused absences. Faculty are also responsible for notifying students in a timely fashion if their absence request is approved as excused or not approved.

6.2 Students

Students are responsible for reviewing and understanding the attendance policy and communicating with faculty in a timely manner when they need an excused absence. Where possible, excused absences must be approved in advance of the absence. Students are also responsible for providing the necessary written documentation for all excused absences and requests for excused absences. Students who plan to have multiple absences should discuss this matter with the faculty member at the beginning of the semester so that the impact of these multiple absences can be understood by the student prior to the add/drop deadline for the course.

7. SANCTIONS

Faculty who fail to follow this policy are subject to disciplinary action as referenced in the Faculty Handbook.

Student requests for excused absences and accompanying documentation are subject to the Honor Code.

Other student behavior related to this policy may be reported by faculty to the Office of Student Accountability & Restorative Practices (OSARP) for potential alleged violation(s) of university policy as outlined in the JMU Student Handbook.

8. INTERPRETATION

The authority to interpret this policy rests with the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Previous Version: April 2023; August 2023

Approved by the provost: April 2023; August 2024