

Student Attendance for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021

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 highlight some issues unique to this academic year and suggest some options you may consider.

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 who are required to be isolated or quarantined by the JMU Health Center will be asked if the Health Center may notify the Dean of Students. Students diagnosed elsewhere 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 Honor Code 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 for the Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 semester, 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 a large number of classes due to illness, *including being under quarantine*, so 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 suggest the following:

- ❑ 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 practicable, including options for make-up work, assignment of an incomplete grade, or a course withdrawal.
- ❑ 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.
- ❑ You should not require documentation from a health provider (including the University Health Center) if an absence is for fewer than three class meetings. (*We are working on the honor system here, which gets back to the lenient and forgiving approach*). Students should contact you if an absence is for three or more class meetings. You should ask students who report to you that they are ill to notify the University Health Center, who will notify the Dean of Students. The Dean of Students office will provide students with documentation to share with their professors. Please note that this a different process than has been used in the past.
- ❑ 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 for Spring 2021

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

Spring 2019 Version (before COVID)	Spring 2021 Version
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	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.

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.

class as it is what I will use to check attendance and please sit, socially distanced, with your group.

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 *Wall Street Journal* articles and sending me a link to your comment that I may in turn share with your classmates.

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.

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.)