

Western Michigan University
Faculty Senate
Memorandum of Action

MOA – 19/04

TITLE
Creation of Student Attendance Expectation Policy

Name of Council(s)/Committee(s):
Professional Concerns Committee

Approval Date:
April 17, 2019

Implementation Date:
Upon Administrative Approval

RECOMMENDATION:

Create a Student Attendance Expectation Policy in order to provide guidance about what might be considered normative behavior and actions so that students and faculty understand clearly how best to navigate absence-related issues in the classroom.

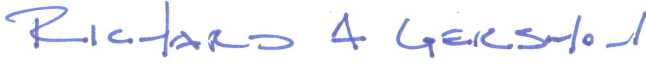

Robert Eversole, Chair, Professional Concerns Committee

4/17/19
Date

Approve Disapprove Other Action

Comments:

Amended and approved at the 7 November 2019 Faculty Senate meeting.


Richard A. Gershon, WMU Faculty Senate President

11/7/2019
Date

Approve Disapprove Other Action

Comments:


Jennifer P. Bott, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

12.13.19
Date

Approve Disapprove Other Action

Comments:


Edward B. Montgomery, WMU President

12/13/19
Date

**Western Michigan University
Faculty Senate
Memorandum of Action**

MOA – 19/04

Creation of Student Attendance Expectation Policy

RATIONALE

The intellectual development and academic success of students at Western Michigan University is of paramount importance. Faculty are responsible to organize, create, and deliver instruction in a variety of formats, and they ultimately certify student accomplishment based upon performance. Faculty also provide access to professional expertise and guidance. Student engagement in these activities is fundamental to their own success and to the mission of the University.

Courses with defined schedules (including in person, online, and hybrid offerings) are provided to facilitate an orderly and predictable environment for learning, as well as to provide assurance of a registered student's right to access the course and the relevant faculty expertise. Scheduled courses allow students to avoid conflicts and reflect the University's expectation that students should be present for every meeting of any instructional opportunity (class/lab/service/research) for which they are registered.

RECOMMENDATION

Create a Student Attendance Expectation Policy in order to provide guidance about what might be considered normative behavior and actions so that students and faculty understand clearly how best to navigate absence-related issues in the classroom.

PROPOSED POLICY LANGUAGE

Instructors are expected to establish and clearly communicate attendance expectations relevant to individual courses in the course syllabus. Course attendance expectations, where articulated, must be consistent with University policy. Students should always consult with the instructor to determine the potential impact of any absence.

It is recognized that occasionally it may be necessary for a student to be absent from a scheduled course activity for reasons beyond their control. Examples of such necessary absence include, but are not limited to religious observance, bereavement, illness, University sanctioned activities, and short-term military obligation. Examples of absence not considered necessary under this policy include but are not limited to work schedules or related events, vacations, trips, interviews, sports practice or optional events, and internship obligations.

The University expects each student to be responsible for class-related work missed as a result of a necessary absence; this work may be made up (or not) in some fashion at the discretion and direction of the instructor.

In all cases of possible accommodation for absence, it is expected that faculty will treat student requests with respect, and students must realize that only the instructor can excuse a student from a course requirement or responsibility, or assign make-up or alternative work.

When necessary absences can be anticipated, the student must inform the instructor of the situation as far in advance as possible and the instructor should strive to accommodate the student consistent with their class absence expectations. (Instructors should note that these expectations are easiest to apply equitably if they have been articulated in a syllabus.) Individual course policies may state expected notification periods. For unanticipated or emergency absences where advance notification to an instructor

is not possible, the student should contact the instructor as soon as possible by e-mail, phone, or in person. The student must recognize, however, that simply informing the instructor is not the same as obtaining permission. It remains up to the individual instructor to decide if, and how, any work is to be made up. For this purpose, the student is responsible for initiating and maintaining communication with the instructor.

1. **Religious Observance:** Instructors and students are expected to refer to the existing policy on absences related to religious observance. <https://wmich.edu/policies/religious-observances>.
2. **Bereavement:** Reasonable absence during times of grief following the death of a close relative or friend is to be expected. Even when these events can be anticipated, the strong emotional consequences can lead to unpredictable behaviors or reactions. Instructors should assume the veracity of a request, especially when first contacted. Although some form of documentation may seem reasonable to request, in times of grief it may not be received or seen as a benign request. It is recommended that instructors perhaps consider reserving the right to request documentation at some future time, but begin by simply assuming a helpful attitude and trying to let the student move through the grieving process. As for duration of absence, instructors are expected to use reasonable judgment. The need to travel and the degree of responsibility may necessitate multiple class periods missed. Such absences are anticipated to be short term, one to three class periods per semester. Similarly, absences in the compressed summer terms may not be readily accommodated. If more time is needed, the students might need to be advised that making up the work may become prohibitive and other options (such as withdrawal or assigning an incomplete grade) might be discussed.
3. **Illness:** Clearly, illness can strike anyone and result in a temporary inability to attend classes. Indeed, in the case of infectious illness, it is also in the best interests of all that a student not attend class. Instructors should use reasonable judgment in requesting documentation. Students should expect that documentation might be required, especially if the timing of absence coincides with exams, quizzes, or assignments. Instructors should also remain aware that often one can be quite ill but not seek medical attention and if students assert they could not attend class, one might waive a request for documentation (but this remains the instructors' prerogative). Such absences are anticipated to be short term, one to three class periods per semester. Similarly, absences in the compressed summer terms may not be readily accommodated. If more time is needed, the students might need to be advised that making up the work may become prohibitive and other options (such as withdrawal or assigning an incomplete grade) might be discussed.
4. **University Sanctioned Activities:** Absences for University sanctioned activities, such as, but not limited to, athletic competitions, performances, and other similar organized activities that might conflict with classes are expected to be minimal since students can be aware of schedules during the registration process. One exception that sometimes arises is when travel is involved for formal competitive events. Students are expected to provide instructors, at the start of the term, with advanced, written notice of any and all potential conflicts with attendance and are responsible for making any necessary arrangements with the instructor. Such absences are expected to be minimal, one or two per semester. Similarly, absences in the compressed summer terms may not be readily accommodated. If more time is needed the students might need to be advised that making up the work may become prohibitive and other options (such as withdrawal or assigning an incomplete grade) might be discussed.
5. **Short-Term Military Obligations:** The University recognizes that those who are actively serving in the Military Reserves or National Guard of the United States are required by their military contract to attend mandatory training. **Any sequential or non-sequential absence may total no more than 15% of scheduled** ~~This may involve up to 14 sequential calendar days, hence two weeks of class meeting time.~~ It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester of the potential for mandatory military duty **obligations** ~~conflicts~~. Students should expect that absences from heavier course loads may be more difficult, or not possible to recover from than absences from lighter course loads. Unique or variant exceptions should be dealt with in a negotiated manner between the student and instructor. In certain laboratory-based or intensive short-term courses, students can jeopardize their academic status with a number of absences, particularly in lab courses that cannot be made up later. In courses with extensive laboratory exercises, group projects, group performances, or participation

requirements, equivalent exercises or assessments may not be possible, as determined by the instructor. Similarly, absences in the compressed summer terms may not be readily accommodated. Students might need to be advised that making up the work may become prohibitive and other options (such as withdrawal or assigning an incomplete grade) might be discussed.

Military Reserve is a person who is currently serving in one of the following services:

- United States Army Reserve
- United States Navy Reserve
- United States Marine Corps Reserve
- United States Air Force Reserve

National Guard is a person who is currently serving in one of the following services:

- Michigan Army National Guard
- Michigan Air National Guard
- Army or Air National Guard of any other state or territory of the United States of America

Department of Homeland Security Reserve is a person who is currently serving in the United States Coast Guard Reserve.

GLOSSARY

Short-Term Military Obligation: Short-Term Military Obligation: Any sequential or non-sequential absence may total no more than 15% of scheduled class meeting time. Any absence of up to 14 consecutive calendar days as identified by published military orders. Military orders must provide the student's name, start and end date of the absence, military organization's name, and must be signed.