

More about Attendance Accommodations

Federal law requires colleges and universities to consider reasonable modification of attendance policies if needed to accommodate a student's disability. In making this determination, two questions must be answered:

1. Does the student have a documented disability that directly affects his or her ability to attend class on a regular basis? Disability Support Services will make this determination based upon a review of documentation from the student's physician or psychologist and provide verification in the letter of accommodation that students present to their professors.
2. Is attendance an essential part of the class? Would modification of attendance policies result in a fundamental alteration of the curriculum? Instructors make this determination in consultation with Disability Support Services.

How to Determine if Attendance is Essential

The following guidelines, based upon guidance from The Office of Civil Rights (OCR), can be used in considering whether attendance is an essential element of a course:

- What does the course description and syllabus say about attendance?
- Is attendance factored into the final course grade?
- What are classroom practices and policies regarding attendance?
- Is the attendance policy consistently applied? (ie., Has the policy been modified for others or any exceptions made to the policy for non-disabled students, such as athletes?)
- Is there classroom interaction between the instructor and students, among students?
- Do student contributions constitute a significant component of the learning process?
- Does the course rely on student participation as a method for learning?
- What is the impact on the educational experience of other students in the class?
- Is there content only offered in class?
- Are assignments used as class content when they are due? (e.g. problem sets reviewed as the first lecture on that content)

The accommodation should be provided unless the accommodation significantly compromises the integrity of the course as offered. Requests for accommodations for absences due to a disability should be considered on an individual and course-by-course basis. Disability Support Services requires that students with a disability-related need for flexibility in attendance meet with their instructors to discuss the extent to which modification in attendance policies may be reasonable for a particular class. Following this meeting, the student and instructor should have a clear understanding of what accommodations can be made for disability-related absences (e.g., extensions on assignments, make-up exams, no penalty for agreed-upon number of additional absences), and procedures for implementing them, including when/how to contact a professor. Please contact DSS if you need assistance at any point in this process.

Considerations to Keep in Mind When Implementing a Modified Attendance Policy

- Additional absences are usually small in number.
- Make-up tests or missed work, when reasonable, have short extension windows in most cases.
- Limits are reasonable; stay away from blanket “come-and-go and submit work as you please” policies.
- Students are not required to provide doctor’s notes for absences covered under this accommodation.
- The accommodation does not cover non-disability related illness (such as flu) or other non-medical reasons as to why student is absent.

What Else Can Instructors Do to Support Students with This Accommodation Request?

When a class is missed due to a disability-related absence, it may also be reasonable to allow a make-up or postponement of an assignment (such as a paper, exam, or quiz). In certain courses, it may be appropriate to consider an alternative assignment, reading, or project to make up for missed class discussion or projects.

Even if attendance and participation are deemed as fundamental to the learning, instructors might find creative ways to grant this accommodation without compromising the pedagogical integrity of the course. For example, consider a student with a physical disability who needs to miss every other Friday of his first semester writing course because of a biweekly medical procedure. Typically, each Friday of the semester involves small group discussion with students critiquing each other’s papers. To make up for the missed class, the student with the attendance accommodation might be required to meet with a tutor in the university writing center to review drafts of papers.