

Accessibility Services Office

Reasonable Flexibility as an Accommodation

Student engagement and academic success are closely correlated with regular attendance, classroom participation, and collaborative learning between faculty and students. For these and other reasons, The Coordinator of Accessibility Services encourages students with disabilities to follow attendance policies established by their instructors and complete all course work on or before designated due dates.

The University acknowledges, however, that there may be times when students cannot attend class due or meet assignment deadlines due to circumstances related to their disabilities, particularly those of a chronic or an episodic nature. These students may request Reasonable attendance accommodations. The coordinator will evaluate the level of impact and determine if reasonable flexibility would be an appropriate accommodation.

Professors should not compromise or lower essential requirements of the course and are not expected to take on an undue administrative burden. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, reasonable accommodations are intended to provide equal access and not necessarily success. This accommodation is not considered to be reasonable if it would constitute a fundamental alteration of an essential element of the course or program.

What Should Students Do If They Believe Reasonable Flexibility is a Necessary Accommodation?

1. Attend the first day of classes to learn about attendance policies and other course expectations and requirements. Students should schedule a meeting with professors if they have questions or concerns about course attendance policies.
2. Meet with the Coordinator of Accessibility Services each semester—ideally, in the first week or two of the semester—to request accommodation.
3. Meet with each professor to complete and sign the Reasonable Flexibility Agreement.
***Professors determine the level of flexibility**
4. Return the Completed agreement form to the Coordinator.

5. Meet with the Coordinator of Accessibility Services to discuss options if instructors deny their requests for attendance accommodations. One option might be making schedule adjustments if students feel they cannot meet the attendance requirements of a course.

What Role Does the Coordinator of Accessibility Services Play in Approving Attendance Leniency as an Accommodation?

When the student provides a professor with the Reasonable Flexibility Agreement, it has been established that the Accessibility Services Office received the necessary documentation and self-report to determine that such an accommodation is necessary for equal access.

How Might Instructors Determine if Reasonable Flexibility is Appropriate?

Reasonable flexibility can be determined by analyzing the course design. Flexibility should not compromise the essential design and learning outcomes of the course. Reasonable flexibility may not be granted, for example, in courses with daily discussion, regular small-group work, regular oral presentations, labs, and other collaborative in-class activities.

While determining reasonable flexibility the professor should consider the following questions:

- Are attendance and/or participation factored in as part of the course grade?
- Is there any flexibility regarding attendance or assignments already built into the course?
- Does instruction and learning rely on specific elements from the previous session or assignment?
- What is the impact on the educational experience of other students in the class if a student is absent or misses a deadline?

Note: Even if attendance and participations are deemed as fundamental to the learning process—i.e., an essential element of the curriculum—professors might find “creative” ways to approve this accommodation without compromising the pedagogical integrity of the course. For example, a student with a physical disability will miss every other Friday of his first-semester writing course because of a bi-weekly medical procedure. For each Friday of the semester, students discuss drafts of papers in small groups. To make up for missed classes, the student with the attendance accommodation might be required to meet with a tutor in the university writing center to review drafts of papers.

What Else Might Professors do to Support Students with this Request?

- Include policies for attendance, excused/unexcused absences, make-up work, and class participation in course syllabi.
- Review these policies and answer questions on the first day of classes
- Meet with these students after the first class period, or as soon as possible, who have questions about course attendance and participation policies.

- Manage attendance/deadlines expectations by setting boundaries—i.e., restricting the number of additional classes that can be missed and late assignment submissions—so students don't expect unlimited absences/late assignments in subsequent courses/semesters.
- Make sure students have a clear understanding of their flexibility requirements if alterations are made in course flexibility policies.

What Are the Expectations of Reasonable Flexibility as an Accommodation?

Reasonable Attendance Expectations

Attendance flexibility policies become effective when students and instructors agree upon reasonable accommodations and sign the Reasonable Flexibility Agreement, as provided by the student. Retroactive accommodation are at the discretion of the professor and not be provided.

On the Reasonable Flexibility Agreement, professors are asked to identify the number of additional absences allowed (above the number identified in the original course policy). Attendance flexibility does not give students the license to miss an unlimited amount of class. Students with this accommodation are responsible for obtaining lecture notes for any missed classes. Even with attendance modifications, students should make every effort to attend all of their classes, as noted in the introduction to this section. Students are responsible for reporting absences in a timely manner directly to their instructors unless a severe disability-related illness prevents them from doing so. Under these circumstances, the Coordinator of the Accessibility Services Office may make a special exception to contact instructors about unexpected absences.

Exam and Coursework Expectations

Students are expected to complete all course work on time unless alternative arrangements have been made with the professor. Providing reasonable flexibility with deadlines can cause greater issues towards the end of the semester. Flexibility with deadlines does not give the student permission to submit every assignment late and/or at the end of the semester. On the Reasonable Flexibility Agreement, professors are asked to identify the number of late assignments and the maximum number of days to allowed before docking points or no submission acceptance. Students must communicate with the professor in advance if they would like to utilize the accommodation for that deadline. Reasonable flexibility may include two late assignments that must be submitted within 5 days of the submission due date. The students must make this request at least 24 hours before the assignment is due.

Accommodations are not necessarily retroactive. Professors are not required to extend deadlines for missed assignments and make-up work if the student have not met with the professor in advance and submitted the completed Reasonable Flexibility Agreement to Accessibility Services. Professors do not have to provide reasonable flexibility beyond what is written in the agreement. If questions or concerns arise regarding the students' academic performance, professors are encouraged to communicate directly with ASO Coordinator.

A Note from the Student Health Center

Written excuses are not issued by the Student Health Center for missed classes/assignments. It is the responsibility of the students to notify professors regarding missed classes/deadlines. Exceptions to this rule occur if students have a more serious/prolonged illness, surgery, or injury. If students miss 3 or more consecutive days of class, they or their parents or guardian can contact the Student Health Center about this extended absence. After students or parents provide documentation, the Student Health Center will send an “out-of-class notice” to students’ professors, their advisors, and the Dean of Students with the expected dates that the students will miss.

Students are informed that the “out-of-class notice” does not excuse them from missed assignments, exams, or lecture notes. It is the responsibility of students to speak with their professors about the possibility of making up uncompleted course work.

What Should Students Consider before Scheduling Courses, Making Schedule Adjustments, and Choosing a Major?

If students anticipate ongoing problems with attendance due to a chronic or episodic illness, they should meet with their faculty advisor and the Coordinator of the Accessibility Services Office to discuss their concerns *before* scheduling courses for the following semester. Students should plan schedules that allow for medical procedures and appointments and other anticipated disability-related absences. Students who anticipate that regular attendance may be a continuing challenge from one semester to the next should consult with the department chair to discuss the feasibility of attendance accommodation in their potential major area(s) of study.

Any questions or concerns regarding this policy may be directed to the Accessibility Services Office.