

Disability Services Center

Attendance Leniency 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 Disability 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 to medical circumstances related to their disabilities, particularly those of a chronic or an episodic nature. These students may request attendance accommodations for injuries, concussions, Crohn's disease, lupus and other autoimmune diseases, fibromyalgia, migraines, cancer, psychological disorders, and other illnesses as well as medical procedures.

What Should Students Do If They Believe Attendance Leniency 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.

Note: "Students waiting to be admitted to a course may be given the places of those who are not present on the first day of class" (*OWU Catalog*).

2. Meet with the Coordinator of Disability Services each semester—ideally, in the first week or two of the semester—to request accommodation.
3. Provide documentation to the Coordinator Disability Services that supports the accommodation request and to what extent. Any questions regarding type of documentation, the Coordinator of Disability Services may be contacted directly.
4. Provide Case-by-Case Attendance Letter and discuss with each professor. If the request is approved, have a clear understanding of the policy (e.g., the number of additional absences and the consequences for exceeding this number).

5. Meet with the Coordinator of Disability 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 Disability Services Play in Approving Attendance Leniency as an Accommodation?

When the student provides a professor with the Case-by-Case attendance accommodation, it has been established that the Disability Services Center received the necessary documentation and self-report to determine that such an accommodation is necessary for equal access. The Coordinator of the Disability Services Center cannot excuse class absences or guarantee that attendance accommodations will be approved, but can advocate for such flexibility. Professors, with the support and input of the Coordinator of the Disability Services Center, may determine if absences will be excused or if the course attendance policy will be amended or waived. Leniency in attendance should not significantly modify the essential objectives of the program or course.

How Might Instructors Determine if Leniency in Attendance is Appropriate?

Regardless of students' disability, professors are not required to modify essential objectives of their courses, including the acceptable number of missed classes. Attendance leniency 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, particularly if absences would require an unreasonable amount of additional work (e.g., setting up a lab) on the part of the professor. Professors have the final decision in determining if attendance and participation are core elements of the learning process in the courses they teach.

Professors should use the questions below, developed by the Office of Civil Rights, to determine the relative importance of attendance as an essential course feature and whether attendance flexibility may be warranted for a specific course:

- Is there [significant] classroom interaction between the instructor and students and among students?
- Do student contributions constitute a significant component of the learning process?
- Does the fundamental nature of the course rely upon student participation as an essential method of learning?
- To what degree does a student's failure to attend constitute a significant loss to the educational experience of other students in the class?
- What do the course description and syllabus say?
- What method is used to calculate the final grade?
- What are the classroom practices and policies regarding attendance? Is the attendance policy equally applied? Has the policy been modified for others or any exceptions made to the policy for non-disabled students? (e.g., if athletes are allowed excused absences, then students with disabilities must be excused as well)

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

What Are the Expectations If Attendance Leniency is Approved as an Accommodation?

Modified Attendance Expectations

Modifications to course attendance policies become effective when students and instructors agree upon reasonable accommodations and sign the Case-by-Case Attendance Policy, as provided by the student. Retroactive accommodation will not be provided.

On the Case-by-Case Attendance Accommodation form, professors are asked to identify the number of additional absences allowed (above the number identified in the original course policy) and note the potential consequences if students exceed this number. For example, instructors might lower the course grade by a certain percent for each missed class above the adjusted number, or will recommend that students withdraw from the course if they reach a designated number of absences.

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 if attendance modifications are approved, 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 directly to their instructors unless a severe disability-related illness prevents them from doing so. Under these circumstances, the Coordinator of the Disability Services Center may make a special exception to contact instructors about unexpected absences.

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. (See the section below for more information about missed course work and course expectations.)

Exam and Coursework Expectations

An exception to the attendance requirement does not exempt students from other course expectations and requirements. Students are expected to complete all course work on time unless alternative arrangements have been made with the instructor. Students should anticipate possible health flare-ups and complete course work in advance of due dates.

Instructors are not required to extend deadlines for missed assignments and make-up work, particularly if students have not informed instructors about possible absences due to a health flare up or unexpected medical appointments or procedures. When students miss classes, they are responsible for obtaining lecture notes from other class members—unless instructors and students have agreed upon another procedure.

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 Disability Services Center 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 Disability Services Center.