

# University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

## Policy on Absence and Attendance

### I. PURPOSE

Medical students and their supervising faculty benefit from having a well-defined set of expectations of when students may be absent from the curriculum, and the associated requirements for communicating such absences appropriately, as well as making up or repeating missed coursework. This policy defines the policies governing medical student attendance and absence at UPSOM.

### II. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- Medical students

### III. POLICY

#### General Guidelines

Students are expected to be present at all required-attendance sessions and examinations throughout the curriculum. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the attendance expectations for each part of the curriculum.

Students must follow the school's procedures for notification of anticipated and unanticipated absences (see "Procedures" section below). In the case of unanticipated absences for illness or emergency, the notification must be submitted as soon as possible.

Students are responsible for the content of any curricular units missed for any reason (see below for details).

The Student Affairs and Medical Education Deans will track student absences over time. The following may be considered attendance issues that may result in a notification of the Advisory, Student Affairs, and Medical Education Deans and referral to the Promotions Committee (when appropriate) in accordance with the school's Code of Professionalism:

- Absence for personal reasons from four or more required sessions within one academic year in the Foundations segment
- Absence from a required session without obtaining advance approval or notifying the school as soon as possible.
- Failure to communicate with the course/clerkship/elective director about any unexcused absences
- Failure to complete the online absence notification
- Increasing trend in number of absences across courses

## Excused Absences

The following are approved reasons for an excused absence from a required session:

- Personal illness or to seek health-related care
- Death or severe illness of a family member
- Religious holiday observances
- Legal (e.g., jury duty)
- Participation in a scientific conference where the student is the lead author/presenter and directly participating in the conference presentation (specifically for the time of that presentation, and reasonable travel arrangements as needed, negotiable with the course/clerkship director)
- Participation in an academic conference where the student is in a leadership role (i.e., has a formal position as an officer in an organization (specifically for the time of that presentation, and reasonable travel arrangements as needed, negotiable with the course/clerkship director)
- Match-related activities (residency interviews, expected “second look” meetings, SOAP process, match day)
- Community emergencies that prevent student attendance due to significant physical or psychological safety concerns

Note that the length of the excused absence in the above references situations will be determined on a case-by-case basis taking into account the individualized circumstances. See below for information regarding Lengthy Absences.

## Disability Accommodations – Additional Excused Absences

Students seeking disability-related accommodations should contact The Office of [Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS), as soon as possible. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations as appropriate.

## Flex Days

Students may also request to be excused from the curriculum for occasional “personal time”—events or activities other than those listed above as “excused” absences. This might include family events, weddings, or other personal activities. These will be known as “flex days.”

### Required Courses

Foundations phase students may be excused from a course for a flex day:

- In each academic year, students may request seven flex half-days during coursework.
- No more than two flex half-days will be permitted during a calendar month.

### Required Clerkships and Acting Internships

Clerkship and Bridges phase students may be excused from a clerkship or acting internship (AI) for a flex day:

- No more than two flex days (or four flex half-days) will be permitted per academic year.
- No more than one flex day (or two flex half-days) will be permitted during a single clerkship/AI.

### Limitations on Flex Days

Students will not be excused for flex days/half-days at the following times:

- During a one-week course (e.g., Introduction to Being a Physician)
- During orientation for a clerkship
- During the first or final day of a clerkship or acting internship
- During curriculum sessions that are not feasible to recreate, such as clinical skills sessions with patients, a skills lab, standardized patient session, or hands-on simulation program
- On the day of scheduled exams (summative or formative)

## **Elective Courses**

The general clerkship requirements for attendance, acceptable reasons for absence, requirements for notification about anticipated and unanticipated absence from clerkships, and requirements to make up missed work also apply to electives.

In addition, with advance permission from the responsible course faculty, students may arrange time away from an elective for up to five days. All electives will adhere to the maximum of five days. A course director may stipulate that students may be away from the elective for fewer days, which supersedes the five-day general guideline; if so, this must be approved in advance by the Office of Medical Education, listed clearly in the elective course catalogue, and discussed with students at orientation.

Exceptions to this policy to permit more than five absence days may be approved by special arrangement with the elective course director or the Dean of Student Affairs.

## **Academic Consequences of Absences**

Students are responsible for the content and work associated with all missed sessions; such make-up work must be reasonable, non-punitive, commensurate with missed time, and designed to help students reach learning objectives. Under no circumstances will an absence relieve a student of meeting all of the academic requirements of the course or clerkship. If the absence conflicts with a session or sessions that cannot be otherwise made up or completed, the student is advised that the absence may affect his or her performance evaluation in the course. Failure to satisfactorily complete the remedial/make-up assignments in a timely manner may result in an overall course failure. Students who complete make-up work in a timely fashion and satisfactorily should not face any grading penalty for excused absences.

Students who miss more than 10% of the total duration of the clerkship or segment of a clerkship – for any reason – will be required to make up missed time.

Students who miss more than 25% of the total duration of a clerkship – for any reason – will be required to reschedule the entire clerkship.

Students who miss between 10% and 25% of a clerkship — for any reason – will need to make up missed time in the manner determined to be appropriate by the clerkship director, which may include rescheduling the entire clerkship.

If a student has missed 50% or more of the required sessions within a single course (including electives and Integrated Life Sciences courses) –for any reason – the student will be reviewed by the Promotions Committee. The student may receive a grade of Unsatisfactory and may be required to repeat the entire course.

## **Lengthy Absences**

A lengthy absence is defined as equivalent to or greater than 50% of a course in the Foundations phase. A lengthy absence is not considered a Leave of Absence. If a student is interested in seeking a Leave of Absence, they should refer to the Leave of Absence policy for details]. A lengthy absence may be granted by the Associate Deans for Student Affairs and Medical Education, only for medical reasons or a family emergency. A student is expected to either attend sessions remotely and/or complete make-up work for all required sessions that are missed, based on the specific course affected and the student situation. Remote sessions may be offered only if:

- The documented family need or student medical condition does not preclude active participation in the required sessions
- It has been determined by the Assistant Dean for Medical Education, in consultation with a course director, that remote participation is both equivalent or nearly equivalent to onsite participation, and superior to written remediation
- The student is physically distant from the medical school and unable to readily return within 24 hours

Students missing all or most required activities in more than one consecutive course may be advised to take a leave of absence. These recommendations will be made by the Academic Success Team in consultation with course directors and the Associate Dean for Medical Education.

This guidance does not include missing activities in courses shorter than two weeks, or in courses that are longitudinal in nature (e.g., one half-day per week).

## **Unexcused Absences**

Students who have unexcused absences will lose remaining flex days commensurate to time missed. However, each absence would remain unexcused.

Any student who has an unexcused absence for a summative assessment event (an exam or OSCE) will receive an unsatisfactory grade for that course unit of curriculum.

Any student who has two unexcused absences within a Foundations phase course will automatically lose 15 percentage points towards their final grade.

Any student who has three unexcused absences within a Foundations phase course will receive an unsatisfactory grade for that unit of curriculum, regardless of their other performance.

There may be certain units of curriculum where a different approach is warranted; those course directors or content leads MUST receive approval from the Assistant Dean for Foundations, and they must outline the variance clearly in all communications with students.

The Assistant Dean for Foundations can make exceptions to the above policy on unexcused absences should there be unusual extenuating circumstances for students. Students who object to the decision of the Assistant Dean can appeal to the Associate Dean for Medical Education.

#### **IV. POLICY AUTHOR(S)**

- Office of Medical Education

#### **V. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

- [Policy](#) on Leave of Absence
- UPSOM [Code](#) of Professionalism
- Non-Discrimination [Policy](#)
- [Policy](#) on Student Attendance During Community Emergencies
- [Policy](#) on Academic Remediation

#### **VI. REFERENCES**

None

#### **VII. APPROVALS**

Dean, School of Medicine, 12/22/17; revised 12/16/19, 8/5/22.

**Latest revision approved by:**

Curriculum Committee, approved March 20, 2023.

Education Policy Council, approved April 10, 2023.

Executive Committee, approved July 10, 2023.

Dean, School of Medicine, approved July 28, 2023.

## VIII. PROCEDURES/NOTES

For **communication and reporting**:

Foundations phase students requesting flex days should use UPSOM's official request [form](#).

[https://pitt.sharepoint.com/sites/nav365/Pages/MS3\\_4\\_UPSOM\\_Absence\\_Request\\_Form.aspx](https://pitt.sharepoint.com/sites/nav365/Pages/MS3_4_UPSOM_Absence_Request_Form.aspx)

Clerkships/Bridges phase students requesting flex days should use the school's official request [form](#) for absences.

[https://pitt.sharepoint.com/sites/nav365/Pages/MS3\\_4\\_UPSOM\\_Absence\\_Request\\_Form.aspx](https://pitt.sharepoint.com/sites/nav365/Pages/MS3_4_UPSOM_Absence_Request_Form.aspx)

Students should provide as much advanced notice as possible for any planned absence (excused or flex), to allow for appropriate schedule or site assignment changes, with the goal of at least one month in advance. This may not always be possible.

Students in Foundations must notify the appropriate Course Director(s) or Content Lead(s) of any planned absence or missed day. Students working at clinical sites must notify their clerkship/elective director/coordinator and the appropriate members of their clinical teams—ideally before, or as soon as possible after, a missed day. This will allow for adequate coverage for clinical duties. If appropriate notification is not initiated by the student, the absence would count as unexcused.

Students are expected to submit an absence request [form](#) before a required curricular event, or as soon as possible after, if it is an emergency. If a student has not communicated the absence request within 48 hours of the curricular event, it will be considered an unexcused absence (regardless of the cause of the absence).

Students who are present but neglect to sign in to required Foundations activities must inform a curriculum specialist within 48 hours, or the event will be counted as an unexcused absence.

If a student is requesting an excused absence for personal illness or to seek health-related care, AND they will be missing important sessions from our flex day limitations list (see below), they must present documentation from a health care provider certifying the absence. This should be uploaded to the website platform for absence requests. Such absence requests, as noted above, must be submitted no later than 48 hours after the curricular event. Documentation must be provided at the time of absence request submission or within 3 business days. After that point, absences lacking sufficient documentation (certification from a physician, licensed provider or equivalent) for whatever reason will be considered unexcused.

- During any one-week course (e.g., Introduction to Being a Physician)
- During orientation for a clerkship
- During the first or final day of a clerkship or acting internship



- During clinical skills sessions with patients, SPs, or in a simulation environment (e.g., a skills lab, interviewing class, or WISER session)
- On the day of scheduled assessments/exams (summative or formative)--including Shelf exams and OSCEs

The duration of time allowed for excused absences will be determined based on discussions between the OMED Dean responsible for that segment and the appropriate course, clerkship, or elective director, based on a student's individual circumstances.

For **flex days**, students who have scheduling conflicts with sessions in courses or clerkships that are "blackout" for flex days should notify course/clerkship leadership in advance. It may be possible to switch assigned sites or days to prevent the conflict. For instance, if a student in the Physical Examination course has an important research activity on an afternoon that might be a course day, they can ask the course administrator before the start of the course if they can have a different afternoon. Students are advised against taking flex days during curricular units when they have had other excused absences.

Flex days will be allocated by curriculum phase.

- Foundations students will be allocated 10 flex half days to use during the first three semesters of the curriculum
- Clerkships phase students will be allocated 4 flex half days for the first semester of this phase of the curriculum, and then 7 flex half-days annually thereafter
- Unused flex days will "roll over" to the next semester within each curricular phase—but not across curricular phases (i.e., Foundations phase flex days do not carry over to the Clerkships phase).

For **disability** accommodations, students should contact the Office of Disability Resources and Services (DRS), at <https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/disability-access/disability-resources-and-services>,

140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, [drsrecep@pitt.edu](mailto:drsrecep@pitt.edu), (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users.

For all planned **healthcare-related absences**, students are encouraged to schedule healthcare services at times that interfere the least with required or important educational activities. When requesting a healthcare related absence, students do not need to describe the specific reasons for the care—just the category (e.g., "I need health care," or "I have a doctor's appointment"), to support the absence as excused. Students should try to minimize time away as much as possible. Students should also be familiar with school policies and course-specific attendance guidelines. Students who have significant health care needs may need to consider a

medical leave of absence, a decision that would be made in collaboration with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

Every unit of curriculum will have **make-up work** for every required event, with a clear deadline spelled out in writing and verbally in the course materials provided at the beginning of a course. Students who need to negotiate with the course/clerkship director to make up time on clerkships or electives must schedule during flexible time (e.g., vacation days) or during upcoming periods of the schedule (e.g., flex weeks). Students are expected to complete their make-up work by the deadline. If they do not, they will receive an unsatisfactory grade for that unit of curriculum and will be required to remediate. If there are any disagreements about appropriate make-up work for absences, the OMED Dean responsible for that segment will adjudicate. Promotions Committee may be involved depending on a student's overall academic record, as per policy (see Policy on Academic Remediation).

Any student who has an **unexcused absence** for any curricular activity will receive a wellbeing check by the Assistant Dean for Foundations, to make sure they are safe and see what help they might need. They will also be advised that additional unexcused absences will have specific academic consequences (as outlined in the policy). Students with a second unexcused absence will lose 15 percentage points towards the final grade. This will make passing the course difficult but still possible. They will receive, from the Assistant Dean for Foundations, a written notification of the deduction and its implications, and that additional unexcused absences will have additional academic consequences (as outlined in the policy).

Unexcused absences will be tracked over time by OMED staff, and students who demonstrate a pattern of such absences will be referred to their Advisory Dean for a discussion. The Assistant Dean for Foundations may also talk with them, and such a student could be referred to the Professionalism Committee for further action.

Students will be oriented to this new approach at the start of the academic year, with the rationale presented. We will remind students periodically and hold to a consistent approach in all courses of the phase.

In extraordinary circumstances, students can appeal elements of this policy to the appropriate Dean responsible for that segment of the curriculum. The Associate Dean for Medical Education will be the next line of appeal.



A summary of responsibilities for absences:

### **Student responsibilities**

1. If a student fails to document attendance for a required activity, it is their responsibility to inform the curriculum specialist.
2. If a student misses a required activity, they must fill out an absence request form. Absence request forms must be submitted within 48 hours of the activity.
3. If a student misses a required activity, they must complete any make-up work which will be specifically described in the syllabus.

### **Curriculum specialist responsibilities**

1. Review attendance documentation and submitted absence forms every Monday
2. Submit any unexcused absences to appropriate dean
3. Remind each course director that they or their faculty are NOT to excuse students.

### **Course director responsibilities**

1. Clearly delineate make-up work and deadlines in syllabus and verbally
2. Review all make-up work
3. Let OMED know when all make-up work is submitted

### **Appropriate dean's responsibilities**

1. Contact 1<sup>st</sup> time offenders (unexcused absences) in writing
2. Inform 2<sup>nd</sup> time offenders of point loss in writing
3. Communicate with any student with 3 or more unexcused absences, and work with Student Affairs and other faculty/administrators on management

If a student has a situation that requires a different approach, they can seek an exemption to any of these specific policy guidelines, by meeting with the Dean responsible for that particular curricular segment.

For instance, if a student wishes to be absent during a curricular “blackout” day (see above) that otherwise would preclude flex day use, or exceed their allotted flex days, they should utilize the **appeal process** (using the form posted on Elentra). Such requests should be submitted to the Associate Dean for Medical Education at least two weeks prior to the planned absence (or as soon as possible, if a situation is urgent). Requests will be reviewed by the Curriculum Committee Executive Subcommittee to determine if it reaches the threshold for

approval: unusual, extenuating circumstances requiring a student to be absent. Decisions will be communicated within three days.