

To: The University Senate
From: University Senate Educational Policy Committee
Subject: Proposal for a Medically Excused Absence Policy for Students (MEAPS) to be added to Purdue University Main Campus Academic Regulations

Reference: [1] <https://www.purdue.edu/advocacy/students/absences.html>
[2] <https://catalog.purdue.edu/content.php?catoid=13&navoid=15965#a-attendance>
[3] <https://catalog.gatech.edu/policies/student-absence-regulations/>

Disposition: University Senate for Discussion and Adoption

Rationale: University Senate Document 10-8 (established March 21, 2011) outlines how General Attendance Issues are to be handled by course instructors in the event of absences that are beyond the control of the student (such as illness, family emergencies, bereavement, etc.). The language in this document does not enforce any mandatory accommodations for students experiencing sudden and unexpected medical conditions or issues, whether they be physical or mental in nature, and which result in the student missing class or other coursework. Examples of such language include: “Instructors are *expected* to establish and clearly communicate in the course syllabus attendance policies”, “this work [missed work] *may be* made up *at the discretion of the instructor*”, and “instructors are *encouraged* to accommodate the student” (italics added for emphasis on non-binding language). From anecdotal experiences and conversations with Purdue faculty, many instructors are accommodating and willing to work with students, but there remains a subset who do not adequately accommodate these burdened students nor provide opportunities for work to be made up for equal credit.

A survey carried out by the University & Academic Affairs committee of the Purdue Student Government in 2019-2020 found that out of 144 students surveyed across all Purdue University – West Lafayette colleges, 60 reported having experienced class absences as a result of medically induced events/issues (Of these 60 students, 48 completed the entirety of the survey and these are the results that are referenced here). 48% reported missing 1-3 days, 23% missed 4-6 days, and 29% missed over 7 days. 47% of these students reported that professors/instructors did not extend due dates for assignments or projects, and 43% indicated that professors/instructors did not allow for make-up labs, exams, or other graded activities that required

attendance. 71% of these students reported their grades being affected by their absence and 21% reported having to retake a class as a consequence of their medically induced absence(s). In addition to these findings, additional statistics and student testimonials are available upon request.

These survey results demonstrate the lapses in accommodation that may occur when faculty are given the ability to provide excused medical absences at their discretion. The current Academic Regulations governing Class Attendance (Reference 2) do not contain language specific to medical absences and the University does not officially recognize medical conditions or situations as “reasons to be granted an excused absence from class”. Adding language explicitly addressing medically excused absences is necessary to ensure accommodations are fairly distributed to those students who are eligible and in order to protect faculty from claims of favoritism or special treatment when granting excused absences.

With the Grief Absence Policy for Students (University Senate Document 10-6, established March 21, 2011), the Office of the Dean of Students reviews cases individually and is able to officially grant students excused absences according to procedures stated within that document, thereby removing the burden from faculty. Providing language specific to accommodations for medical absences would benefit both students and faculty in a manner similar to the Grief Absence Policy, in an effort to maintain uniformity in the granting of medically excused absences and the verification of their legitimacy.

Many universities, including Purdue, have procedures for providing students with the means to withdraw from classes in the event of medical hardship, but few universities feature a policy that protects students during short-term medical absences where a withdrawal may be unnecessary. Reference 3 (given above) provides the link for Georgia Tech’s policy regarding “Student Absence from Class Due to Illness or Personal Emergencies”, which is a stand-out example of an official university policy governing medically excused absences.

It is for the reasons provided above that the following proposal is presented for consideration by the University.

Proposal:

To accommodate students experiencing medically induced absences and to ensure they are provided adequate opportunities to make up missed coursework, the following policy will be added to the Purdue University Academic Regulations, under section “Classes”, subsection “A. Attendance”.

The policy is written as follows:

Medically Excused Absence Policy for Students

Policy Statement: Purdue University recognizes that students may occasionally have to miss class and other academic obligations due to ~~serious medical conditions or incidents~~ hospitalization, emergency department or urgent care visits, whether physical or mental in nature. This policy intends to describe the process students may follow in requesting a medically excused absence as well as what rights and responsibilities are placed on students, faculty, and the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS). The guidelines put forth in this policy are designed to protect student privacy and wellbeing while providing faculty and administration with the information necessary to decide what options exist for eligible students to make up missed coursework. An emphasis is placed on balancing student accommodations with academic integrity, and as such, required documentation is outlined below as well. This process is optional.

In any case, students are urged to not attend classes while they are ill and/or contagious and to seek appropriate medical treatment. It is recommended that students communicate their absences with professors in a timely manner whenever possible.

Students will be excused, and no penalty will be applied to a student's absence for situations involving hospitalization, emergency department or urgent care visit and they will be given the opportunity to make up coursework as defined in the course syllabus.

Students experiencing ~~serious medical conditions or incidents~~ hospitalization, emergency department or urgent care visits can provide documentation to ODOS who will then assess the student's request for a Medical Excused Absence, and issue notification of the start and end of the absence to the student's instructors. The student should then follow up with the instructor to arrange accommodation as per the policy.

The Medical Excused Absence shall not exceed fifteen (15) days per academic year, and no more than ten (10) academic calendar days taken consecutively. Total absences, including travel, may not exceed 1/3 if the course meetings for any course.

With a verified Medical Excused Absence notification by ODOS, no penalty will be applied to a student's absence

Notice: This policy is designed to provide students with minimum protections in cases of a severe medical absence. Students are encouraged to proactively reach out to instructors to see if an agreement can be reached regarding the student making up missed

work. This policy is designed to ensure students are protected during documented and severe illnesses/incidents, and additional leniency on behalf of instructors is encouraged.

Notice: The phrases “class absence” and “missed coursework” refer to any instance where a student is not present at the time of a scheduled activity, assignment, lab, evaluation, examination, or other relevant academic activity associated with the completion of a course for which the student is enrolled.

Scope: This policy applies to all full-time and part-time students currently enrolled at the Purdue University Main Campus in West Lafayette, Indiana.

Student Expectations, Rights, and Responsibilities: Students who miss class or other coursework due to a ~~serious medical illness or incident~~ **hospitalization, emergency department or urgent care visits** and are requesting a medically excused absence should note the following:

1. Students acknowledge that requesting a medically excused absence is a voluntary process and any documentation produced by the student and given to Purdue University administration is done so voluntarily and with the expectation of privacy and adherence to all legal and Purdue policy protections.
2. Students are responsible for providing documentation issued by a licensed medical provider to ODOS that, at a minimum, contains the following information:
 - a. The medical institution or facility where treatment occurred
 - b. Date(s) of the visit and any future visits or treatment (if known and applicable)
 - i. Duration of recommended recovery period also desired (if known and applicable)
 - ii. Indication that class absence was unavoidable or recommended by residing physician; if future absences are required (as part of subsequent treatment or recovery), indication that those are unavoidable or recommended is also desired
 - c. Documentation is to be provided within three instructional days of the medical incident.
3. In the event documentation is unavailable, ODOS staff may evaluate a student’s eligibility for medically excused absences on a case-by-case basis.
4. Students are expected to work with faculty to establish an agreed upon timeline for completing missed work.

Office of the Dean of Students Expectations, Rights, and Responsibilities: When supporting students experiencing

medically induced absences, ODOS is subject to the following guidance:

1. Collection, storage, and eventual disposal of student-submitted medical documentation must be handled in a secure manner that is compliant with all legal and Purdue policy protections, such that student privacy and confidentiality is prioritized.
2. Any student-submitted medical documentation will not be shared with instructional staff, faculty, or any entity outside of ODOS.
3. Upon examination of student-submitted medical documentation and any communication with the student, ODOS will serve as the sole authority responsible for indicating if the student's absences are eligible to be medically excused.
4. Should an absence be deemed medically excused, ODOS will communicate this decision with the appropriate faculty whose coursework coincided, or will coincide, with the student's absence(s). This communication will also indicate that faculty are compelled to work with students to enable them to make up missed coursework or find alternatives for equal credit, within a reasonable timeframe.
5. Should an absence be deemed medically excused, ODOS will advise faculty to not ask the student for any medical documentation or information.

Faculty Expectations, Rights, and Responsibilities: When supporting students experiencing medically excused absences, faculty are subject to the following guidance:

1. Faculty are expected to not ask students for any medical documentation or information. Should it be provided without a request, faculty are encouraged to return the documents or destroy them in a manner compliant with all legal and Purdue policy protections.
2. Should an instructor be notified by ODOS that a student in their course has experienced, or will experience, a medically excused absence, faculty are expected to work with the student to enable them to make up missed coursework or find alternatives for equal credit, within a reasonable timeframe and without penalty.
3. Faculty are expected to work with students to create a reasonable timeline and time limit for making up missed work.
4. Faculty are advised to direct any questions or concerns relating to the medically excused absence to ODOS and not the student.

Exception: This policy recognizes that certain programs at Purdue University are regulated by governmental or regulatory agencies who impose strict guidelines for student attendance. In the event a student's medically excused absence exceeds the number of allowed absences as dictated by the governing agency, this policy cannot

guarantee the student will be able to make up missed work or continue to adhere to the program's attendance requirements.

Exception: This policy is not intended to provide extended accommodations for chronic medical conditions. The intention of this policy is to afford accommodations to students experiencing serious and short-term medical situations which cause them to miss coursework. Students experiencing a chronic condition or diagnosis may have their initial absences accommodated, but long-term periods of absences will need to be addressed by the Disability Resource Center (DRC).

Closing Remarks: Students experiencing serious medically induced absences should notify their instructors and the Office of the Dean of Students concurrently. If ODOS is given proper documentation or verifiability of an absence, instructors will excuse students from class and provide them the opportunity to earn equivalent credit (including through a grade of Incomplete) and demonstrate evidence of meeting the learning outcomes for missed assignments or assessments. If the student is not satisfied with the implementation of this policy by a faculty member, he or she is encouraged to contact the Department Head and/or the Office of the Dean of Students for further review of their case. In a situation where grades are negatively affected, the student may follow the established grade appeals process.

Committee Votes:

For:

Faculty

Thomas Brush
Todor Cooklev
Jennifer Freeman
Eric Kvam
Erik Otárola-Castillo
Alice Pawley
Vanessa Quinn
Libby Richards
Antônio Sá Barreto
John Sheffield
Thomas Siegmund

Students

Janelle Grant
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Advisors

Jeff Elliott
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Against:

N/A

Abstained:

Faculty

Jeffrey X. Watt

Absent:

Faculty

Li Qiao

Students

Elli DiDonna

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Ex-Officio

Present, but non-voting members:

Jaclyn Palm
John Pearson