

Attendance and Students with Disabilities

Summary

Columbus State University adheres to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 933-112 Section 504). Attendance policies may need to be negotiated among the Center for Accommodation and Access, faculty, and students with disabilities.

Purpose

This document presents the expectations and limitations of accommodating students with disabilities as it relates to class attendance.

Policy

The Center for Accommodation and Access may have a role in determining course attendance policies. Because attendance may be integral to the pedagogic process, faculty at the university, departmental, and individual level, sets these policies. In most cases attendance is fundamental to course objectives.

Faculty is ultimately responsible for determining the weight and importance of class attendance and participation. If a student is unable to attend classes for an extended period of time, then he/she is ultimately responsible for informing the instructor(s) of the reasons why he/she is not attending class. The faculty member determines if the attendance and participation are considered to be integral components to the learning process; and if the student is not meeting those requirements, then he or she may not be otherwise qualified to attend classes at that point in time.

For example, students may be required to interact with others in the class in order to demonstrate the ability to think and argue critically or to participate in group projects. In other instances faculty may determine that students can master content despite some or many absences. Rarely does faculty decide that students do not need to attend classes at all. Similarly, faculty also determines policies regarding make-up work and misses quizzes and exams. Faculty is not required to lower or effect substantial modifications of standards for accommodation purposes.

What the Center for Accommodation and Access can do for students:

The Center for Accommodation and Access can work with students when their

disabilities cause disability-related absences, based on appropriate medical and/or psychological documentation.

What faculty can do for students:

Faculty should meet with the student at the beginning of the semester and discuss the method the instructor would like to be notified regarding disability-related absences. The instructor and student may want to discuss the number of absences the student anticipates.

Faculty should make their policies clear so that students can make informed choices about which courses to take. Faculty should also apply attendance policies consistently among classes. Faculty can choose to announce attendance/make-up policies on the first day of class and reinforce this information on the class syllabus.

If faculty intend to disallow or restrict absences, they may choose to use wording similar to this: "Your presence is fundamental to meeting the objectives of this course. Consequently there will be ____ (number of absences) and ____ (number of makeup quizzes and exams)".

In a legal decision by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), Case no. 09-96-2150 (OCR Region IX, 1996), attendance policies and classroom participation were addressed. OCR noted that it accords significant deference to a college's determination that attendance is essential in a particular course. Several factors were presented that OCR would consider in a given challenge to determine that attendance was essential:

- Is there classroom interaction between the instructors and student and among students?
- Do student contributions constitute a significant component of learning?
- Does the fundamental nature of the course rely upon student participation as essential to the learning method?
- To what degree does a student's failure to attend constitute a significant loss to the educational experience?
- Is there a course syllabus and description?
- Does the syllabus contain the classroom practices and policies regarding attendance?
- (Adapted from "Recent Legal Decisions" Jeanne Kincaid, Esq. and Southern University-Carbondale, Disability Support Services)

Of Note: In a session of the Learning Disabilities Association of America, Feb. 1999, ADA attorneys advised staff members of the Center for Accommodation and Access to have faculty members document in writing why they would not allow accommodations of classroom attendance and/or make-up work. The above questions derived from the OCR judgment can be used as a guide for documentation.

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What students with disabilities need to know about attendance.

The Center for Accommodation and Access does not determine class attendance policies. Because attendance may be integral to the learning process, the faculty of the college, at the departmental or individual level, sets these policies. In most cases attendance is fundamental to course objectives. For example, students may be required to think and argue critically or to participate in group projects. In other instances faculty may determine that students can master course content despite some or many absences. Rarely, faculty may decide that students do not need to attend class at all. Similarly, faculty also determines policies regarding make-up work and missed quizzes and exams.

Faculty is not required to lower or effect modifications of standards for accommodation purposes.

What are the responsibility of the students:

Students are required to submit appropriate medical and/or psychological documentation at the beginning of the semester to the Center for Accommodation and Access. Letters from the Center for Accommodation and Access verifying the documentation has been submitted and meets the ADA qualifications are distributed by the students to professors to initiate discussions concerning policies of attendance and make-up of course work. Students who are absent from class due to a disability related absence, should contact the Center for Accommodation and Access and their professors. It is the responsibility of the student to notify professors of prolonged absences (i.e., hospitalization, prolonged treatment, etc.). Students are required to submit appropriate documentation for the period of absence.

Listen closely to faculty announcements about attendance and make-up policies and procedures. Also, refer to your syllabus frequently throughout the semester for information about these issues.

Procedures for Verifying Disability-Related Absence

The following procedure is used to verify disability-related absences. The Center for Accommodation and Access does not excuse students with disabilities nor does it establish attendance policies. Verification of disability-related absences notifies the instructors of legitimate absences due to a student's disability. The verification of disability-related absences does not usually apply to routine appointments to a health-care provider. Disability-related absences apply to hospitalizations, illness-related to a disability, and lengthy treatment processes (such as chemotherapy). This is determined on a case-by-case basis.

If the student is absent from class because of a disability-related circumstance such as those mentioned above, the student will need to provide verification of the absence from

their health care provider to the professor or to the Center for Accommodation and Access, per the arrangements made previously with the professor. The documentation should establish the reason for the absence and its relation to the disability.

If the student encounters an unexpected disability-related circumstance, such as an emergency hospitalization or illness, he/she should notify the Center for Accommodation and Access and his/her professors. The student will need to notify the instructors to arrange make-up work or other assignments.

The student may wish to medically withdraw if the student's health care provider, Dean of Students and/or Counseling Center psychologist advises the student to do so. See "Medical Withdrawals."

Faculty is ultimately responsible for determining the weight and importance of class attendance and participation. Faculty determines if attendance and participation are integral components to the learning process. If the student is not meeting these requirements, then the student may not be "otherwise qualified" to attend school at this point in time.

Related USG Policy

4.1.5 Students with Disabilities

Last Update

5/25/17

Responsible Authority

Director of the Center for Accommodation and Access