

## **Report of the Ad Hoc Excused Absences Committee**

### **Background**

According to rules 3335-9-21 and 3335-9-22, Ohio State leaves excused absence decisions to departments, colleges and individual instructors. The lack of an explicit university level statement regarding such absences leaves considerable ambiguity for students seeking an excused absence for illness, religious observance, jury duty and other circumstances. On February 1, USG brought a proposal to Senate Steering asking the Senate to investigate adoption of an excused absence policy. The question was sent to Committee on Enrollment and Student Program (CESP). This committee was in favor of the proposal to investigate, and potentially adopt, a revision to the absence rules. Given the complexity of the issue and number of stakeholders, this ad-hoc committee is formed to investigate options to address concerns with the current rules. Please see Appendix A for the entire charge to committee.

The committee members were:

- Curt Haughvedt, Fisher College of Business
- David Sivakoff, Statistics
- Marymegan Daly, Evolution, Ecology & Biological Diversity, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education
- Erika Kemp, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
- Caleb Hineman, Undergraduate Student
- Kate Greer, Undergraduate Student
- Nicolas Lugo, Graduate Engineering Student
- Brandon Lester, Legal Affairs
- Jenn Irwin, Student Advocacy
- Amy Treboni, Advising
- Sam Falcone, Buckeyelink, Registrar

Hannah Torma, Senate Recording Secretary, provided resources and support.

At the first meeting, November 5<sup>th</sup>, the committee members elected Curt Haughvedt as Chair.

### **A synopsis of the process is provided below:**

- November 5<sup>th</sup> from 3-4
  - Discussion held regarding the current ways excused absences are accommodated on campus. Undergraduates relayed instances of students receiving zeros on exams and not being able to make up other assignments due to religious holidays.
- December 10<sup>th</sup> from 8-9
  - Discussion about committee direction and plan for next steps. Specifically how we would include health/medical sciences as absences relate to clinical requirements.
- February 12<sup>th</sup> from 9-10
  - Discussion regarding Excused Absence Language suggestions
- February 22<sup>nd</sup> from 3-4
  - Phone call was held with U of Minnesota. They created a policy in 2009 and revised it in 2017. Considered their 'most trafficked policy'. Minnesota saw a 35% reduction in visits to their health center with the introduction of their self-reporting form.

- March 1<sup>st</sup>: The student representatives sent a draft policy for committee members to review
- March 26<sup>th</sup> from 10-11
  - Wording was discussed by committee members.
- April 11<sup>th</sup> from 1-2
  - Wording was discussed by committee members.
  - April 12<sup>th</sup>: Sam Falcone & Erika Kemp met to continue edits. A final draft version was uploaded to Box for committee members to review, and the members were emailed with the updates.
  - April 15<sup>th</sup>: Meg Daly provided comments and edits, she also routed to Title IX.
- August 26<sup>th</sup> from 10-11
  - Wording was edited, self-reporting form was updated
- September 3<sup>rd</sup> from 10-11
  - Final meeting and edits made
- September 12<sup>th</sup>
  - Presented to Senate Steering Committee
- October 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - Presented to Faculty Council

**Below outlines the items considered for each charge to the committee**

**Charge #1**

- Investigate options for how excused class absences are handled for students. Study best practices and novel approaches for excused absence policies used at comparable institutions.
  - Through faculty, student and staff report discovered there are many ways absences are currently handled at OSU
  - Students gathered information from other Big 10 institutions as well as throughout the US of similar size and created a power point shared with the group.
  - A webcall was held with Minnesota where they did create a rule around excused absences and make up work/opportunities. They have a very busy office dealing with this issue.

**Charge #2**

- Solicit input from relevant stakeholders regarding any problems encountered by students and/or instructors under the current rule. Solicit suggestions for solutions to these problems from these stakeholders. Key stakeholders include faculty (notably those teaching large numbers of students), advisers, student services staff, administrators and legal affairs.
  - All parties participated (faculty, staff, students)
  - Difficult to determine one uniform way to handle absence due to variety of class sizes, formats and programs across campus
- Stakeholders report...
  - Due to the variety of courses, sizes, formats and programs, a rule change would be difficult to conceptualize.
  - Large class sizes often do not take attendance
  - Lab set-ups may not be able to be maintained past the dates due to equipment and time restraints
  - Clinical requirements often have a minimum number of hours required

- Minimal competencies must be attained for clinical skills that cannot be missed.
- Make-up exams may be different and are hard to create
- Reports from students are that instructors are not working with individuals for religious holidays, illness/injury and other unanticipated events.
- Student Advocacy reports that they are already facilitating conversations between students and faculty regarding these issues

#### Charge #3

- Make a recommendation regarding whether to revise the current rule and provide the rationale for this decision.
  - Decided to create a best practice type of guideline for all parties to refer to when an issue of an absence is requested to be excused.
  - The current rule allows the variability needed in an institution of this size, with the final decision resting with the instructor
  - The issue seems to be that some guidance is warranted about a 'best practice' method for how to handle excused absence requests.
  - This guideline does not guarantee an excused absence, but rather provides a method to follow to have a discussion between faculty and student.

#### Charge #4

- If an excused absence rule change is recommended, outline the ways in which the change addresses key stakeholder concerns. Summarize the set of changes that should be incorporated by the rules committee in the writing of specific rule language.
  - See 'little p' policy/guideline-Appendix B & C
  - Began with student wording, edited by staff and faculty, reviewed by legal for word choices, reviewed by BuckeyeLink, Student Advocacy, Title IX among others in draft form.

#### **Recommendations moving forward**

- House the document through Office of Academic Affairs
  - Allow them to make any other edits, including soliciting input from regional campuses
- Suggestions on distribution
  - To get word to students: Through University Survey course, through STEP, house on OAA website somewhere, OnCampus Today
  - To get the word to faculty: Through New Faculty orientation, UITL Modules and distribution through OAA to Deans and Division Chairs, OnCampus Today

Respectfully submitted,  
Erika Kemp & Curt Haughtvedt, Chairs  
October 10, 2019

Appendix A: Charge to Committee

Appendix B: Suggested language for best practice in Excused Absences

Appendix C: Suggested Student Self-reporting of Illness Form

## Appendix A, Charge to Committee

1. Background
  - a. According to rules 3335-9-21 and 3335-9-22, Ohio State leaves excused absence decisions to departments, colleges and individual instructors. The lack of an explicit university level statement regarding such absences leaves considerable ambiguity for students seeking an excused absence for illness, religious observance, jury duty and other circumstances. On February 1, USG brought a proposal to Senate Steering asking the Senate to investigate adoption of an excused absence policy. The question was sent to Committee on Enrollment and Student Program (CESP). This committee was in favor of the proposal to investigate, and potentially adopt, a revision to the absence rules. Given the complexity of the issue and number of stakeholders, this ad-hoc committee is formed to investigate options to address concerns with the current rules.
2. Committee Charge
  - a. Investigate options for how excused class absences are handled for students. Study best practices and novel approaches for excused absence policies used at comparable institutions.
  - b. Solicit input from relevant stakeholders regarding any problems encountered by students and/or instructors under the current rule. Solicit suggestions for solutions to these problems from these stakeholders. Key stakeholders include faculty (notably those teaching large numbers of students), advisers, student services staff, administrators and legal affairs.
  - c. Make a recommendation regarding whether to revise the current rule and provide the rationale for this decision.
  - d. If an excused absence rule change is recommended, outline the ways in which the change addresses key stakeholder concerns. Summarize the set of changes that should be incorporated by the rules committee in the writing of specific rule language.
3. Committee Membership
  - a. The committee shall be composed of the following individuals, constituting 9 voting and 4 non-voting members:
    - i. Four faculty (three tenure-track): Meg Daly, Curt Haughtvedt, David Sivakoff, Erika Kemp
    - ii. 2 USG student representatives: Chase Barnett, Kate Greer, Caleb Hineman
    - iii. 1 CGS student representative:
    - iv. 1 IPC student representative: Alex Sherman
    - v. Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, or designee: John Wanzer
    - vi. Legal Affairs (non-voting) Brandon Lester
    - vii. Student Advocacy representative (non-voting) Jenn Irwin
    - viii. 1 Adviser(non-voting) Amy Treboni
    - ix. Enrollment Services & Registrar (non-voting) Kara Miller
    - x. One of the faculty members will serve as chair.
4. Meetings: The chair will call meetings of the committee. The committee should deliver to Steering a progress report in November 2018 and a final report in March 2019.

## Appendix B. Suggested language for Best Practice in Excused Absences

[Faculty Rule 3335-9-21, Absences](#) states: “Each department or school may make its own rules relative to occasional absences by students from scheduled activities. If, however, a student is absent from a course to such an extent as to imperil his or her credit, or is notably irregular in attendance, it shall be the duty of the instructor concerned to report the facts promptly to the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled. The dean may take such action as deemed appropriate.”

Given the diversity of class sizes, formats, and environments at Ohio State, attendance requirements and the ability to accommodate absences can vary significantly. For example, attendance may not be taken at all in large lecture classes, whereas certain laboratory, experiential and/or clinical requirements may require extensive individualized preparation and attention, such that absences can have a larger impact.

While no single system will cover all situations, this guidance document seeks to provide a fair and workable framework for faculty and students to use in addressing the need for absences generally, while recognizing that individual professors may need to handle specific classes differently and have the right to, per Faculty Rule 3335-9-21. This document highlights legal and other compliance issues that faculty need to consider as they develop and enact an absence policy for their courses and identifies best practices and resources for students seeking an excused absence. Open and timely communication is key between faculty and students.

Faculty members may excuse student absences for a variety of circumstances and adjust curriculum requirements as appropriate. Students, faculty, and other instructional staff are expected to work together with respect and integrity to define and enact the appropriate curriculum adjustments.

Some examples of reasonable and common situations leading to an absence from class may include, depending upon the circumstances:

- Illness, physical or mental, or injuries of the student or a student’s dependent
- Situations covered by Title IX, including medical conditions related to pregnancy
- Participation in intercollegiate athletic events and other university-affiliated academic events as stated in Faculty Rule 3335-9-22 Group Absences.
- Subpoenas
- Jury duty
- Military service
- Bereavement, including related travel
- Religious observances; holidays observed by many members of the university community include, but are not limited to: Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur; Sukkot; Passover; Shavuot; 'Id al-Fitr; 'Id al-Adha, and Good Friday
  - A calendar of commonly observed religious holidays can be viewed at: [https://registrar.osu.edu/participationroster/religious\\_holidays.pdf](https://registrar.osu.edu/participationroster/religious_holidays.pdf)

Note that some of these situations are covered by Federal, State, or other applicable laws. If you have concerns or questions, you may contact the [Office of Academic Affairs](#), [Office of Legal Affairs](#), or [Office of Institutional Equity](#)

Students have a responsibility to:

- Attend each and every class meeting scheduled during the normal meeting times, including final exams
- Meet all of the requirements for each course for which they are registered
- Know an instructor’s course policy regarding absence and make-up work at the start of the semester.

- Notify faculty/instructor of any preplanned absences within the first week of class or as soon reasonably as possible.
- Make a timely request that an unforeseen absence be excused
- Take reasonable efforts to avoid schedule conflicts
- Work collaboratively and transparently with your course instructor

Faculty have a responsibility to:

- Establish and disseminate a consistent course absence policy that explains expectations and the process for seeking an excused absence
- Provide a syllabus on the first day of the course that includes information regarding examinations, scheduled experiential learning activities, or other requirements to the extent possible
- Develop reasonable curriculum adjustments where applicable and track student engagement
- Consider all points of view when exercising judgement in applying course policies in non-standard situations
- Work collaboratively and transparently with your students

Faculty members may reasonably require documentation to support a request for an excused absence. However, requiring doctor's notes, police reports in case of injury, and other such documentation in the event of physical/mental illness or injuries can cause an unintended hardship for students who may not, for example, have financial means or the ready ability to obtain such a note. Furthermore, this kind of documentation often contains highly sensitive information that needs to be managed in special ways to protect the privacy of the individual and to maintain compliance with institutional data policies. Students in special situations or those requiring specific, long-term, or other accommodation should seek support from appropriate university offices including but not limited to: [Student Advocacy](#), [Student Life Disability Services](#), the [Office of Institutional Equity](#).

For situations of illness or injury, it is recommended that faculty members accept <FORM>, a notice of student absence that a student fills out on their own. By completing this form, the student acknowledges that they are responsible for communicating appropriate information to their instructor to allow the instructor to make an informed decision about whether to excuse an absence, and that they must complete any missed assignments or make-up work associated with their absence. The veracity of information conveyed in this form is certified by the student's signature, and the submission of untrue information is subject to penalty via the [Code of Student Conduct](#) as Academic Misconduct (Section 3335-23-04-A.12: "Providing falsified materials, documents, or records to a university official in order to meet academic qualifications, criteria, or requirements, including but not limited to submitting falsified doctor's notes and/or falsified transcripts."). Submission of this form does not guarantee that an absence will be excused.

A student who feels that they have encountered legitimate and unpreventable circumstances for which they have not received an excused absence may follow the grievance policy for the course/college/division in which the course is taught. Additional resources on campus may be found through the [Student Advocacy Center](#), [Younkin Success Center](#) or [Student Life Disability Services](#).

Faculty encountering unusual or difficult circumstances are encouraged to consult with their chair or Dean, or to seek feedback from the [Student Advocacy Center](#), [Office of Legal Affairs](#), [Office of Undergraduate Education](#), or the [Graduate School](#).

**Appendix C: Self-Reporting Form**



**Self-Reporting of Illness or Injury Resulting in Absence from Class**

*To be completed by the student and given to instructor. Use one form per class.*

Students can use this form to meet their reporting expectations in the event of short term absences due to physical/mental illness or injury for which instructors may request documentation.

<link to guidance document>

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ University ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester or Session: \_\_\_\_\_ Course Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date (s) of Absence: \_\_\_\_\_

***By signing below, I attest that I am/was unable to attend class due to temporary impairment from illness or injury that significantly impairs/impaired my ability to participate and/or perform in academic activities, or which would have placed my fellow students and instructors at significant risk for contagion. By filling out this form, I am requesting an excused absence for the dates listed above. I understand that I am subject to disciplinary action if I have provided false or misleading information on this form.***

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_