

Disability-Related Absences

A number of disabling conditions may cause a student to be absent from class at times. Examples include chronic illnesses that have fluctuating symptoms, such as Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and severe sleep disorders. Disability-related absences in no way alter the class requirements, the expectations of faculty or the responsibilities of the student. It is the student's responsibility to address class attendance or alterations with their faculty.

While a disabling condition may make class attendance impossible at times, students are encouraged to attend as much as possible. Students learn by being present, listening, asking questions, joining in discussions, etc. and profit from instances when faculty signal that an important concept is being discussed.

Disability Services does not have a role in determining course attendance policies. Because attendance may be integral to the academic process, these policies are set by faculty at the college, departmental, or individual level.

In some cases, attendance is fundamental to course objectives; for example, students may be required to interact with others in the class, 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 course content despite some or many absences. Rarely, faculty may decide that students do not need to attend classes at all.

Similarly, faculty also determine policies regarding make-up work and missed quizzes and exams. Faculty are not required to lower or effect substantial modifications of standards for accommodation purposes.

However, Disability Services does have a role in documenting for faculty the existence of a disabling condition which may affect attendance. Students with disabling conditions that may affect attendance are responsible to contact the Special Needs Counselor in Student Services – Bldg #8 (main campus) and provide appropriate documentation. Once that documentation is received, they should work with Disability Services on an accommodation letter, which will include the following statement:

"Due to a documented disability that is episodic and chronic in nature, _____ may have to miss class on occasion. It is requested that his/her disability be taken into consideration when applying your classroom attendance policy. _____ is responsible for all class notes and assignments and is to make up any missed work in a timely manner. You are not required to make accommodation to essential course requirements."

At the beginning of the semester, the student should initiate a conversation with each faculty member about how absences will be handled. The student and faculty member should discuss:

- How the instructor prefers to be notified when a student will be absent
- The role class discussion plays in that class
- Whether the class will include in-class writing or small group work
- The role class attendance, participation, and in-class work plays in grading
- Whether an alternate exam will be used for any make-up tests
- To what extent the student can work ahead in the class, in order to minimize the impact of disability flare-ups
- A plan for completing make-up work

Note takers will not be provided for disability-related absences. Students should seek a copy of a classmate's notes. Information from faculty on which students likely take the best notes for themselves may be useful.

Students who have had disability-related absences are responsible to monitor their class performance, and determine any negative impact the absences may have had. This would be particularly important just prior to the withdrawal deadline, so that a student can withdraw if excessive absences will result in a poor grade.