



Modified Attendance as an Accommodation

West Chester University of Pennsylvania views class attendance as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. Instructors are expected to provide notice of the dates on which major exams will be given and assignments will be due on the course syllabus. However, some students with disabilities may be approved for an accommodation of modified attendance due to a disability which may require the development of a Modified Attendance Agreement for a student in a specific course. Generally these students have disabilities which are chronic or episodic in nature which may cause difficulties with regular class attendance. This might include, but is not limited to, students with diabetes, epilepsy, cancer, mental health disabilities, migraines and conditions requiring on-going or specialized medical treatment.

DETERMINING HOW MANY DISABILITY-RELATED ABSENCES ARE REASONABLE

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) provided the following guidelines to be used in considering whether attendance is an essential element of a course:

1. Is there classroom interaction between the instructor and students and among students?
2. Do student contributions constitute a significant component of the learning process?
3. Does the fundamental nature of the course rely on student participation as an essential method for learning?
4. To what degree does a student's failure to attend constitute a significant loss to the educational experience of other students in the class?
5. What do the course description and syllabus say?
6. Which method is used to calculate the final grade?
7. What are the classroom practices and policies regarding attendance?

The accommodation should be provided unless the accommodation threatens the integrity of the course as offered. It is important that the student and course instructor discuss the issue so that the student can then make an informed decision regarding alternatives. Requests for accommodations for absences due to a disability should be considered on an individual and course-by-course basis.

ACCOMMODATING CLASS ABSENCES

When a class is missed due to a disability related absence, a general rule for determining a reasonable timeframe for a makeup or postponement of an assignment (such as a paper, exam or quiz) is the time equivalent to that which was missed. In certain courses, it may be appropriate to consider an alternative assignment, reading or project to make up for missed class discussion or projects. Other examples of how disability related absences may be accommodated may include the

ability to submit or make up missed assignments or assessments that have been impacted by the disability-related absence without grade penalty. To help facilitate the discussion and set parameters between an instructor and a student, a Modified Attendance Agreement should be completed by the student and instructor for each course to clarify expectations and set guidelines.

- The Modified Attendance Agreement should be completed at the beginning of the semester or as soon as the student presents the Letter of Accommodation (LoA) to the instructor.
- The Modified Attendance Agreement should be established before absences have become an issue. Instructors are only required to provide approved disability-related accommodations after receiving an LoA and a discussion between the student and professor has taken place.
- The method and timing of notification of absences and making up any materials, exams, assignments, etc. missed due to the absence should be mutually agreed upon and detailed in the Modified Attendance Agreement.
- When a student is absent due to their disability, they are responsible for the course content, lecture notes and information presented that day. The student needs to arrange how they will obtain this information.
- The student is not required to present the instructor with medical documentation verifying his/her disability-related absences, but may be required to document other non-disability related absences as per the syllabus requirements.
- In most instances, communication with the OEA and the provision of additional documentation is not needed to verify the student's absence(s). However, if the absences meet or exceed the number of absences agreed upon in the Modified Attendance Agreement, the OEA should be informed. This will allow the OEA to be of assistance in answering questions about the accommodations from both the student and the instructor.
- If the student requests a change to the number of absences initially agreed upon due to a change in their disability, the student should be referred to the Director of the OEA to discuss. Additional documentation or an update from the student's treating physician may be needed by the OEA to determine if a modification to the agreement or other accommodation may be appropriate.