

## Responses about the student absence documentation policy

1.

*This change brings up the issue of accountability and equity among students as anyone can now submit a form without being held accountable. Ultimately, documentation is likely still going to be required by faculty to address the issue of accountability and equity since faculty strive to maintain equity in their classes. Faculty members are concerned about the potential that students can abuse this new system if they have not completed the necessary work. Even if the faculty member makes adjustments to their syllabus, this will not cease to be an issue. This change essentially pushes the task of documentation back to faculty, who are already overwhelmed with the amount of work they are currently doing. Further, students will now be required to provide documentation to the faculty member, which seems somewhat inappropriate, and could potentially make students feel very uncomfortable. Additionally, what information can faculty legally not request when asking for documentation themselves? Is it just personal medical information? Or are there other limitations in place? It seems like this could potentially lead to legal issues for faculty or additional grievances.*

*It seems there could have been another way to approach this issue, such as changing the type of documentation that could be submitted so that the documentation doesn't provide information that is protected under HIPAA guidelines or FERPA laws, rather than completely eliminating the documentation process. Finally, this issue seems to be part of a growing trend of top-down administration, where sweeping changes are made without consideration for faculty input or the impact the change will have on students or faculty.*

I find it concerning that our Provost suggests syllabi policies that are not pedagogically appropriate for all areas. It is important to remember that the provost is in a position of authority, and statements from our chief academic officer such as "just offer three tests and drop one" may not work for some course learning outcomes. Public provost statements like this may be perceived as policy. Further, regardless of the flexibility built into a course syllabus, students who, for example, miss an exam due to an emergency will typically still feel that they should have the right to take the exam; after all, they were prevented by an emergency, not personal choice.

2. Absenteeism is a problem.

3. I have an attendance policy, fairly strict because my classes are discussion based (absence means you can't discuss, right?). Will this new notification system affect my ability to penalize students for more than a certain number of absences unrelated to WOU-sponsored events?

4. We're confused about how this was rolled out as it seems to be a major change for WOU. The details are unclear, but it seems that we can no longer validate absences from our courses. This means that we can no longer have an excused absence policy, which is an important "WOU Friendly" retention effort by many faculty.

Most students don't abuse the system, but many have lied to our faces, so having a campus unit that validates excuses has been a critical component of doing business.

We don't understand how we can move forward. For example, if a student has a death in the family and has to miss an exam, do we just take their word? Is this a fair accommodation for others in the class?

Please supply a campus-wide written policy from administration. We need clarity.

5. I have a colleague that comes from several schools that have an attendance policy. Can we incorporate some policy into this procedure? I don't require notification from students, but I remind them other instructors often require it. I would love to find way to incentivize and encourage attendance.

6. Will this be the \*only\* statement about student absences that faculty will be allowed to include in syllabi? I ask, because biology has a strict attendance policy for our laboratories (as you probably know). Hopefully, edits to this form will allow faculty to specify the consequences for missing classes.

Also, I did a quick search of OSU's policies and found these:

#### AR 14. Attendance

Attendance is one of the most important factors in a student's academic success. Therefore, an instructor may consider attendance as part of a course grade. If attendance is used in determining the student's grade, how attendance shall be used needs to be defined in the course syllabus by the instructor.

[source: <https://catalog.oregonstate.edu/regulations/#text>]

**Q: I have an attendance policy in my class that says that unless students have a documented excuse from class, they may be deducted points. Can I do this?**

A: Yes, you can. You may ask to see documentation of a medical visit or other visit to justify the excuse. We, however, advocate that you do not keep the documentation, as then you become responsible for the proper and secure storage of the documentation.

[source: <https://registrar.oregonstate.edu/ferpa-faqs>]