

COVID Attendance/Student Absences Recommendations

Overall goals/introduction

Appalachian State University recognizes the challenges of teaching and learning during this unprecedented time. As the University plans to bring our students back to campus this fall, we are working to protect the health and safety of our students and faculty, and to ensure that students can be successful in their courses during this challenging time.

It is the policy of Appalachian State (*Faculty Handbook*, Section 6.3.1) that class attendance is an important part of a student's educational experience. Students have always been expected to attend every meeting of their classes, and to be responsible for class attendance. These expectations have not changed. However, we recognize that to ensure health and safety, we may need to re-consider class attendance in the traditional sense.

The recommendations and information shared below are intended to assist faculty with their course planning for Fall with regard to class attendance and student absences. As always, faculty have the discretion to include class attendance as a criterion in determining a student's final grade in the course. However, we encourage faculty to reconsider their standard attendance policies in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

Our primary request of faculty is to consider proactively creating opportunities to maintain course participation and engagement while ensuring that students experiencing symptoms or illness, do not physically attend class.

Recommendation 1: Identify difficulties students may have with regard to class attendance

During this crisis, our students may be facing a variety of challenges. It may help to keep in mind that students may:

- Be exposed to COVID-19 and need to be quarantined;
- Become ill and need to isolate;
- Have a family member fall ill;
- Experience increased anxiety and mental health issues;
- Be in a CDC-identified high risk category.

COVID-related absences will take several forms and impact your course design whether your course meets face-to-face or online, and whether your online course meets synchronously or asynchronously. For example, a sick student simply cannot be in the classroom, do the assigned work on time, or take a test on the date you administer it. A student who feels physically well but who must self-isolate cannot show up to class face-to-face but can engage

with the course remotely. Keep in mind that the number of class periods missed may vary and, in some cases, may be over a prolonged period.

Additionally, please note that instructors will not be informed if a student tests positive, due to the confidentiality of health-related information. Relatedly, do not ask students for confidential health-related information, including whether they have been tested, or have tested positive.

Recommendation 2: Broaden how you define “attendance”

Faculty, at their discretion, may include class attendance as a criterion in determining a student’s final grade in the course (*Faculty Handbook*, Section 6.3.1.1). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the high probability that some students will be absent from class, faculty may wish to broaden the attendance policy to include not only physical attendance in the classroom, but also participation and engagement in the course in other appropriate ways. Faculty are encouraged to review essential course requirements and academic activities within the course to determine if there are equivalent alternatives for participation and engagement. Such alternatives should be equivalent experiences which do not fundamentally alter, waive or lower essential course requirements, academic standards, or educational experiences/outcomes; they should only provide flexibility with physical attendance.

Faculty are then encouraged to ensure that any essential, non-substitutable, face-to-face activities are clearly labeled in their syllabi, and to consider if it’s possible to schedule such activities prior to the withdrawal deadline. For example, these activities may include face-to-face internships, clinical experiences, science labs, service learning projects, or other intensive experiences that require mandatory attendance on specific dates to pass the course.

Physical attendance in the classroom is not the only way that students might participate in the class and engage with the course material. There are a variety of ways that instructors can maintain or even enhance student participation and engagement. While we recognize that some of the suggestions below may increase faculty workload, some things to consider include:

- Using recording options within the classroom or Zoom to capture lectures.
- Using the wide range of tools within AsU Learn to assist students with learning and to ensure and track their engagement in the course.
- Permitting the completion of equivalent alternative work versus that which might be completed during class time.
- Allowing students to attend class remotely (i.e., live video conferencing such as Zoom).
- Permitting alternate participation via discussion board or forum activities.
- Providing methods for electronic or contact-less submission of assignments.
- Offering more than one exam date and time (e.g., requiring students to take 8 out of 10 quizzes rather than 8 specific quizzes).

Recommendation 3: Reconsider the weight of attendance in your final course grade for Fall 2020

Faculty who require attendance as one component of a course grade may wish to reduce the overall weight of attendance and engagement for Fall 2020. Some students may be temporarily impacted by COVID-19 and unable to attend, participate, and engage as typically required. In an attempt not to penalize students that contract COVID or have other COVID related issues, or perhaps worse, to incentivize their physical attendance when ill, it may be beneficial to either significantly reduce the weight of this component in the final course grade or develop a policy about how the impact of COVID will be addressed in a fair and supportive manner.

Recommendation 4: Be aware of available resources to assist with course design and instruction.

Appalachian has many resources available to assist faculty reconsider or redesign various aspects of their courses.

Center for Academic Excellence Resources

- [Assessment of Student Learning Teaching Guide](#) to help faculty reconsider assessment strategy for hybrid and online courses
- [Instructional Strategies Teaching Guide](#) to help faculty consider strategies for engaging students in hybrid and online courses
- [Course Organization Teaching Guide](#) to help faculty organize an adaptable course
- [Inclusive Online Teaching](#) webpage to help faculty respond to COVID-19 with inclusivity
- [Preparing for Fall 2020](#) webpage with information to help faculty prepare for hybrid and online course design and delivery

Recommendation 5: Be aware of academic and COVID-related policies and resources that may affect student retention and success in your courses.

Appalachian has many resources dedicated to assisting our students through the impacts of COVID 19.

- University Policies and COVID Support Pages
 - [University Withdrawal Policy Information](#) includes dates and information about course withdrawals
 - Instructors will NOT be informed if a student tests positive or must be isolated or quarantined.
 - [Continuity in the time of COVID-19](#)

- Campus Resources
 - [Office of Disability Resources](#) for accommodations on the basis of disability.
 - [Student Learning Center Keep Learning](#) webpage with recommendations and resources for student success
 - [Office of the Dean of Students](#) serves students by providing support and assisting students in navigating challenges they may face as members of our campus community.
 - [Counseling Center](#)
 - [Student Health Services](#)