

Caregiving Authorized Absence Proposal

History of the concern

The pandemic has called attention to challenges faced by student caregivers that have always been present but not widely acknowledged. As an institution and as instructors, we must recognize that to be successful in recruiting, retaining, and nurturing a diverse body of students, we need to use every tool at our disposal, including the authorized absences policy. Including authorized absence language that addresses the experiences of our student caregivers allows these students to see themselves in the policy and provides a more inclusive and supportive environment.

The list of examples below is not exhaustive. As faculty and staff, we must work toward recognizing our students as people and giving them our empathy. The proposed language supports the university's mission statement, our collective work towards equity, diversity, and inclusion, and our commitment to helping students return to the classroom. Seeing the whole person – acknowledging students as people with relationships to others – and accommodating caregiving needs of students is part of our duty and our obligation.

It is already well-established that authorized absences have reasonable limits. We expect similar limitations would be applied to the caregiving authorized absence. Furthermore, procedures exist to allow students to take an Incomplete in a course, or similar action, in cases of prolonged absences.

We encourage swift action to adopt the proposed language.

Proposed language*

“or (8) caregiving, parenting, and pregnancy obligations of such a necessary, unavoidable, or critical nature as to prevent the student from being able to attend class.”

* Complete policy is below.

Examples

We include caregivers and families:

- A single parent who must take a person under their care to a medical appointment
- A scheduled babysitter is a no-call no-show, and the student must provide that supervision and care
- Someone in the household - parent, sibling, partner, roommate, pet - needs emergency care, and the student must assist

We help create equity of economic status:

- Last minute emergencies - such as loss of childcare - requires the student to stay at home
- A family has a only one vehicle, and the student cannot travel to campus
- Collective health and safety is practiced by keeping a sick child home from school

We recognize the diversity of caregiving obligations:

- A student takes a roommate to a medical appointment or cares for them in time of illness
- Caring for a sibling while parents are working
- A child's school enters a period of online instruction due to communicable disease

Authorized Absences (US 11/09)

Absences that fall under one of the following categories are considered authorized: (1) participation in an approved field trip listed in the catalogue as a requirement for a course in which the student is enrolled; or (2) participation in an authorized extra-curricular activity on the regularly approved calendar of university events [such absences are reported by the dean to each department at least 48 hours in advance of the trip or event]; or (3) Labor Day employment; or (4) active military service; or (5) accommodation of students' religious beliefs [see Accommodation of Students' Religious Beliefs Policy below]; or (6) illness, injury, or emergency of such severity as to prevent the student from being able to attend class; or (7) being summoned to court or requested to appear in court or having to serve on jury duty; **or (8) caregiving, parenting, and pregnancy obligations of such a necessary, unavoidable, or critical nature as to prevent the student from being able to attend class.** A student should communicate directly with the instructor when an absence falls under one of the approved **eight** categories. Instructors have discretion regarding requests for absences that do not fall under one of the approved **eight** categories. (US 4/13)

In the case of severe illness, injury, or emergency, instructors should be kept apprised of the situation through direct communication with the student and/or via the Dean of Students Office which will assist students and communicate with instructors as needed.

When absences are authorized, instructors are obligated to work with students to determine the best way for students to resume participation in the class without a penalty. However, if the absences are lengthy, the student, instructor, college dean, and Dean of Students Office should work together to determine if it will be possible for the student to successfully complete the course.