Attendance and Participation Policies for Online Teaching in Fall 2020

Attendance is fundamental to engaged learning. While recognizing the extraordinary circumstances that face us, students are expected to attend all scheduled course meetings of an online course, unless prevented from doing so by illness or another exceptional circumstance. Keep in mind that students who miss a class or any course requirement because of religious observance will be excused from that absence, as outlined in this memo.

You may wish to use the full range of scheduling options for components of your course, including the “flipped” (pre-recorded) lecture option and the newly available 4:30 – 7:30 pm slot, to facilitate attendance among students across multiple time zones. We recommend that you record each “live” class session, following the guidelines for doing so within the context of FERPA, to post to your course website in case a student must miss class.

We also recommend that you think about how you will grade participation, acknowledging that students will engage your course from different time zones, with varying access to quiet spaces and sometimes unpredictable internet access. We advise you to consider adopting another participation mechanism (such as a discussion board with structured prompts) for those students who, on an exceptional basis, cannot attend class.

Also consider that it may be even more challenging for students to get speaking time in a precept or seminar conversation on Zoom. For this reason, we encourage you to engage the full range of interactive features in Zoom, as well as to use assignments in addition to “speaking” to measure participation. You may choose to grade all participation components to arrive at a participation grade.

Faculty are urged to make their requirements regarding attendance and participation clear in their course syllabi and other communications with students at the start of the term. Sample language for inclusion on course syllabi is below. Faculty teaching on Zoom may also wish to advise students that they may choose to use virtual backgrounds, including backgrounds from our campus.

Faculty may determine whether or not to penalize a student’s participation grade based on a number of unexcused absences, and should also describe that deduction in their syllabus. You may also wish to excuse an absence (or allow for late arrivals) for students who encounter lengthy wait times for voting on Election Day. Adding language to that effect in your syllabus in advance will be very helpful for your students.

If you have concerns about a student’s attendance in your course, or if a student indicates that a serious illness or family emergency will prevent their regular attendance, please contact the student’s residential college dean or director of studies right away.

Finally, for the small number of courses that may meet in person and on campus, please anticipate that students may need to quarantine or self-isolate for defined periods of time. In these in-person, on-campus courses, we advise faculty to design other means of engagement and participation for students who must miss class for these specific, short-term reasons.
SAMPLE syllabus language

#1 Standard lecture course:

Students are expected to attend each scheduled class on time and ready to participate fully. Please have your video (with whatever background you prefer to use) turned on, except during class breaks, unless you have an unexpected difficulty or have arranged with me otherwise. An excused absence will only be granted in the case of a religious observance, an ODS-approved accommodation, or -- as verified by your residential college -- a serious illness or an exceptional circumstance.

#2 Weekly seminar:

This seminar requires your full participation. Complete all assigned readings before class and come to class on time, prepared with comments and questions. Class participation will be evaluated by the overall quality of your contributions in both live and asynchronous forums. You are expected to have your video (with whatever background you prefer to use) turned on, except during class breaks, unless you have an unexpected difficulty or have arranged otherwise with me. An excused absence will only be granted in the case of a religious observance, an approved accommodation, or -- as verified by your residential college -- a serious illness or an exceptional circumstance. Given that this seminar meets once a week, only one unexcused absence is allowed; each unexcused absence after that will result in a one third letter grade deduction from your participation grade.*

*N.B. Faculty have discretion over whether and how to penalize a student’s grade for an unexcused absence.