Planning for Class Absences (Including Your Own)

We've returned to in-person teaching and learning, but we can still expect the unexpected from our students and ourselves. Prepare for absences by considering the following recommendations. Use what suits your course context and contact us for one-one-one consultations for more ideas. We serve anyone who teaches Penn State students, in any modality, at any location.

Attendance, Participation, and Late Policies

Set clear expectations regarding absences, missed in-class work, assignments, group-work, discussions, and other activities.

- Communicate your attendance and participation policies in the syllabus and in class from the very beginning of the semester and as often as seems reasonable.

- Describe the key things that happen only during class meetings, and clarify what "participation" means in your class, e.g., learning with and from peers, interacting with instructors and receiving immediate feedback, lab work that must be accomplished using specialized instruments and/or chemicals.

- "Instructors can offer up to less than 25 percent of an in-person class remotely (synchronously or asynchronously), a flexibility to manage their own absences, whether due to illness or other unavoidable circumstances, during travel, or for pedagogical reasons." Penn State University Registrar - Instruction Modes

- Create a contingency plan in case members of the instructional team must be absent and communicate to your students what they can expect to happen. See here for some suggestions.

- Create a Google form for students to request extensions, perhaps allowing them to negotiate a new due date or indicate when they expect to complete the work.

Plan for Missed Classes

Build options into your course, so students have more than one way to participate.

Offer all of your students optional ways to participate in class discussions, complete assignments, and perform in-class activities in case they can't make it to class as much as your course design allows.

- Offer students a choice between synchronous and asynchronous discussions. A real-time discussion may be appealing to students who enjoy the quick interaction, while asynchronous discussion threads in Canvas can benefit students who wish to have more time to think about their responses.
- Share your lecture notes and PowerPoint slides either before class, so students can use them to guide their notetaking, or after class, so they refer to them as they study.
- Invite your students to contribute to class notes in an online collaborative space like Google Docs, MS Teams, or MS O365 docs.

- Create virtual spaces for students to interact informally (i.e., without the pressure of a grade), for example, a "Parking Lot" discussion forum in Canvas where students can arrange study groups, post questions for each other, and share their thoughts. Yammer can work well for this, too.

Plan for Late Assignments, Exams, or Quizzes

Build flexibility into your course, so students have more time when they need it without needing to ask for it.

- Extend the availability of online quizzes and tests to between 36 and 72 hours in case technical problems or physical ailments interfere with their completion.
- Allow multiple attempts at a quiz or test for the same reasons.
- Offer grace periods of 5-7 days for assignments, as opposed to having one rigid due date.

Review These Policies and Resources as You Plan

Senate policy 42-27: Class Attendance

Senate policy 44-35: Conflict of Non-Final Exams. See AAPM F-4 for procedure.

AD53: Privacy Policy

Coronavirus Information