Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Attendance Policy

February 10, 2020

Senators:

On October 2, 2019 the Faculty Senate requested that the Steering Committee form an ad hoc committee to propose a revised undergraduate attendance policy that would address concerns brought by the Jewish Faculty and Staff Council as well as additional concerns voiced by Senators. The Senate mandated that the ad hoc committee should include broader representation than the Committee on Scholastic Standards and Petitions, the standing committee of the Senate that typically reviews attendance policy.

The Steering Committee approved the following committee members by email on October 21:

1. Mark Cooper, FS Chair (Chair)
2. Sang-Eun Byun, Senator HSRM
3. Joseph Flora, Senator, Engineering and Computing
4. Patrick Greene, Student Representative to Standards and Petitions & Chair of the Student Senate Judiciary Committee
5. Lisa Jerald, Undergraduate Student Ombuds
6. Sandra Kelly, Vice-Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies
7. Val Littlefield, Faculty Athletics Representative, African-American Studies
8. Maureen Petkewich, Senator DMSB
9. Adam Schor, Jewish Faculty and Staff Council, History
10. Clifford Scott, EOP, Title IX Coordinator, ADA Coordinator
11. Joshua Stone, Senator Biological Sciences
12. Karen Worthy, Senator Nursing
13. Representative of military students' association—invitation extended to Jake Tyler, Graduate Student in Biology
14. Faculty representative from the Palmetto College—David Dangerfield, History, USC Salkehatchie joined 10/22.

Henry White, Associate General Counsel, and Maria Hickman, Senior Associate Athletics Director for Academics and Student Development, attended meetings as needed at the request of the committee chair.

On October 29, the committee met to discuss its charge, review Senate discussion of the issue, and assign subcommittees follow-up tasks. The following tasks were assigned:

1. What do other SEC schools do?
2. Can we clarify the make-up work issue—when to allow—and find language that makes clear why attendance requirements differ in discussion-based, clinical, or experiential courses?
3. How would an appeals process work?
4. How do colleges with no percentage rule govern excused absences?
The committee next met on December 6, when it received a report from Associate General Counsel Henry White. White explained that we are legally required to excuse absences and to allow to make-up work for a list of reasons. The committee discussed reports from the subcommittees previously charged, identified features required and desired in a policy, and determined to bring three distinct proposals to the Senate for its review. Subcommittees were again assigned to:

- Draft language legally required of every policy.
- Draft additional language that describes three options as follows.
  1. A policy that would resemble current policy, with a percentage of unpenalized unexcused absences.
  2. A policy that would distinguish excused from unexcused absences, without setting a minimum percentage of allowable unexcused absences.
  3. A policy that would prohibit grade penalty for absence but allow participation grades.

The committee reconvened on January 9 to review subcommittee work. Areas requiring clarification and further discussion were identified and a subcommittee was tasked to refine drafts of the three proposals for review and comment on-line.

On February 3, the committee met to resolve a few issues remaining and unanimously agreed to review and approve this final report via email.

The ad hoc committee brings no specific recommendation. Time will be reserved for discussion of the proposals on the agenda of the March 4 Faculty Senate meeting. A motion to adopt will be in order and amendments may be offered from the floor.

Patrick Greene, the student representative, advises that option 3 (instructors may not assess grade penalty for absence) would be preferred by undergraduates, while option 2 (instructors may assess grade penalty for any unexcused absence) would be unpopular; option 1 may be perceived as a compromise.

Senators are advised that our current attendance policy is not helpful legally. We need to replace it. Language shared by each policy option reflects the guidance of General Counsel. Legal requirements will apply to graduate students as well as undergraduates. Because policy-making authority for graduate students rest with the Graduate Council, Senators should consider the attached proposals primarily from the point of view of undergraduate instruction.

Senators are encouraged to share this report with their colleagues and to discuss the proposals with them.

Sincerely,

Mark Cooper
Chair, Ad Hoc Committee on Attendance Policy
**Attendance Policy Option 1: 5% Rule**

**Policy Statement**

The University of South Carolina expects its students to commit to their educations by attending class and participating in course activities. In assessing student attendance and participation, the University aims to ensure the highest academic standards while recognizing that events occur beyond the personal control of students or faculty. Different courses demand different approaches to assessing student attendance and participation. Therefore, subject to certain limitations described below, instructors of record are responsible for determining the attendance and participation policies appropriate to their individual courses.

Each instructor should describe their attendance and participation policy in the courses syllabus, if only to point to this general policy. Should an instructor fail to provide a written attendance policy, this general policy applies.

If an instructor intends to assign a grade penalty for absence or a grade for participation the instructor must: inform students in writing how attendance and participation will be measured, particularly as such measurement goes beyond recording students’ mere presence in the classroom for all or part of a class session; maintain current, verifiable records; take care to apply attendance and participation policies consistently and fairly for all students; and recognize that failure to comply could constitute grounds for a grade appeal.

While instructors are not required to keep a record of attendance, they are encouraged to do so whenever practical. Federal law requires institutions to document the last day of participation for enrolled students who fail to complete a course.

Instructors must allow make-up work for excused absences as described below.

Students are responsible for satisfying the requirements for attendance and participation for any class in which they are enrolled, including requirements for notification and documentation of excused absences. Whenever possible, and as specified below, documentation is required in advance of any excused absence.

This policy applies to all courses offered by the University of South Carolina, including synchronous or asynchronous online courses.

**Excused Absences**

Instructors requiring attendance as a component of a student’s grade must distinguish between excused and unexcused absences in the written policy for the course.

Excused absences may not be penalized in a student’s grade, and the student must be permitted to make up coursework missed due to an excused absence or to complete an equivalent assignment agreed upon with the instructor. Online courses, whether synchronous or asynchronous, are not exempt from this rule. In all cases of excused absence, the instructor of record must engage in an interactive process with the student to determine reasonable make-up work.

Instructors may refuse to grant a request for an excused absence or for make-up work that would result in a fundamental alteration of the essential academic requirements of the course. In such instances, students should be apprised of the University’s policy regarding course withdrawals, including undergraduate hardship withdrawals.
The University of South Carolina is required by law to excuse absences from class for the following reasons:

1. Performance of a military duty or obligation imposed by state or federal law, as documented in writing by the appropriate state or federal authority.
2. Legal obligation to appear at or participate in a judicial or administrative proceeding, including the performance of jury duty, as documented in writing by the appropriate judicial or administrative authority.
3. Any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth, as documented by the student’s health care provider, requiring the student’s absence from class.
4. A disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and as documented by the Student with the Student Disability Resource Center, which prevents the student from attending class.
5. Observance of a religious practice, holiday or holy day, if the instructor of the class is provided written notification by the student of their intent to observe such religious practice, holiday or holy day no later than the end of the second week of regularly scheduled classes in a full fall or spring semester term, and within twice the length of the drop/add period for any other term. Change / Drop dates can be found at: https://my.sc.edu/codes/partofterms/index.
6. Any other absences required to be excused by applicable state or federal law.

The University of South Carolina requires that absences from class for the following reasons must also be excused:

1. Participation in an authorized University activity, in which the student plays a formal, required role. Such activities include, but are not limited to, musical performances, academic competitions, and varsity athletic events. University documentation of participation should be provided in advance of the absence.
2. Illness or injury that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class, with appropriate documentation.
3. Death or severe illness of an immediate/dependent family member, with appropriate documentation.
4. University closure for weather-related or other emergencies.

Instructors, at their discretion, may also excuse absences from class for the following reasons:

1. Non-closure weather-related emergencies that affect a student’s capacity to reach campus or that require a student’s presence off-campus.
2. Mandatory interviews related to employment, professional school, or graduate school that cannot be rescheduled.
3. Any other situation deemed excusable by the instructor. Instructors are encouraged to show understanding toward students’ needs while remaining mindful of the University’s high academic standards and the need to be scrupulously even-handed.

Requesting Excuses

To arrange excuses for absences that can be anticipated at the start of a term—including, but not limited to, authorized university activities and religious observances—students should submit a request in writing (email is acceptable) stating the dates of the anticipated absence, explaining the reason for absence, providing supporting documentation as required above, and including any request for make-up work. Students should submit this request no later than the end of the
second week of regularly scheduled classes in a full fall or spring semester term and within twice
the length of the drop/add period for any other term. Change / Drop dates can be found at:
https://my.sc.edu/codes/partofterms/index.

To arrange excuses for absences that cannot be anticipated at the start of a term--including, but
not limited to, legal proceedings or illness--students should submit in writing a request stating
the date of absence, the reason for absence, and any request for make-up work as soon as
reasonably possible after they become aware of the need to be absent. For instance, in the case
of a contagious illness a student should notify the instructor soon after becoming aware of this
illness. Instructors should not maintain records of student medical conditions. On the Columbia
campus, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is available to certify any excuses involving
confidential personal information.

Unexcused Absences: The “5% Rule”

The University recognizes that students may occasionally miss classes for legitimate reasons not
rising to the level of a formal excuse. For this reason, course attendance policies may penalize
unexcused absences in a student’s grade only after a student’s unexcused absences exceed a set
percentage of the total classes that the student missed without excuse. Once unexcused absences
exceed this set percentage, every unexcused absence may accrue a penalty to a student’s grade.

For traditional lecture-based, face-to-face classes, the minimum percentage of unexcused
absences allowed must be at least 5 percent of total class meeting time. For example, students in
a traditional, face-to-face 3-credit course, which meets in class for a total of 2100 minutes, may
not be penalized for absences that total less than 105 minutes of class time (a minimum of one
allowable unexcused absence for a class meeting two times per week for 75 minutes; two for a
class meeting three times per week for 50 minutes); students may be penalized for each
unexcused absence beyond 105 minutes.

Exceptions:

1. Clinical courses, “practicum” courses, laboratory courses, and certain other special
   kinds of courses may have allowable percentages shorter than 5 percent of class time.

2. Online courses (asynchronous or synchronous) may also set their own policies for
   participation in online activities and/or meetings, to which the 5-percent minimum
does not apply.

Any instructor assessing a grade penalty for absence must specify in the course syllabus the
percentage of allowable unexcused absences (with a minimum of 5% for traditional face-to-face
classes) and the penalty to a student’s grade for each unexcused absence in excess of that
percentage. Online courses should specify any penalties for not participating in activities in the
allotted time without a valid excuse.

Instructors have full discretion to set their own policy regarding the late acceptance of course
work missed due to an unexcused absence; this policy should be specified in the course syllabus.

Assistance and Appeals

On the Columbia Campus, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is available to assist instructors
and verify, in certain cases, students’ stated reasons for requesting excused absences. Palmetto
College campuses should work with their Faculty Organizations to define similar agencies.

Any student who is denied a request for an excused absence from class for any of the reasons set
forth herein may appeal the decision per the STAF 6.30 Academic Grievance Policy. As
described in STAF 6.27, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is also available to help students resolve grievances and maintain policy compliance.

Students are expected to be fully honest with instructors, university staff and administrators when they make requests to excuse absences and when they work with instructors to arrange terms for the completion of coursework missed due to excused absences. Any dishonesty in requesting excused absences or accommodations for the timely completion of missed work is regarded as a violation of academic integrity and is subject to disciplinary action through the Office of Academic Integrity.
Attendance Policy Option 2: Excused Only

Policy Statement

The University of South Carolina expects its students to commit to their educations by attending class and participating in course activities. In assessing student attendance and participation, the University aims to ensure the highest academic standards while recognizing that events occur beyond the personal control of students or faculty. Different courses demand different approaches to assessing student attendance and participation. Therefore, subject to certain limitations described below, instructors of record are responsible for determining the attendance and participation policies appropriate to their individual courses.

Each instructor should describe their attendance and participation policy in the courses syllabus, if only to point to this general policy. Should an instructor fail to provide a written attendance policy, this general policy applies.

If an instructor intends to assign a grade penalty for absence or a grade for participation the instructor must: inform students in writing how attendance and participation will be measured, particularly as such measurement goes beyond recording students’ mere presence in the classroom for all or part of a class session; maintain current, verifiable records; take care to apply attendance and participation policies consistently and fairly for all students; and recognize that failure to comply could constitute grounds for a grade appeal.

While instructors are not required to keep a record of attendance, they are encouraged to do so whenever practical. Federal law requires institutions to document the last day of participation for enrolled students who fail to complete a course.

Instructors must allow make-up work for excused absences as described below.

Students are responsible for satisfying the requirements for attendance and participation for any class in which they are enrolled, including requirements for notification and documentation of excused absences. Whenever possible, and as specified below, documentation is required in advance of any excused absence.

This policy applies to all courses offered by the University of South Carolina, including synchronous or asynchronous online courses.

Excused Absences

Instructors requiring attendance as a component of a student’s grade must distinguish between excused and unexcused absences in the written policy for the course.

Excused absences may not be penalized in a student’s grade, and the student must be permitted to make up coursework missed due to an excused absence or to complete an equivalent assignment agreed upon with the instructor. Online courses, whether synchronous or asynchronous, are not exempt from this rule. In all cases of excused absence, the instructor of record must engage in an interactive process with the student to determine reasonable make-up work.

Instructors may refuse to grant a request for an excused absence or for make-up work that would result in a fundamental alteration of the essential academic requirements of the course. In such instances, students should be apprised of the University’s policy regarding course withdrawals, including undergraduate hardship withdrawals.
The University of South Carolina is required by law to excuse absences from class for the following reasons:

1. Performance of a military duty or obligation imposed by state or federal law, as documented in writing by the appropriate state or federal authority.
2. Legal obligation to appear at or participate in a judicial or administrative proceeding, including the performance of jury duty, as documented in writing by the appropriate judicial or administrative authority.
3. Any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth, as documented by the student’s health care provider, requiring the student’s absence from class.
4. A disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and as documented by the Student with the Student Disability Resource Center, which prevents the student from attending class.
5. Observance of a religious practice, holiday or holy day, if the instructor of the class is provided written notification by the student of their intent to observe such religious practice, holiday or holy day no later than the end of the second week of regularly scheduled classes in a full fall or spring semester term, and within twice the length of the drop/add period for any other term. Change / Drop dates can be found at: https://my.sc.edu/codes/partofterms/index.
6. Any other absences required to be excused by applicable state or federal law.

The University of South Carolina requires that absences from class for the following reasons must also be excused:

1. Participation in an authorized University activity, in which the student plays a formal, required role. Such activities include, but are not limited to, musical performances, academic competitions, and varsity athletic events. University documentation of participation should be provided in advance of the absence.
2. Illness or injury that is too severe or contagious for the student to attend class, with appropriate documentation.
3. Death or severe illness of an immediate/dependent family member, with appropriate documentation.
4. University closure for weather-related or other emergencies.

Instructors, at their discretion, may also excuse absences from class for the following reasons:

1. Non-closure weather-related emergencies that affect a student’s capacity to reach campus or that require a student’s presence off-campus.
2. Mandatory interviews related to employment, professional school, or graduate school that cannot be rescheduled.
3. Any other situation deemed excusable by the instructor. Instructors are encouraged to show understanding toward students’ needs while remaining mindful of the University’s high academic standards and the need to be scrupulously even-handed.

**Requesting Excuses**

To arrange excuses for absences that can be anticipated at the start of a term—including, but not limited to, authorized university activities and religious observances—students should submit a request in writing (email is acceptable) stating the dates of the anticipated absence, explaining the reason for absence, providing supporting documentation as required above, and including any request for make-up work. Students should submit this request no later than the end of the
Option 2

The second week of regularly scheduled classes in a full fall or spring semester term and within twice the length of the drop/add period for any other term. Change / Drop dates can be found at:

https://my.sc.edu/codes/partofterms/index.

To arrange excuses for absences that cannot be anticipated at the start of a term—including, but not limited to, legal proceedings or illness—students should submit in writing a request stating the date of absence, the reason for absence, and any request for make-up work as soon as reasonably possible after they become aware of the need to be absent. For instance, in the case of a contagious illness a student should notify the instructor soon after becoming aware of this illness. Instructors should not maintain records of student medical conditions. On the Columbia campus, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is available to certify any excuses involving confidential personal information.

Unexcused Absences

Course attendance policies may penalize unexcused absences in a student’s grade; such policies must be specified in the course syllabus. Online courses should specify any penalties for not participating in activities in the allotted time without a valid excuse.

Instructors have full discretion to set their own policy regarding the late acceptance of course work missed due to an unexcused absence; this policy should be specified in the course syllabus.

Assistance and Appeals

On the Columbia Campus, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is available to assist instructors and verify, in certain cases, students’ stated reasons for requesting excused absences. Palmetto College campuses should work with their Faculty Organizations to define similar agencies.

Any student who is denied a request for an excused absence from class for any of the reasons set forth herein may appeal the decision per the STAF 6.30 Academic Grievance Policy. As described in STAF 6.27, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is also available to help students resolve grievances and maintain policy compliance.

Students are expected to be fully honest with instructors, university staff and administrators when they make requests to excuse absences and when they work with instructors to arrange terms for the completion of coursework missed due to excused absences. Any dishonesty in requesting excused absences or accommodations for the timely completion of missed work is regarded as a violation of academic integrity and is subject to disciplinary action through the Office of Academic Integrity.
Attendance Policy Option 3: No Absence Penalty

Policy Statement

The University of South Carolina is committed to providing compelling and enriching educational experiences of the highest quality. It considers its students to be adults who are responsible for their own decisions regarding course attendance and does not assess grade penalties for absence. Instructors may, however, require and evaluate course participation. Different courses demand different approaches to assessing student participation. Therefore, subject to certain limitations described below, instructors of record are responsible for determining the participation policies appropriate to their individual courses.

If an instructor intends to assign a grade for participation the instructor must: inform students in writing how participation will be measured, particularly as such measurement goes beyond recording students’ mere presence in the classroom for all or part of a class session; maintain current, verifiable records; take care to apply participation policies consistently and fairly for all students; and recognize that failure to comply could constitute grounds for a grade appeal.

While instructors are not required to keep a record of attendance, they are encouraged to do so whenever practical. Federal law requires institutions to document the last day of participation for enrolled students who fail to complete a course.

Instructors must allow make-up work for excused absences as described below.

Students are responsible for notification and documentation of excused absences. Whenever possible, and as specified below, documentation is required in advance of any excused absence.

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Excused Absences

Students must be permitted to make up coursework missed due to an excused absence or to complete an equivalent assignment agreed upon with the instructor. Online courses, whether synchronous or asynchronous, are not exempt from this rule. In all cases of excused absence, the instructor of must engage in an interactive process with the student to determine reasonable make-up work.

Instructors may refuse to grant a request for an excused absence or for make-up work that would result in a fundamental alteration of the essential academic requirements of the course. In such instances, students should be apprised of the University’s policy regarding course withdrawals, including undergraduate hardship withdrawals.

The University of South Carolina is required by law to excuse absences from class for the following reasons:

1. Performance of a military duty or obligation imposed by state or federal law, as documented in writing by the appropriate state or federal authority.
2. Legal obligation to appear at or participate in a judicial or administrative proceeding, including the performance of jury duty, as documented in writing by the appropriate judicial or administrative authority.
3. Any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth, as documented by the student’s health care provider, requiring the student’s absence from class.
4. A disability, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and as documented by the Student with the Student Disability Resource Center, which prevents the student from attending class.

5. Observation of a religious practice, holiday or holy day, if the instructor of the class is provided written notification by the student of their intent to observe such religious practice, holiday or holy day no later than the end of the second week of regularly scheduled classes in a full fall or spring semester term, and within twice the length of the drop/add period for any other term. Change / Drop dates can be found at: https://my.sc.edu/codes/partofterms/index.

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4. University closure for weather-related or other emergencies.

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2. Mandatory interviews related to employment, professional school, or graduate school that cannot be rescheduled.

3. Any other situation deemed excusable by the instructor. Instructors are encouraged to show understanding toward students’ needs while remaining mindful of the University’s high academic standards and the need to be scrupulously even-handed.

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To arrange excuses for absences that cannot be anticipated at the start of a term—including, but not limited to, legal proceedings or illness—students should submit in writing a request stating the date of absence, the reason for absence, and any request for make-up work as soon as reasonably possible after they become aware of the need to be absent. For instance, in the case of a contagious illness a student should notify the instructor soon after becoming aware of this illness. Instructors should not maintain records of student medical conditions. On the Columbia
campus, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is available to certify any excuses involving confidential personal information.

**Assistance and Appeals**

On the Columbia Campus, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is available to assist instructors and verify, in certain cases, students’ stated reasons for requesting excused absences. Palmetto College campuses should work with their Faculty Organizations to define similar agencies.

Any student who is denied a request for an excused absence from class for any of the reasons set forth herein may appeal the decision per the STAF 6.30 Academic Grievance Policy. As described in STAF 6.27, the Undergraduate Student Ombuds is also available to help students resolve grievances and maintain policy compliance.

Students are expected to be fully honest with instructors, university staff and administrators when they make requests to excuse absences and when they work with instructors to arrange terms for the completion of coursework missed due to excused absences. Any dishonesty in requesting excused absences or accommodations for the timely completion of missed work is regarded as a violation of academic integrity and is subject to disciplinary action through the Office of Academic Integrity.