



Academic Ombud

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Fall 2017 Semester Academic Reminders

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Welcome back from the Summer Break. At the University of Kentucky, our highest priority is an education that prepares students for personal success, as leaders to improve the well-being of the Commonwealth and the Nation and to effectively address Global Issues. Effective communication and transparency of processes are key ingredients in our ongoing efforts to improve student success, retention and progress towards graduation.

We would like to acknowledge and thank Professor Michael Healy for his excellent service as Academic Ombud during the last three years. Many faculty and students from across campus have expressed their appreciation for Michael's work as Ombud and we wish him the best as he returns full time to his faculty position in the College of Law.

Academic Ombud Services (AOS) is a confidential and impartial resource to assist students and faculty in resolving academic issues. This update contains a number of reminders as well as guidelines for issues that have come to the Ombud's attention. As well, links to various resources and relevant University Senate Rules (SR) that may be helpful to faculty are included. Should you have questions or concerns involving academic policies, please contact AOS at ombud@uky.edu or 859-257-3737. You may also visit our [website](#) or our office at 109 Bradley Hall. Best wishes for a stimulating and successful semester.

- Topics:
1. Syllabus
 2. Excused Absences
 3. Dead week
 4. Attendance and Class Behavior Issues
 5. Academic Integrity Issues
 6. Disability Issues

1. Syllabus

A carefully prepared syllabus is the single most effective tool that will prevent many of the disputes that come to the Ombud's office. It is critical to clearly define rules regarding grading, absence policies and many other issues. Senate rules regarding syllabi can be found in several subsections of SR 5.0, 6.0 and 7.0, as well as on the [University Senate website](#). Information in the following sections should all be well-defined in the syllabus. A [syllabus template](#) can be found on the University Senate website.

As a reminder:

- Provide a copy of the syllabus by the 2nd class meeting at no cost to the student. Syllabi may be posted electronically and must remain available for the entire semester. (SR 6.1.1)
- Generally, syllabi should not be changed after the semester has started.
- Include information about the content, the activities to be evaluated, and the grading practice to be followed. (SR 6.1.1).
- Outline the impact unexcused absences, tardiness and/or late assignments have on grades. (SR 5.2.4.2)
- In 400G and 500-level courses describe the differing expectations for undergraduate and graduate students. (SR 3.1.4).

2. Excused Absences

[SR 5.2.4.2](#) states that "A student shall not be penalized for an excused absence", and goes on to define several categories of excused absences, e.g., illness, death of a family member, major religious holidays, etc. Please note that SR 5.2.4.2 E gives the instructor additional discretionary latitude to accept "Any other circumstances which the Instructor of Record finds reasonable cause for absence." Instructors are encouraged to work with students that have reasonable requests.

Notification Requirements. To prevent confusion, faculty should inform students in the course syllabus about the notification requirements for the course for excused absences. Notification requirements must be at least as protective of student rights as required by Senate Rules. In general, students must notify the Instructor of an absence within one week following the period of absence. The Senate Rules state that advance notice may be required to excuse an absence in three circumstances:

(1) Absence for a major religious holiday requires advance written notification. "Faculty should indicate in their syllabus how much advance notice they require . . . [and] shall use their judgment as to whether the [religious] observance in question is important enough to warrant" an excused absence. SR 5.2.4.2 D. The same section also states that "the presumption should be in favor of a student's request" and that "The Offices of Institutional Diversity, the Dean of Students, and the Ombud are available for consultation" should the Instructor require guidance.

(2) "Trips for members of student organizations sponsored by an educational unit, trips for University classes, and trips for participation in

intercollegiate athletic events,” when advance notice is “feasible.” SR 5.2.4.2 C. If advance notice is not feasible, the student must provide adequate notification and documentation within one week after the student’s return to class.

(3) Interviews for full-time job opportunities post-graduation and interviews for graduate or professional school require advance notice. Please see “Excused Absence for Job and Graduate/Professional School” below.

Excused Absence Due to Illness Documented by UHS.

According to SR 5.2.4.2 A, a student’s absence is excused for “Significant illness of the student or serious illness of a member of the student’s household (permanent or campus) or immediate family. The Instructor of Record shall have the right to request appropriate verification.” There continues to be some confusion regarding documentation of illness. Many students rely upon University Health Service (UHS) for treatment of illness or injury during the semester. UHS has prepared a [statement](#) about class attendance and student illnesses that is useful for students and faculty. The statement discusses public health and policy reasons why a sufficiently ill student ought to be absent from class and circumstances when a student need not make a visit to UHS. UHS has defined three levels of documentation, Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3. Tier 1 forms are filled out by the student; it is at the discretion of the instructor whether to accept Tier 1 documentation to excuse an absence. Tier 2 and Tier 3 are generated by UHS and provided to the student. The student must then forward the email or present the hard copy to the faculty. Faculty have informed the Ombud that emailed documents may be easily fabricated. The Ombud recommends that faculty make use of the verification offered by UHS which can be done by simply forwarding the original Tier 2 (or, in some cases, Tier 3) email to the UHS email address provided in the body of the documentation. AOS recommends that instructors accept verified Tier 2 and 3 forms to excuse a student’s absence. More information on UHS Tiers may be found on the [AOS website](#).

Excused Absence Due to Illness Documented by Other Health Care Providers: Please be aware that faculty have informed AOS that students may be fabricating documentation to provide verification for excused absences. Faculty are encouraged to inform students in the syllabus that the instructor will contact the provider to confirm the authenticity of documentation provided to excuse absences due to illness. For non-UHS health care providers, the student may need to contact their provider to allow an instructor to contact the provider to verify that the student was seen.

Excused Absence for Job and Graduate/Professional School: The [University Senate approved a new rule](#) for excused absences on March 20th, 2017. The new rule is as follows: Absences due to “Interviews for full-time job opportunities post-graduation and interviews for graduate or professional school [are excused]. The student must notify the Instructor of Record prior to the occurrence of such absences. Instructors of record have the right to request appropriate verification. [US: 3/20/2017]”. The rule is in

effect, but has not yet been updated in the Senate Rules posted on the University Senate Website. It is SR 5.2.4.2 E and the prior SR 5.2.4.2 E will be SR5.2.4.2 F in the next SR update. Please note that the student is required to notify the instructor prior to the absence, and instructors are encouraged require and verify documentation.

3. Dead Week

There continue to be complaints from students that faculty are not conforming to the limits on Dead Week activities defined by [SR 5.2.4.6](#). As a reminder:

- No written exams or quizzes or final examinations may be scheduled during Dead Week
- Make-up exams or quizzes may be scheduled.
- No projects, lab practicals, papers, presentation deadlines or oral/listening examinations may be scheduled during Dead Week unless they were scheduled in the syllabus AND the course has no final examination (or assignment that acts as a final examination) scheduled during finals week.
- A course with a lab component may schedule the lab practical of the course during Dead Week if the lab portion does not also require a final examination during finals week.
- Graded homework that is a routine part of the course and is announced in the course syllabus may be assigned for submission during Dead Week.

Feel free to contact [AOS](#) if you have any questions regarding Dead Week.

4. Attendance and Class Behavior Issues

If class attendance will be used as a basis for grading, faculty must explicitly state in the syllabus how a student’s attendance will affect the student’s grade. For example, an instructor may state in the syllabus that a student’s letter grade in the course will be reduced by one letter if the student has more than three unexcused absences in the course. The instructor should define in the syllabus all course policies relating to unexcused absences and tardiness. Any such policies on class attendance that affect grading must be applied consistently for all students in the class. If a policy relating to unexcused absences is not stated in the course syllabus or the policy does not specify a penalty for unexcused absences, the instructor should not penalize the student for any unexcused absences.

Instructors are reminded that [SR 5.2.4.2](#) establishes policies related to excessive excused absences. Note that this rule does not apply to unexcused absences, which cannot be combined with excused absences to exceed the 20% threshold. The Senate Rule states that if a student has excused absences in excess of 20% of the class contact hours, the student has the right to withdraw and receive a ‘W’ for the course, or the instructor may impose an incomplete ‘I’ if the student does not withdraw. If an instructor is considering assigning an ‘I’ grade for any reason, the instructor is encouraged to consult [SR 5.1.3.2](#) for the policies and procedures relating to assignment and completion of incomplete grades.

Instructors are reminded that [SR 6.1.2](#) requires that faculty must respect the right of each student to voice opinions that conflict with the Instructor's opinion and the opinion of other students. Students must, however, express their opinions in a manner that is respectful, civil, and not disruptive to the class.

Finally, instructors may wish to discourage disruptive behavior in class by stating in the course syllabus that a student who violates the rules for civil behavior in class will be told to leave the class and will receive an unexcused absence for that class. That unexcused absence would have the same effect as any unexcused absence described in the syllabus on the student's grade.

5. Academic Integrity Issues

Instructors are encouraged to be aware of the rules and procedures related to cheating and plagiarism. There is a link on the [AOS website](#) to an essay by Dr. David Royse, a previous Ombud. SR 6.3 defines cheating and plagiarism. [SR 6.4](#) outlines the steps to be taken by the instructor. Briefly, if the instructor suspects an academic offense has occurred, the instructor and chair should meet with the student. If the instructor determines that an offense has occurred, the chair should then contact Sean Cooper in the registrar's office to determine if the student has any previous academic offenses as this will influence the severity of the sanction that will be imposed on the student. Do not contact the registrar's office prior to meeting with the student and determining an academic offense has occurred.

AOS has been made aware of paraphrasing software that has been used to disguise plagiarism. Previously identified online software included [paraphrasing-tool.com](#) and [plagiarisma.net](#). A recent google search identified several others. A writing assignment that contains odd phrasing may indicate that this type of software has been used. For example, the previous paragraph was entered into Article Rewriter on [seowagon.com/article-rewriter](#) and the first sentence rewritten as "*Instructors are prompted to stand aware concerning the guidelines and processes related in imitation of cheating or plagiarism.*"

6. Disability Issues

AOS continues to see issues related to accommodating students with disabilities. If a student with a documented disability requires academic accommodations for your course, the student must provide you with a Letter of Accommodation from the [UK Disability Resource Center](#) (DRC). It is best to ask at the beginning of the term that any students requiring accommodation contact you as soon as possible to avoid issues at a later date. As well, please insure that you do everything possible to meet the accommodations required for these students.

If the student is not registered with the DRC, she or he may begin the process by registering [online](#). The DRC is located in Suite 407 of the Multidisciplinary Science Building, 725 Rose Street, 0082. To contact the DRC by phone, please call V/TDD (859) 257-2754.

As always, AOS would like to hear your comments and suggestions. If there are specific issues that you believe would be of interest to other instructors, please feel free to [email](#) us your ideas and we will consider them for inclusion in future start of semester notices. Thank you again for your service to the University of Kentucky and its most valuable asset, our students. Have a great semester.

LINKS:

[The Course Syllabus](#)
[Academic Offense Policy](#)
[Accommodation of Religious Observances](#)
[Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)
[Dead Week](#)
[Final Examinations](#)
[Cheating During Examinations](#)
[Class Records & Papers](#)
[Course Evaluations](#)
[Cancellation of Classes](#)