

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

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MANAGING STUDENTS' ABSENCES

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UW faculty members have a long tradition of working closely with students to enable their success when they miss class for justifiable reasons. These reasons include illness, family emergencies, dangerous weather, and major religious observances. They also include participation in such UW-authorized programs as debate, intercollegiate athletics, student competitions, and artistic performances. This memo outlines ways to foster this culture without sacrificing academic rigor.

Professors and students share responsibility for managing excused absences:

All instructors shall permit students who have official authorized absences to make up work without penalty in the classes missed. An authorized absence, however, merely gives the individual who missed the class an opportunity to make up the work and in no way excuses the student from the work required.¹

This regulation leaves room for a range of strategies, depending on the nature of the class and the assignments involved. Here are a few examples:

1. The professor or a colleague may proctor exams, tests, or quizzes given to the affected students before or after the official test time. This approach may require slight alterations to the assignment, to prevent academic dishonesty while maintaining fair and comparable levels of challenge to the students.
2. Professors or other academic employees, from UW or from other institutions, may proctor exams, tests, or quizzes given to the affected students while the students are traveling. These away-from-home accommodations involve releasing the assignment in question to the off-site proctors, often in electronic formats.
3. In cases involving student athletes, Professor Alyson Hagy, UW's Faculty Athletics Representative, can work with instructors here and on other campuses to have the students complete assignments while traveling. In the case of other competitions or performances, faculty members overseeing the program should be willing to provide guidance to the students' other professors.
4. When students miss class sessions because of illness, it is usually best for the health of professors, other students, and the community at large for the afflicted students to stay at home. The students need not supply an official excuse, and professors should not try to judge the medical merits of students' explanations. Instead, professors should work with the students in good faith to find other ways to complete the required activity.

¹ See UW Regulation 6-713, viewable at <http://www.uwyo.edu/generalcounsel/files/docs/uw-reg-6-713.pdf>.

This list is far from exhaustive. As with any teaching techniques, all such approaches require some care to reduce the opportunity for academic dishonesty. Proper management of the assignment and clear communication with any alternate proctors are essential here.

One approach that is not acceptable is to count other tests, quizzes, or exams more heavily for the affected students than for other students. This approach has little pedagogical justification, and it treats students inequitably, whether or not it effectively favors the absentees or the other students.

If questions arise about how to treat student absences fairly and in a fashion that remains consistent with the goals of the course, please feel free to consult with your department head, someone in the office of the Dean of Students, or, in the case of a student athlete, Professor Hagy.