Attendance Policy: Undergraduate Optometry Students

A. Attendance Policy

Preamble
Attendance is advantageous for student engagement and learning, and essential for participation-based activities (e.g., clinical practice, labs, and in-class active learning and assessments). Full attendance demonstrates professionalism and respect for colleagues, faculty, staff and patients of the School of Optometry and Vision Science given the work that accommodating absence creates. However, special circumstances may warrant absence from a mandatory activity, and accommodation will be considered for reasonable requests from students.

This policy articulates the School of Optometry and Vision Science’s requirements when undergraduate students miss scheduled program activities, with the exception of external placements in Optom 458 and Optom 468.

Mandatory and non-mandatory attendance
The following list differentiates student activities that require mandatory attendance from those that are non-mandatory:

*Mandatory attendance*
- Clinical assignments
- Skills/other laboratories
- Small group sessions (TBL, grand rounds, etc.)
- Assessments—i.e., activities in which students are required to submit and/or engage in work for assessment (e.g., tests, final examinations, laboratory examinations)

*Non-mandatory attendance (but recommended)*
- Lectures and other large-group sessions (unless otherwise specified in the course syllabus)

Students are responsible for knowing the content covered in a session, regardless of whether they attend or not.

Principles related to notification and approval of absence from a mandatory activity
Although special circumstances may warrant an absence from a mandatory activity, students are responsible for submitting applications for any planned absence or timely and satisfactory explanation for unplanned absences from mandatory activity. The Undergraduate Studies Committee1 (the Committee) is responsible for decisions regarding student absence (Notification of absence guidelines and procedures appear in Section B).

For any absence, whether absence was pre-approved or not, the course instructor will decide nature of the accommodation for the missed activity (see [http://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/Regulations-Accommodations](http://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/Regulations-Accommodations)). There is no guarantee that midterm tests or quizzes will be rescheduled (see [http://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/Regulations-Accommodations](http://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/Regulations-Accommodations)). The missed course element weight may instead be transferred to the final examination.

---

1 The Undergraduate Studies Committee is composed of the Associate Director Academic (chair), the Associate Director Clinical Programs both Undergraduate Studies Officers and the Undergraduate Studies Administrator (non-voting)
Students should not make travel arrangements or other commitments before the absence request has been approved. If the request is denied, any financial consequence (e.g., rebooking a flight) is the responsibility of the student. Before entering contests that will involve absence from the program, students should consider if the absence could be accommodated (e.g., during the final examination period).

Submitting an absence notification regarding a mandatory activity is comparable to submitting a university petition, thus students are acknowledging that mandatory activities have been fairly applied and they are seeking relief from one or more of them.

B. Notification of Absence Guidelines and Procedures

1. Planned Absences

When special circumstances that may warrant an absence are anticipated, students are responsible for submitting notification of their planned absence from any mandatory activity, at least four weeks in advance of the activity or once they become aware of the special circumstance. Students are required to submit a Planned Absence Request (Appendix A) by email from their university account, accompanied by supporting documentation.

Guidelines regarding consideration of notification of planned absences

Approval of planned absences from mandatory activities are not guaranteed, thus students are strongly advised not to commit to any plans before receiving confirmation of approval from the Committee. The Committee will take into consideration all relevant factors in determining whether to grant approval for an absence, including but not limited to:

- the reason for the absence
- the type of mandatory activities to be missed and their relative importance or uniqueness in the course(s)
- the number of mandatory activities to be missed and their relative importance or uniqueness in the course(s),
- the student’s academic standing and the anticipated impact of the absence, and
- the student’s professional performance to-date

Previous Planned Absence Requests may be considered in relation to decisions regarding requested absences.

Examples of planned absences (and required documentation) follow:

- Academic conference presentation regarding research presentations or student leadership commitments (e.g., travel days, abstract, and correspondence confirming acceptance of paper/poster. If the student is not the first author, then a letter from the research supervisor and/or first author must explain why the student is being asked to present; proof of relevant student leadership position and role at conference)
- School committee membership (committee and role)
- Family emergency, funeral or memorial service (relationship)
- Health care appointment
- Major personal celebration event (event, participation, role, and travel days, if applicable)
- Organized athletic event or other competition (invited participation; correspondence of invitation)
Attendance Policy: February, 2017

- Religious observance (specific observance, including date(s)/time)
- Other (relevant documentation is required)

**Notification procedures for planned absences**

A Planned Absence Request form (Appendix A) should be submitted to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator, at least four weeks in advance of any mandatory activity or as soon as the special circumstance is known.

Normally, the Committee will meet within one week to consider the request. Information from the affected course instructors will be sought. If the planned absence is approved, USC will inform the affected course instructors and the student. If the matter is sensitive, the details of the absence will be kept confidential. The course instructors will specify any extra measures that the student will be required to take as a result, such as making up missed educational activities, etc. If the accommodation is refused, the student will be provided with a rationale.

All submitted Planned Absence Requests (Appendix A) are retained in the student’s permanent record, whether the absence was granted or not.

**2. Unplanned Absences**

Sometimes, an absence may arise due to unforeseen and often emergent circumstances. In such cases, the School recognizes the right of students to determine the best course of action based on their unique knowledge of, and perspective on, the situation. This course of action may include a decision to miss one or more mandatory activities. The School is committed to fostering a supportive, compassionate environment at the heart of which is the conviction that student well-being is intimately connected to student success. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that a student’s right to decide to miss mandatory activities is accompanied by a responsibility to accept and address any study consequences of the decision.

Students who decide to be absent from one or more mandatory activities are still responsible for submitting notification of their absence as soon as possible, after attending to the immediate needs arising from the situation. This must be done using the Unplanned Absence Notification Form (Appendix B) to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator. If clinic activity was being missed then the clinic should be informed by telephone at the earliest possible time.

**Notification procedures for unplanned absences**

Students are responsible for submitting notification to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator of the missed activities, as soon as possible, after attending to the immediate needs arising from the situation. In the event that the student believes that an extended absence may be required, this should be conveyed in the notification, and will normally require additional supporting documentation (e.g., a verification of illness form). The instructors will specify any extra measures that the student will be required to take as a result, such as making up missed educational activities, etc.
3. Reporting of student absences by lab demonstrators, teaching assistants, other supervisors and administrative staff
Course instructors, laboratory demonstrators, and clinic staff are required to report unplanned student absences from mandatory activities to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator to ensure that students have met their responsibility to request and/or document absences.

4. Consequences of not attending a mandatory activity
Students may be deemed to have committed a lapse in professionalism, if they:

- were able to, yet do not plan, for the absence and submit an absence request
- Do not provide timely and adequate documentation following an urgent/emergent event
- Ignore the decision of the Committee regarding a request for absence

The student’s record will document lapses in professionalism. Lapses could lead to the denial of subsequent absence request and/or the application of academic penalties (e.g., as described in the course syllabus).
Appendix A: Planned Absence Request

The email must be from the student’s UW waterloo email account.

Planned Absence

Email to: Undergraduate Studies Administrator marie.amodeo@uwaterloo.ca

Subject line: Student Last Name, First Name - Request for a Planned Absence

Body of email:
Please complete the following fields including the subject line. Students should not assume a request has been approved until they receive communication from the Undergraduate Studies Committee

Student Number
Last name (registered):
First name (registered):
Common/preferred name (if applicable):
Year of study:

Mandatory activities from which you would like to be excused, be specific:

Clinic Rotation during request (if applicable):

Date(s) of activities:

Are you missing any scheduled assessments (e.g. final exam) during this time (Yes/No)?

Indicate the type of a planned absence and the relevant details.
Type:
Reason/details:

Do you have a plan for making up this activity (explain)?
Appendix B: Unplanned Absence Notification

The email must be from the student’s UWaterloo email account.

Unplanned Absence

Email to: Undergraduate Studies Administrator marie.amodeo@uwaterloo.ca

Subject line: Student Last Name, First Name, UNPLANNED Absence

Body of email:
Complete the following fields including the subject line.

Student Number
Last Name (registered):
First Name (registered):
Common/preferred (if applicable):
Year of study:

Mandatory activities being missed (provide as much detail as possible):

Clinical Rotations (if applicable):

Are you missing any scheduled assessments (e.g. final exam) during this time (Yes/No)?

Students need only to indicate that the absence was due to an urgent health concern, an illness, injury or family emergency. Additional documentation such as a VIF, may be required.

For 'other' unplanned absences, specify the details.

Reason (please specify: illness, injury, family emergency/situation, or other):
Details (only needed if reason is 'other'):

Do you have a plan for making up this activity (explain)?
Flow Charts

Planned Absences

Student submits a Planned Absence Request via email to the US Administrator

Information is gathered from the course instructors

The USC meets within 1 week to make a decision regarding the request

The decision is communicated to the student

If approved the USC informs the affected Course Instructors

Student communicates with the course instructor to arrange any required make-up activity
Unplanned Absences

Student decides to miss a mandatory activity due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances

As soon as possible the student submits an Unplanned Absence Notification form via email to the US Administrator and informs the clinic by phone if applicable

The US Administrator informs the affected Course Instructors

The USC meets within 1 week to consider the situation if the student anticipates that the absence will be for an extended period of time

Information is communicated to the student and instructors

Student communicates with the course instructor to arrange any required make-up activity