

Table of Contents

A. Attendance Policy	2
1. Preamble	2
2. Mandatory and non-mandatory attendance.....	2
3. Principles related to notification and approval of absence from a mandatory activity	2
B. Accommodations for Disabilities and Chronic Health Conditions	3
C. Absences: Guidelines, Procedures and Notification	3
1. Planned Absences	3
<i>a. Factors considered when reviewing a planned absence request</i>	3
<i>Guidelines for planned absence from Clinical Courses (OPTOM 348A/B, 458, 468, 478)</i>	4
<i>Guidelines for planned absence from External Clinical Clerkships (including OPTOM 458 at HSOC)</i>	4
<i>Examples of planned absences (and required documentation), including for all clerkships:</i>	4
2. Unplanned Absences	5
3. Quest Self-declared Absences	5
<i>a. Self-declared Short-term Absences</i>	5
<i>b. Pandemic Event / COVID -19 Self-declared Absence</i>	6
<i>c. Notifying the UGSC of a Self-declared Absence</i>	6
4. Notification Procedures for Absences	6
<i>a. Planned Absence Request Yrs 1-3 and Yr 4 WOVS Term</i>	6
<i>b. Unplanned Absence Request Yrs 1-3 and Yr 4 WOVS Clerkships</i>	7
<i>c. Planned or Unplanned Absence Request Yr 4 External Clerkships</i>	7
5. Reporting of student absences by lab demonstrators, teaching assistants, other supervisors and administrative staff.....	8
6. Consequences of not attending a mandatory activity	8
D. Challenging the Committee’s Decision	8

A. Attendance Policy

1. 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 optometry students miss scheduled program activities in the optometry program. The intention of this policy is to have the student go through the Undergraduate Studies Committee¹ (UGSC/the Committee) rather than contacting individual instructors, laboratory demonstrators or clinic personnel to communicate an absence. This is in place to circumvent situations where inconsistent decisions are made between instructors and/or students. Alerting an instructor, laboratory demonstrator or clinic to a sudden unplanned absence is, however, encouraged.

2. 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
- 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 outline).

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

3. 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, and timely and satisfactory explanations for unplanned absences, from mandatory activity. The USGC is responsible for decisions regarding student absence when the request concerns absence from a mandatory activity at WOVS. Absence guidelines and procedures appear in Section C.

For any absence, , the course instructor will decide nature of the accommodation for the missed activity. There is no guarantee that missed course elements will be rescheduled. The course outline may indicate the consequence of missing a course element and may include transfer of the weight of the missed course element to the final examination.

Students should not make travel arrangements or other commitments before receiving a decision for an absence request. 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 would reasonably be accommodated (e.g., a planned absence during the final examination period would likely **not** be accommodated).

In submitting the request, students are acknowledging that they are seeking relief from one or more mandatory activities, and that this relief is an exception to the course/program expectations.

B. Accommodations for Disabilities and Chronic Health Conditions

AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum.

If a student suspects that their disability or chronic health condition will likely impact their ability to complete a mandatory activity/activities in the program, then they must register with AccessAbility who will determine the accommodations required. Registration with AccessAbility should be made as soon as possible when accommodation is needed. It needs to be renewed at the beginning of each academic term and the renewal is a streamlined process because of previous registration. Registering with AccessAbility late in the term may not allow time for AccessAbility to process requests. AccessAbility services will contact the course instructor and the Committee to coordinate accommodations.

C. Absences: Guidelines, Procedures and Notification

1. Planned Absences

When special circumstances that may warrant an absence is anticipated, students are responsible for submitting their request for a 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, accompanied by supporting documentation (outlined below). Faculty members, instructors or administrative staff who are asked directly by a student to accommodate a planned absence should re-direct the student to submit their request via the online application (see Section 3) to the UGSC.

a. Factors considered when reviewing a planned absence request

Approval of planned absences from mandatory activities are not guaranteed, thus students are strongly advised not to commit to any plans before receiving a decision from the Committee. The Committee will take into consideration all relevant factors available to them when making a decision, 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) or clinical experience,
- the student's academic standing
- the student's professional performance to-date

Previous Planned Absence Requests may also be considered in relation to decisions regarding future planned absences.

Guidelines for planned absence from Clinical Courses (OPTOM 348A/B, 458, 468, 478)

Students should assume their obligations to the clinical program and to patients are paramount, and that permission to be absent from clerkship rotations will be given only when clearly appropriate.

Missed Clinical Assignments at Waterloo Optometry and Vision Science (WOVS) Clinics.

Students are required to submit a planned absence request for anticipated absences from clinic in OPTOM courses 348A/B and 478. When reviewing the request, the Committee will take into account the impact on the provision of clinical care at the School's eyecare clinics. In some cases, planned absences may not be approved if it requires cancellation of clinical services. In particular, non-curricular activities that receive a large number of students desire to participate in and may, as a consequence, result in a limited number of requests being approved. If a planned absence is approved, a make-up clinic day is scheduled at the end of term. Students are reminded not to make travel plans until the make-up schedule has been released to ensure all course requirements are completed.

Guidelines for planned absence from External Clinical Clerkships (including OPTOM 458 at HSOC)

Students are required to submit a planned absence request for anticipated absences from clinic in OPTOM courses 458 and 468 directly to the Clerkship Administrator. If the absence is for curricular related activities, the absence will be considered endorsed and make-up time may not be required. Students are allowed a maximum of 3 endorsed days from their external clerkship site (including travel) without additional clinic make-up. If a student exceeds 3 endorsed days and for all non-curricular absences, make-up time will be required. In addition to the guidelines listed above, planned absences may not be approved during the orientation week of the external clerkship, or during the final week of the external clerkship to ensure completion of all patient care activities.

In cases of bereavement or chronic illness (with doctor's note), a student may require a longer period of absence from their Clinical Clerkship. These cases will be dealt with on an individual basis.

Examples of planned absences (and required documentation), including for all clerkships:

- Academic conference presentation regarding research presentations, student certification or leadership commitments (e.g., travel days, abstract, and correspondence confirming acceptance of paper/poster). If the student is not the first author of a research presentation, 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 their role/activities at the conference should be provided.
- 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)

- Religious observances commensurate with the University's recognized list (specific observance, including date(s)/time)
- Other (relevant documentation is required)

Note for religious observances: If there are a number of religious observances that are known in advance, a single Planned Absence Request can be made requesting all of the absences.

Note: When booking medical appointments in advance, consideration should be given to what clinical activity would be missed. Absences from Primary Care or Optical Services are easier to accommodate at the end of the term than specialty clinical services.

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 consequences of that decision.

When the unplanned circumstance results in the student being absent from one or more mandatory activities, the student is responsible for submitting notification of their absence as soon as possible, after attending to the immediate needs arising from the situation.

Verification of Illness form (VIF): You may require a VIF if you are ill and miss mandatory activities. It is preferred that you use Campus Wellness to obtain the form (UW service). It will provide the dates and level of incapacitation to the UGSC, but not your diagnosis. If you are determined to be severely incapacitated, you should not attend any activities at the School for the duration of the illness. There is a charge for the form to be filled out paid to Campus Wellness, which the student pays.

3. Quest Self-declared Absences

<https://uwaterloo.ca/quest/help/students/how-do-i/self-declare-absence-undergraduate-students>

The University has a portal on Quest where two types of absence can be self-declared: (a) a short-term (up to 48hr) absence, and (b) a pandemic related event. **If you complete one of these absence declarations on Quest, you must also complete the optometry absence request form (see 3c).**

a. Self-declared Short-term Absences

Students can use Quest to self-declare an absence of up to 48 hours. This short-term absence can be declared for any reason and requires no documentation. A maximum of one self-declared short-term absence will be allowed per academic term and it cannot be self-declared retroactively.

Instructors are expected to provide the student with an accommodation for any missed assessments during the short-term absence window.

A short-term absence can only be declared during the Formal Lecture Period and not in the final examination period. Similarly, students that have received an approved absence for OEBC or NBEO examinations (Canadian and American Board examinations) will not be able to take a self-declared short-term absence in the days prior to the OEBC or NBEO examination.

If a student needs to be absent during the examination period, they must complete the planned/unplanned Optometry Absence Request Form (<https://uwaterloo.ca/optometry-vision-science/current-students/optometry-student-resources>) and they will also need to provide documentation for the absence.

b. Pandemic Event / COVID -19 Self-declared Absence

<https://uwaterloo.ca/quest/help/students/how-do-i/self-declare-absence-undergraduate-students>

You must not attend campus if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or you are required to isolate. To help you decide if you should be absent and/or in isolation, you can use the provincial self-assessment tool (<https://www.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>). If absence or isolation is indicated, you should complete the self-declared absence for a public health event on Quest.

c. Notifying the UGSC of a Self-declared Absence

If you have filled out a Quest self-declaration of absence you must also complete a WOVS Unplanned Absence Request Form. When completing the WOVS form, please check one of the options that corresponds with the self-declaration that you have made on Quest:

- Short term absence
- Public Health event

You should also identify any mandatory activities that you will miss when absent, as described in section **4. Notification Procedures**; this informs the UGSC of your Quest self-declaration of absence.

4. Notification Procedures for Absences

Students should anticipate that each approved planned or unplanned absence from a clinical assignment is generally contingent upon making up that time at a later date within the same clinical rotation. If an absence from an external clerkship is unable to be made up during the period of their external clerkship, the absence will carry forward, and the student will be required to make-up that time at the University of Waterloo Optometry Clinics prior to completing their fourth year. **Students may not make-up clinic time prior to the planned absence date.**

a. Planned Absence Request Years 1-3 and Yr 4 WOVS Term

A Planned Absence Request form should be submitted to the UGSC through the UW Optometry and Vision Science website *at least four weeks in advance of any mandatory activity or as soon as the special circumstance is known.*

The Planned Absent Request form is online at:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/optometry-vision-science/current-students/optometry-student-resources>

Submission of this form sends an email to the Undergraduate Studies Admissions and Program Manager (CC: to the Undergraduate Studies Committee Chair).

Normally, the Committee will meet within one week to consider the request. Incomplete information in the request form will result in a delay for the decision. Information from the affected course instructors

will be sought by the Committee. The student **should not** approach the instructor and make arrangements with them. The Committee will email a decision to the student and to the affected course instructors.

If the planned absence is approved, the decision letter will specify any extra measures that the student will be required to take as a result, such as making up missed educational activities or change in assessment weighting. The details of the reasons for the absence will be kept confidential to the Committee and are not shared with the instructor. If the accommodation is refused, the student will be provided with a rationale. All submitted Planned Absence Requests are retained, whether the absence was granted or not.

b. Unplanned Absence Request Years 1-3 and Year 4 WOVS Clerkships

Students are responsible for submitting an Unplanned Absence Request form to the Undergraduate Studies Committee as soon as possible, after attending to the immediate needs arising from the situation or after completing the Quest self-declaration of absence.

Unplanned absence due to a medical reason for one day or more will require supporting documentation (e.g. a VIF), unless the absence is a Quest self-declaration. For 4th years, a VIF is required only if the absence from clinic is more than one consecutive day. If the student believes that an extended absence of more than 1 day may be required, this should be conveyed in the notification, and may also require additional supporting documentation. The instructors will specify to the Committee any extra measures that the student will be required to take as a result.

If clinic activity will be missed due to the emergent circumstance then the clinic should be informed no later than 7am on the day of the absence by email using clinicoperations.manager@uwaterloo.ca.

The Unplanned Absent Request form is online at:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/optometry-vision-science/current-students/optometry-student-resources>

Submission of this form sends an email to the Undergraduate Studies Administrator (CC: to Undergraduate Studies Committee Chair).

c. Planned or Unplanned Absence Request Year 4 External Clerkships

An Absence Request Form must be completed and submitted to the Clerkship Administrator for both planned and unplanned absences.

If the absence request is for a planned absence, it must be submitted *at least 4 weeks in advance of any mandatory activity or as soon as the special circumstance is known.*

If the absence request is unplanned (due to an emergent situation, illness etc.) the absence must be reported to the Clerkship Administrator *no later than one week after the first day of absence.* The site supervisor must initially authorize the absence before submitting the form and the Course Instructor for external clerkships will determine the amount of make-up time required.

The absence request form is online at:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/optometry-vision-science/current-students/optometry-student-resources>

Submission of this form sends an email to the Clerkship Administrator (CC: to the Course Instructor for external clerkships).

5. 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 Admissions and Program Manager (Optometry.ugc@uwaterloo.ca) to ensure that students have met their responsibility to request and/or document absences.

6. 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
- Fail to follow-up with instructor for completion of missed mandatory course elements

Lapses in professionalism will be documented and could lead to the denial of subsequent absence requests and/or the application of academic penalties (e.g., as described in the course outline).

D. Challenging the Committee's Decision

If the student feels that the Committee's decision is unfair or has not considered important, emergent and relevant information, the student can challenge the decision. As outlined in Policy 70 Section 4c

<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70>

the student may pursue a Grievance because:

"...the action of a faculty member or staff member of the University affecting some aspect of his/her University life has been unfair or unreasonable."

The policy also indicates (Policy 70, Appendix B), that the first step in the procedure is to email/meet with the Chair of the Committee to seek to informally resolve the issue. If the outcome of this step is that the Committee's decision is unchanged, the student may proceed with submitting a Policy 70B Challenge to the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies in Science.

The Grievance procedure is intended to be an arm's length review of the decision that the Committee makes when the student feels that the decision is unfair. It is the student's right to question an unfair decision, and there are no additional penalties applied for pursuing a challenge.