



University Senate TRANSMITTAL FORM

Senate Document #:	14-15-21
PCC ID #:	N/A
Title:	Proposed Policy on Excused Absence
Presenter:	Charles Delwiche, Chair of the Academic Procedures & Standards (APAS) Committee
Date of SEC Review:	April 19, 2016
Date of Senate Review:	April 28, 2016
Voting (highlight one):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On resolutions or recommendations one by one, or 2. In a single vote 3. To endorse entire report 4. For information only
Statement of Issue:	<p>In January 2015, Undergraduate Studies submitted a proposal to the Senate pertaining to excused absences for undergraduate students. The proposal called for the creation of a new excused absence policy that would apply to all types of excused absences and would replace the current III-5.10(A) University of Maryland, College Park Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances and V-1.00(G) University of Maryland Policy for a Student's Medically Necessitated Absence from Class, as well as cover information contained in the Undergraduate Catalog. In addition, the Senate Office received a proposal from the Provost's Student Advisory Council regarding a proposed bereavement procedure for students.</p> <p>The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) charged the Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee with consideration of a new umbrella policy on excused absences. The SEC also requested that the Student Affairs Committee review the proposals and submit feedback and recommendations directly to APAS.</p> <p>During summer 2015, the Senate Office also received a proposal for an extension of the excused absence policy to cover military service. The proposal was submitted on behalf of the University of Maryland's Veteran's Steering Committee. The SEC charged both APAS and the Student Affairs Committee with review of the</p>

	additional proposal, and sent an amended version of the committees' charges asking them to consider whether military services should be included in an excused absence policy.
Relevant Policy # & URL:	<p>III-5.10(A) University of Maryland, College Park Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances http://umd.edu/policies/2014-iii-510a.html</p> <p>V-1.00(G) University of Maryland Policy for a Student's Medically Necessitated Absence from Class http://umd.edu/policies/2014-V-100g.html</p>
Recommendation:	APAS recommends that the Senate approve its recommended University of Maryland Policy on Excused Absence, which immediately follows its report, as a replacement for III-5.10(A) University of Maryland, College Park Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances and V-1.00(G) University of Maryland Policy for a Student's Medically Necessitated Absence from Class. If approved by the Senate and the President, all reference documents, including the Undergraduate Catalog and Faculty Handbook, should likewise be updated to reflect the new policy.
Committee Work:	APAS reviewed this topic during the 2015-2016 academic year. APAS reviewed similar policies and procedures at peer institutions and discussed the possibility of the creation of an online, centralized reporting/request mechanism at the University. APAS reviewed the text of the current relevant policies, as well as the information in the Undergraduate Catalog. APAS also discussed various aspects of excuse absence procedures and practices on campus and nationwide. APAS identified two elements as particularly important for the implementation phase of its final recommendations, which are further discussed in the report: 1) centralized reporting, and 2) updates and supplementary guidance in both the Undergraduate Catalog and the Faculty Handbook on best practices in implementation. APAS reviewed the text of the proposed policy as submitted by Undergraduate Studies and decided to craft its own umbrella policy. After numerous iterations of a draft policy, on April 9, 2016, the APAS Committee voted in favor of forwarding its recommended policy on excused absence to the Senate for consideration.
Alternatives:	To not approve the APAS Committee's recommended University of Maryland Policy on Excused Absence.
Risks:	There are no associated risks.
Financial Implications:	There are no financial implications at this time.
Further Approvals Required:	Senate approval, Presidential approval.

Senate Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee

Report on Senate Document # 14-15-21

Proposed Policy on Excused Absence

April 2016

2015-2016 APAS Committee Members

Charles Delwiche, Chair
Britt Reynolds, Ex-Officio, Undergraduate Admissions Rep
Mark Shayman, Ex-Officio, Graduate School Rep
William Cohen, Ex-Officio, Provost's Rep
Ann Smith, Ex-Officio, Undergraduate Studies Rep
Adrian Cornelius, Ex-Officio, University Registrar Rep
Robin Pike, Faculty
Marilee Lindemann, Faculty
Charles Mitter, Faculty
Eric McKenzie, Faculty
Richard Klank, Faculty
Douglas Roberts, Faculty
Linda Moghadam, Faculty
Brian Barker, Faculty
Daniela Wagner-Loera, Faculty
Lelyn Saner, Faculty
Emily Heavin, Exempt Staff
Mark Rivera, Graduate Student
Stephanie Gill, Undergraduate Student
Kevin Adams, Undergraduate Student
Lindsay Strehle, Undergraduate Student

BACKGROUND

In January 2015, the Office of Undergraduate Studies submitted a proposal to the University Senate pertaining to excused absences for undergraduate students. The proposal called for the creation of a new excused absence policy that would apply to all types of excused absences and would replace the current III-5.10(A) University of Maryland, College Park Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances and the V-1.00(G) University of Maryland Policy for a Student's Medically Necessitated Absence from Class. The proposal included a single proposed excused absence policy, which had language drawing from the Religious Observances policy, the Medically Necessitated Absence policy, and the Undergraduate Catalog. The goal of the proposal was to present a single policy with a common approach to informing an instructor of absence, when documentation is needed, and the types of documentation required. The proposed policy attempted to reflect current policies and practices at the University in a single document. In addition, around the same time, the Senate Office received a proposal from the Provost's Student Advisory Council regarding a proposed bereavement procedure for students.

The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) met in spring 2015 and reviewed the proposals from Undergraduate Studies and the Provost's Student Advisory Council. The SEC decided to charge the Academic Procedures and Standards (APAS) Committee with consideration of a new umbrella policy on excused absences (Appendix 1). The SEC also requested that the Student Affairs Committee review the proposals and submit feedback and recommendations to APAS, in order to fully consider the impact of the proposed policy and to provide for an understanding of the perspectives of both faculty and students.

During the summer of 2015, the Senate Office also received a proposal for an extension of the excused absence policy to cover military service. The proposal was submitted on behalf of the University of Maryland's Veteran's Steering Committee. The SEC decided to charge both APAS and the Student Affairs Committee with review of the additional proposal, and sent an amended version of the committees' charges asking the committees to consider whether military services should be included in an excused absence policy as part of the current review of the Proposed Policy on Excused Absence (Appendix 2). The Student Affairs Committee was again asked to submit a memorandum to APAS regarding the committee's stance on the proposal.

COMMITTEE WORK

The APAS Committee began reviewing the charge in during the fall 2015 semester. It began by reviewing the text of the two relevant current University policies: 1) III-5.10(A) University of Maryland, College Park Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances (Appendix 3), and 2) V-1.00(G) University of Maryland Policy for a Student's Medically Necessitated Absence from Class (Appendix 4). The committee also read the section of the Undergraduate Catalog that discusses excuse absence procedures (Appendix 5). The committee found that "excused absence" is not defined in current policy. In addition, the committee received and reviewed memos from the Student Affairs Committee regarding its recommendations on the practicality of an umbrella policy (Appendix 6) and on coverage for military service (Appendix 7).

The committee also reviewed similar policies and procedures for excused absences at peer institutions, including the University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign, the University of Wisconsin - Madison, Indiana University - Bloomington, the University of California - Berkeley, the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, the University of Minnesota, Michigan State University, Ohio State University, Rutgers University, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Iowa, the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, Purdue University, Northwestern University, the University of Michigan, and the University of California - Los Angeles (see Appendix 8). The committee reviewed whether these institutions had policies, and if so, whether the policies discussed coverage for religious observances, medical/illnesses, bereavement leave, military service, academic/university-sponsored activities, and any other categories. The committee found that policies at institutions across the nation vary greatly in terms of coverage offered, outside of coverage for religious observances. Some of the policies appeared to leave substantial interpretation and individual judgment to each college/school or instructor. Only a few policies or procedures specifically covered military service.

The committee talked about how “excused absence” is currently defined in the Undergraduate Catalog, which indicates that it is practice at the University to “excuse the absences of students that result from the following causes: illness of the student, or illness of a dependent as defined by Board of Regents policy on family and medical leave; religious observance (where the nature of the observance prevents the student from being present during the class period); participation in university activities at the request of university authorities; and compelling circumstance beyond the students control.” The committee reviewed input and feedback from the Director of the University Health Center regarding policies for granting and administering medical notes at universities across the nation and found that the vast majority of universities in the United States do not require medical excuses. Committee members also gathered departmental practices and attendance procedures to share with the committee, in an effort to compare how different units on campus handle excused absence requests from students.

The committee also talked at length about the nature of make-up work and current procedures for make-up arrangements; for instance, the Religious Absence policy notes that it is the “student’s responsibility to contact the instructor for each course in which work is missed, provide appropriate written notification and make arrangements for make-up work or examinations.” It was also noted that the Medically Necessitated Absence policy indicates that the frequency of the absence and whether or not the absence coincides with a major scheduled graded event determine the type of excuse necessary.

Throughout the course of its discussion, the committee talked about the taxonomy of absences, including predictable absences (e.g., religious observances, University-sponsored activities like attendance at a conference, some personal events like a wedding), unpredictable absences (e.g., illness, bereavement), and somewhat predictable absences (e.g., military service, family leave). The committee talked about the duration of excuses absences (e.g., a single class/one event, multiple classes/one event, and multiple classes/more than one event). Timeliness of requests was also discussed (e.g., that predictable absences could be requested within the first two weeks of the semester, whereas unpredictable absences should be requested as soon as is practical). The committee also talked about what types of documentation is appropriate to require for excused

absence requests (e.g., using “verifiable” documentation for major graded events, self-signed notes for minor graded events).

The committee also discussed related ideas, including the importance of attending class and how classes with a significant amount of in-class participation manage excused absences. The committee talked about courses that use “Drop-N” practices, and how excused absences should not provide a reduced course load of work for students in most cases.

During the committee’s deliberations there were two elements that the committee identified as particularly important for the implementation phase of its final recommendations: 1) centralized reporting, and 2) updates and supplementary guidance in both the Undergraduate Catalog and the Faculty Handbook on best practices in implementation:

Centralized Reporting

Some institutions (notably the University of Michigan and Rutgers University) use an online, centralized reporting/request mechanism, by which a student can request excused absence by submitting a single request online (and uploading documentation as appropriate to the request), with the system then sending the request to all courses in which the student is registered, as well as maintaining a record of such requests for advising and administrative purposes. Such an online system would simplify the process of requesting excused absences, would help identify students facing unusual circumstances, and would help ensure consistent application of the excused absence policy. To establish such a system would require resources for its development and implementation, but the benefits would potentially be large, and the APAS Committee strongly recommends that the University work towards establishing such a system.

Updates & Supplementary Guidance

The Undergraduate Catalog and the Faculty Handbook are intended to provide information regarding the implementation and practice of University policies, and as such are more frequently referred to by members of the University community than University policies *per se*.

The Undergraduate Catalog currently has a section on “Attendance and Assessment/Examinations,” which discusses the importance of attendance and the University’s expectation that students will take full responsibility for their academic work and academic progress. This section of the Undergraduate Catalog also notes that attendance and in-class participation may be ongoing requirements and an integral part of the work in some courses. It discusses the responsibilities of students and instructors in regard to in-class participation and the effect of absences on the evaluation of the student’s work in a course. This section of the Undergraduate Catalog references the current policies on Religious Observances and Medically Necessitated Absences from Class. Similarly, the Faculty Handbook has a section on “Student Attendance,” which discusses the need for course syllabi to specify the nature of in-class participation expected and the effects of absences on students’ grades; it also has references to current University policy. The Faculty Handbook mentions excused absences in other sections, as well, including the sections on “Course Assessment Guidelines” and “Syllabus Guidelines.”

The committee felt strongly that both reference documents should continue to provide supplementary guidance to students and faculty regarding best practices in implementation of the new policy, and noted that it would be helpful to have some examples in the Faculty Handbook of syllabus language and grading policies that reflect these best practices. Consequently, the successful implementation of the proposed revisions to the policy on excused absences will require careful revision of these documents to reflect the changes in the policy, as well as to provide updated guidance and examples of best practices for both faculty and students.

During its review, APAS carefully reviewed the text of the proposed policy as submitted by Undergraduate Studies and ultimately decided to craft its own umbrella policy for discussion. After numerous iterations of a draft policy, on April 9, 2016, the APAS Committee voted in favor of forwarding its recommended policy on excused absence to the Senate for consideration. The committee's recommended policy defines excused absence as "an absence for which the student has the right to receive, and the instructor has the responsibility to provide, reasonable accommodations." The committee's recommended policy is organized into four sections: 1) Policy, 2) Notification and Documentation, 3) Academic Accommodations, and 4) Appeals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The APAS Committee recommends that the Senate approve its recommended University of Maryland Policy on Excused Absence, which immediately follows this report, as a replacement for current policies III-5.10(A) University of Maryland, College Park Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances and V-1.00(G) University of Maryland Policy for a Student's Medically Necessitated Absence from Class.

If approved by the Senate and President, all reference documents, including the Undergraduate Catalog and Faculty Handbook as noted above, should likewise be updated and revised to reflect the new policy.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Charge from the Senate Executive Committee (SEC), dated February 23, 2015

Appendix 2 – Amendment to the Proposed Policy on Excused Absence Charge from the SEC

Appendix 3 – III-5.10(A) University of Maryland, College Park Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances

Appendix 4 – V-1.00(G) University of Maryland Policy for a Student's Medically Necessitated Absence from Class

Appendix 5 – Excerpt from the Undergraduate Catalog 2015-2016 section on Attendance and Assessment/Examinations

Appendix 6 – Memo from the Student Affairs Committee, dated July 21, 2015

Appendix 7 – Memo from the Student Affairs Committee, dated October 6, 2015

Appendix 8 – Peer Institution Research, conducted during AY 2015-2016

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND POLICY ON EXCUSED ABSENCE

I. Policy

An excused absence is an absence for which the student has the right to receive, and the instructor has the responsibility to provide, reasonable accommodation.

Students are expected to take full responsibility for their own academic work and progress. Students, to progress satisfactorily, must meet all of the requirements of each course for which they are registered. Students are expected to attend classes regularly. Consistent attendance offers students the most effective opportunity to gain command of course concepts and materials. Excused absences must be requested promptly and must be supported by appropriate documentation.

Excused absences do not alter the academic requirements for the course. Students are responsible for information and material missed on the day of absence. Students are within reason entitled to receive any materials provided to the class during the absence. Students are responsible for making provision to determine what course material they have missed and for completing required exercises in a timely manner.

Events that justify an excused absence include religious observances; mandatory military obligation; illness of the student or illness of an immediate family member; participation in university activities at the request of university authorities; and compelling circumstances beyond the student's control (e.g., death in the family, required court appearance). Absences stemming from work duties other than military obligation (e.g., unexpected changes in shift assignments) and traffic/transit problems do not typically qualify for excused absence.

II. Notification and Documentation

To receive accommodation for an excused absence:

1. The student must notify the instructor in a timely manner. The notification should be provided either prior to the absence or as soon afterwards as possible. In the case of religious observances, athletic events, and planned absences known at the beginning of the semester, the student must inform the instructor during the schedule adjustment period. All other absences must be reported as soon as is practical.
2. The student must provide appropriate documentation of the absence. The documentation must be provided in writing to the instructor by the means specified in the syllabus.
 - a. For medically necessitated absences: Students may, one time per course per semester, provide a self-signed excuse as documentation of an absence from a single class (e.g., lecture, recitation, or laboratory session) that does

not coincide with a major assessment or assignment due date. For all other medically necessitated absences, students must provide documentation from a physician or the University Health Center, upon request of the course instructor.

- b. For all other absences students must provide verifiable documentation upon request (e.g., religious calendar, court summons, death announcement, etc.).
3. Providing false information to University officials is prohibited under Part 9(h) of the Code of Student Conduct (V-1.00(B) University of Maryland Code of Student Conduct) and may result in disciplinary action.

III. Academic Accommodations

In keeping with the USM III-5.10 Policy Concerning the Scheduling of Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observance, “Students shall not be penalized because of observances of their religious holidays and shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances.” For all other excused absences, the student must be provided reasonable accommodation. The accommodation provided should, within reason, neither advantage nor disadvantage either the student or the rest of the class.

If the accommodation is a makeup assessment, it must be timely, at a time and place agreed upon by the instructor and student, cover the same material, and be at the same level of difficulty as the original assessment. In the event that a group of students requires the same makeup assessment, one time and place may be scheduled. The makeup assessment must not interfere with the student's regularly scheduled classes, and must be consistent with the V-1.00(A) University of Maryland Policy on the Conduct of Undergraduate Classes and Student Grievance Procedure.

If makeup work is not feasible, an alternate accommodation for excused absences will be provided. Alternate accommodations will be according to the principles established by the unit offering the course.

Students who miss a substantial number of class sessions or course assignments should seek guidance from an academic advisor with respect to academic options.

Extended absences stemming from active military duty are addressed in the USM V-7.00 Policy on Students who are called to Active Military Duty during a National or International Crisis or Conflict.

Absences related to a student's disability are addressed in the VI-1.00(D) University of Maryland Disability & Accessibility Policy and Procedures.

IV. Appeals

Students who feel that they have unfairly been denied either excused absence or appropriate accommodation for an excused absence should first seek to resolve the disagreement with the course instructor. If the student and instructor are unable to find a mutually agreeable resolution, the student may file an appeal with the head of the administrative unit offering the class. In most cases this will be the Chair of the Department. In the case of non-departmentalized units and interdepartmental programs, this role will be taken by the Dean (or the Dean's designee).

The unit head should use procedures similar to those specified in the III-1.20(B) University of Maryland Procedures for Review of Alleged Arbitrary and Capricious Grading – Undergraduate Students – but with clear indication that the appeal is with regard to excused absence, not arbitrary and capricious grading.