

Joint Faculty Senate/Provost Task Force on Attendance Policy

Final Report – 2022-2023

Membership:

Chair(s): Samantha Prins & Melanie Shoffner

Members: Hollie Hall*, Brent Lewis*, Michael O’Fallon*, Jenn Phillips*, Meg Sander*, Wren Stevens, Kathy Ott Walter

*Ex-Officio members

Charge:

This joint Faculty Senate/Provost task force is comprised of two Faculty Senate representatives, two academic administrators, and four ex-officio members.

The Attendance Policy Task Force will

- review the current JMU student attendance policies ([Undergraduate Catalog, Faculty Handbook](#), III.A.17).
- review the report from the 2018-19 Provost’s Excused Absence Policy Task Force, charged with reviewing JMU’s current policies and practices related to student absences and developing a policy for standardizing absences and excused absences.
- consider the impact of JMU’s move to the Sun Belt athletic conference.
- consider the impact of pandemic-related learning on current attitudes and expectations of faculty and students.
- consult with key stakeholders across campus, as relevant.
- identify concerns and make recommendations.

Summary of Current Semester Activity:

The committee met to discuss the policy drafted at the conclusion of Fall 2022, as mentioned in the mid-year report.

Committee discussions after the mid-year report focused on development of *processes* for the approval of excused absences—specifically those used by the Office of Student Academic Success & Enrollment Management and the Dean of Student—rather than enumeration of activities that might constitute excused absences. The committee considered the following:

- Students should consider the impact of many absences on their learning, whether these are excused or not.
- The draft policy outlines an appeals process to follow if an absence is not excused and/or there is a perceived penalty for the absence.
- The draft policy is useful for cases in which student requests for excused absences are not *otherwise* approved by instructors. This recognizes that most instructors are believed to work

appropriately with students in such situations, and this policy is not intended to interfere with or stop student-instructor communication.

Committee members agreed to submit the revised draft (Appendix 2) for next steps to the Provost’s leadership team, Academic Council, Associate Deans, Academic Unit Heads, and Faculty Senate Steering. The Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs approved the policy (Appendix 1) in April 2023; it was presented to the Board of Visitors that month.

Future Work Planned:

Recognizing the pressures on the timing of the policy’s development, the potential of the excused absence categories on instruction, and the new processes required by the policy, the committee suggests that feedback on the policy and its implementation be sought from stakeholders (e.g., instructional faculty, students, athletic directors, Office of Student Academic Success & Enrollment Management, Dean of Students, OSARP, AUHs, and Deans) in 2023-2024 in order to address potential revisions to the policy.

Appendices

Table of Appendices

| Number or Title | Brief Description |
|------------------------|---|
| 1 (URL) | <u>Academic Affairs Policy #16: Attendance and Excused Absences</u> as published in April 2023. |
| 2 (page 3-4) | Draft policy as submitted by Task Force in February 2023. |

Appendix 2

Proposed Academic Affairs Policy #X Excused Absence Policy

Committee revisions on language: 17 February

1. Purpose

This policy provides guidance on excused absences in relation to class attendance.

2. Authority

The Board of Visitors has been authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia to govern James Madison University. See Code of Virginia § 23.1-1600; § 23.1-1301. The Board has delegated the authority to manage the university to the president. This power is delegated by the President to the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs in areas concerning the Division of Academic Affairs.

3. Definitions

Accommodations

Class

Class attendance policy

Course

Credit-bearing course

Disability accommodations

Documentation

Excused absence

Federally mandated excused absences

Mandatory or unrepeatable course component

University sanctioned event

University-recognized event

University-sponsored event

4. Applicability

This policy applies to all students enrolled in any credit-bearing course at the university, regardless of academic level (e.g., first year, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate, or continuing education). This policy also applies to instructors in all credit-bearing courses.

5. Policy

Instructors must provide an attendance policy for each course. The attendance policy must state any mandatory and/or unrepeatable components of the course and the procedures for notifying instructors of expected excused absences.

Instructors must grant an excused absence for the following events, in accordance with federal law:

- ADA accommodations
- religious observances
- court-imposed legal obligations, such as subpoenas or jury duty
- military service [or obligations]

Instructors must grant an excused absence for the following events in accordance with this university policy after receiving confirmation of student participation in the event by the specific body noted below:

- I) participation in an intercollegiate [or NCAA] athletics event with confirmation from Athletics
- II) participation in a university-sponsored event with confirmation procedure per the Office of the Vice-Provost for Student Academic Success and Enrollment Management (SASEM)
- III) participation in a university-recognized academic event with confirmation of the AUH (and Dean?) of the academic unit sponsoring the event
- IV) major illness resulting in hospitalization with confirmation from the Dean of Students office

The application of excused absences for all other reasons is at the instructor's discretion.

Students are responsible for communicating with instructors in a timely manner and providing the necessary written documentation for all excused absences and requests for excused absences as required by the instructor. Students who plan to have multiple absences should discuss this matter with the instructor at the beginning of the semester so that the impact of these multiple absences can be understood by the student prior to the add/drop deadline for the course.

Instructors are responsible for providing an equitable and reasonable adjustment to any graded assessment that does not academically penalize students for an excused absence.

5.1 Appeals:

Students may choose to appeal if

- A. an instructor denied their request for an excused absence for activities/events outside of those in (II) that are confirmed by SASEM. For activities within the scope of SASEM's approval (II above), no appeals will be accepted (or this will be outlined by the VP for SASEM.)
- B. they believe they have been academically penalized because of an excused absence.

In both cases, students appeal in sequential order to the 1) course instructor, 2) academic unit head for the course, and 3) college dean for the course. A written appeal to the academic unit head must be submitted no later than X or Y business days respectively for (A) and (B) following the written appeal to the instructor. A written appeal to the dean must be submitted no later than Z or T business days respectively for (A) and (B) from the date of receipt of the academic unit head's decision. The decision of the dean is final.

6. Sanctions

Documentation and presentation of requests for excused absences are subject to the honor code. Students who fail to abide by this policy are subject to discipline in accordance with the honor code.

Instructors who fail to abide by this policy are subject to discipline in accordance with the faculty handbook.

7. Responsibility

The authority to interpret this policy rests with the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs.