

Undergraduate Course Attendance and Coursework Completion Policy

Policy number: 203
Policy owner: Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Date of initial publication: July 22, 2020
Date of latest revision: July 3, 2023

SECTION I. PURPOSE

This policy establishes expectations for class attendance and coursework completion in undergraduate courses, defines what can be considered an excused absence from class or the timely completion of coursework, and outlines the process for notification and verification of excused absences.

SECTION II. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

This policy governs all undergraduate courses (regardless of form and regardless of whether the course is credit-bearing) and all St. Thomas undergraduate coursework requirements, including but not limited to final examinations. The expectations set forth in this policy apply to all St. Thomas students enrolled in undergraduate courses (including non-degree-seeking students), all instructors who teach undergraduate courses, and all administrators of academic units that offer undergraduate courses.

SECTION III. DEFINITIONS

When used in this policy, the following terms have the following meanings:

- a. **Academic unit** means a St. Thomas school, college, academic department or academic program, center or institute.
- b. **Acute illness** means a physical or mental health condition that is limited in duration but prevents a student from attending class on a short-term basis. Examples include the flu; strep throat; hospitalization; a mental health crisis; and significant distress associated with a traumatic event, including identity-based trauma.
- c. **Administrator** means a school or college dean or associate dean; a department chair; the director or associate director of an academic program, center or institute; or the administrative leader of any other academic unit.
- d. **Disability** means a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities including, but not limited to caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.
- e. **Excused absence** means an absence from a class or a failure to timely complete required coursework for which a student will not be penalized and will be granted an opportunity to complete make-up work or alternative course requirements, so long as the total number of excused absences in the course is limited as detailed in this policy.
- f. **Instructor** means the person who is assigned to teach one or more credit-bearing courses.

- g. **Identity-based trauma** means significant distress as a result of experiencing a social-identity-based stressful event and/or anticipating that one might be targeted because of one's social identity, including but not limited to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family status, disability, age, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, genetic information, or any other characteristics protected by applicable law. Students experiencing identity-based trauma may express symptoms as an acute illness and/or disability as defined by this policy.
- h. **Undergraduate course** means any course that has a three-digit course number below 500.

SECTION IV. ATTENDANCE EXPECTATIONS

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and timely complete all required coursework for the undergraduate courses in which they are enrolled. Students are responsible for planning their schedules to avoid conflicts with class sessions and course requirements. However, St. Thomas recognizes that there are legitimate circumstances in which students may miss class sessions or be unable to timely complete coursework. In such situations, instructors will excuse the absence and offer make-up work or alternative course requirements in accordance with this policy.

SECTION V. EXCUSED ABSENCES

Instructors will permit and not penalize students for a limited number of reasonably unavoidable absences during the academic term. An absence will be considered reasonably unavoidable (and therefore excused) if the absence was due to circumstances where class attendance or the performance of coursework is impossible, impracticable or would be detrimental to the health or well-being of the student or dependents involved, as further detailed in Sections V.A and V.B below. For circumstances not specifically identified below, the instructor will make a determination whether the absence was due to circumstances that are reasonably unavoidable and therefore may be considered excused.

The total number of excused absences that will be permitted in a single course during the academic term will depend on the specific facts and circumstances, which may include, among other considerations, the percentage and significance of the class sessions and coursework missed. For example, missing more than one (1) week's class meetings for a four (4)-credit course in the fall or spring semester (i.e., an absence rate of approximately seven percent (7%)) generally would be considered excessive barring extraordinary circumstances.

A. Excused Absences Based on Unexpected or Expected Circumstances

The following absences will be excused, subject to the verification and documentation requirements of this policy:

1. Acute illness of the student or a student's dependent;
2. Acute medical conditions related to pregnancy;
3. Medical appointments for non-elective procedures and Veteran's Administration medical appointments that cannot reasonably be scheduled at an alternate time;
4. Participation in intercollegiate athletic events sponsored by the St. Thomas Athletics Department (not including club sports);
5. Personal appearances in connection with subpoenas and other court orders;
6. Jury duty;

7. Military service including, but not limited to, National Guard and Reserves;
8. Bereavement leave in connection with the death of a family member, including travel related to bereavement leave;
9. Religious observances, whether or not they are formally acknowledged on the St. Thomas Academic Calendar, including travel related to the observance;
10. Participation in formal meetings of the Faculty Senate, Student Senate and Board of Trustees by students selected as representatives to those bodies; and
11. Activities sponsored by St. Thomas if identified by the executive vice president and provost or the provost's designee as the basis for excused absences (e.g., research presentation at a refereed scholarly conference, music performances).

B. Excused Absences Based on Disabilities

Students with a disability who anticipate or experience challenges adhering to class attendance or coursework requirements for reasons related to their disability are expected to contact Disability Resources promptly after the student first identifies the need for an accommodation with respect to class attendance or coursework requirements. Disability Resources will work with the student and the instructor to determine whether the student is eligible for accommodations and to obtain appropriate supporting documentation. Accommodations will be determined on an individual, case-by-case basis depending on the particular facts and circumstances. Accommodations are not retroactive.

SECTION VI. NOTIFICATION AND VERIFICATION

Students who have a disability accommodation in place must notify instructors of class absences and other needs in accordance with the accommodation plan. Instructors may not request students to provide the instructor with documentation that verifies a student's disability. Verification for disability-related absences and modified coursework requirements are handled through Disability Resources, which obtains and maintains all required documentation. Instructors with questions about disability accommodations are expected to contact Disability Resources.

Students who do not have a disability accommodation related to class absences or coursework deadlines must notify their instructor promptly upon becoming aware of the need for an absence or make-up work. The notice must include information explaining the circumstances the student believes will justify the absence. It is the student's responsibility to request make-up work under this policy. Students are expected to request arrangements for make-up work as soon as practicable, and ideally in advance of any absence or the due date for the coursework. Instructors are not required to automatically offer make-up work to students who miss class sessions or fail to timely complete required coursework, even when the absence or delay is excused under this policy.

If a student's absence or failure to meet coursework requirements is not covered by a disability accommodation, instructors may request the student to produce documentation to verify the reason for the absence if (i) the student has had more than one illness-related absence or more than a single episode of missed work, or (ii) the absence involves missing laboratory sessions, exams or important graded in-class assignments. When requesting documentation to verify absences due to illness, instructors may not request students to identify the specific illness or medical condition that necessitated the absence or request other information regarding the illness or medical condition. (Note that St. Thomas Health Services does not provide excuses for routine health issues that may lead to missed classes, laboratory sessions, studios, exams, projects or deadlines. More information

on the Health Services excuse policy is available at:
[https://www.stthomas.edu/healthservices/services/privacy/excuse/.](https://www.stthomas.edu/healthservices/services/privacy/excuse/)

SECTION VII. OPPORTUNITY FOR MAKE-UP WORK

If requested by a student, instructors must provide a reasonable opportunity for the student to make up missed work or complete course requirements in an alternative way (including exams or other course requirements that have an impact on the course grade) if:

1. The absence was excused in accordance with Section V;
2. The student has fully complied with the notification requirements in Section VI; and
3. The student has provided sufficient verification if requested by the instructor, in accordance with Section VI.

However, instructors are not obligated to offer make-up work or alternative course requirements to a student who has missed so much of the critical components of a course, even for legitimate reasons, that arrangements for make-up work or alternative course requirements would not be reasonable.

Academic units may establish more specific requirements for notifying instructors and completing the associated make-up work, especially when the absence involves activities that may not be possible to make up, such as laboratory or clinical sessions and performances, so long as the requirements do not conflict with this policy.

SECTION VIII. APPEALS

If a student believes the student has been wrongly denied the opportunity to make-up work due to disagreement with the instructor about the reasonableness or unavailability of an absence or missing coursework, the student may pursue the complaint using the usual process for appeals of student grievances related to academic matters.