

# Attendance Flexibility as an Accommodation

A FAQ guide for Faculty

## **What is an attendance flexibility accommodation?**

Federal law requires colleges and universities to consider reasonable accommodation of attendance policies, when appropriate, to accommodate a student's disability. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) will first meet with the student to evaluate whether the request is a reasonable accommodation.

Once a student is approved for this accommodation, it would appear on their accommodation letter. The student is then directed to meet with each of their instructors to discuss a contingency plan in the event attendance flexibility will be needed in that course. They will also ask the instructor to sign an attendance agreement and provide a copy of that to the instructor and ODS following the meeting.

Please note: This accommodation is determined on a case-by-case and course-by-course basis.

## **Must an instructor provide flexibility if attendance is an essential component of a course?**

No, in the event attendance and participation are essential functions, and flexibility would fundamentally alter the course, accommodations may not be considered reasonable. However, WPI would like to be clear that this is not solely a subjective decision to be made by a faculty member without consideration of specific objective criteria. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has provided the following guidelines to determine if attendance is an essential part of a course:

- Is there classroom interaction between the instructor and students, and among students?
- Do student contributions in the classroom constitute a significant component of the learning process?
- Does the fundamental nature of the course rely upon student participation in the classroom as an essential component of learning?
- To what degree does a student's failure to attend a class constitute a significant loss to the educational experience of other students in the class?
- Is classroom attendance a component of grade calculation?
- What are classroom practices and policies regarding attendance and what does the course description and syllabus say regarding expectations for class attendance?

Each of these criteria should be considered carefully before a decision is made with regard to specific class attendance policies. The Office of Disability Services is available as a support to instructors who are questioning whether attendance is an essential component of the course and/or if they have considerations outside of this list. Please contact our office if you have any questions regarding this or any accommodation for a student in your course.

## **What if a student sends an accommodation letter but does not reach out to discuss a plan?**

- It is the student's responsibility to work with the instructor to initiate a contingency plan for attendance after sending the accommodation letter and then to provide a signed attendance agreement to the instructor for their own signature. As stated in our Attendance Flexibility Policy, the accommodation cannot be provided if a discussion and agreement between the student and instructor has not taken place. Students are encouraged to do this as soon as possible at the start of the term.
- We strongly encourage students and instructors to develop a plan in writing regarding attendance flexibility for each course. WPI's Attendance Flexibility Agreement form is available on the ODS webpage. It is encouraged that the following questions be considered:
  - How and when should a student notify the instructor of the need to miss class?
  - In the event of a missed class on an assigned due date or exam date, what would be the policy or expectation for that assignment or exam?

## **What if a student misses an exam due to a disability related absence?**

- If a student misses an exam due to a disability-related absence, the Exam Proctoring Center (EPC) would be available as an option to make up the exam, if needed. Please contact the Office of Disability Services to discuss EPC-related support.