

## Guidance Regarding Shift from “Attendance” to "Participation and Engagement”

---

The university is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which we can work and support students' learning. A significant portion of maintaining a safe and healthy environment means we should not pressure students to come to campus for bi-modal classes when they are ill or have been potentially exposed to COVID-19. Communicate early and often with students that you are willing to help, and encourage them to reach out if they have questions or concerns.

Faculty are encouraged to be flexible with students regarding their attendance policy. Academic Affairs asks the following of faculty:

- 1) Students who have COVID-19 or a potential exposure should be directed to Health Services or the UHCL COVID-19 page for reporting. There is a process to verify and notify faculty when a student is absent for COVID-19-related illness or exposure. Faculty are asked to help ensure that students who have COVID-19 or a potential exposure have access to content within their Blackboard course so that students may continue learning even if unable to attend class
- 2) Faculty teaching bi-modal classes are asked not to have an attendance policy that penalizes students who are unable or unwilling to come to campus due to verified illness (outlined in 1) or due to fears and concerns regarding their safety.
- 3) In the absence of a program-wide policy or policy applied to all sections of the same course, students in bi-modal classes should be given the same flexibility for in-person exams outlined above regarding attendance.

While the Provost is requiring that all faculty teaching bi-modal and online synchronous courses create an attendance policy that does not penalize a student for not being able to attend, faculty are encouraged to craft policies that encourage or require engagement' and participation' in the course. Ultimately, the university does not want any course policy incentivizing a student to attend class while ill or when they have been exposed to the virus.

---

Faculty are encouraged to consider shifting terminology from *attendance* to *participation* or *engagement*. Participation may look like attending in person sessions, attending synchronous (remote/online) class sessions, submitting work, participating in discussion boards and office hours, and contributing to other activities and assignments within your course. It is imperative that you explicitly state the criteria for participation and engagement on your syllabus and on your Blackboard page.

Below are considerations, guidance, and resources to assist with developing class engagement and/or participation policies to ensure that students are interacting with the content, learning, meeting objectives, and more.

- Faculty should be prepared for increased student absenteeism. Absenteeism is projected to possibly be as high as 30-40% for any course during the peak of the pandemic. It is challenging to require verification of illness, particularly when: health care providers might be unlikely to provide written excuses; students can get COVID-19 positive test results with no written verification; [CDC guidance](#) directs those who believe they have been exposed to COVID-19 to quarantine as a safety precaution; and more.

- Examine your course attendance and “make-up” policies and consider if they can be reconceptualized. With the current transmission and infection rates, it is advised that students who are ill, who have been potentially exposed, or students caring for someone who is ill, not attend class. Students may also have significant caregiving responsibilities. For these reasons, we advise that you review your attendance and “make-up” policies and consider possible alternatives such as measuring student engagement or class participation.
- Consider including a statement on your syllabus to explicitly tell students not to come to an in-person class if they are ill or suspect exposure
  - *If you are feeling ill or have a respiratory illness of any kind, with fever and cough, you should stay home to prevent spreading it to others. You should not come to class if you know, or have reason to suspect, you have been in close contact with a person infected with COVID-19. If you are unable to attend class due to illness or concern of exposure, please contact me immediately via email or direct message in Teams (or your mechanism of choice).*
- Articulating clear guidelines for participation will help students understand expectations for class discussions (on discussion boards, in forums, groups, etc.). The following are examples of language for Class Participation or Student Engagement from other universities. Feel free to integrate them to fit the context of your class.
  - *Participation is a major component of this class, but how you participate is (in part) up to you. In-class discussions (in f2f or synchronous sessions), contributions to BlackBoard discussion boards, and correspondence with me will all be factored into participation. Respect for the classroom space -- helping to create an environment where other students can learn -- will be considered, as well.*
  - *Participation comes in four forms: 1) Vocal in-class/section participation (in in f2f sessions or synchronous); 2) engagement on discussion boards with your peers; 3) contributions made in the ‘chat’ during our synchronous class sessions and 4) Reading responses. For Reading Responses: Please submit responses (1 paragraph/3-5 sentences) about one of the required readings for every lecture. In order to receive full credit, you must do this before the class that the reading is due. Partial credit will be awarded for late responses. [Offer guidance regarding what is expected on the reading responses]*
  - *Students enrolled in bi-modal and online synchronous courses are expected to be fully engaged in the course even in weeks when they are unable to attend our scheduled sessions (f2f or synchronous online). Maintaining engagement and positive academic standing in the course, will require participation. Students are expected to continue an ongoing online presence. This requires participating in course related activities that may include, but is not limited to reading announcements, taking exams/quizzes online, participating in group work, posting to discussion forums, submitting assignments, watching lectures, and carrying out the requirements outlined in the syllabus. It is a good practice to login to online courses several times a week to stay informed of news, announcements, grades, assignments, and other important course information.*
  - *Attendance is not graded for this course. If you are ill, or have been potentially exposed, please do not come to a f2f course session. Instead, it is expected that each student will engage in Class Participation. Logging into our BlackBoard shell is not sufficient, by itself, to demonstrate participation by the student. Students are expected*

*to establish a record of participation in academically-related activities in order to earn participation points. Academically related activities include, but are not limited to:*

- *attending and contributing during a synchronous online class session where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the instructor and students;*
  - *attending a f2f session, if students are healthy and able to do so;*
  - *submitting your assignments on-time;*
  - *taking an exam;*
  - *attending small group discussions;*
  - *engaging with ideas, questions, contributions in the chat during our synchronous classes;*
  - *participating in an online discussion in our discussion boards/forums, or*
  - *initiating contact with a faculty member to ask a question about the course content.*
- *Due to the nature of the subject material for this class and its instructional format, class engagement is important to complete this course successfully. Students are adults and must establish their own priorities. If illness, emergency, or better educational opportunity prevents your attendance in a f2f session or our synchronous online sessions, I would appreciate an e-mail. I do not “give permission”, however, and the student is fully responsible for any gaps in knowledge or missed materials. There will be resources available online (ex: session recordings, mini-lectures, discussion prompts, etc.) to assist the student in their efforts to cover the missed content. Late arrival and/or early departure from f2f or synchronous sessions is disruptive, please take steps to minimize this impacting our class discussions. As indicated in the grading structure presented for this class, students can earn participation points by engaging in other ways, even if they cannot attend a f2f or synchronous session. However, your comportment when you can join us, such as: arriving late, leaving early, etc. will impact your participation grade. Please see the “Participation” section of the syllabus for additional guidance.*
- *Success in this course is dependent on your active participation and engagement throughout the course. As such, students are required to complete all assignments by the due date, and to actively participate in class discussions. Additionally, students are expected to:*
- *Log on at least three times a week – on different days in order to complete weekly assignments, assessments, discussions and/or other weekly deliverables as outlined in the syllabus;*
  - *Participate in the weekly threaded discussions, this means that, in addition to posting a response to the thread topic presented, students are expected to respond to each other and comment on questions from the instructor and/or other students;*
    - *Students will not receive participation/engagement credit for the course in a particular week if they have not posted on the discussion forum and/or submit assignment/essay or complete assessment if administered in that week.*