SOM OP: 40.02, Student Attendance Policy

PURPOSE: The purpose of this School of Medicine (SOM) Policy and Procedure is to explain attendance expectations for students in the School of Medicine.

REVIEW: This SOM Policy and Procedure will be reviewed within each odd-numbered fiscal year by the Student Affairs Committee (SAC). Revisions will be forwarded to the Office of the Dean for approval and publication.

POLICY/PROCEDURE:

1. General. This policy is intended to address questions about student attendance in courses throughout the medical school curriculum.

2. Years 1 and 2.
   a. Attendance Requirements: There are no personal days for medical students in Years 1 and 2. While highly recommended, attendance is not mandatory, except as specified for certain components of individual blocks.
      1) First day of the Block (Orientation to the Block)
      2) Scheduled examinations
      3) All other mandatory activities identified by the Block and Associate Directors and listed in the course syllabus.
   b. Excused Absences:
      1) Requests for an excused absence from mandatory activities must be submitted online no later than 45-days in advance of the date(s) of the requested excused absence. Request must include the specific mandatory activity (or activities) that would be missed. Mandatory block activities will be available to students via the SOM online curriculum management system at least 60-days prior to the start date for each block.
      2) A student is allowed no more than four (4) excused absences per academic year.
      3) A written rationale for the student’s request for an excused absence must be supplied.
      4) Categories for Non-Emergency Excused absence.
         a) Absence to attend professional meeting/conference. Eligibility for the category of absence includes student must have ≥75 grade average in the current Block; or if the request is for an excused absence at the beginning of a block (prior to exam 1), the student must have had a ≥75 grade average in the prior Block. See paragraph 8 for more information.
b) Absence due to religious observance. Student must provide name and dates of the religious event/holiday and the location at which they will be observing the holiday.

c) Wedding attendance. Approval may be granted for immediate family (as defined under TTUHSC Family and Medical Leave policy HSC OP 70.32), or if the student is a confirmed member of the wedding party. Student must indicate his/her relationship to couple, role in the wedding (i.e., attendee or member of wedding party), date of ceremony, and location of event.

d) Other requests. Other categories for requesting a non-emergency excused absence are considered at the discretion of the Student Affairs Committee.

c. Requesting Leave of Absence from Mandatory Activities:

1) To request a leave of absence, a student must submit SOM OP 40.02.A, Year 1-2: Medical Student Absence Request Form to the Office of Student Affairs.

2) Completion of this form will generate an email to relative course coordinator(s), who will in-turn verify student eligibility based upon academic standing and prior number of excused absences.

3) Following confirmation from the course coordinator regarding student eligibility for an excused absence, an email is generated to the course director or responsible faculty member requesting review. The course director must respond/comment within 48-hours of the request.

4) After 48 hours, the request is sent via email to all voting members of the SAC. Members of the SAC may select one of three choices:
   a) Approve
   b) Deny
   c) Hold for further discussion.

5) A decision is automatically reached when one of these choices receives 50% + 1 (quorum) votes from the SAC.

6) If the decision is to further discuss the request or if no choice reaches a quorum, then the request will be discussed at the next SAC meeting.

7) Once a decision is reached by the SAC, the student, the course director or responsible faculty member and the course coordinator are automatically notified by email of the SAC decision. The course coordinator is responsible to monitor and log all approved requests.

d. Approval or Denial of an Unexcused Absence Request:

1) Each request is considered individually, except when several students request absence to attend the same meeting.

2) Decision to grant or deny an excused absence request is made by vote of the SAC members.
3) When a request is granted, the student is responsible for coordinating with the block director or faculty member to remediate any missed curricular requirements.

4) The requesting student shall be notified of the SAC decision by email.

e. **Appealing a Denial of Request for Leave of Absence:** Any decision regarding an excused absence request from a mandatory activity by the SAC is final. If a student disagrees with the SAC decision, the student may appeal in writing to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, who will make a final determination in consultation with the Chair of the Student Affairs Committee.

In the event the student does not adhere to the decision of the SAC and misses a mandatory activity without approval (or meeting other excused absence criteria), the absence will be considered unexcused.

f. **Excessive and Unexcused Absences:** Excessive excused or any unexcused absences are not permitted, and students will be referred to the Student Conduct Administrator or the SPPCC for possible disciplinary action. Graded activities missed due to unexcused absence(s) cannot be repeated.

3. **Year 3.**

a. **Attendance Requirements:** Students in Year 3 are required to be present each day and for all exams and to be present to carry out all clerkship duties and responsibilities as scheduled, except as allowed under the excused absence policy.

b. **Excused Absences:** Students may be granted up to 12 excused absences during completion of the Year 3 curriculum. To request a leave of absence, a student must submit SOM OP 40.02.B, Year 3: Medical Student Absence Request Form for the respective campus ([Amarillo](#), [Covenant](#), [Lubbock](#), or [Permian Basin](#)) to the campus Student Affairs Office.

Any absence for any reason must be reported to the Clerkship Director and Coordinator. If an absence for illness is for more than one day, documentation of the illness and/or a diagnosis from a licensed health care provider must be provided to the Clerkship Director/Coordinator and forwarded to the student’s campus Student Affairs Office for inclusion in the student’s file.

c. **Personal Days:**

1) Up to four of the 12 excused absence days may be taken as “personal days”. Requests for personal day absences should be submitted and approved by the responsible Clerkship Director at least 30 days in advance of requested absence(s).

2) “Personal days” would include any absence not otherwise defined as a sick day, observance of a religious holiday, or attendance at a professional meeting. Examples of personal day absences include, but are not limited to, attending family events (e.g., weddings, graduations, birthdays) and addressing personal business needs.
3) “Personal day” absences will not be granted during mandatory attendance activities. Mandatory attendance activities in Year 3 are MS 3 Orientation, all graded activities (e.g., NBME exams), Integration Seminar, class meetings, and the Longitudinal Clinical Skills Exam (LCSE). Additional “mandatory attendance” activities may be designated at the start of each clerkship.

4) Students may appeal to their home campus Student Affairs office for approval of up to two additional (beyond the allowable four) personal days during the Spring semester of the academic year.

a) One additional “personal day” may be requested during January – March and one additional “personal day” may be requested during April – June.

b) Approval of either of these additional personal days must be agreed upon by both the student’s home Student Affairs Office and supervising Clerkship Director.

c) If allowed, these two additional personal days encompass a maximum of six of the twelve excused absence days during Year 3.

d. Sick Days/Leave: Sick leave is intended for use only in the event of personal illness or to assist a member of the immediate family who is actually ill.

1) For purposes related to sick leave “immediate family” is defined as:

   a) Individuals who reside in the student’s household and are related by kinship, adoption, or marriage

   b) Foster children certified by the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services who reside in the student’s household; or

   c) Minor children, whether or not living in the student’s household.

2) Use of sick leave for family members not residing in the student’s household is strictly limited to the time necessary to provide care and assistance to a spouse, child (minor or adult), or parent of the student who needs such care and assistance as a direct result of a documented medical condition.

3) The use of sick leave for any reason other than due to personal illness or family health needs as detailed above will be considered misconduct and subject to referral to the Student Conduct Administrator on the student’s home campus and/or disciplinary action through the Student Promotions and Professional Conduct Committee Year 3-4 Subcommittee.

e. Absence to Attend Professional Meetings: Approved absences to attend professional meetings in Year 3 will not be classified as “personal days”. See paragraph 8 for more information.

f. Absence to Observe a Religious Holiday: Requests for an excused absence in observance of recognized holy days and/or religious observances must be submitted to a student’s home campus Student Affairs office no later than 30 days in advance of the request for the excused absence.
1) Absences for observance of religious holidays will be reviewed/approved on an individual basis by the Academic Dean responsible for Student Affairs on a student’s home campus.

2) If approved, any missed work days in observance of a religious holiday will be subtracted from the total of 12 allowable excused absences per academic year.

g. Tracking of Student Absences: Absences during Year 3 will be reported on the clerkship grading form and documented in the student’s home campus Student Affairs Office for inclusion in the student's file.

1) All student absences will be centrally tracked through each regional Student Affairs Office. Once a student reaches a total of 8 absences during the third year (for whatever reasons) notices will be sent to all remaining clerkship coordinators noting the exact number of absences the student has already accrued.

2) Any student who misses more than 4 working days in an eight-week clerkship will be referred to the Student Conduct Administrator and may be referred to the SPPCC Yr3-4. Additionally, any student who is absent for more than 12 working days during the six clerkship periods that constitute the MS 3 curriculum will be referred to the Student Conduct Administrator and may be referred to the SPPCC Yr3-4. The student will be given the opportunity to explain the circumstances resulting in the missed days. As a result of this discussion, it is possible that a student could be:
   a) Required to repeat a clerkship or elective; OR
   b) Required to repeat the year; OR
   c) Dismissed.

h. Appealing an Absence: If a student in Year 3 disagrees with a decision regarding absences or missed days, he/she may appeal in writing to the Academic Dean responsible for Student Affairs on their home campus who will make a final determination in consultation with the Chair of the Student Affairs Committee.

i. Excused Absence for Integration Seminar: All students in Year 3 will be excused from regular clerkship duties for the presentation of Integration Seminar (Student Grand Rounds). Students will also be excused for 1-2 planning sessions for the Integration Seminar as described in the syllabus for this course. Students on night float will be excused at midnight prior to the seminar presentation.

j. Unexcused Absences: Unexcused absences are not permitted in clerkships and may result in disciplinary action.

4. Year 4.

a. Any absence during Year 4 for any reason must be reported to the Elective Director and Coordinator.

b. Excused absences in Year 4 are categorized in the same manner as Year 3 in paragraph 3.c-f (e.g., personal day, sick day, attendance at professional meeting, observance of religious holiday) with an additional category for residency interview day(s).
c. There is a limit of 12 excused absences per academic year during scheduled curricular time. Non-emergency absences must be requested no later than 15-days prior to the requested date of the absence. To request a leave of absence, a student must submit SOM OP 40.02.C, Year 4: Medical Student Absence Request Form for the respective campus (Amarillo, Covenant, Lubbock, or Permian Basin) to the campus Student Affairs Office.

d. Students must be present for at least 90% of all required rotations, selective rotations and elective rotations.

1) A student may therefore be excused for one (1) day in a two-week rotation and two (2) days in a four-week rotation without expectation for remediation of missed time in order to complete elective requirements.

Rotations available on a Monday through Friday schedule have minimal to no availability for make-up days. Rotations with a 7-day-a-week work schedule may contain extra days on the weekend available for remediation of missed time in excess of the number of excused absences allowed per two- or four-week elective experience.

2) If absences occur in excess of one (1) day for a two-week rotation or two (2) days for a four-week rotation, the Year 4 Director or Elective Director will determine the format and timing of the make-up.

e. Absence for Residency Interviews:

1) Non-emergency excused absences (including for residency interviews) must be requested no later than 15 days prior to the requested date of the absence.

A short notice residency interview offer that cannot be scheduled (requests made less than 15-days in advance) requires documentation in support of the short notice. (*Note: Students in Year 3 of the Family Medicine Accelerated Track are covered by this section.)

2) It remains the prerogative of the rotation/Year 4 Director to grant or to deny requests for non-emergency excused absences and to establish the conditions for making up any work that is missed.

f. Appealing an Absence: If a student in Year 4 disagrees with a decision regarding absences or missed days, an appeal may be submitted in writing to the Academic Dean responsible for Student Affairs on the home campus to make a final determination in consultation with the Chair of the Student Affairs Committee.

5. Attendance at Graded Activities. No credit will be given for any graded exercise missed without a valid excuse.

6. Illness or Personal Emergency on Exam Days.

a. If the student is unable to participate in a required learning activity/clinical experience or take an exam at the scheduled time due to illness or a personal emergency, the student must contact the appropriate Block Director, Clerkship Director, or the perspective Office of Student Affairs prior to the start of the scheduled activity so appropriate notice is given to the Course Director. Email is acceptable. If extreme circumstances (e.g., severe illness, need to leave town...
immediately, etc.) prevent the student from contacting SOM personnel prior to the start of an exam, a classmate or immediate family member may call on the student’s behalf as soon as is realistically possible. In either case, it is necessary to leave a phone number where the student can be contacted.

b. If the absence from the scheduled exam is due to illness and the student has not yet seen a physician, the student will be directed to proceed to a licensed health care provider to ensure that appropriate health care is delivered and to provide documentation regarding illness as the basis for the missed exam.

c. No credit will be given for any graded exercise missed without a valid excuse. If a student believes this consequence is not appropriate to the particular situation, he/she may appeal this action in writing to the Academic Dean responsible for Student Affairs on the home campus, who will consult with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, the Clerkship Director responsible for the exam, and one other Clerkship Director from that year to determine if the prescribed course of action is appropriate. In the event a second exam is missed and again the designated procedures are not followed, the student will meet with the Academic Dean responsible for Student Affairs on the home campus and the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs to discuss further administrative action to be taken.

7. Absence Due to Bereavement. Students requesting excused absence(s) due to bereavement are expected to notify the home campus Office of Student Affairs as soon as it is known an absence is necessary. If a required curricular activity (e.g., an exam, required learning activity, clerkship or elective days) will be missed due to a bereavement absence, the student is expected to provide the Office of Student Affairs with record of the individual’s death (e.g., obituary, in memoriam listing, etc.).

Excessively late or “after the fact” notification of a bereavement absence and/or inability to provide external supporting documentation will be referred to the Student Conduct Administrator for review of possible disciplinary action.

8. Attendance at Professional Meetings. If a student wishes to be excused from class or clerkship responsibility to attend a professional meeting, he/she must first obtain permission from the home campus Student Affairs Office as far in advance of the anticipated absence as possible. The Academic Dean responsible for Student Affairs on the student’s home campus will determine whether the meeting/function merits an excused absence and may consult with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs when necessary.

a. If permission for an absence is granted, one of the following options is available to the student regarding the missed work days:

1) Presenter: Student is presenting original scholarly work, invited to speak based on “expertise” in a specific area, or is representing the School of Medicine in an official capacity at a recognized professional meeting. Absence(s) may be excused with no expectation to make up missed work days.

a) Option should be used only once per academic year for up to maximum of three (3) work days.

b) Appeals can be made to the Academic Dean responsible for Student Affairs on the student’s home campus for additional absences in this category.
2) Participant: Student attending professional meeting as a participant:
   a) Missed work days will be subtracted from the total of 12 allowable excused absences per academic year; or
   b) Made up by the student through arrangement with the Clerkship Director (if possible).

b. Expected supporting information for attendance at professional meetings includes name, date(s), and location of conference; student's role (e.g., attendee, presenter, standing committee member); travel arrangements; registration confirmation; and/or invitation to present scholarly work. One travel day before and after a confirmed meeting date is allowed.

c. Appeals for absences for other reasons related to attending professional meetings can be made directly to the Academic Dean responsible for Student Affairs on the student's home campus.

d. The Student Affairs Office will inform the Course/Clerkship Director of the decision regarding a student's absence to attend a professional meeting, and the student will then contact the Course/Clerkship Director directly to arrange for making up missed work (if required). A student must be in “good academic standing” to be granted permission to attend a professional meeting or other school-related activity.

9. Code of Conduct for Student Attendance and Absences. Any student submitting an excused absence request for any reason is expected to abide by the following:

   a. To represent any and all information contained in, or related to, the absence request completely and truthfully. If it is determined a student has engaged in intentional deception or misrepresentation of information as part of his/her excused absence request process, this will be considered a breach of professional conduct and the student will be subject to review and disciplinary action by the Student Conduct Administrator and/or the Student Promotions and Professional Conduct Committee.

   b. Any attempt to influence a SAC member as part of the excused absence request process will also be considered a breach of professional conduct and the student(s) involved will be subject to review and disciplinary action by the Student Conduct Administrator and/or the Student Promotions and Professional Conduct Committee.

ATTACHMENTS

SOM OP 40.02.A – Year 1-2: Medical Student Absence Request Form

SOM OP 40.02.B – Year 3: Medical Student Absence Request Form (Amarillo, Covenant, Lubbock, Permian Basin)

SOM OP 40.02.C – Year 4: Medical Student Absence Request Form (Amarillo, Covenant, Lubbock, Permian Basin)