

Guidelines

Faculty Responsibilities: Meeting Classes and Absences from Classes

Introduction:

Teaching is the primary responsibility for faculty at Towson University, and faculty accept professional obligations associated with the degree of independence they have in carrying out their work. Faculty must meet their classes regularly and reliably. Faculty appointments also involve other responsibilities as well. The University encourages faculty scholarship and the dissemination of scholarly work, as well as engagement with project partners and the larger community. Participation by faculty in professional organizations and conferences contributes to the sharing of ideas and may otherwise enhance the faculty member's professional development; engagement with partners or with community groups may enhance the University's effectiveness in meeting its wider mission. Such forms of engagement may entail short absences from the campus during an academic term that stand in tension with the obligations of teaching. Questions may legitimately arise, then, as to when and on what terms faculty may miss a class or classes in order to pursue professional activities related to their appointments.

Guidelines:

The Faculty Handbook provides policies on faculty members' responsibility to meet classes and on faculty absences from class (Chapter Seven, Sections VIII and IX). The first policy stipulates that "Faculty members must meet classes as scheduled unless illness or absence arranged according to University policies prevents. If a faculty member is absent due to illness, the department chairperson must be notified so that arrangements for class coverage, announcements of assigned work, and dismissal may be made." The second provides that "Absence for professional purposes and for personal reasons may be allowed at the discretion of the department chairperson. Arrangements for class coverage must be made and such absences may not be for more than five days unless approved by the provost and dean of the college."

In the case of final exams, the Faculty handbook is explicit (Chapter Seven, Section XXI): "When giving final examinations faculty members must adhere to the specific days and times published in the Schedule of Courses (online only). In courses that do not lend themselves to final examinations (such as seminars and colloquia) faculty members must meet their classes during the time scheduled for the examination."

When faculty are absent from classes and from the campus, there is a cost to students and very often a cost to colleagues in the department or beyond who may be asked to cover academic or service responsibilities. Each faculty member who anticipates an absence has the responsibility to mitigate its effects to the greatest degree possible for students and for colleagues. The provisions of the Faculty Handbook require that the chair be notified immediately of any unplanned absence. They also require that planned absences receive

explicit approval from the chair prior to the absence and confirmation of arrangements for class coverage. Class coverage must not mean simply an assertion that students have been given an assignment for the period of absence but that structured class work has been developed or arranged, comparable to that for a normal class period when the faculty member is present. This might include presentations by other faculty or visitors, proctored exams, or online student exercises and interactions that clearly support student learning and the purposes of the course. The Faculty Handbook policies establish a limit of five days, beyond which any absence must have both the dean's and provost's approval. The Provost has delegated responsibility for such approvals to the deans through the process described below.

The limit of five days is equivalent to one week of normal class meetings, whether that involves one, two, three, or more than three class sessions. A faculty member thus should not normally plan to be absent from the campus for the equivalent of more than a week's worth of classes in the same course during any semester. In the case of a course meeting once a week, this would mean a limit of one class missed through planned absence; a commensurate limit would apply for courses meeting two or three times a week. Department chairs should communicate this limit to faculty and should refer faculty requesting any additional absence to the approval process below.

The University acknowledges that on rare occasions, a professional opportunity of special significance for the faculty member's work may justify an absence that extends beyond the equivalent of five days or one week's worth of classes during the semester for any one course or for all courses taught. A conference organized as an annual event would not normally meet this standard; one organized on a national or international level to mark a particular event or anniversary by bringing together the leading scholars in a particular field might do so. As valuable as these distinctive experiences might be, faculty continue to have a primary responsibility to their students and their courses during the term. Thus, consideration of any absence during a term of more than one week (whether a contiguous period or a combination of shorter trips) must be handled collaboratively and carefully.

Process for Absences That Exceed One Week or the Equivalent:

*A faculty member considering professional engagements that would entail an absence of more than a week, or that would entail missing more than a week's worth of meetings in the same course during the semester, is **responsible for consulting with the department chair and the dean in a timely fashion before making any commitment to such travel.** Approval should be requested upon receipt of an invitation or at first consideration of a commitment; normally the process should be completed at least two weeks before a planned absence. Without prior approval, the commitment should not be made.*

1. The **faculty member** must notify the department chair and the dean of the potential absence, explaining the purpose of the time away from class, the relationship of the scholarly conference or professional opportunity involved to the work of the faculty member, and the anticipated contributions of the faculty member to the conference or project involved. The faculty member should provide information on the duration of the

conference or activity and should plan individual participation in ways that will reasonably limit time away from campus.

2. The **faculty member** should explain what steps will be taken to provide substantive teaching-learning experiences for students in each course affected by the absence that are appropriate to the format of the course.

3. The **department chair** will assess the apparent value of the conference for the individual faculty member, evaluate the adequacy of the proposed arrangements for student learning and course continuity, and indicate to the dean whether the absence appears justified from the perspective of the department.

4. The **dean** will evaluate the rationale and arrangements for the proposed absence, seek additional information if needed, and approve or disapprove the interruption of the faculty member's teaching and other campus responsibilities.

The process described in 1-4 above must be documented in writing. It must be clear to all concerned that the required explanations have been provided, that the chair has had an opportunity to comment, and that the dean has provided explicit authorization before the faculty member plans an absence exceeding the limits defined above. This process should be completed no later than two weeks prior to the planned travel or other professional activity, except in circumstances when notification of need to attend a professional meeting occurs closer in timing than two weeks.

Approved by the Deans' Council 10/6/09

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