What Does Flexibility With Attendance and/or Deadlines Mean? A Guide for Implementation

We have learned that faculty and students would like more guidance regarding the accommodation “flexibility with attendance” and “flexibility with deadlines.” This information is designed to help faculty in assessing how to implement these accommodations in the classroom. Also, this guide is intended to assist students in discussing this accommodation with faculty. In this guide, we outline factors for faculty to consider, the process, responsibilities, and some common scenarios.

When is flexibility appropriate? Some factors for faculty to consider:

Generally, students are expected to follow established classroom attendance and deadline policies. However, some disabilities are episodic in nature and as a result a student may have to miss class/deadline for medical concerns. While we want to encourage faculty to be flexible with the attendance/deadline policies, faculty are not required to alter any essential functions of the course.

Faculty may find it helpful to consider the following when determining whether the course component is an essential function of a course.

Attendance:
- Is there classroom interaction between the instructor and students and among students?
- Do student contributions in class constitute a significant component of the learning process?
- Does the fundamental nature of the course rely on student participation as an essential method for learning?
- To what degree does a student’s failure to attend constitute a significant loss to the educational experience of other students in the class?
- What do the course description and syllabus say?
- What method is used to calculate the final grade?
- What are the classroom practices and policies regarding attendance?

Deadlines:
- To what degree does a student’s failure to submit work timely constitute a significant loss to the educational experience of other students in the class?
- Does the fundamental nature of the course rely on meeting deadlines as an essential component for learning?
- What do the course description and syllabus say?
- What method is used to calculate the final grade?
- What are the classroom practices and policies regarding deadlines?

What is the process?

1. The Disability Center determines that the accommodation(s) are reasonable. We explain to students that this does not mean that they can miss as many classes as they want or that they never have to submit work by the established deadline. Also, the student is responsible for completing all coursework. Finally, we explain that it is the student’s responsibility to discuss this accommodation(s) with the professor.
2. The student is responsible to initiate the conversation about these accommodations early in the semester. This accommodation cannot be provided without a discussion between the professor and student. Some students register late in the semester and some wait to give professors accommodation memos. In these cases, professors are not expected to provide any retroactive accommodations. However, it may still be helpful to have this information, even at a late point in the semester.

3. The professor should assess the impact of attendance and deadlines on the class and determine what accommodations can be made. There are some classes in which this accommodation is not appropriate. These tend to be classes when the student learning is being assessed in the classroom or when allowing an absence would place an undue burden on the professor. The professor and student can use the discussion points at the end of this guide to address all aspects of the course, including how attendance and deadlines can be accommodated when the student misses homework, projects, papers and exams. It is also important to discuss professor expectations of the student when the student misses class or a deadline. The key to implementing these accommodations successfully is for faculty to be very clear about their expectations.

4. The Disability Center is available to provide support for faculty and students regarding this accommodation. Feel free to contact us at any point in the process.

**Student Responsibilities:**

- Initiate conversation early with faculty. Be clear in communications. Understand that not all classes are can offer flexible attendance/deadlines. The student should not just hand the professor their memo and expect to receive the accommodation. A conversation must occur between the student and professor.

- The student is still required to complete all coursework. When a student misses class or recognizes they will not be able to meet a deadline, the student should notify their professor immediately. The accommodation of flexibility regarding attendance does not mean that the student will automatically get an extension for work that is due on a day they are absent. The student should still make every attempt to turn their work in via email. If the student will not be able to turn in a homework assignment or if they miss a quiz or exam, it will be their responsibility to contact the professor to ask if the student will be allowed to make up the work. If the student will miss a deadline, it is their responsibility to contact the professor to ask if they will be allowed an extension.

- Keep the Disability Center Access Advisor/Coordinator updated and informed if the student is missing class/deadlines. If the professor contacts the Disability Center, it is helpful for the student’s Access Advisor/Coordinator to know about the situation. *The Disability Center will not contact instructors on behalf of the student.*
Professor Responsibilities:

- Be available to discuss the accommodation with the student.

- Determine how essential attendance/deadlines is to the course. If it is determined, through a deliberative consideration (using the bullet points listed above), that attendance/deadlines is an essential requirement this accommodation may not be applicable.

- Be very clear in expectations when meeting with the student. The professor may choose to use the discussion points at the end of this guide to assist in this conversation. The professor can contact the Disability Center for assistance with this discussion.

- Sometimes student absences become excessive. While this should always be addressed first between the professor and the student, the professor is welcome to contact the Disability Center to help address the concern.

Disability Center Responsibilities:

- Approve this accommodation only when appropriate.

- Provide student guidelines and information about his or her rights and responsibilities.

- Provide assistance to faculty in determining how to implement this accommodation in the class.

- Provide support to student and faculty when questions or difficulties arise due to these accommodations.

Scenarios:

1. Professor allows 3 absences and then students’ grades drop by a letter grade. A student with flexibility regarding attendance may be allowed 6 absences and 24 hours to make up any work missed.

2. In a foreign language course, a student is told at the start of the semester that the professor cannot allow much flexibility regarding attendance as much learning depends on classroom interactions. However, the professor will keep the student’s accommodation in mind. Student is hospitalized for a week at the end of the semester and cannot complete a presentation. Professor allows the student to make the presentation up with only the professor as this does not essentially alter the course objectives.

3. Professor gives clicker points for attendance. Professor allows student to respond to questions via email. However, student must contact professor and answer questions within 24 hours of class.

4. Student and professor agree that student can miss class more often than classmates as long as all of the work is completed. However, it is nearing the end of the semester and student has not turned in assignments, has not been in contact with the professor, and has not attended class. In this case, the professor would not be expected to extend deadlines as student has not taken responsibility for maintaining communication and is not completing coursework.
Discussion Points for Flexibility Regarding Attendance:

These discussion points can serve as a resource for the faculty member and student outlining how classroom attendance, exams and quizzes, assignment due dates, and instructor notification are to be handled in case of absences or missed deadlines.

Classroom Attendance: Is there an attendance policy? Is there room for flexibility? Are there a maximum number of absences allowed?

Exams and Quizzes: Will student be allowed make ups? Is there a timeframe within which make ups must be completed?

Assignment Due Dates: Would student be able to turn in work electronically? Will there be flexibility if a student is absent on a day that an assignment is due? If there is flexibility, how much is appropriate? Consideration should be given to potential pitfalls in extending deadlines if extension is given throughout the semester.

Instructor Notification: Do notifications need to occur in advance of an absence or a missed deadline? How does the professor prefer to be notified?