

Student Engagement Guide

Communicating and Engaging with Instructors

The importance of course attendance

Course attendance and participation are essential to student success, regardless of course modality. We recognize that students may encounter unanticipated extenuating circumstances that temporarily impede their ability to attend courses or complete assignments.

When these situations arise, we have compiled some tips for working with your instructors to explain the situation and to be aware of the support resources available to remain or get back on track.

Absence Notification Request Process

In general, absence notifications may be provided by the Dean of Students Office on a limited basis for extenuating circumstances of **three or more consecutive days** when the nature of the absence **falls within one of the following categories:**

- Health Related
- Grief
- Military Training
- Jury Duty
- University Affiliated

For more information, review the [Student Absence Notification Request Procedure](#).

Important Note:

An absence notification issued by the Dean of Students office in limited circumstances does not excuse a student's absence or absolve them of completing academic course requirements. Each faculty member retains discretion in determining if an absence is considered excused and if flexibility can be provided, except in instances required by law or by Equity and Title IX provisions. Faculty may consult with and/or rely on the Dean of Students for a determination.

In all instances, it is the student's responsibility to follow up with the faculty member to discuss the absence and potential options for missed coursework.

Provide Advance Notice

- Ideally, you should let your instructors know as far in advance as possible if you will need to miss class.
- If you are ill or another emergency has occurred, reach out to your instructors directly as soon as you are able to let them know of your absence.
- Review the syllabus to see if your instructors have a preference on how you should communicate with them. Be sure to use their title when you contact them, you should not address instructors by their first name unless requested.
 - Email is a great first step, but you might also want to stop in and see your instructor during office hours or request to set up a time to meet via Zoom or speak over the phone.

How to talk with your instructor about your absence

We recommend that students talk with their instructors up front to help bridge the gap between a short-term health concern, illness or injury, or any other matters that may be impacting ability to temporarily attend classes, focus on classwork, and/or meet academic deadlines.

To assist with communication to your instructor(s), we recommend the following tips:

- Email the instructor using your *S&T email address* or through Canvas, whichever they have deemed as their preferred or means for communication.
- Use clear, concise, and discrete language in communicating. Describe the health concern, need for grief leave, or other unexpected circumstance for which you need a short-term absence.
- Long-term absences should be discussed with the instructor, academic advisor, and Student Accessibility and Testing if a disability accommodation is needed. Further consideration should be given to whether the course fundamental requirements can be met or if incompletes or a withdrawal is an option.
- Utilize the instructor's office hours or ask to schedule an appointment to follow-up about the need and to discuss missed coursework.
- Plan as much as possible and openly discuss any missed work: quizzes, assignments, exams, class participation.
- Create an action plan after consulting with the instructor.
- Continue to follow-up with your instructor(s).
- If you have concerns about what an instructor allows regarding the potential make up of any missed work, you should contact the department chair.

Be Prepared to Do the Work

- Review the syllabus to see what you missed or will be missing.
- If you know about your absence in advance, try to get the work done ahead of time or complete missed assignments as soon as possible.
- When you talk with your instructor, provide them with a proposal on how you will get caught up. Include specific dates of when you will turn in missed assignments or days/times that you are available to make up a missed lab or exam.

Reminder: It's still up to them if they are going to excuse your absence and permit you to make up the time or work. While you are proposing a plan, you are still asking for their permission, so be respectful.

- If you are worried about falling behind or need some extra support, consider working with a Student Success Coach, LEAD or Knack Tutor, or making an appointment with the Writing Center.

Talk to Classmates

- It's always a good idea to try to get the contact information for at least one person in each of your classes. At the beginning of the semester, introduce yourself to someone sitting near you and ask if you want to exchange contact information in case one of you needs to miss class. This way you can ask them for any notes or to share anything you might have missed while you were out.

Sample Email Templates

Example #1 – Advance notice of absence (preferred)

Dear Professor (professor's last name),

I am writing to share with you that I will be unable to attend your class (course name and time of course) on the following dates (insert dates here) due to (insert situation here, i.e., illness/flu) situation. I hope to maintain and complete all course requirements that I will miss during my time away in a timely manner.

Can we set up a time to meet and discuss my upcoming absence and coursework?

Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to talking to you soon.

Sincerely,

Your name

Example #2 - When absence has already occurred.

Dear Professor (professor's last name),

I am writing to share with you that I have not been able to attend your class (course name and time of course) on the following dates (insert dates here) due to (insert situation here, i.e. illness/flu) situation. I am committed to catching up on any course work in a timely manner.

I would like to arrange a time to discuss/meet regarding my absence, the missed work, and possible next steps. When might be a suitable time for this discussion?

Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to talking to you soon.

Sincerely,

Your name

Student Engagement Considerations

Use Office Hours

Take advantage of office hours. These are great opportunities to share or clarify information related to the course.

Don't Be Afraid

Your instructor has office hours for a reason, they are available to listen and assist their students. Ask questions early and often. Your input is valuable.

Prepare in Advance

You and the instructor will benefit from your having content and questions prepared in advance. Share your needs and questions in a respectful and genuine manner.

Clarify Intent or Needs

Be clear about what you need or wish to discuss in advance. This helps the instructor prepare. Outline specific questions, needs, or any uncertainty about course content.

Listen and Express Gratitude

Be an active listener and respond in a respectful way. Keep in mind that your instructor also has limited time, let them know you value their time.

Utilize Help and Resources

Course specific assistance is available through [Knack Tutoring](#), [S&T Tutoring](#), or the [Student Success Center](#). S&T also provides a variety of [resources and services](#) designed to support your holistic well-being and success.

Want to Consult?

Contact your academic advisor, the [Dean of Students office](#) or schedule to speak with a [Case Manager in Student Well-Being](#).