UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
College of Medicine
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Pre-Clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy

Category: SAMC

Responsibility: Academic Director, UGME

Approval: Student Academic Management Committee

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1) Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear and consistent expectations for students, staff and faculty related to student attendance in the **pre-clerkship portion of the MD program.** Other related documents are Student Leadership Absence Policy, and Procedure for Session Attendance Across Sites/Campuses.

2) Scope:

This policy applies to all undergraduate students registered in Years 1 and 2 of the Doctor of Medicine (MD) program at the University of Saskatchewan at all distributed sites/campuses.

3) Principles:

The College of Medicine supports flexible learning and acknowledges diverse student needs. Absences may be approved under specific circumstances, guided by principles of equity, transparency, and confidentiality. Decisions consider the student's well-being, academic responsibilities, and the integrity of the M.D. program.

Regular and punctual attendance is essential. Active participation is expected in all learning environments, including lectures, labs, seminars, tutorials, small groups, and clinical sessions.

As per the University of Saskatchewan Duty to Accommodate policy, Undergraduate Medical Education (UGME) will provide reasonable accommodations to students who experience barriers to their education on the basis of a prohibited ground under the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code. Accommodations must be made up to the point of undue hardship and must not compromise the essential requirements of the program.

Failure to meet attendance requirements may result in

1. Exclusion from final examinations
2. Requirement to repeat the term
3. Review under the M.D. Program Procedure for Concerns with Medical Student Professional Behavior

4) Definitions:

Pre-Clerkship: The first and second years of the University of Saskatchewan Undergraduate Medical Education Program (UGME) are termed "pre-clerkship."

Mandatory Sessions: Mandatory sessions are scheduled for educational activities in which attendance is required. These sessions are considered critical to the development of core competencies outlined in the medical curriculum, and the learning objectives of these sessions are more challenging to learn independently. Examples include orientations, small group and clinical sessions, scheduled assessments, and labs. These sessions are typically scheduled well in advance.

Non-Mandatory Sessions: Non-mandatory sessions typically include scheduled classes, recorded lectures, review sessions, guest lectures, and supplemental talks. These educational sessions cover important aspects of the curriculum. While attendance is highly encouraged, it is not required, allowing students the flexibility to engage with these learning activities at their own discretion.

Independent Learning Time (ILT): Independent learning time refers to designated periods where students study and engage with course material on their own, outside of scheduled classes or mandatory sessions. This time is meant for reviewing lectures, completing readings, practicing clinical skills, or preparing for exams, allowing students to learn at their own pace and according to their individual needs.

Approved Absence: An approved absence is defined as a documented and formally authorized absence from academic or clinical activities, granted in advance through established procedures and requires valid justification and, where applicable, supporting documentation.

Program Integrity: Program integrity refers to the responsibility of the UGME program to ensure that all students who graduate meet the established academic, clinical, and professional standards required for safe and effective medical practice.

Academic Difficulty: Academic difficulty refers to a student's struggle to meet the required academic standards of the program. This may include low or failing grades, unsatisfactory performance in clinical or coursework assessments, Concerns related to professionalism or behavior affecting academic progress.

5) Policy

A. Annual Allowance for Absences

A.1: Maximum Allowance

Students are allowed a maximum of five (5) approved absences per academic year. This includes Planned, Unplanned, and Flex Days. All absences are tracked.

A.2: Absences Exceeding Five Cumulative Days in a Year

If a student's total absences exceed five cumulative days within an academic year, the Year Chair, in consultation with the Academic Director, Director of Student Services, and the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) will assess the situation and determine the appropriate course of action. Possible outcomes may include, but are not limited to:

- Temporary withdrawal from coursework
- Deferral of assessments or exams
- Modification of the academic schedule or learning plan

Any additional absence requests beyond this threshold will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the appropriate Year Chair.

A.3: Assessment Criteria for Absence Requests Exceeding the Annual Limit

Students who have had unplanned absences due to illness or personal circumstances and are requesting further Planned or Flex Day absences beyond the five-day limit may also have requests denied. These decisions will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

A.4: Case-by-Case Approach

Each absence request will be evaluated individually, considering:

- Nature of the absence (e.g., illness vs. transportation issue)
- Duration of absence
- Number and type of learning activity missed
- Student's academic standing and history
- Capacity to meet program requirements upon return.

B. Types of Absences

B.1: Planned Absences (Including for Mandatory Sessions)

Planned absences allow students to request time away from mandatory or non-mandatory sessions for important professional or personal reasons.

6.1.1: Types of Planned Absences

- Observance of a religious/faith holiday
- Health care appointments for students or their dependents
- Attendance at a funeral or memorial service
- Presentation at an academic conference
- Attendance at an academic conference
- Invited and active participation in organized athletics or other competition
- Key participation in a significant personal celebrations or events (i.e. wedding, baptism, birthdays etc.)
- Attendance at a College of Medicine committee meeting
- Appointment with another College of Medicine or University office/leader
- Important professional leadership activities associated with University of SK, College of Medicine and groups affiliated with the College of Medicine
- Other planned and/or foreseeable absences

B.1.2: Timeline for Submitting planned Absence Requests

The request should be submitted a minimum of **4 weeks** in advance of the planned absence.

The UGME administrative team will review the request and provide a decision within 2 weeks of the receipt of the request for the absence.

B.1.3: Guiding principles for planned absences

Requests will be reviewed by:

- The type and number of session(s) that will be affected, type and weight of assessment.
- The student's academic and professional performance to date.

- The cumulative count of absences to date, including any approved upcoming absences.

Note: the UGME program will try to adapt the schedule to accommodate SMSS-identified events important to the medical student community.

B.1.4: Adjustments to Clinical Skills Scheduling

Clinical Skills sessions, particularly ComPLEx sessions, may be adjusted to accommodate the clinical schedules of physician preceptors. These sessions can be added or rescheduled within the program's clinical skills blocks up to 48 hours in advance, with email notification provided to students. As such, students should anticipate this possibility and plan accordingly by submitting a request for a planned absence, if necessary.

Retroactive approval for absences is not permitted. If a student is out of town or otherwise unavailable without an approved planned absence and is unable to attend a rescheduled session, the absence will be recorded as unapproved

B.1.5: Approval for Missing Mandatory Sessions or Assessments

Approval for an absence from a mandatory session depends on specific considerations include the relative weight of the assessment to be missed, logistics of rescheduling the assessment, impact of foregoing the assessment (i.e., lost opportunity for feedback, a grade of zero, etc.) and student performance.

B.1.6: Missed Mandatory Sessions After Approval

If a mandatory learning activity is scheduled for a student after an absence has been approved, the student will not face any professional or academic penalties.

B.1.7: Rescheduling Missed Sessions

Due to scheduling constraints, the UGME program may NOT be able to reschedule missed sessions. Students are still responsible for learning the content from the missed session.

B.1.8: Students in Academic Difficulty

Planned absence requests may not be approved for students with academic or professional difficulties. These requests may be denied if time away is deemed to put the student at further academic risk, regardless of how many approved absences have been used. This decision will be made in consultation with the student and the Year Chair.

B.1.9: Absence Limitations Involving Assessments

Students are limited to one absence per academic year that involves deferral of a quiz, mid-term, or end-of-module exam due to the difficulty of accommodating such absences. Any absence requests beyond one that involves such a deferral will be considered in exceptional circumstances only. Please see the Deferred Exams Policy for more information.

B.1.10: Limitations on planned absences

Planned absences cannot be requested and will not be approved for these academic activities:

- Final examinations
- OSCE
- Anatomy practical exams

Absences from these activities due to illness, significant health or personal issues or other unforeseen exceptional circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis as outlined in the Deferred Exams Policy.

B.2: Unplanned Absences

B.2.1: Types of Unplanned Absences:

- Illness and/or injury
- Mental health concerns
- Family emergency
- Personal crisis
- Transportation problems

B.2.2: Guiding Principles for Unplanned Absences:

The UGME team is committed to a compassionate and supportive learning environment. It recognizes that unforeseen or emergent circumstances may arise, and students may need to miss educational sessions. While the UGME team will make every reasonable effort to support students—such as offering make-up opportunities or alternative formats— accommodation cannot be guaranteed in all cases.

B.2.3: Notification for Unplanned Absences:

- In all cases, the students should ensure the personal well-being and immediate safety of themselves and others affected by the situation.
- Students must notify the appropriate administrative staff of their absence as soon as they are able to do so after attending to emergent needs/issues. See the Application of Absence.
- If a student is ill, the student should make every effort to advise the office with as much advanced notice as possible. This is particularly important for mandatory sessions and assessments.
- Medical or other documentation of the need for absence may be required. The UGME office will advise the student if any other documentation is required. If the supporting documentation is confidential in nature (i.e. medical, or sensitive family matters), documentation can be submitted to the Office of Student Affairs at the student's educational site.
- The UGME office will work with the student to reschedule any mandatory assessed sessions that may have been missed due to the unplanned absence as appropriate.
- Failure to provide timely notification is considered unacceptable. In such cases, the College may not be obligated to offer make-up sessions, assessments, or alternative accommodation.

B.2.4: Family Emergencies

In the event of an acute illness, injury, or a serious situation involving a family member or loved one, students must notify the UGME office as soon as they are able to indicate the reason for their absence. Supporting documentation may be required, depending on the length of the absence. Any supporting documentation of a confidential or family matter can be provided to the Office of Student Affairs at the student's educational site.

B.2.5: Personal Crisis

The student must contact the site-specific Student Affairs office as early as possible to indicate an absence due to a personal crisis. Student Affairs will work with the student and the UGME office to determine the appropriate course of action.

B.2.6: Transportation Problems / travel delays

The student must contact the UGME office as soon as it is apparent that an absence is likely due to a travel delay. Supporting information and documentation must be provided, which includes the nature of or reason for the travel delay.

Arrangements and accommodation will not be made for absences resulting from poor planning on the part of the student.

B.3: Flex Days

Flex Days are designated days within the academic calendar during which students may take time off at a short notice without the need to provide a reason or documentation. These days are intended to provide flexibility for personal needs, wellness, or unforeseen circumstances, while maintaining the integrity of the academic program.

B.3.1: Guiding principles and considerations for flex absences:

- Students are allowed a maximum of three flex days per academic year.
- Absences due to flex days will count towards the total 5 absences per academic year.
- Flex Days cannot be combined with any other types of leave.

B.3.2: Flex days may be requested, and will be considered for the following:

- Module orientations: Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with information covered in the module orientation even if they are absent.
- Large group sessions.
- Unscheduled Curricular time, including independent learning time 8:30-4:30, Monday to Friday.

B.3.3: Limitations on flex absences:

Flex days will not be approved for the following:

- Year or course orientations
- Mandatory lectures, including recorded lectures, where active engagement, real-time participation, or assessments are involved
- Clinical Skills sessions
- Small group case-based seminars/case-based learning sessions
- Small groups in Foundations
- Anatomy Labs
- Arts and Humanities Year 1 Sessions
- Sessions involving interprofessional learning
- Sessions scheduled during the last three weeks of the term**
- Quizzes, team-based learning sessions (TBLs), mid-term or end-of-module exams
- Exams (including OSCEs)

***With the number of scheduled summative assessments and OSCEs in the final 3 weeks of the term, managing absences and rescheduling is particularly challenging, as limited time remains to accommodate missed sessions.*

B.3.4: Applying for Flex Day Absences:

Flex Day requests must be submitted a minimum of 3 business days and a maximum of 2 weeks prior to the requested date.

Students should not book travel until their request is fully approved.

Flex Days cannot be retroactively approved.

The Administrative Coordinator will advise the relevant Module or Course Director and/or administrative staff member of an approved Flex Day absence.

If an assessment is due on an approved Flex Day, the student is still responsible for submitting it by the deadline and reviewing any missed content.

B.4: Attendance at Academic Conferences

Students may request an absence of up to three days per academic year for participation in conferences. These days fall within the standard five-day absence allowance and will generally be approved. Requests exceeding three days will be considered only under the following conditions:

- The student is presenting at the conference,
- The student is involved in the administration of the event,
- The student is a member of the organizing committee.

All absence requests must follow the established approval process and be submitted as soon as the student becomes aware of the need for time away, minimum 4 weeks in advance.

Students must submit the following documentation:

- A copy of the conference program,
- Proof of acceptance of their paper or poster presentation (if applicable),
- A tentative travel itinerary (do not purchase tickets until after absence is approved)
- After the event, they must submit an official certificate of attendance.

Conference leave should be requested and approved before the student registers for the conference or purchases travel tickets, or as soon as acceptance is received for presenters.

6) Extended Absence more than 5 Consecutive Days

If a student anticipates being absent for more than five consecutive days, they must:

- Inform the Year Chair about the expected absence.
- Contact the Office of Student Affairs for guidance.
- Review the Leave of Absence Policy to determine whether a formal leave of absence is required.
- Submit a leave of absence request to the Academic Director along with supporting documentation (e.g., medical notes, travel itinerary) to the Office of Student Affairs.

7) Responsibilities:

Pre-Clerkship administrative staff and Year Chairs/Year Site Coordinators are responsible for operationalizing the procedures outlined, with oversight by the Program Manager, and consultation as required with the Academic Director, and Associate Dean UGME.

8) Procedures:

- The student must submit an absence request online using the Application for Absence link found on the Pre-Clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy page.
- Prior to submitting the request, students are encouraged to contact their site-specific UGME Administrative Coordinator (by email or in person) to discuss the planned absence.
- During this initial discussion, students should provide as much supporting documentation as possible to facilitate the evaluation process.
- The Administrative Coordinator and/or student will consult with the relevant Preceptor/Module or Course Director to determine if the requested absence can be accommodated.
- Please be aware that your request may not be approved due to academic or scheduling implications.
- Students should not book trips until their request is fully approved. Students are responsible for any costs incurred if travel arrangements need to be cancelled.
- Please ensure you always book cancellable trips during the academic year, as sessions may be rescheduled.
- For confidential matters, documentation should be submitted directly to the Student Affairs Office at the student's site. The UGME Office will consult with Student Affairs when reviewing the request, while maintaining strict confidentiality.

9) Consultation Encouraged for Absence Requests

While this policy outlines the procedures and criteria for absence requests, students are strongly encouraged to consult with the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) and the UGME Administrative Team before submitting a request—especially in complex or uncertain situations.

- This proactive step ensures that students receive personalized guidance based on their academic standing, session type, and the nature of the absence.
- It also helps clarify whether the absence qualifies under the policy and what documentation or planning may be required.
- Students are advised to be comprehensive and transparent in their requests, providing all relevant details to support timely and informed decision-making

10) Outcome of Absence Request

There are three possible outcomes for an absence request:

- Approved
- Denied
- Conditionally Approved – if an alternate learning experience or assessment can be arranged.

The designated Site Administrative Coordinator will review all planned absence requests and approve or deny them based on established policy.

Typical Outcomes for Requests for Planned Absences: **see Appendix** 1.

11) Appeals of Absence Request Decisions

Students have the right to appeal the decision through the established UGME appeal process.

- If a student disagrees with the decision, they may appeal to the designated Year Chair via email, including a clear rationale and all supporting documentation.
- The decision of the Year Chair is final.
- The students are encouraged to seek guidance from the Office of Student Affairs in requesting absence or prior to appealing the decision.

12) Respectful Conduct in Leave Requests

Students requesting leave from the UGME program are expected to communicate respectfully and professionally with administrative staff. The administrative team works diligently to support students and facilitate accommodations. Unprofessional communication may result in an informal professionalism discussion as outlined in the MD Program Procedures for Concerns with Medical Student Professional Behaviour.

Administrative staff are also expected to respond in a respectful, and collaborative manner.

Early involvement of the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) is encouraged to support clear communication and prevent misunderstandings.

13) Non-Compliance:

Not following absence policies or disregarding program decisions may be considered a professionalism issue, as outlined in the M.D. Program Procedures for Concerns with Medical Student Professional Behaviour

The College of Medicine may require students to make up missed time to ensure learning opportunities are optimized.

Serious Instances of non-compliance with the Pre-Clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy should be brought to the attention of the Vice-Dean, Education or the Associate Dean, Undergraduate Medical Education, within the College of Medicine.

14) Communication & Distribution

This policy will be housed in the College of Medicine SharePoint, in the UGME Admin common folder.

It will also be housed in SAMC SharePoint folder.

This policy will be posted on the UGME page of the College of Medicine website, under the Policies, Procedures and Forms link.

Any updates approved by SAMC will be distributed to the Year 1 and Year 2 Chairs and all admin coordinators/support staff responsible for Pre-Clerkship at all sites, who will distribute it to all pre-clerkship faculty leads and the Pre-Clerkship Sub-Committees.

15) Contact

Academic Director, UGME
Phone: 306-966-2750
Email: medicine.ugme@usask.ca

0) Appendix

Appendix 1 Typical Outcomes for Requests for Planned Absences

Observance of a Religious/Faith Holiday: Requests for time off to observe a religious or faith holiday will generally be approved, unless it impacts the program's essential requirements or schedule.

Health care appointments for students: Students are encouraged to schedule health care appointments at times that do not conflict with educational sessions whenever possible. Requests for absence from a mandatory session due to healthcare appointments will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Health care appointments for dependents or primary caregiver responsibilities: Students who have significant caregiving responsibilities will take this into consideration when requesting absences. Planned absences may include situations such as medical appointments for children or dependent family members that require the student's presence. Other requests will be assessed individually, and absences from mandatory sessions may be approved based on the specific circumstances.

Attendance at a Funeral or Memorial Service: Requests will generally be approved. The College of Medicine will seek alternative arrangements to enable the student to make up for any missed assessments and/or other critical mandatory sessions, if possible.

Attendance or Presentation at an academic conference: Will be considered on a case-by-case basis. See section 5.B.4 for more information.

Active Participation in an Organized Athletics or other Competition, at the Varsity Level or Equivalent: Students must request absence for such events, regardless of mandatory or non-mandatory sessions, well in advance and provide an official invitation to participate. Recreation-level athletic/sports activities will not be accepted as a valid reason for absence.

Active Participation in a Major Personal Celebration or Event (i.e. wedding, baptism, etc.): Requests for planned absences will generally be approved for up to a maximum of five days per academic year, depending on the student's level of involvement and the personal significance of the event. Students are required to provide a description of the event and their participation in it as part of their initial request. Requests for planned absence in these circumstances will be evaluated individually, taking into account potential consequences of missing it, and the student's academic performance to date.

Attendance at a College of Medicine Committee Meeting: Requests for a planned absence from a mandatory session may be approved for meetings in which the student member's participation is

essential, and the meeting cannot be scheduled at another time; confirmation from the Chair will be required.

Important professional leadership activities associated with University of SK, College of Medicine and groups affiliated with the College of Medicine: Please see Student Leadership Absence Policy.

Appointment with another College of Medicine or University Leader: In exceptional circumstances where a student's participation in an important appointment is essential, if rescheduling is not possible an absence from a mandatory session may be approved, contingent upon the student's good academic standing and confirmation from the event leader that the absence is justified.

Other Planned and/or foreseeable Absence: Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.