

Guidance for College of Science Faculty on PS 22 (Student Absence from Class)

This document is intended to provide suggestions for faculty in interpreting PS 22. It was prepared by an ad hoc group consisting of faculty representatives from each department in the College of Science, the assistant and associate deans, the LSU Assistant Dean of Students, and the president of the College of Science student council.

Some of the text in this document is based on documents prepared by Professor Bill Demastes (English) and on discussions in Faculty Senate meetings in 2013. Thanks to Bill for sending us these materials.

The current version of PS 22 may be found on the LSU Policies page: <https://lsu.edu/policies/>

New items in the October 2020 version of PS 22:

- Valid reasons for absence now include
(I) Professional school and graduate school interviews;
(J) Interviews at LSU-sponsored career fairs; and
(K) Voting in local, state, and federal elections.
- A statement on excused absences is now required in the class syllabus. See below for an example.
- The interfaith calendar link should be <https://www.interfaith-calendar.org/>
- Students with valid excuses must be offered makeup assignments. See below.

Introduction

You are encouraged to consider each student's excuse independently, yet remain fair and consistent in making decisions.

Students face many circumstances that may warrant an excused absence, leading to the need for a makeup assignment. PS 22 helps define these circumstances, but "the instructor will determine the validity of a student's reason(s) for absence". You are encouraged to consult with advisors or administrators in your department or in the College office (8-4200 or science@lsu.edu), or Student Advocacy & Accountability (SAA), on complex situations.

In cases where documentation is unclear or inadequate, please use your best judgment, or ask for advice (see below). False claims of excused absences by students are a violation of the Code of Student Conduct. You should report such cases to SAA; see the Academic Misconduct link at <https://www.lsu.edu/saa/lsu-cares/index.php>.

Advice is available to help you evaluate student excuses fairly

Please ask for advice if you are not sure about an excuse.

Advising staff in the College of Science office (or the student's home college) can make recommendations. Student Advocacy & Accountability (SAA), in the Division of Student Affairs, is often extremely knowledgeable about individual students and the seriousness of situations they face. Also, your department may have an undergraduate (or graduate) advisor or associate chair who has experience with student absence issues.

If SAA or a College advisor tells you about the seriousness of a student's situation, we recommend that you accept this as evidence that the excuse is valid.

Health-related excuses

According to PS 22, "The student is responsible for providing...appropriate documentation of the reason for the absence." However, they are not required to disclose the details of a medical (physical or mental health) situation to anyone.

Please note that the LSU Student Health Center does not normally provide "excuses" or release information on whether a student has been seen. Off-campus facilities often do not provide excuses, or they may provide generic forms that are difficult to validate. Thus, students may not be able to give you detailed documentation, or they may not be able to give you any official documentation at all. The director of the Student Health Center recommends that we consider a different definition of the phrase "appropriate documentation" from PS 22. It could mean that the student presents a reasonable account of when they were unable to attend and when they were able to return.

A professional staff member in Student Advocacy & Accountability may have access to more detailed information and may be able to advise you on the severity of a student's situation without revealing protected health information.

Statement on excused absences in the syllabus

A statement is required by PS 22. Here is the minimum statement that is required, as quoted by the Registrar's office:

Attendance: Absences may be excused at the discretion of the instructor and in accordance with PS 22. See LSU's policy on Student Absence from Class at https://www.lsu.edu/policies/ps/ps_22.pdf

You may wish to ask students to notify you as far ahead of time as possible if they know they will be absent (for example, for a field trip, a varsity athletic event, or a religious observance).

Your policy may be different for different kinds of assignments.

Please explain any such differences clearly in your syllabus.

Students with valid excuses must be offered a makeup.

From PS 22: "...students with excused absences must be given the opportunity to make up the work they missed prior to being given other options, such as having later assignments count for more credit."

You may offer students with valid excuses a choice of a makeup *or* some other remedy, but one of the choices must be a makeup. This rule is new as of Fall 2020.

This means that you are not allowed to prohibit makeups, or say that certain kinds of assignments cannot be made up.

If you are giving a group final exam, or an exam that takes place over longer periods of time, you should be prepared to provide makeups as well.

The makeup assignment should be as similar as possible to the missed assignment.

The situation for the returning student and a makeup assignment is never the same as that for students who did it in the original time/place, but you can minimize the differences. Makeup assignments should be offered as soon as practicable after the student returns.

It may not be possible to offer identical makeup assignments for laboratory experiments or field work. Such classes sometimes designate a single "makeup day" for students who have an excused absence.

Statement on class attendance in the syllabus

You may already have such a statement. You could suggest an absence ceiling that a student could reach before the likelihood of mastering the material is seriously impaired. If a student asks you whether they have missed too many classes and should drop the class, you should give them your best advice. However, you should generally do this only if they ask.

An exception can be made in classes like MATH 1550, when an alternate class (MATH 1530) is available that starts at midterm. In such a case, the faculty member may recommend to students who are struggling that they consider switching to the alternate class.

Group absences often occur late in the week

This could mean that if you schedule major assignments on Mondays or Tuesdays, fewer students will need makeup assignments.

Advise students of their appeal rights

A student is entitled to appeal your decision regarding the validity of an excuse according to the general appeal procedure in PS 48. An alternative to the PS 48 appeal would be an appeal of the final course grade according to the catalog's grade appeal procedure.

If a student asks you for help (with any issue)

Students often miss class because of personal, family-related, or health-related (including mental health) challenges. Students may mention that they are dealing with such issues. If you are not sure how to help, please ask for advice. Departmental and College advisors, the Student Health Center, or SAA can advise you. You can also refer the student to them, so that they do not need to talk to each instructor separately. Or you can submit a "Student of Concern" report (<https://www.lsu.edu/saa/lsu-cares/index.php>, near the bottom of the page) about the student and their situation.