POLICY TITLE
Attendance Policy for Clinical Phase

PURPOSE AND SCOPE
This policy outlines the attendance policy for the Clinical Phase and the procedure students must follow to obtain an excused absence and defines consequences for excessive absences.

RESPONSIBLE PARTY AND REVIEW CYCLE
The Clinical Affairs Committee will review the policy in even-numbered years, or as needed, and submit to the Academic Excellence Committee for approval.

ARC-PA REFERENCE(S)
A3.01: Program policies must apply to all students, principal faculty and the program director regardless of location.
A3.02: The program must define, publish, make readily available and consistently apply its policies and practices to all students.
A3.15: The program must define, publish, consistently apply and a make readily available to students upon admission: (g) policies and procedures for student grievances and appeals.

HISTORY OF APPROVALS AND UPDATES
Approved by Academic Excellence Committee, June 17, 2021.

DEFINITIONS
• Absence is defined as missing any portion of the shift (an hour, 1/2-day, full day)
• Tardy is defined as (for example: shift starts at 8:00 am and you show up at 8:00 am or after, you are considered tardy)
• Excused absence is defined as an absence that is approved by the University and/or UNC-CH MHSPAS Program.
• Unexcused absence is defined as an absence that is not approved/scheduled by the University and/or UNC-CH MHSPAS Program.

POLICY
The professional standards and expectations in physician assistant school are similar clinical practice expectations beyond physician assistant school. Attendance to clinical assignments and required course activities is a full-time commitment and a measure of professionalism. Students must make every effort to attend required activities, using off days for personal activities to the greatest extent possible. Part-time jobs, extracurricular activities, vacations, or need for childcare are NOT acceptable excuses for absences.
Students must obtain an excuse for all absences no matter the length (an hour, 1/2-day, full day) from the Director of Clinical Education. Preceptors cannot grant excused absences, nor can they excuse a student from clinical duties. Students must make up all excused and unexcused absences at the discretion of the Director of Clinical Education. Work that is not made up can result in comments in the UNC-CH MHSPAS Student Professionalism Encounter Form.

Students who accrue more than two excused absence days in a four-week clinical course are at risk for receiving a grade of “Incomplete” based on the quality of make-up work and level of competence and will be referred to the Academic Excellence Committee.

Students who accrue one or more unexcused absence days in during the clinical phase of the program will be referred to Academic Excellence Committee which may result in academic and/or professionalism probation, a course grade of “incomplete” or dismissal based on severity. Students referred to the AEC for unexcused absences will generally receive a professionalism warning, though probation may be applied depending on the circumstances.

Students who accrue more than five absences during the clinical phase will be referred to the Academic Excellence Committee which may result in academic and/or professionalism probation, or dismissal based on severity. Exceptions to this (more than five (5) days of excused absences) will be determined by the Academic Excellence Committee on a case-by-case basis.

Students must contact the Director of Clinical Education and preceptor immediately if they are missing clinical time due to illness or (leaving early, arriving late, or missing any amount of time). Failure to notify the Director of Clinical Education and preceptor of any absence from a rotation regardless of the reason or number of hours is considered an unexcused absence and the student will be referred to the Academic Excellence Committee which may result in academic and/or professionalism probation, or dismissal based on severity.

Three or more tardies on rotations during the clinical phase will count as a full day absence. Exceptions to this will be considered by the Director of Clinical Education on a case-by-case basis.

Students may obtain an excused absence at the discretion of the Director of Clinical Education and its campus liaisons (Campus Health). Excused absences are not guaranteed except for medical reasons. Reasons for excused absences include:

- **Medical/illness**: Includes illness and medical appointments. There is no limit on absences for medical reasons. Students with chronic illness that involve multiple absences must meet with the UNC MHSPAS Director of Clinical Education and their Academic Advisor to set up plan regarding absences and make-up. It is also a student’s responsibility to contact the preceptor as soon as possible to arrange make-up days and/or assignments.
- **Family/close friend event or emergency**: Students must provide a brief explanation when requesting an excused absence. Examples include, but are not limited to, funerals and medical
emergencies of family members. It is also a student’s responsibility to contact the preceptor as soon as possible to arrange make-up days and/or assignments.

- Professional meeting/Conference: An excused absence is only granted when the student is a presenter. Student must submit conference documentation when requesting an excused absence. It is also a student’s responsibility to contact the preceptor as soon as possible to arrange make-up days and/or assignments.

- Jury Duty: Student must provide a copy of the summons when requesting an excused absence. It is also a student’s responsibility to contact the preceptor as soon as possible to arrange make-up days and/or assignments.

- Religious holidays: Per University policy, students are authorized up to two excused absences each academic year for religious observances required by their faith. Recurring excused absences (greater than two) for religious observances, students must complete and submit the Religious Accommodation Form. Students should review the UNC-CH Religious Accommodation Policy.

- Weddings: Students must request an administrative excuse for a wedding as soon as possible, no later than eight weeks prior to the event. Students must also submit a copy of the wedding invitation. Students must use their professional judgement to minimize absences to weddings and prioritize attendance to only the most significant weddings. It is also a student’s responsibility to contact the preceptor as soon as possible to arrange make-up days and/or assignments.

- Required Training: Students must provide details of the required training.

- Military obligations: Students needing to miss rotation days due to military obligations will not be counted as days missed, but given the length of absence, may be required to make up time at a later date. Student must provide a copy of orders or a signed memorandum from their Commander.

**Student must submit requests in advance whenever feasible or as soon as possible.** If granted an excused absence, it is the student’s professional obligation to notify the preceptors and site coordinators as soon as possible. It is also a student’s responsibility to contact the preceptor as soon as possible to arrange make-up days and/or assignments. **If 4 hours of clinic time is missed, a 1/2 day will be documented. More than 4 hours of missed clinic time = a full day.**

*PAEA End of Rotation Exams/PACKRAT/Cumulative Summative Assessment Written*  
Refer to the PAEA End of Rotation Exam policy regarding attendance.

*Clinical Seminar Courses*  
Clinical Seminar courses consist of five, 3–5-day courses that all students, regardless of current location of residence, must complete for program completion. The school will not exempt students from this *program to practice* learning experience, nor will it truncate the length of the courses. Given the nature of the course, students cannot easily make up, repeat, or replicate course activities. As such, students must attend the entire length of the course, accruing no more
than one excused absence. Student’s risk failing or receiving a grade of “Incomplete” if they exceed the one allotted excused absence. All absences must be made up at the discretion of the Director of Clinical Education. If a student is tardy (showing up at 8:00 am when class starts at 8:00 am) this will count as a 1/2-day absence. Exceptions to this will be determined by the Director of Clinical Education on a case-by-case basis and if notification was made prior to showing up late to clinical seminar.

Holidays
While on clinical rotations, students must only observe holidays that are observed by their respective clinical site. If a student is assigned by a preceptor to work on a holiday, the student may NOT request use of a discretionary day on the holiday.

Challenging Life Circumstances
Challenging life circumstances may require extended absences (more than three (3) days in one rotation), and students should reach out to the UNC-CH MHSPAS Student Affairs, UNC-CH MHSPAS Director of Clinical Education and their Academic Advisor as soon as possible to develop a plan/consider a leave of absence.

New Child Adjustment Policy
The purpose of this policy is to outline parameters for taking time away from the Master of Science Physician Assistant Studies Degree curriculum for family adjustments at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Physician Assistant Program (MHSPAS). This policy is inclusive to all students. New Child Adjustment (NCA) will be extended to students without regard to their age, sex, or gender and for any situation in which a new child is brought into a student’s care, including but not limited to childbirth, adoption, foster care, or custody change.

The New Child Adjustment (NCA) Policy establishes the parameters by which students can take a predetermined amount of time away from their studies to care for a new child while remaining enrolled at UNC-CH MHSPAS.

While the NCA option exists to accommodate students wishing to graduate with their original class, this policy does not guarantee that all students who want an NCA will graduate on time, and students are still responsible for completing all graduation and course requirements. Certain policies are outside the control of UNC-CH MHSPAS, which may affect the extent of flexibility offered. It is recommended student elect to request a leave of absence during this time period.

Initiation and Intent of an NCA
To pursue an NCA, students must contact UNC MHSPAS Student Affairs as early as possible to plan their time away and make preparations for any restructuring of their schedule if needed. While advance notice is ideal and provides the best options to students, UNC MHSPAS acknowledges that there may be circumstances in which a new child is not always expected (e.g. emergency custody situations). In these situations, students should contact UNC MHSPAS Student Affairs as
soon as possible to discuss options. All students enrolled in the MHSPAS program must complete all graduation and course requirements within 36 months from the date of matriculation.

**Excessive Absences or Failure to Make Up Absences**

In the event a student accrues excessive excused (greater than 5 during the entire clinical phase) or unexcused absences according to the aforementioned thresholds for Clinical Phase, the Director of Clinical Education and Academic Advisor will first contact the student out of concern for well-being. After this discussion, the UNC-CH MHSPAS Clinical Affairs Committee reserves the right to refer a student to the UNC-CH MHSPAS Academic Excellence Committee. Referral to the UNC-CH MHSPAS Academic Excellence Committee for excessive absenteeism does not include absences for medical reasons.

The Academic Excellence Committee reserves the right to recommend that a student’s lack of attendance be noted in the UNC-CH MHSPAS Student Professionalism Encounter, which may result in academic and/or professionalism probation or dismissal based on severity.

In the event a student fails to make up absences according to expectations set by Director of Clinical Education, the Clinical Affairs Committee reserves the right to refer the student to the UNC-CH MHSPAS Academic Excellence Committee. The Academic Excellence Committee reserves the right to recommend that a student’s lack of attendance be noted in the UNC-CH MHSPAS Student Professionalism Encounter, which may result in academic and/or professionalism probation or dismissal based on severity.

**Exceptions**

Situations will arise outside of exceptions listed which may lead to other prioritization about attending required activities. Absence requests must be requested formally through the UNC-CH MHSPAS Director of Clinical Education. The Director of Clinical Education will review the request, communicate with the UNC-CH MHSPAS Clinical Affairs Committee, as necessary, and provide a response. UNC-CH MHSPAS Students must notify preceptors & hospital attendings of absences, if absence is granted.

**PROCEDURE(S):**

Students must notify by email/text the Director of Clinical Education of the absence in addition to submission of a request for an excused absence in Microsoft PowerApps. **Any missing requests will be considered an unexcused absence.** Required documentation, as outlined above, must be emailed to the UNC-CH MHSPAS Director of Clinical Education and Student Affairs at the time of request submission. The Director of Clinical Education will grant or deny the request within PowerApps. Student will be notified through PowerApps of the decision regarding their request. PowerApps will maintain record of all excused and unexcused absences. Documentation provided to the UNC-CH MHSPAS Director of Clinical Education and Student Affairs will be retained in the
student’s academic file. The student must also notify the preceptors and site coordinators of their absence(s) (excused or unexcused) as soon as possible. Students can check the number of excused absences in Microsoft PowerApp at any time.

PUBLISHED

- UNC PA Program Policies and Procedures web page: https://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/unc-pa/students/policies-proceedures/
- UNC PA Program Student Handbook