

POLICY TITLE

Attendance Policy for Pre-Clinical Phase

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy outlines the attendance policy for the Pre-Clinical Phase and the procedure students must follow to obtain an excused absence or join a class session virtually and defines consequences for excessive absences.

RESPONSIBLE PARTY AND REVIEW CYCLE

The Pre-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.

HISTORY OF APPROVALS AND UPDATES

Approved by Academic Excellence Committee, February 2022.

DEFINITIONS

- Absence is defined as missing any class session
- Tardy is defined as arriving after class start time has elapsed
- 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 programs are consistent with clinical practice expectations once a student has completed training. Class and required course activities are full-time commitments. Adherence to attendance requirements is 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 Pre-Clinical Education. Course instructors cannot grant excused absences. Students must make up all course work missed due to excused and unexcused absences. Missing course work has the potential to hinder academic progression due to the cumulative nature of the curriculum. Students will be held to the same academic standards regardless of absences.

Students who accrue **more than two excused absences** in a pre-clinical course (meaning more than 2 class sessions) 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** during the pre-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 cumulatively** during the pre-clinical phase will be referred to the Academic Excellence Committee for consideration of 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 Pre-Clinical Education immediately if they will miss a class time due to illness or will be leaving early, arriving late, or missing any amount of time. Failure to notify the Director of Pre-Clinical Education of any absence from a class 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 a professionalism warning, academic and/or professionalism probation, or dismissal based on severity.

Three or more tardy episodes for classes during the pre-clinical phase will result in a meeting with the Director of Pre-Clinical Education and the student’s academic advisor. The student will then be referred to the Academic Excellence Committee should tardy behavior continue after this meeting.

Students may obtain an excused absence at the discretion of the Director of Pre-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 Pre-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 course instructor(s) or course director as soon as possible to arrange make-up work 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 class instructor(s) or course director as soon as possible to arrange make-up work and/or assignments.
- **Professional meeting/Conference:** An excused absence is only granted when the student is a presenter. Students must submit conference documentation when requesting an excused absence. It is also a student's responsibility to contact the course instructor(s) or course director as soon as possible to arrange make-up work 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 course instructor(s) or course director as soon as possible to arrange make-up work 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. In the case of 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 course instructor(s) or course director as soon as possible to arrange make-up work and/or assignments.
- **Required Training:** Students must provide details of the required training.
- **Military obligations:** Students needing to miss class(es) due to military obligations will not be counted as days missed, but will be responsible for making up all missed course work, assignments, and assessments. 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 pertinent course instructor(s) and course director as soon as possible. It is also a student's responsibility to contact the course instructor(s) or course director as soon as possible to arrange make-up work and/or assignments.

Challenging Life Circumstances

Challenging life circumstances may require extended absences, and students should reach out to the UNC-CH MHSPAS Student Affairs, UNC-CH MHSPAS Director of Pre-Clinical Education and their Academic Advisor as soon as possible to develop a plan, consider a leave of absence, or in some cases the opportunity for deceleration.

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 pre-clinical phase) or unexcused absences according to the aforementioned thresholds for the Pre-Clinical Phase, the Director of Pre-Clinical Education and the Academic Advisor will first contact the student out of concern for well-being. After this discussion, the UNC-CH MHSPAS Pre-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 missed course work according to expectations set by the Director of Pre-Clinical Education, the Pre-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 a professionalism warning, 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 submitted formally through the UNC-CH

MHSPAS Director of Pre-Clinical Education. The Director of Pre-Clinical Education will review the request, communicate with the UNC-CH MHSPAS Pre-Clinical Affairs Committee, as necessary, and provide a response. UNC-CH MHSPAS Students must notify course instructor(s) and/or course director(s) of absences, **if the absence is granted**.

PROCEDURE(S):

Students must notify by email/text the Director of Pre-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 Pre-Clinical Education and Student Affairs at the time of request submission. The Director of Pre-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 Pre-Clinical Education and Student Affairs will be retained in the student's academic file. The student must also notify the course instructor(s) and/or course director 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-procedures/>
- UNC PA Program Student Handbook
- Reviewed and accepted by Program Director, 2/25/2022