



# Academic Ombud

- *confidential* • *impartial*
- *informal* • *independent*

## Spring 2018 Semester Academic Reminders

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Welcome back from the Holiday Break. At the University of Kentucky, our highest priority is an education that prepares students for personal success, as leaders to improve the well-being of the Commonwealth and the Nation and to effectively address Global Issues. Effective communication and transparency of processes are key ingredients in our ongoing efforts to improve student success, retention and progress towards graduation.

Academic Ombud Services (AOS) is a confidential and impartial resource to assist students and faculty in resolving academic issues. This update contains a number of reminders as well as guidelines for issues that have come to our attention during Fall Semester. As well, links to various resources and relevant University Senate Rules (SR) that may be helpful to faculty are included. Should you have questions or concerns involving academic policies, please contact AOS at [ombud@uky.edu](mailto:ombud@uky.edu) or 859-257-3737. You may also visit our [website](#) or our office at 109 Bradley Hall. Best wishes for a stimulating and successful semester.

- Topics:
1. Syllabus
  2. Dead week
  3. Annual Graduate Student Evaluations
  4. Homework on Holidays/Snow Days
  5. Excused Absences
  6. Attendance and Class Behavior Issues
  7. Academic Integrity Issues
  8. Disability Issues

### 1. Syllabus

A carefully prepared syllabus is the single most effective tool that will prevent many of the disputes that come to the Ombud's office. It is critical to clearly define rules regarding grading, attendance/absence policies and many other issues. Senate rules regarding syllabi can be found in several subsections of SR 5.0, 6.0 and 7.0, as well as on the [University Senate website](#). Information in the following sections should all be well-defined in the syllabus. A [syllabus template](#) can be found on the University Senate website.

As a reminder:

- Provide a copy of the syllabus by the 1<sup>st</sup> class meeting at no cost to the student. Syllabi may be posted electronically and must remain available for the entire semester. (SR 6.1.1)

- Syllabi should not be changed after the semester has started.
- Include information about the content, the activities to be evaluated, and the grading practice to be followed. (SR 6.1.1).
- Outline the impact unexcused absences, tardiness and/or late assignments have on grades. (SR 5.2.4.2)
- In 400G and 500-level courses describe the differing expectations for undergraduate and graduate students. (SR 3.1.4).

In addition to the bulleted points above, AOS continues to see students who have complaints about poorly defined grading policies and the addition of graded assignments, quizzes, and papers not described in the original syllabus. In the former case, make sure that all graded components of the course are well described, including the weight assigned to each component, the scale or method for determining the final grade, and where helpful, the criteria for evaluation. For grading based on class participation, you should define what is expected for evaluation of class participation, e.g., preparation, contribution to the discussion, depth of understanding of contributions, etc. Grading based on the quality of class participation is often perceived as being very subjective by students. It would be helpful to define very clearly in the syllabus what your expectations are, as well as verbally telling students during the first few class meetings what your expectations are for grading the quality of class participation.

AOS has seen a couple of cases this past semester where quizzes, assignments, or papers have been added to the course that were not in the original syllabus. This is not allowable under Senate Rule 6.1.1 "*... the right to be informed in writing (in the course syllabus) at the first class meeting about the nature of the course-the content, the activities to be evaluated, and the grading practice to be followed. Whenever factors such as absences or late papers will be weighed in determining grades, a student shall be informed. All students must be informed in writing of the course content and other matters listed in this rule . . .*". In cases where this has happened, it has provided a valid basis for the students to file a grade appeal with the University Appeals Board.

### 2. Dead Week

There continue to be complaints from students about activities that are not allowed during Dead Week. These activities are defined in [SR 5.2.4.6](#). As a reminder:

- No written exams or quizzes or final examinations may be scheduled during Dead Week
- Make-up exams or quizzes may be scheduled.
- No projects, lab practicals, papers, presentation deadlines or oral/listening examinations may be

scheduled during Dead Week unless they were **1) scheduled in the syllabus, AND 2) the course has no final examination** (or assignment that acts as a final examination) scheduled during finals week.

- A course with a lab component may schedule the lab practical of the course during Dead Week only if the lab portion does not also require a final examination during finals week.
- Graded homework that is a routine part of the course and is announced in the course syllabus may be assigned for submission during Dead Week.

Please note the third point above. Exceptions stated in SR 5.2.4.6 are that “*class participation and attendance grades are permitted during Dead Week*” and that “*The current wording of this rule does not prohibit continuing into Dead Week regularly assigned graded homework that was announced in the class syllabus*”. If you choose assign homework during Dead Week, please make sure that it conforms to homework that is “*regularly assigned*” throughout the course.

Finally, please note that students may not be required to turn in a take-home exam before the end of regularly scheduled exam (SR 5.2.4.7), and that homework that is not explicitly part of a take-home exam is not allowed during Finals Week. Feel free to contact [AOS](#) if you have any questions regarding Dead Week.

### 3. Annual Graduate Student Evaluations

AOS has seen a number of doctoral students who are having various issues related to not making sufficient progress towards completing their course of studies. In talking with these students, it is apparent that many doctoral programs are not providing the students with the required annual assessments. In fact, the Ombud has met with a couple of students in their 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year of a doctoral program who have never received the required annual evaluations. Graduate faculty and DGS's are reminded that the Graduate School, 2017-2018 DGS Policies & Procedures Manual, requires that graduate students be provided annual evaluations. Specifically, “*Each doctoral student's progress toward the degree will be reviewed (at least) annually by either the Graduate Faculty in the program, the doctoral advisory committee, or the graduate education committee. Students will be informed in writing of the results of that meeting by the Director of Graduate Studies or the chair of the advisory committee, or their designee.*” (p. 27). In many cases, the issues that brought the graduate student to the AOS office could have been avoided had they received adequate feedback on their progress.

### 4. Homework on Holidays and Snow Days

During Fall Semester there were disputes arising from instructors assigning homework to be due on Holidays, including Thanksgiving Day. The rules are very clear on this; homework cannot be due on holidays. Senate Rule 2.1.1 defines policies regarding academic holidays. “*Academic Holiday*” means that *neither classes are held, nor are assignments made due, on the academic holiday. If an Instructor has made an assignment due on an academic holiday, then it actually is not due until classes begin after*

*the end of the academic holiday.*” Academic holidays include during Spring and Summer Semesters include:

- Martin Luther King Birthday
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Spring Break

A second issue that instructors may be facing is what to do when classes are cancelled due to inclement weather. Many of you will remember 3 years ago when we had six days cancelled due to a blizzard. This situation was not explicitly covered in the senate rules at the time, so the Senate Rules and Elections Committee was asked to provide an interpretation. The interpretation is as follows: “*when the President "cancels classes" due to a 'snow day,' it is not a situation that students have an 'excused absence' that is to be remedied under the Senate's 'excused absence' rules. Rather, the effect of the President's action is that no class existed on that day to be made up, e.g., just as on New Year's Day holiday there do not exist any University classes. It may happen that the Instructor of a class determines that the material that the Instructor would have presented in class on the 'snow day' must be still be presented to the students. In such case, the Instructor must either present the material at some later regularly scheduled class meeting, or determine an alternative means to present it, other than scheduling an ad hoc class meeting (e.g., put the material on a UK web site for the class). The Instructor cannot schedule an ad hoc class meeting or similar event in a time slot other than a regularly scheduled class meeting, and then penalize a student who does not attend that ad hoc class meeting.*”

Based on this interpretation, homework assignments, including those submitted online, would be due the first regular class day following the ‘snow day’, since the day of cancelled classes would be treated as an academic holiday. The second thing that instructors should consider, are contingency plans for day missed because of University classes being cancelled. We are aware of one class that an instructor has put a policy in their syllabus that the lectures would be recorded and placed in Canvas, and that there would be a question and answer session scheduled after the students return to classes.

### 5. Excused Absences

[SR 5.2.4.2](#) states that “*A student shall not be penalized for an excused absence*”, and defines categories of excused absences, e.g., illness, death of a family member, major religious holidays, etc. Please note that SR 5.2.4.2 F gives the instructor additional discretionary latitude to accept “*Any other circumstances which the Instructor of Record finds reasonable cause for absence.*” Instructors are encouraged to work with students that have reasonable requests. AOS frequently has students contact the office regarding whether an absence can be excused. We often contact the instructor to discuss the individual situation, but ultimately, the decision rests with the instructor on what they will accept as “*other circumstances*” that are a “*reasonable cause for absence*”.

Notification Requirements. To prevent confusion, faculty should inform students in the course syllabus about the

notification requirements for the course for excused absences. Notification requirements must be at least as protective of student rights as required by Senate Rules. In general, students must notify the Instructor of an absence within one week following the period of absence. The Senate Rules state that advance notice may be required to excuse an absence in three circumstances:

- (1) Absence for a major religious holiday requires advance written notification. The Ombud Office is available for consultation should the Instructor require guidance.
- (2) *“Trips for members of student organizations sponsored by an educational unit, trips for University classes, and trips for participation in intercollegiate athletic events,”* when advance notice is *“feasible.”* SR 5.2.4.2 C. If advance notice is not feasible, the student must provide adequate notification and documentation within one week after the student’s return to class.
- (3) Interviews for full-time job opportunities post-graduation and interviews for graduate or professional school require advance notice. See “Excused Absence for Job and Graduate/Professional School” below.

Excused Absence Due to Illness Documented by UHS. According to SR 5.2.4.2 A, a student’s absence is excused for *“Significant illness of the student or serious illness of a member of the student’s household (permanent or campus) or immediate family. The Instructor of Record shall have the right to request appropriate verification.”* There continues to be some confusion regarding documentation of illness. UHS has prepared a [statement](#) about class attendance and student illnesses that is useful for students and faculty. UHS has defined three levels of documentation, Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3. Tier 1 forms are filled out by the student; it is at the discretion of the instructor whether to accept Tier 1 documentation to excuse an absence. Tier 2 and Tier 3 are generated by UHS and provided to the student. The student must then forward the email or present a hard copy to the faculty. Faculty have informed the Ombud that emailed documents may be easily fabricated. The Ombud recommends that faculty make use of the verification offered by UHS which can be done by simply forwarding the original Tier 2 or Tier 3 document to the UHS email address provided in the body of the documentation. AOS recommends that instructors accept verified Tier 2 and 3 forms to excuse a student’s absence. More information on UHS Tiers may be found on the [AOS website](#).

Excused Absence Due to Illness Documented by Other Health Care Providers: Please be aware that faculty have informed AOS that students may be fabricating documentation from off campus health care providers for excused absences. Faculty are encouraged to inform students in the syllabus that the instructor will contact the provider to confirm the authenticity of any documentation for excused absences due to illness. For non-UHS health care providers, the student may need to contact their provider to allow an instructor to contact the provider to verify that the student was seen.

Excused Absence for Job and Graduate/Professional School: The [University Senate approved a new rule](#), SR 5.2.4.2 E for excused absences for certain interviews on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The new rule states that *“Interviews for full-time job opportunities post-graduation and interviews for graduate or professional school [are excused]. The student must notify the Instructor of Record prior to the occurrence of such absences. Instructors of record have the right to request appropriate verification.”* Students are required to notify the instructor prior to the absence, and instructors are encouraged require and verify documentation.

Since this is the first full Spring Semester since the new rule was established, AOS anticipates that there will be questions regarding this rule since many graduating students will be interviewing for jobs in the Spring. AOS recommends that you include a note about excused absences for employment in your syllabus, reminding students that they must notify you prior to the absence and that you may or will verify the interview.

## 6. Attendance and Class Behavior Issues

If class attendance will be used as a basis for grading, faculty must explicitly state in the syllabus how a student’s attendance will affect the student’s grade. For example, an instructor may state in the syllabus that a student’s letter grade in the course will be reduced by one letter if the student has more than three unexcused absences in the course. The instructor should define in the syllabus all course policies relating to unexcused absences and tardiness. Any such policies on class attendance that affect grading must be applied consistently for all students in the class. If a policy relating to unexcused absences is not stated in the course syllabus or the policy does not specify a penalty for unexcused absences, the instructor should not penalize the student for unexcused absences.

Instructors are reminded that [SR 6.1.2](#) requires that faculty must respect the right of each student to voice opinions that conflict with the Instructor’s opinion and the opinion of other students. Students must, however, express their opinions in a manner that is respectful, civil, and not disruptive to the class.

Instructors may wish to discourage disruptive behavior in class by stating in the course syllabus that a student who violates the rules for civil behavior in class will be told to leave the class and will receive an unexcused absence for that class. That unexcused absence would have the same effect as any unexcused absence described in the syllabus on the student’s grade.

Finally, instructors are reminded that the Community of Concern (CoC) provides a valuable resource for students who are struggling with a wide range of issues, including behavioral and mental health issues. In many cases these issues can have a significant impact on the student’s academic performance. CoC has a very impressive track record for assisting students who are dealing with a wide range of issues that can directly affect their academic performance. More information on the CoC is available on their website at: <http://www.uky.edu/concern/>, including a link to file a discreet report to the CoC.

Another resource we encourage instructors to use when they have concerns about students struggling with academic issues is to send an 'Academic Alert' to the student's advisor. The academic alert notification can be accessed on the class roll page in MyUK. To access this feature, logon to MyUK, and open the class roll under Faculty Services. You will see a link that you can use to file a concern that will be directed to the student's advisor. With the addition of new full time advising staff to the colleges, this has become a more effective process allowing the students advisors to reach out in a more timely manner to help them deal directly with academic performance issues or underlying issues that are affecting their academic performance.

## 7. Academic Integrity Issues

Plagiarism continues to be the most common academic offense issue that comes to AOS. There is a link on the [AOS website](#) to an essay by Dr. David Royse, a previous Ombud, that you may find helpful. SR 6.3 defines cheating and plagiarism and [SR 6.4](#) outlines the steps to be taken by the instructor. Briefly, if the instructor suspects an academic offense has occurred, the instructor and chair should meet with the student. If the instructor determines that an offense has occurred, the chair should then contact Sean Cooper in the registrar's office to determine if the student has any previous academic offenses as this will influence the severity of the sanction that will be imposed on the student. Do not contact the registrar's office prior to meeting with the student and determining an academic offense has occurred. Once a sanction has been determined, AOS can also provide you with template letters for various types of academic offenses and levels of sanctions. Please contact us if you have questions regarding offenses or procedures to be followed.

As a reminder from the previous start of term notice, AOS has been made aware of paraphrasing software that has been used to disguise plagiarism. Previously identified online software included [paraphrasing-tool.com](#) and [plagiarisma.net](#). A recent google search identified several others. A writing assignment that contains odd phrasing may indicate that this type of software has been used. For example, the previous paragraph was entered into Article Rewriter on [seowagon.com/article-rewriter](#) and the first two sentences were rewritten as "*Plagiarism continues in imitation of keep the almost common tutorial fault difficulty up to expectation comes after AOS. permanency There is a hyperlink over the AOS website after an treatise by Dr. David Royse, a previous Ombud, as thou may additionally discover helpful.*"

## 8. Disability Issues

AOS continues to see issues related to accommodating students with disabilities. If a student with a documented disability requires academic accommodations for your course, the student must provide you with a Letter of Accommodation from the [UK Disability Resource Center](#) (DRC). The DRC accommodation letter should be provided to the instructor at the beginning of the term.

Please be aware that instructors are required to provide the appropriate accommodations, or to arrange for the accommodations through the DRC. We continue to see cases where the student does not provide the letter until the last minute before an exam. It is the student's responsibility to provide these letters in a timely manner. It is best to ask at the beginning of the term that any students requiring accommodation contact you as soon as possible to avoid issues at a later date. While you are encouraged to make an announcement in class, please be sensitive to the student. Many of these students are very sensitive about their issues and they should not be discussed in class. Please make it clear that these students can contact you during office hours or by appointment to discuss their accommodation needs. Should a student provide an accommodation letter at the last minute before an exam, while you are not obligated to make the accommodation, we recommend that you try to work with the student.

If the student is not registered with the DRC and brings a potential issue to your attention, please let them know that they may begin the process by registering [online](#). The DRC is located in Suite 407 of the Multidisciplinary Science Building, 725 Rose Street, 0082. To contact the DRC by phone, please call V/TDD (859) 257-2754.

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As always, AOS would like to hear your comments and suggestions. If there are specific issues that you believe would be of interest to other instructors, please feel free to [email](#) us your ideas and we will consider them for inclusion in future start of semester notices. Thank you again for your service to the University of Kentucky and its most valuable asset, our students. Have a great semester.

### LINKS:

[The Course Syllabus](#)  
[Academic Offense Policy](#)  
[Accommodation of Religious Observances](#)  
[Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)  
[Dead Week](#)  
[Final Examinations](#)  
[Cheating During Examinations](#)  
[Class Records & Papers](#)  
[Course Evaluations](#)  
[Cancellation of Classes](#)