

Regulations for student attendance and guidelines for approved absences from mandatory activities

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A. Attendance Regulations

Preamble

A high rate of attendance is key to the success of medical students, given the competency-based, experiential nature of medical training and the central role played by highly interactive small-group modes of instruction at the University of Toronto. However, there are instances which may necessitate medical students requiring time away from the MD Program.

These regulations and guidelines permit and support planned and unplanned absences from mandatory learning activities in order for students to seek needed health care services.

Students are also permitted to take up to three personal days in the course of a single academic year in each of the 4 years of the MD Program. Guidelines regarding personal days, including situations in which they cannot be used, are provided in Section B.

Mandatory and non-mandatory activities

All scheduled assessments are mandatory. For the purpose of these regulations and guidelines, scheduled assessments include all activities in which students are expected to submit and/or engage in work for assessment.

Included below is a listing of non-assessment activities that are considered mandatory or non-mandatory for the purpose of these regulations and guidelines. MD Program curriculum leaders are responsible for ensuring that course/component syllabi clearly indicate which non-assessment sessions are and are not mandatory.

For both mandatory and non-mandatory sessions, students are responsible for knowing the content covered in a session, regardless of whether they attend or not.

Foundations (years 1 and 2):

Mandatory sessions

- All small group tutorials and workshops, including but not limited to Case-based Learning (CBL), Clinical Skills, Public Health, Ethics & Professionalism, Health Science Research (HSR), and Portfolio
- All service-learning community visits
- All Family Medicine Longitudinal Experience (FMLE) sessions
- All core Interprofessional Education (IPE) sessions
- All anatomy laboratory sessions

Non-mandatory sessions (unless otherwise specified)

- All lectures and other large-group (whole class) sessions are optional except when otherwise specified by the course director, component director or theme lead

Clerkship (years 3 and 4):

Mandatory sessions

- All clinical activities
- All core Interprofessional Education (IPE) sessions
- All Portfolio sessions
- All local (site-specific) didactic teaching sessions, except when otherwise specified by the course director

Attendance at discretion of course director

- Non-MD-specific sessions (such as Grand Rounds) may be mandatory or optional, at the discretion of the course director
- Attendance at other types of session may be mandatory or optional, at the discretion of the course director. Students should assume that sessions not listed above are mandatory unless they are advised otherwise.

Non-mandatory sessions (unless otherwise specified)

- All central didactic teaching sessions are optional except when otherwise specified by the course director

Principles related to notification and approval of absence from a mandatory activity

Although special circumstances may warrant a student's absence from a mandatory activity, students are responsible for submitting notification of any planned or unplanned absence from a mandatory activity. Planned absences require prior approval; unplanned absences require timely and satisfactory explanation; personal days require timely notification. Students may be required to submit supporting documentation for planned and unplanned absences. Notification of absence guidelines and procedures are provided in Section B below.

Consequences of not attending a mandatory activity

Unless prior approval is granted by the appropriate curriculum leader(s), failure to attend a mandatory activity for a reason that should have allowed for planning and an absence request is normally considered unprofessional behaviour and may be reflected in a student's professionalism assessment.

Failure to attend a mandatory activity for an urgent/emergent reason without subsequently providing adequate notification and explanation within a reasonable time frame is also normally considered unprofessional behaviour and may be reflected in a student's professionalism assessment.

Disregarding the decision of a MD Program leader regarding a request for absence from a mandatory activity is also normally considered unprofessional behaviour and may be reflected in a student's professionalism assessment.

For any absence, but especially those affecting experiential learning such as clinical placements, students may be required to make up the time that was missed, whether the absence was pre-approved or not.

MD Program holiday and examination schedule

Students in the MD Program are subject to the MD Program holiday and examination schedule, which frequently differs from the University of Toronto holiday schedule published annually by the Office of Vice-Provost. If a student reviews the posted MD Program holiday and examination schedule and has any doubts about expected attendance on a given day, he or she should contact the Foundations or Clerkship Director, or the Foundations or Clerkship Administrative Coordinator, as appropriate.

B. Notification of Absence Guidelines and Procedures

1. Planned Absences

When special circumstances that may warrant an absence are anticipated, students are responsible for submitting notification of their planned absence from any mandatory activity(ies), normally at least four weeks in advance of the activity(ies) to be missed. In addition, depending upon the type or duration of the absence, or the number of prior absences, students may also be required to submit supporting documentation.

Guidelines regarding consideration of notification of planned absences

Students should not assume that approval will be granted for planned absences, and are strongly advised not to commit to any plans before receiving confirmation of approval from the program. The MD Program will take into consideration all relevant factors in determining whether to grant approval for an absence, including but not limited to:

- the reason for the absence,
- the type of mandatory activity(ies) to be missed, and their relative importance or uniqueness in the course(s)/component(s),
- the number of mandatory activities to be missed, and their relative importance or uniqueness in the course(s)/component(s),
- the student's academic performance to date and the anticipated impact of the absence on his/her studies, and
- the student's professional performance to date.

Previous absence requests may be considered in relation to decisions regarding requested absences.

Notification procedures for planned absences

For any planned absence from a mandatory activity, students are responsible for submitting a request, normally at least four weeks in advance of the activity(ies) to be missed. Further details about how to request a planned absence can be found on the MD program's [school absences webpage](http://www.md.utoronto.ca/school-absences) (www.md.utoronto.ca/school-absences).

If the planned absence is approved, the student is responsible for informing in a timely manner the immediate education supervisor(s) of the activity(ies) they will be absent from. If the matter is sensitive, the student may elect to first consult with the Associate Dean Health Professions Student Affairs (HPSA) or a counsellor in the Office of Health Professions Student Affairs to determine appropriate notification procedures.

Following receipt of notification from the student, the relevant curriculum leader(s) will determine the appropriate response, including whether or not the student is also required to submit supporting documentation. They will also specify any extra measures that the student will be required to take as a result, such as making up missed educational activities, etc.

All submitted absence requests are retained in the student's permanent record, whether the absence was granted or not. In the case of highly sensitive reasons for the absence (for example, medical or family matters), students are not required to provide full details of the situation in the absence request, but may be requested to provide information and/or supporting documentation to the Associate Dean Health Professions Student Affairs in order for the request to be appropriately adjudicated.

2. Unplanned Absences

While some absences from mandatory activities may be anticipated, in other cases an absence may arise due to unforeseen and often emergent circumstances. In such cases, the MD Program recognizes the right of students to determine the best course of action based on their unique knowledge of and perspective on the situation. This course of action may include a decision to miss one or more mandatory activities. Students who decide to be absent from one or more mandatory activities are, however, responsible for submitting notification of their absence as soon as possible after attending to the immediate needs arising from the situation. In addition, depending upon the type or duration of the absence, or the number of prior absences, students may also be required to submit supporting documentation.

Guidelines regarding consideration of notification unplanned absences

The MD Program is committed to fostering a supportive, compassionate environment at the heart of which is the conviction that student well-being is intimately connected to student success. Nevertheless, it must be

recognized that a student's right to decide to miss mandatory activities is inherently accompanied by his/her responsibility to accept and address any consequences of the decision with regard to his/her studies.

Previous absence requests may be considered in relation to decisions regarding requested absences or other relevant matters.

Notification procedures for unplanned absences

If a student chooses to be absent from one or more mandatory activities, he or she is responsible for submitting notification and copying the immediate education supervisor(s), if known, of the activity(ies) missed, as soon as possible after attending to the immediate needs arising from the situation. Further details about how to submit notification for an unplanned absence can be found on the MD program's [school absences webpage \(www.md.utoronto.ca/school-absences\)](http://www.md.utoronto.ca/school-absences). In the event that the student believes that an extended absence of three or more days may be required, this should be conveyed in the notification, and will normally require submission of supporting documentation after the immediate needs arising from the situation have been attended to. If the matter is sensitive, the student may elect to first consult with the Associate Dean Health Professions Student Affairs (HPSA) or a counsellor in the Office of Health Professions Student Affairs to determine appropriate notification procedures.

Following receipt of notification from the student, the relevant curriculum leader(s) will determine the appropriate response, including whether or not the student is also required to submit any additional documentation. They will also specify any extra measures that the student will be required to take as a result, such as making up missed educational activities, etc.

All submitted absence requests are retained in the student's permanent record, whether the absence was granted or not. In the case of highly sensitive reasons for the absence (for example, medical or family matters), students are not required to provide full details of the situation in the absence request, but may be requested to provide information and/or supporting documentation to the Associate Dean Health Professions Student Affairs in order for the request to be appropriately adjudicated.

3. Personal Days

Students are permitted to take up to three personal days in the course of a single academic year in each of the 4 years of the MD Program, effective starting with learning activities that take place in the 2017-18 academic year. These are days where students may be absent from educational activities without providing a reason. The program recommends that students plan ahead so that these days are available to them for anticipated personal events such as attending a friend or family member's wedding, family reunions, and other celebrations (e.g. partner's convocation).

Guidelines regarding consideration of notification of personal days

Personal days cannot normally be used:

- on scheduled call days in clerkship
- on days marked for course orientation
- the day before or the day after a long weekend or vacation period
- two days before, the day before, or the day of an assessment
- in conjunction with another type of absence (e.g. before or after attending a conference)
- on clerkship courses of two weeks in duration, or less
- on three days within the same academic year where a specific theme content is covered; e.g. three mandatory ethics/IPE/Leader/Portfolio in Foundations
- on three days within the same clerkship course
- on a day where a Portfolio session is held in the clerkship

Under extenuating circumstances, exceptions to the above will be considered.

Personal days do *not* need to be used for:

- illness
- personal medical appointments
- presenting at a conference

The planned and unplanned absences guidelines and procedures apply to absences for those three situations.

Students are responsible for communicating with relevant faculty and classmates to ensure that they make up missed content.

Notification procedures for personal days

Students are responsible for submitting personal day requests as far in advance as possible, normally at least four weeks in advance of the activity(ies) to be missed. Further details about how to request personal days can be found on the MD program's school absences webpage (www.md.utoronto.ca/school-absences). Students are expected to manage their personal day requests in a responsible and professional manner.

Following receipt of a personal day request, students will receive confirmation of receipt from the relevant faculty or administrator, including notification of course conflicts, if any.

Students are responsible for communicating with relevant faculty and classmates to ensure that they make up missed content.

4. Reporting of student absences by tutors, other supervisors and administrative staff

Students are responsible for providing notification of any planned or unplanned absence from a mandatory activity, including personal day absences. To ensure that absences in which the notification procedures outlined above were not followed are addressed and recorded, tutors, other supervisors and administrative staff are also required to report student absences from a mandatory activity, whether pre-approved or not. Further details about how to report an absence can be found on the MD program's [school absences webpage](http://www.md.utoronto.ca/school-absences) (www.md.utoronto.ca/school-absences).