EXPLANATION OF STUDENT OMBUDS SERVICES’ (S.O.S.) ABSENCE VERIFICATION ROLE

Time and again, research on student performance affirms that consistent class attendance is the #1 predictor of academic success. It is to be expected then that the university and its faculty take your presence and participation very seriously. Each instructor’s course syllabus is expected to explain attendance policy as it applies to that course, so be sure to read and become acquainted with the “rules” for each of your courses.

But what should you do if a class absence cannot be avoided?

1. In most situations, if you anticipate needing to be away from class, or something has just occurred that has resulted in a class absence, speak directly with the instructor of the affected class(es). The majority of cases are resolved by providing an explanation and discussing how you can make up missed work or tests. Most instructors work directly with the student, and involvement by Student Ombuds Services (S.O.S.) isn’t needed.

2. However, sometimes objective verification, especially in complicated situations, might be helpful to both the student and the instructor. In these cases, ask S.O.S. to help.

The Class Attendance regulation (http://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-03) provides some parameters and guidance for faculty and students to consider in determining whether a class absence is excused. Other than in a couple exceptional situations, essentially the judgment of whether a life event warrants missing a class is in the hands of the instructor. Verification of the situation – either by the student or the Student Ombuds – can help the instructor make the appropriate determination.

The instructor's attendance/absence policy as stated in the course syllabus is also an essential element in determining whether an absence is indeed to be excused. The only mandated accommodations of an absence are for religious observances (N.C.G.S. § 116-11(3a)) or when a student has a court order requiring court attendance.

The University’s Attendance Regulation refers to absences in two broad categories: anticipated and unanticipated.

- **Anticipated absences** include such events as mandated court dates, required days of religious observance, and participation in an official university function. Because these events are known in advance, instructors are to be informed well ahead of their occurrence so that arrangements for submitting course work or possibly scheduling a make-up test can be made.

- **Unanticipated absences** include such events as: illness, death of a family member, or a natural disaster. Communication with instructors as soon as possible once the event is known is expected and in everyone’s best interest.

When requested by either the student or the instructor, Student Ombuds Services (S.O.S.) is glad to work alongside the student to verify the facts of both anticipated and unanticipated class
absences and to then communicate that verification to the student’s instructors. A copy of the verification message is also sent to the student and the student’s academic advisor. Verification of an anticipated or unanticipated class absence is usually done in the form of some objective document(s) such as a doctor’s note, an obituary, or a reference to the Diversity Calendar (http://oied.ncsu.edu/main/holidays/) for religious observances.

There are, of course, unanticipated events that are less significant which may also result in a class absence (e.g. flat tire). Whether such a “life event” is considered excused is up to the judgment of the instructor. Again, it is recommended that the student reviews that part of the instructor’s syllabus regarding attendance requirements at the start of each semester, prior to the occurrence of any potentially interfering event.

Once a student situation that will result or has resulted in class absence(s) is verified and communicated either by S.O.S. or directly by the student, the faculty member typically provides needed support to make up missed course work or tests consistent with course and/or department policy.

On rare occasions, an extended absence or a series of absences, even when verified, may collectively interfere with the successful completion of a course. In such extreme circumstances, the student’s academic advisor is the best person to work with the student to determine whether dropping the course, requesting an “incomplete” as a temporary grade, or even withdrawing from the semester are options to be considered.

Students, parents, faculty and staff are welcome to contact S.O.S. with questions regarding anticipated or unanticipated class absences:

- Call 919-515-2963
- Email student-ombuds@ncsu.edu or
- Submit an "Ask the Ombuds" on-line form.

S.O.S. staff will take basic information, and expedite a response and assistance as soon as possible.