


# NAVIGATING ATTENDANCE MODIFICATION

Annette Jenner-Matthews  
Syracuse University



# What students receive an attendance modification accommodation?

- Students with chronic health conditions. Especially those that are episodic in nature.
  - *Can be infrequent health issues or those that happen on a more regular basis*
- Mental health issues
  - *Will this accommodation help students get to class more often or will it enable students to miss more classes?*
- Attendance modification is not given to those with time management issues

# Old attendance statement on our standard accommodation letter (Fall 2014)

- STUDENT understands his responsibility to attend all classes but there may be times when he will be unable to attend class due to an exacerbation of his/her disability. At the beginning of the semester, STUDENT will work with you to make a specific plan for how these absences will be addressed, and agree upon the arrangements and expectations for completing any makeup work resulting from missed class time.
- If this student misses a substantial amount of class time, or does not make up the work within the deadline agreed upon with the professor, the student will work with the professor on a possible drop, withdrawal, incomplete, or even a failing grade.

# Where the process fell apart

- Student who attended ESF came with documentation of social anxiety
- Difficulty attending class in a large lecture room on campus
- Several semesters with no issues
- Adjunct professor contacted our office because student was in her class and she wasn't sure what to do.
  - *Student had not been attending class but got an A on the mid-term.*
  - *Didn't want to pass the student but had no grades tied to class participation or attendance.*

# Development of a new attendance modification policy

- Several members of the office attended Jamie Axelrod's talk at AHEAD
  - *Northern Arizona University had an OCR case related to their "recommendation" on student accommodation letter.*
    - "Recommendation: The student's disability may impact attendance. It is recommended that the instructor collaborate with the student early in the semester to determine the best way to accommodate."
    - OCR had issues with the idea that this was a recommendation
    - Original process looks a lot like what Syracuse is doing now.
    - Modified this so that the agreements are completed by ODS staff

# Current students authorized for an attendance modification accommodation

- In Spring 2017, 66 students had an approved attendance modification accommodation
- 4.3% of the students we serve
  - *21 students were diagnosed with mental health*
  - *34 students were diagnosed with basic medical*
  - *11 students were diagnosed with complex medical*

# Procedures for Attendance Modification

- Counselor meets with student to determine if a modified attendance policy is required based on disability.
- Student is provided a separate letter of accommodation authorizing attendance modification for upcoming semester.
- \*Review individual syllabi with student in preparation for meeting with instructor
- \*Counselor emails the faculty to give them background on attendance modification
- Student and instructor meet and fill out attendance modification agreement
- Student returns the agreements and they are reviewed by counselor

# Syllabus review

- What does the syllabus say about attendance?
- Is the class lecture-based or discussion-based?
- Is class participation factored into your grade – if so, how is it measured?
- Are there in-class quizzes or graded assignments?
- Are there in-class exams?
- Lab, field trips, etc.



# Faculty email:

\_\_\_\_\_ is a student in your \_\_\_\_\_ class who has an attendance accommodation. The attendance modification accommodation is most frequently granted for a student who has a documented chronic health problem which occasionally causes him/her to be absent from class. The students are directed to contact you in advance to discuss this accommodation and work with you to fill out an attendance modification agreement. The intent of this accommodation is to establish a plan of action prior to attendance becoming an issue. Faculty set their own attendance policies; the accommodation is simply a request for some flexibility in the policy. The amount of flexibility will depend on the nature of the class and whether class participation is a factor in the final grade. Students who are eligible for this accommodation are responsible for completing all coursework. This accommodation is not a “blank check” which allows students to miss a large number of classes for any given course. A student with excessive absences in a class should consult with the instructor about dropping/withdrawing the course or receiving an incomplete grade when appropriate.

Based on Office of Civil Rights Cases in 1994 the following six factors should be used in considering if attendance is an essential element of a course and should be consider when you are working with the student to complete the modified attendance agreement

# Is attendance an essential element of a course – Civil Rights Cases

- Are there classroom interactions between the instructor and the students and among students?
- Do student contributions constitute a significant component of the learning process?
- Does the functional nature of the course rely on student participation as an essential method for learning?
- To what degree does a student's failure to attend constitute a significant loss to the educational experience of the other students in the course?
- What do the course description and syllabus say?
- What are classroom practices and policies regarding attendance?

# Attendance Modification Authorization Letter

RE: Attendance Accommodation for \_\_\_\_\_ SUID \_\_\_\_\_

The Office of Disability Services (ODS) has authorized the above student to receive an attendance modification as a disability-related accommodation.

The intent of this accommodation is to establish a plan of action prior to attendance becoming an issue. This will ensure that both the integrity of the course and the student's accommodation needs are met.

The student has the responsibility to engage with you in a discussion of how this accommodation will be implemented. In order to facilitate this discussion, ODS has provided the student with an attendance modification agreement document. Please complete this form together with the student based on the following:

\* Followed by 6 Questions

# Attendance Modification Agreement

- Is attendance factored into your grading of this course?      Yes      No
  
- Is class participation factored into the grading of this course?      Yes      No

# Attendance Modification Agreement continues

- What is the agreed upon number of absences that would fundamentally alter the class?
- What is the recommended action when this number of absences has been exceeded (Ex: drop, withdrawal, incomplete)
- When the student misses class, he/she is expected to: (for ex. email within 24 hrs).
- How and within what time period will class content be made up? (ex. Alternative assignments, meeting)
- How and within what time period will missed, in-class, graded assignments be made up (including exams)?
- Signatures/date: Student, Professor, ODS counselor

# What works and what doesn't

- What works:

- *Have had good conversations about accommodation as follow-up from initial emails.*
- *It has helped in cases where students have hit "too many absences"*
- *Some faculty have completed the agreement very thoughtfully*

- What doesn't work:

- *Some faculty are resistant to the process*
- *Some faculty do not provide thoughtful answers to questions.*
- *Only a small percentage of students completed the agreements and returned them to ODS*

# Old extensions statement on our standard accommodation letter (Fall 2014)

- Out of class Assignments
- STUDENT understands his/her responsibility for class work but there may be times when he/she is in need of extra time for assignments or take-home exams due to an exacerbation of his/her disability. At the beginning of the semester, STUDENT will speak with you and discuss and agree upon the arrangements and expectations for receiving extra time on assignments - including how much advance notice he/she will give to you when requesting this accommodation for a particular assignment.

# Splitting of the extension accommodations

- Short-term assignment extensions
  - *This is for extensions on assignments that are announced ad hoc by instructors (i.e. not posted or stated on syllabus) that have a turn-around time of less than one week*
- Long-term assignment extensions
  - *This is for extensions on long-term assignments that are scheduled by the professor and announced to the students in advance with a turn-around time of greater than a week.*



# Current students authorized for an extensions for long-term assignments

- In Spring 2017, 28 students had an approved attendance modification accommodation
- 1.8% of the students we serve
  - *12 students have disabilities related to mental health*
  - *5 students have disabilities related to basic medical*
  - *4 students have disabilities related to complex medical*
  - *2 students have visual impairments*
  - *5 students had other disabilities*

# Out of class assignment modification agreement - Long term Assignment

- If a modification is necessary for disability-related reason(s), what method should the student use to make arrangements for an extension (ex: email, by conference with professor, phone call).
- How far in advance must the student make a request for an assignment due date modification?
- Identify the assignment that will be covered under this agreement (ex: homework, papers, project, presentations)
- How long will the extension be for each assignment?
- If the new deadline is not met, how will this be addressed (ex: incomplete, grade reduction, further extension)?
- Signature/Date

# Conclusion

- The attendance and extension agreements have added more control into the process both for students and faculty.
- The current process is a bit more labor intensive than all parties would like.
- Not all students feel that the process is worth it and some do not follow through with the process.
- The process will change with the implantation of Accommodate software.
- We are still looking to improve the process.