

Absences

Overview

We strongly recommend students to be present for ALL educational activities. And as stated in the Attendance section, for many of the educational sessions, attendance is required.

The practice of medicine is collaborative and collegial. Excellent patient care requires good communication and trust among and between colleagues. Medical education requires students to work collaboratively with each other, patients, fellow students, staff, and faculty in a regular and predictable manner.

The nature of our work as caregivers requires that we notify appropriate persons when we must be absent so that patient care is not compromised, and both clinical and educational responsibilities are fairly shared. As a supportive community that values wellness and well-being, the School of Medicine faculty, staff, and administration realize that various circumstances--emergent or otherwise--will require that members of our community must occasionally be absent from required events. Furthermore, we must work together to support each other during circumstances that take us away from required events. This policy outlines the process by which students can request an absence from required duties.

Failure to comply with this policy will be considered unprofessional behavior.

Absence Policy

During Foundations

During clinical clerkships, students must adhere to the During Foundations, absences from required activities will be considered for the following reasons:

- Appointments for medical care that cannot reasonably be scheduled outside your MD program responsibilities
- Acute medical illness or family emergency
- To give a scholarly presentation at an academically relevant national meeting
- Running for or holding national office in a relevant professional organization
- Religious observances
- Required student meetings with deans and potential/actual Discovery mentors
- Required MD/PhD meetings, including the annual MD/PhD retreat
- Important personal events (weddings/graduations of immediate family members)
- Curriculum committee meetings

Other possible absences will be considered by the Associate Dean for Medical Education and Student Affairs on a case-by-case basis.

During the Foundations phase, students should contact Dr. Ira Schwartz to be granted an approved absence.

*Requests should be made as far in advance as possible, and always before the experience for which the student will be absent. **For emergent absences, students***

should phone AND email the appropriate Dean. All other requests should be made in person or by email.

If the requested absence is approved, Dr. Schwartz will notify the Foundations director and the student's Small Group Advisor.

Any required sessions or assignments that are missed must be fulfilled to the satisfaction of the course and Foundations director and the appropriate Dean. Within reason, course directors will assist students to complete all work missed during approved absences, as they deem necessary. If an approved absence does not allow for the missed work to be made up before the end of the course or phase, the student may be assigned a grade of "Incomplete" until the work is completed. If the student is unable to complete the missed work in a timely manner, as determined by the course director, the grade may be converted to "Withdrawal". The designation of "Withdrawal" would require the student to repeat the course.

Unapproved absences during the Foundations phase will be considered a professionalism concern and will be brought to the attention of the Progress and Promotions (P&P) committee. If a student has three or more unapproved absences, referral to the P&P committee could result in a letter of concern, warning, probation, or other ramifications as the committee deems appropriate.

During Clinical Clerkships

During the Application, Discovery, and Translation phases, students should follow the Absence from Clinical Duties Policy and Process (below). Clinical training is an essential part of medical education and represents a critical phase of the medical student experience. Given this, any absence from clinical duties (ACD) is considered a serious matter and may require the time to be made up. This includes if the absence is anticipated (for example: attendance/presentation at a national meeting, important personal events, etc.) OR unanticipated (for example, personal illness/injury or family emergency). Clerkship directors understand that circumstances will sometimes require a student to be absent from clinical duties.

Per SOM policy, students have 1 day off per week (timing negotiated with their clinical teams or the clerkship director) and 1 wellness half-day per month on rotations that are 4 weeks or longer. Clerkship directors may place restrictions on when days off and wellness half-days can be taken (e.g., not during orientation, exam periods, didactic days, etc.). The following are responsibilities and general guidelines for a medical student considering an ACD.

Terms, Definitions, and Student Responsibilities

Absence from Clinical Duties (ACD)

This is defined as an absence that occurs during scheduled duty hours, not during mandatory time off or on additional scheduled days off from clinical service. A student who has an ACD may be **required to make up the time absent (or work missed)**, depending on how much time and what **activities were missed**.

There are no **automatically "approved" absences**. You must discuss the need to make up any clerkship related activities with your clerkship director. **Your clerkship director will also direct when any missed time/work will be made up.**

Anticipated Absences from Clinical Duties

If possible, try to schedule activities **outside of clinical duty hours**. If this is not possible, the student should notify the clerkship director and clerkship coordinator, as well as the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Clinical Services, Dr. Higgins as soon as **a need is known** to seek permission to miss clinical duties during the affected clerkship.

Please make requests in a **professional** manner. **Approval is not guaranteed**, as some clerkship activities cannot be rescheduled or made-up. The final decision regarding accommodation of anticipated absences will be with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Clinical Services.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of common anticipated reasons that an ACD may be requested.

- Appointments for medical care that cannot reasonably be scheduled outside of the MD program responsibilities (should be scheduled during wellness half-days if possible)
- To give a scholarly presentation at an academically relevant national meeting
- Running for or holding national office in a relevant professional organization
- Religious observances
- Required student meetings with deans and potential/actual Discovery mentors (should be scheduled during wellness half-days or late in the day/early evening to limit interference with clinical activities)
- Required MD/PhD meetings, including the annual MD/PhD retreat
- Important personal events (weddings/graduations/funerals of immediate family members)
- Curriculum committee meetings
- Residency interviews, including "second look" invitations after online interviews

Other possible anticipated absences will be considered by the clerkship director and the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Clinical Services on a case-by-case basis

Unanticipated Absences

Include:

- Personal illness/injury
- Family emergency

Students with unanticipated circumstances requiring ACD should notify the clerkship director and coordinator and the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Clinical Services **immediately** via text, email, or phone call, as well as the attending faculty and/or the most senior resident member of their clinical team.

Students with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 Illness:

1. Students with suspected/confirmed COVID or other febrile respiratory illness (i.e., fever and cough/sore throat) may return to work if all 3 criteria are met:
 - No fever for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen) AND
 - Improving symptoms for at least 24 hours AND
 - Student agrees to always wear a surgical mask at school or in clinicals (unless alone AND actively eating/drinking) for 10 days from the onset of symptoms (NOTE: the first day of symptoms is considered "day 0")
2. Students missing 4 days or more of clinical duties or coursework would need a medical excuse from their PCP, SHS or urgent care for it to be an approved absence.

Time Allowed Before Make-Up is Required

Below is a general guideline of when clinical make up time is required after missed days.

- 1-week clerkship/rotation: any days missed
- 4-week clerkship/rotation: if miss more than 1 day
- 6-week clerkship: if miss more than 2 days
- 8-week clerkship: if miss more than 3 days

Scheduling Make-Up Time or Work

The student will need to work with the clerkship director and the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Clinical Services, to find an appropriate time to do this. School policy does not allow missed time to be made up for one clerkship while engaged in another clerkship.

Duty hours

Duty hours are defined as time spent doing all clinical and academic activities related to the program and include patient care, administrative duties related to patient care, and scheduled educational conferences. Clinical service time may occur outside of business hours but should not exceed 80 hours/week.

Scheduled Days ON/Mandatory Time off/Wellness Half-Day

Each clerkship (except Emergency Medicine) will assign a number of scheduled days off, which includes the minimum mandatory time off from duty hours, as specified by ACGME guidelines. The total number of scheduled days off will be determined by each clerkship according to clinical service needs and schedules. Required wellness half-days are considered mandatory time off from clinical duties and students are expected to request the allotted amount of wellness half-days for each clerkship.

Student Responsibilities

1. Students should attempt to schedule non-clerkship related activities outside of normal duty hours for that clerkship (e.g., late afternoons/evenings and weekends or scheduled/mandatory time off, or during wellness half-days).
2. Students must communicate all requests with advance notice (as soon as the need is known to the student) to the clerkship director, clerkship coordinator, and Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Clinical Services.
3. Students must recognize that not all requests for ACD will be able to be accommodated and should be willing to prioritize their requests to assist the clerkship leadership team with their planning.
4. All communication regarding requests for time off should be done in a professional manner.
5. Students who are ACD are required to collect any didactic materials/notes from lectures that they may have missed during their time away.

Guidelines

1. Advance communication with the clerkship director, clerkship coordinator, and the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Clinical Services is required for any requested activity that could result in an ACD. Requests should be made as far in advance as possible, and always before the experience for which the student will be absent. For emergent absences, students should phone AND email the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Clinical Services, and clerkship director.
2. With advance notice, the clerkship directors will work with the student to try and avoid an ACD. This may include arranging rotations or shifts to accommodate the request or helping the student select the best days/times to attend their activity and limit time away from clinical duties. If accommodations can be made to align the student's scheduled time off with their activity, the absence will not be considered an ACD. However, clerkship directors may not always be able to accommodate these requests. In this case, if the clerkship director permits the student to attend the activity, this will result in an ACD.
3. Emergency requests for ACD such as student illness, personal injury, or injury/illness/death of a family member should be communicated as soon as possible to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Clinical Services and the clerkship director and clerkship coordinator.
4. In cases of ACD without prior communication with, or approval by, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Clinical Services office and the clerkship director, a Professional Conduct Evaluation Form will be filed by the clerkship director. This includes unauthorized extension of a previously authorized ACD.

Further information about common reasons for missing required educational events

Absence from Clinical Duties for Personal Medical Care

Medical students are strongly encouraged to maintain their own physical and mental health and well-being. Whenever possible, students should schedule non-emergent healthcare appointments during times that do not conflict with classroom and clinical activities. In the event an appointment must be scheduled during a required educational activity, students must request permission to be absent from required duties from the appropriate Dean (see above).

Religious Observances

The Emory School of Medicine recognizes and respects the importance of individual religious beliefs and practices. While the School of Medicine calendar includes only religious observances recognized as U.S. federal holidays, the school seeks to accommodate student religious needs reasonably and within the requirements of the academic schedule. There shall be no adverse or prejudicial effect resulting to any student requesting an absence from required duties for religious observances. Students assigned to patient care educational activities may request assignments that allow the student to meet their religious needs; however, students may be asked to attend patient care activities that cannot be reasonably re-scheduled, such as on-call time with a care team. Required academic work missed as part of an absence from required duties must be made up to the satisfaction of the supervising faculty member.

Residency Interviews

During clinical clerkships, students MAY be granted one-day of absence from clinical duties for residency interviews per each two weeks of the clinical rotation. This may vary on rotations that schedule shift clinical duties (e.g., Emergency Medicine). Students should discuss and submit requests for absence from clerkship responsibilities to the Dean's Office and clerkship director PRIOR to making travel or other interview plans. Regardless of absences for interviews, students must complete the requirements of the rotation by the last day of the rotation. Any deviation from this policy must be approved by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Clinical Services.

Participation in the MD or MD/PhD Admissions Process

Students actively participate in the MD and MD/PhD admissions process, serving as interviewers. Students will not be allowed to miss mandatory components of any clerkship to serve as an interviewer.

Participation in Meetings of the EUSOM Executive Curriculum Committee and its Subcommittees

Students actively participate in the subcommittees of the EUSOM Executive Curriculum Committee. They play an invaluable role in curricular decisions.

Required Student Meetings with Deans and Potential/Actual Discovery Mentors

During the required clerkships, students are required to meet with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Clinical Services, or their designee. In addition, students need to meet with faculty members in order to select a mentor for their Discovery phase project. If possible, these meetings should be scheduled during a time that minimizes student disruptions in clinical care activities.

[View Absence Flow Chart \[PDF\]](#)

Last modified: 7/15/2024