MD Program
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Regulations for student attendance and guidelines for absences from mandatory activities

Approval body: MD Program Curriculum Committee
Date of original adoption: 20 September 2011
Date of last review: 10 July 2018
Date of last amendment: 14 July 2016; 21 February 2017; 20 June 2017; 10 July 2018
Date of next scheduled review: 10 July 2022

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, as defined below. These regulations and guidelines permit and support absences from mandatory learning activities in order for students to seek needed health care services.

These regulations and guidelines describe reasons for health-related and other types of absences that are normally acceptable and corresponding procedures that are intended to:
• be clear, user friendly and implementable with available resources
• minimize disruption to student learning and patient care
• enable consistent and equitable decision-making
• maintain the educational integrity of the MD Program's goals, objectives and competencies
• facilitate the early identification, in a safe and confidential manner, of students who may require support
• ensure students are empowered to succeed in their progress through the program

Absences from mandatory learning activities fall into two categories:
a) unplanned absences (absences that arise due to unforeseen and often emergent circumstances)
b) planned absences (absences that arise due to known or anticipated circumstances)

Changes to rotation call schedules are *not* considered planned absences. Students who would like to request a change to their call schedule should contact the relevant Clerkship course director and Clerkship course administrator.

A prolonged absence or series of absences that affects the ability of a student to complete a course or curricular component within its normal timeframe or a reasonably extended timeframe (as defined by the relevant curriculum leaders) may be more effectively addressed and supported by a Leave of Absence (LOA), defined as an official, temporary withdrawal from studies. Further details regarding LOAs are included in the program's *Regulations and guidelines for leaves of absence from the MD Program*.

Submission of a U of T Verification of Illness (VOI) Form is *required* for health-related absences from assessments or for health-related absences of more than two consecutive days of mandatory learning sessions. The completed U of T VOI form must be submitted normally no more than five business days after the last day of the unplanned absence. Depending upon the type or duration of the absence, or the number of prior absences, students may be required to submit other supporting documentation.

For both planned and unplanned absences:
- Course and Component Directors (or their delegates) are responsible for determining if deferred/make-up work or assessment is required, and communicating next steps to the student.
- Students are responsible for covering material and knowing the content from any missed sessions and, if applicable, completing any deferred/make-up work or assessments.

Please note that the following are considered *unprofessional behaviour* that may be reflected in a student's professionalism assessment:
- Failure to attend a mandatory learning activity for an urgent/emergent reason (unplanned absence) without providing notification within a reasonable timeframe
- Failure to attend a mandatory learning activity for a reason that was known or anticipated, or can reasonably be expected to have been known or anticipated, but for which a planned absence request was not submitted
- Disregarding the decision of a MD Program leader regarding a planned absence request

Mandatory Learning Activities

Foundations (Years 1 and 2)	Clerkship (Years 3 and 4)
o All scheduled assessments and their corresponding activities	
(as indicated in MedSIS) o All small group tutorials and workshops, including but not limited to Case-based Learning (CBL), Clinical Skills, Health in Community, Ethics & Professionalism, Health Science Research (HSR), and Portfolio o All service-learning community visits o All Family Medicine Longitudinal Experience (FMLE) sessions o All Interprofessional Education (IPE) sessions o All Anatomy sessions o Some lectures, especially those that involve themes or guest panels	o All clinical activities o All learning sessions, including clerkship seminars, core Interprofessional Education (IPE) sessions, Portfolio sessions, and local (site-specific) teaching sessions

Unplanned Absences

Unplanned absences are absences that arise due to unforeseen and often emergent circumstances, including for:
- Self-care
- Illness/injury/personal crisis
- Family emergency
- Funeral/memorial service
- Travel/transportation emergencies (i.e., accidents, subway breakdowns)

Notification Procedures (Unplanned Absences)

Students are responsible for using the MD Program's unplanned absence notification form to submit notification of an unplanned absence as soon as possible after attending to the immediate needs arising from the situation.

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.

Please see Appendix A for an Unplanned Absence Notification Procedures Flowchart.

Planned Absences

Planned absences are absences that arise due to known or anticipated circumstances and require prior approval by the Course or Component Director. 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 Course or Component Director(s) (or delegate).

Notification Procedures (Planned Absences)

Students are responsible for using the MD Program's planned absence request form to submit planned absence requests in a timely manner, as follows:

- For Clerkship clinical rotations, at least 30 days prior to the start date of the rotation in which the missed activity(ies) are scheduled to take place.
- For all other Clerkship courses and all Foundations courses, at least 30 days prior to the activity(ies) to be missed.

If the planned absence request is approved, the student is responsible for informing the immediate education supervisors of the activities 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.

Please see Appendix B for a Planned Absence Request Procedures Flowchart.

Information and Decision-making Guidelines (Planned Absences)

In general, the following factors will be taken into consideration regarding planned absence requests:
- Reason for the absence
- Duration and type of learning activities to be missed, including their relative importance or uniqueness in the curriculum
- Student's academic record, including professionalism
- Student's attendance record/absence history

For more details regarding *common reasons for planned absences*, including corresponding information requirements and typical decision outcomes, see Table 1 (Foundations) and Table 2 (Clerkship) below.

Planned absence requests for reasons other than those included in Table 1 and Table 2 will be considered on a case-by-case basis, but will normally not be approved.

Absence Monitoring (Check-in Meetings)

The MD Program is committed to monitoring absences from mandatory learning activities in order to help ensure that the program is able to provide an accurate assessment of a student's progress through the program and that students are well positioned and supported to succeed in achieving course learning objectives and program competencies. A check-in meeting may be required of a student who has a recurrent or problematic absence history, typically defined as (but not limited to) the following:

- four or more full day equivalent 'self-care' unplanned absences in an academic year, *or*
- eight or more full day equivalent unplanned and/or planned absences in an academic year.
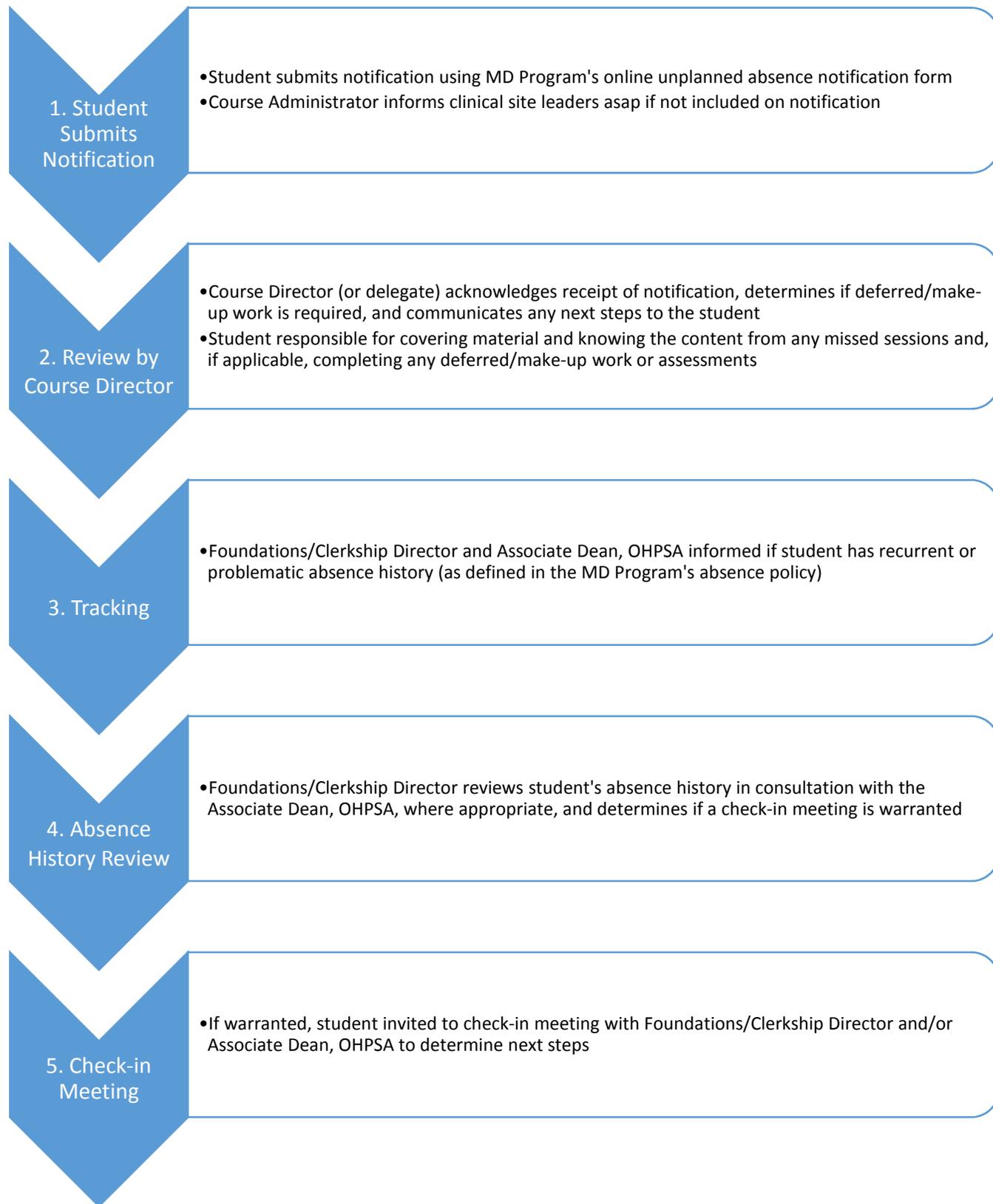
In such cases, the Foundations/Clerkship Director will review the student's absence history in consultation with the Associate Dean, Office of Health Professions Student Affairs (OHSPA), where appropriate, to determine next steps, including if a check-in meeting is warranted.

If warranted, the student will be invited to a check-in meeting with the Foundations/Clerkship Director and/or Associate Dean, OHPSA, which is intended to:
- provide students an opportunity to discuss their absences in a safe and confidential environment,
- help ensure they are aware of the various supports available to them, and
- determine if the student is able to complete a course or curricular component within its normal timeframe or a reasonably extended timeframe (as determined by the relevant curriculum leaders).

The MD Program's *Regulations and guidelines for leaves of absence from the MD Program* will help inform next steps in cases where a student is unable to complete a course or curricular component within its normal timeframe or a reasonably extended timeframe and may benefit from a LOA.

Appendix A: Unplanned Absence Notification Procedures Flowchart

1. Student Submits Notification
- Student submits notification using MD Program's online unplanned absence notification form
- Course Administrator informs clinical site leaders asap if not included on notification

2. Review by Course Director
- Course Director (or delegate) acknowledges receipt of notification, determines if deferred/make-up work is required, and communicates any next steps to the student
- Student responsible for covering material and knowing the content from any missed sessions and, if applicable, completing any deferred/make-up work or assessments

3. Tracking
- Foundations/Clerkship Director and Associate Dean, OHPSA informed if student has recurrent or problematic absence history (as defined in the MD Program's absence policy)

4. Absence History Review
- Foundations/Clerkship Director reviews student's absence history in consultation with the Associate Dean, OHPSA, where appropriate, and determines if a check-in meeting is warranted

5. Check-in Meeting
- If warranted, student invited to check-in meeting with Foundations/Clerkship Director and/or Associate Dean, OHPSA to determine next steps

Appendix B: Planned Absence Request Procedures Flowchart

1. Student Submits Request

- Student submits request using MD Program's online planned absence request form

2. Tracking

- If student has recurrent or problematic absence history (as defined in the MD Program's absence policy), skip to "4. Absence History Review"; if not, then proceed to "3. Review by Course Director"

3. Review by Course Director

- Course Director (or delegate) reviews request and consults with other education leaders, as appropriate, and communicates approval status to the student, including details regarding any required deferred/make-up work or assessments
- If approved, student responsible for informing immediate education supervisors of the activities they will be absent from, covering material and knowing the content from any missed sessions and, if applicable, completing any deferred/make-up work or assessments

4. Absence history review

- Foundations/Clerkship Director reviews student's absence history in consultation with the Associate Dean, OHPSA, where appropriate, and determines if the request should be forwarded to the Course Director for review (step 3) or if a check-in meeting (step 5) is warranted

5. Check-in Meeting

- If warranted, student invited to check-in meeting with Foundations/Clerkship Director and/or Associate Dean, OHPSA to determine next steps

Table 1: Planned Absence Information Requirements and Typical Decision Outcomes: Foundations (Years 1 & 2)

Reason for Absence in Foundations (Years 1 & 2)	Information Requirements	Typical Decision Outcome	
		for a Learning Session	for an Assessment
o Academic presentation at a conference o Participation at a conference (only if student is in an official leadership role representing UofT participating in a working group or committee)	o Brief description of type of/reason for absence o Date(s) of absence including presentation date and travel days, if applicable, and detailed list of corresponding activities to be missed o Proof of acceptance of conference presentation or invitation to participate as a student leader o Additional information/rationale required to justify approval of absence from an assessment	Normally approved for a maximum of three days and one such absence per academic year. Exceptions informed by relevance of academic enrichment absences to student's educational track and/or career goals or student's leadership role.	Normally not approved
o Significant Event (major celebration or event for self or another, invited athletics event or other competition)	o Brief description of type of/reason for absence o Date(s) of absence and detailed list of corresponding activities to be missed o Additional information/rationale required to justify approval of absence from an assessment	Normally approved unless absence falls on: o the working day before an assessment o days where Portfolio sessions are held o Year 2 IPE pain week o three days within the same academic year where specific theme content is covered	Normally not approved
o Health Care Appointment o Caregiving o Funeral/Memorial Service	o Brief description of type of/reason for absence o Date(s) and time(s) of absence and detailed list of corresponding activities to be missed	Almost always approved	
o Religious Observance	o Brief description of reason for absence o Date(s) of absence and detailed list of corresponding activities to be missed (List of examples of dates relevance published annually on Vice Provost, Students webpage.)	Almost always approved in accordance with U of T *Policy on scheduling of classes and examinations and other accommodations for religious observance*	

Table 2: Planned Absence Information Requirements and Typical Decision Outcomes: Clerkship (Years 3 & 4)

Changes to rotation call schedules are not considered planned absences. Students who would like to request a change to their call schedule should contact the relevant Clerkship course director and Clerkship course administrator.

Reason for Absence in Clerkship (Years 3 & 4)	Information Requirements	Typical Decision Outcome	
		for a Learning Session	for an Assessment
o Academic presentation at a conference o Participation at a conference (only if student is in an official leadership role representing UofT participating in a working group or committee)	o Brief description of type of/reason for absence o Date(s) of absence including presentation date and travel days, if applicable, and detailed list of corresponding activities to be missed o Proof of acceptance of conference presentation or invitation to participate as a student leader o Additional information/rationale required to justify approval of absence from an assessment	Normally approved for a maximum of three coursework days (defined as any day on which a student may be scheduled to participate in curricular activities, which may include Saturdays, Sundays and holidays in courses that include call and/or ER shifts) and two such absences per academic year. Exceptions informed by relevance of academic enrichment absences to student's educational track and/or career goals or student's leadership role.	Normally not approved
o Significant Event (major celebration or event for self or another, invited athletics event or other competition)	o Brief description of type of/reason for absence o Date(s) of absence and detailed list of corresponding activities to be missed o Additional information/rationale required to justify approval of absence from an assessment	Normally approved unless absence falls on: o days marked for course orientation o scheduled call days o days where Portfolio sessions are held o Clerkship course of two weeks or less in duration	Normally not approved
o Health Care Appointment o Caregiving o Funeral/Memorial Service	o Brief description of type of/reason for absence o Date(s) and time(s) of absence and detailed list of corresponding activities to be missed	Almost always approved	
o Religious Observance	o Brief description of reason for absence o Date(s) of absence and detailed list of corresponding activities to be missed (List of examples of dates relevance published annually on Vice Provost, Students webpage.)	Almost always approved in accordance with U of T *Policy on scheduling of classes and examinations and other accommodations for religious observance*	