

Student Leadership Absence Policy

Category: Academic
Number: TBA
Responsibility: Associate Dean, Undergraduate Medical Education
Approval: Student Academic Management Committee
January 3, 2019 Date:
Reviewed: January 2021; October 11, 2022; October 15,
2024 URL/SharePoint: UGME policy website

Purpose:

The purpose of the *Student Leadership Absence Policy* is to prescribe college-level standards for approval of absences for students in leadership positions in the College of Medicine and in national and international organizations.

Principles:

The College of Medicine supports student leaders and acknowledges the additional commitment that student leaders make to the College in their roles and recognizes that students in these roles should not be required to utilize the absence days entitled by the *Attendance and Absence Policy – Pre-clerkship and Attendance and Absence Policy – Clerkship* in order to fulfill their leadership roles.

The College of Medicine is also governed by the principles of:

Fairness: The College of Medicine is committed to applying a fair and equitable process in determining approval of medical student absences.

Transparency: The College of Medicine is committed to ensuring a transparent approach to the approval of medical student absences.

Definitions:

Student Leader: A College of Medicine student in good academic standing who executes significant leadership responsibilities as part of their Student Medical Society of Saskatchewan (SMSS) leadership role, Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) leadership role, or leadership role within a College of Medicine approved organization. This includes, but would not be limited to, SMSS Executive Council, CFMS Representative (such as CFMS Board and Executive Members, SMSS VP External, SMSS Positions required at the CFMS National Meetings),

Saskatchewan Medical Association (SMA) Committees, Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) Committees, Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC), College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan (CPSS) Committee, and students appointed to committees (such as Academic Appeal Committees or Search Committees). Please see Appendix 1 for a description of these student leadership commitments.

Scope of this Policy:

This policy applies to all undergraduate students registered in the Doctor of Medicine (MD) program at the University of Saskatchewan irrespective of the geographically distributed site/campus to which they are currently assigned.

This policy aligns with the *Attendance and Absence Policy – Pre-clerkship* and *Attendance and Absence Policy – Clerkship and Deferred Exam Policy*.

Policy:

1.0 Background

Student Leadership absences are intended to guarantee that student leaders who undertake leadership responsibilities beyond their scope as students, but within their scope as medical student leaders, are granted absence days in addition to the number of absence days granted to all medical students. This is to ensure that student leaders also have the benefit of taking planned absences, flex day absences, and unplanned absences, in the same number as all other students. This is to recognize that students in leadership roles may require more absences than students who are not in significant student leadership roles.

Student leaders may apply for absences based on the leadership commitments associated with their role (see Appendix), to a maximum of eight days per year. This would typically be in addition to usual numbers of planned absences, flex day absences and unplanned absences outlined in the relevant *Attendance and Absence Policy*. Requests for student leadership absences that exceed eight days per year will typically prompt a discussion with the Year Chair/Year Site Coordinator. Students with leadership roles, such as national roles, which they anticipate may exceed eight absences per year, are encouraged to meet pro-actively with their Year Chair/Year Site Coordinator early in the year to discuss strategies for managing academic and leadership expectations. (See section 5)

Learners can request partial absences to facilitate leadership obligations that do not require a full day of absence.

2.0 Non-Mandatory Sessions

Non-mandatory sessions are valuable important components within the curriculum but are such that absences from them can be relatively easily made up with extra effort on the student's part (i.e. self-directed learning through a lecture or obtaining lecture notes from a colleague).

Absences from Non-Mandatory sessions are in addition to the maximum of combined Planned and Flex Day absences.

Types of non-mandatory activities considered under this part of the policy will include: large group sessions, non-mandatory lectures/seminars, and non-mandatory small group sessions.

3.0 Mandatory Sessions

Educational sessions that are critical to the MD program and the student's progress are deemed to be mandatory. If missed, mandatory sessions can put the student at a disadvantage within the program and may affect program and national exam performance. Many educational sessions have an assessment component within them. Assessment may range from an in-session assignment to written or oral exam/quiz to OSCEs to assessment of clinical skills.

Absences from mandatory sessions will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis but will generally be approved.

Specific considerations include the relative weight of the assessment to be missed, logistics of rescheduling the assessment, impact of foregoing the assessment (i.e., lost opportunity for feedback, a grade of zero, etc.) and past student academic performance.

The types of mandatory activities considered under this part of the policy will include: mandatory large and small group sessions, mandatory small group cases, mandatory clinical skills sessions, mandatory seminar sessions, and written examinations (e.g, quizzes, midterms, end of module exams, and end of rotation exams).

The types of mandatory activities **not** considered under this part of the policy will include: practical examinations, OSCE examinations, end of term final examinations and any remediated assessment sessions or examinations; attendance for these activities is expected on the scheduled date.

4.0 Application for a Student Leadership Absence

A student leader who is requesting a Student Leadership Absence must be in good academic standing and will complete the online Absence Application using the drop down for “Student Leadership Absence”.

When dates are known for meetings that will prompt a student’s absence request, students are encouraged to request the absence as early as possible in the year to give administrative staff member optimal notice for arranging schedules.

Absences for preclerks will be requested no later than 4 weeks before the planned leadership absence or as soon as possible if a student is provided notice less than 4 weeks in advance. Clerks should apply for leadership absences no later than 6 weeks before the beginning of the rotation, or as soon as possible if a student is provided notice less than 4 weeks in advance.

Included in the request will be:

- Details regarding the sessions that will be missed.
- Outline of the role the student will be engaging in during their absence.
- Documentation supporting the student’s engagement in the leadership activity. This can include a letter from a supervisor, the SMSS, the CFMS, etc.

Special consideration for timing will be taken for students who are asked by UGME faculty/staff to miss class or clinical duties as a student representative on short notice, such as for academic appeals.

The form will be handled by the Pre-clerkship or Clerkship Administrative Coordinator or Administrative Clerical Support who will contact the student, within two weeks, with one of the following results:

- The Student Leadership Absence is approved
- The Student Leadership Absence is not approved

If the absence is approved, the College of Medicine and the student may pursue alternative arrangements to enable the student to make up any missed assessments and/or other critically mandatory sessions due to the leadership commitment. These will be determined in cooperation with the course/module director. Should the absence involve missing an exam, the student should apply for a deferral as per the *Deferred Exam Policy*.

Should the student be scheduled for a mandatory session after their absence has been approved, the student will not be professionally or academically penalized for missing it.

Students should wait to make travel plans until the absence is approved and are strongly encouraged to make flexible travel plans.

5.0 Process when a Student Leadership Absence is not Approved

Absence requests may be declined in some situations. The following is a list of reasons an absence would typically be declined (note that other reasons not on this list may also arise):

- if a student is not in good academic standing or is experiencing academic difficulty that may put them at risk of not successfully completing a course or term.*
- in pre-clerkship, if a student has needed to miss significant portions of the program for other reasons, such that their ability to meet educational objectives may be compromised if they have additional absences
- in clerkship, if a student has not completed sufficient clinical experiences to allow for a valid assessment, as determined in consultation with the Rotation Director/Coordinator.

Prior to declining a leadership absence request, the administrative staff member may consult with the other administrative coordinators in their year to ensure a consistent approach, including across sites. When the student leadership absence is not approved, the administrative staff member, with a cc to the Year Chair and Year Site Coordinator, will provide a rationale explaining why the absence request was not approved.

A student may appeal this decision. Appeals will be submitted by the student to their Year Chair who will review the request on a case-by-case basis, consulting with the Academic Director when relevant. The year chair will provide a response in writing, typically within one week of receiving the appeal request, explaining the rationale for their decision. The decision of the Year Chair is considered final.

Where the Year Chair is also a course or rotation director, the level of appeal will be to the Academic Director.

*Students who are at academic risk or are not in good academic standing are encouraged to discuss with their year Year Chair/Site Coordinator and SMSS leadership stepping away from roles that require significant time away from the program.

Responsibilities

The Associate Dean, Undergraduate Medical Education, is responsible for providing oversight to the overall administration of the *Student Leadership Absence Policy*.

The Manager, Undergraduate Medical Education, with the assistance of the Undergraduate Medical Education Office, is responsible for the implementation, monitoring, maintenance, and evaluation of the *Student Leadership Absence Policy*.

Non-compliance:

Instances or concerns of non-compliance with the *Student Leadership Absence Policy* should be brought to the attention of the Vice-Dean, Education or the Associate Dean, Undergraduate Medical Education, within the College of Medicine.

Procedures:

The Manager, Undergraduate Medical Education, provides overall stewardship to the standard operating procedures associated with the *Student Leadership Absence Policy*.

Contact:

Manager, Undergraduate Medical Education

Phone: 306-966-6135

Email: ugme.medicine@usask.ca

Appendix 1 - Description of Student Leadership Commitments

This list is provided for context and examples of current leadership roles but is not inclusive of all potential roles or responsibilities per role.

SMSS President

- Western Medical Schools Meeting (1.5-2 days)
- Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) Annual General Meeting (AGM) (3 days) and Spring General Meeting (SGM) (3 days)
- White Coat Ceremony (Speaker)

SMSS Past President

- White Coat Ceremony (Speaker) - (Off-Call Duty)
- PGME Allocation Meetings
- PGME Awards Ceremony (Emcee) - (Off Call Duty)
- SIEC HealthLink Physician Panel (Panelist) - (Half-day)

VP Academic

- Western Medical Schools Meeting (1.5-2 days)

- CFMS AGM (3 days) and SGM (2 days)
- Student Academic Management Committee Meetings
 - Potentially also Curriculum Committee Meetings
- Research Symposium (if VPA in Regina, will need to travel to Saskatoon)

VP External

- CFMS AGM (3 days) and SGM (2 days)
- Canadian Medical Association General Council and Health Summit (3 days) ●
Western Medical School Meeting (2 days)

VP Internal (Saskatoon and Regina)

- CFMS AGM (3 days)
- CPSS Meetings (2 days/month [sometimes less often])
- Western Medical School Meeting (2 days)

VP Advocacy

- Western Medical Schools Meeting (2 days)

Global Health Liaison (GHL)

- CFMS AGM (3 days) and SGM (2 days)

Government Affairs and Advocacy Committee (GAAC) Rep

- CFMS National Day of Action

Saskatchewan Medical Association (SMA) Student Rep

- Fall and Spring SMA Representative Assembly (1 day/term)

Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) Board Member

- **CFMS AGM (3 days) and SGM (3 days)**
- CFMS Spring Board Meeting (1 day, weekend off-call) and Fall Board Meeting (1 day, weekend off-call)
- Position specific events which they are presenting at or play a key role in
 - Western Regional Director - Western Medical School Meeting
 - VP Government Affairs - CFMS National Day of Action