December 9, 2015

TO: Ruth V. Watkins
Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Vivian S. Lee
Senior Vice President for Health Sciences

FR: Martha Bradley
Sr. Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Studies

RE: Update to G-6-100: Guidelines for Accommodating Student Absences

Last year, at the request of the Academic Senate, we developed and published in the Regulations Library guidelines for accommodating student absences, both for reasons explicitly listed in Policy 6-100-III-O, as well as for other compelling reasons. Although the Policy does state that “government obligations” should be accommodated, the precise contours of the range of such obligations is not exhaustively detailed.

In particular, there is no explicit mention in the Policy about activities associated with official court proceedings, such as jury service notice, subpoena, summons, and the like. In the guidelines we developed, we did explicitly mention some of these activities, stating there that although the University had no legal obligation to do so, individual instructors could choose to accommodate absences due to such circumstances. At the time, we expected that as a matter of course instructors would make such accommodations.

However, over the past semester, several students have come forward who were not excused from class when compelled to serve on a jury. One such student had a friend frantically calling around various university offices because she was not excused from an exam by her instructor. The judge also would not allow her to leave the courtroom (which is why she could not call) and offered a stint in jail if she opted to leave.

Accordingly, we have now modified the guidelines, (1) to make it clear that activities associated with participation in official proceedings of a court should be accommodated, and (2) to identify the Dean of Students as the contact point for students who need such accommodations. We are asking for your approval of these changes to the guidelines.
Guidelines for Accommodating Student Absences for Explicitly Listed
and Other Compelling Reasons,
Under Policy 6-100-III-O Attendance Requirements

Per University Policy 1-001.II.E, guidelines such as these are meant to:

"Give practical information that may be useful to persons in carrying out their
individual responsibilities in accord with University Regulations, remind
members of the campus community of the relevancy and applicability of
University Regulations, and reflect best practices in administering the operations
of the University."

These particular guidelines are adopted and promulgated under authority of the Senior Vice
President of Academic Affairs and the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences to guide
implementation of the provision in Policy 6-100-III-O which states that "Students absent from
class to participate in officially sanctioned University activities (e.g., band, debate, student
government, intercollegiate athletics), or government obligations (e.g., military duty), or religious
obligations, or with instructor's approval, shall be permitted to make up both assignments and
examinations."

These guidelines are meant to clarify various issues associated with two types of absences, when
they result in missed requirements, assignments, examinations and the like.

The first type (Type I) are those absences explicitly listed in Policy 6-100.III.O, related to
absences for "officially sanctioned University activities (e.g., band, debate, student government,
intercollegiate athletics), or government obligations (e.g., military duty), or religious
obligations, or with instructor's approval."

The second type (Type II) are those absences caused by other compelling reasons, beyond a
student's control, such as: physical or mental illness; injury; death or illness in family or
significant other; or involuntary job change (such as a time, day, or location change).

- "Government obligations" (Type I) include activities associated with participation in official
proceedings of a court, when the student is by law compelled to participate and cannot
control scheduling of the activity: jury service; witness; or appearance as a party. For such
court-related activities, the student must submit to the instructor clear documentation of
the compulsory participation (e.g., jury service notice, subpoena, summons, or other order
to appear, with the date and time specified). The University recognizes the legitimacy of
absences for these types of "government obligations" activities because they are both
beyond a student's control and among the important civic responsibilities of members of
the University community consistent with our institutional missions.
- "Instructors must communicate any particular attendance requirements of the course to
students in writing on or before the first class meeting," excerpt from 6-100.III.O.
“Students are responsible for acquainting themselves with and satisfying the entire range of academic objectives and requirements as defined by the instructor,” excerpt from 6-100.III.O.

“Except in cases of sudden illness or emergency, students shall in advance of the absence arrange with the instructor to make up assignments,” excerpt from 6-100.III.O.

Where possible, instructors should make reasonable adjustments, modifications or adaptations, and students should be given the opportunity to make up requirements, assignments and examinations, unless doing so would constitute an undue burden on the instructor.

For those classes that have required elements (such as labs, field trips, and the like) where it would be an undue burden for the instructor to make adjustments, modifications or adaptations – where, that is, it is simply not feasible either for the student to make up the particular course element or for the instructor to fashion a reasonable alternative element – instructors should indicate this on their syllabus, or functionally equivalent mechanism.

For the purpose of understanding what constitutes "reasonable adjustments, modifications or adaptations," “reasonable” does not mean “the same”. That is, when an instructor permits a student to “make up” a missed requirement, assignment, or examination, the alternative element may be different than the original. This also applies to those excused absences listed in 6-100.III.O, where students are explicitly permitted to “make up” missed requirements, assignments, or examinations. The notion is that, within reasonable boundaries, the student should be “held harmless”. For example, if a missed examination counted for 20% of a student’s grade for the course, an instructor might permit the student to “make up” the exam through an alternative element that requires roughly the same amount of work/preparation and that also counts for 20% of the student’s grade for the course.

Should disagreement arise over what constitutes an undue burden for an instructor, or should a student object to the adjustment or alternative element offered to them by the instructor, the instructor’s action constitutes an “Academic Action” as set out in Policy 6-400 (Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities), Sec I.B.1. Accordingly, detailed procedures are set out in 6-400, Sec. IV (Student Academic Performance) for students wishing to appeal such decisions.

Duly documented Type II absences typically constitute an unusual or extenuating circumstance, warranting an exception to Policy 6-100.G.5, such that a student’s appeal for a late or retroactive withdrawal will be granted by the Registrar’s office, and Income Accounting will subsequently remove tuition charges.

Colleges and Departments should develop, maintain and promulgate to their faculty, students and staff their own additional specific guidelines about these matters, within the parameters set by Policy 6-100 and these University-wide guidelines.

For further information about these guidelines, contact: Dean of Students Office,  
http://deanofstudents.utah.edu/.