

### **Adverse Impact of Some Faculty's Implementation of University-Approved Missed Class Policy**

While MSU student-athletes report that MSU faculty members are overwhelming supportive of them when they have to miss class because of official events or games, they do report instances where some faculty members apply 'the rules in their syllabus' in ways they feel disproportionately adversely impact them. This phenomenon is also experienced by MSU students who miss classes for other university-approved purposes (e.g., band, debate team, etc.). Therefore, it is proposed that an amendment, modification, clarification, and/or specific example be considered and adopted by the appropriate MSU bodies and/or administrators so that the **"Participation in University-Approved Athletic Competitions"** policy for student-athletes (and other similar policies for students who miss classes for approved university-sponsored activities) is implemented in ways that do not disproportionately adversely impact those students.

The most often mentioned example of the current issue is as follow:

A course has three (3) exams during the term and the instructor allows students to drop the lowest grade of the three exams so that the students' final course grades are based on each student's two highest exam scores. Even when some student-athletes properly inform their instructor of their need to miss class because of an official event or game on a class when one of the exams will be given, they are told by the instructor that the student-athlete will have to use that missed exam as the one they drop for their final grade calculation. In these cases, student-athletes are denied an opportunity to actually take three exams and drop their actual lowest exam score from the final grade calculation.

Other examples from FS19 were solicited from Student Athlete Support Services (SASS) and appear on the following pages. It is important to note that **in the vast majority of cases, faculty work extremely well with student-athletes** as well as with Student Athlete Support Services (SASS) so that exams are offered and proctored for student-athletes who must travel for official competition and events. However, the above scenarios persist for some student athletes despite repeated efforts on the part of student-athletes and SASS to speak with faculty and address it.

Therefore, it is requested that the appropriate committee(s) develop policy language for university policy, faculty handbook, and/or the Provost's office so that student-athletes and other students who are required to miss class because of official competition and events receive the same opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and receive the best grades in courses as all students at MSU.

The University Policy as well as excerpt from the Faculty Handbook are also attached.

Some examples from FS18 of students who miss classes because of approved university-related obligations receiving unequal treatment as compared to other students in those classes.

**Example 1:**

Student-Athlete A (GPA 4.0)

Course: XXX XXX

SA A missed 3 labs during semester due to team travel. The faculty member allowed 2 misses, did not allow SA A to make up labs to learn missed course material, and resulting penalty of 15 points almost resulted in the student receiving a grade reduction in the class.

**Example 2**

Student-Athlete B and Student-Athlete C

Course: XXX XXX- Prof XXXXXXXXXXXX

SA B and C were told that 3 absences were allowed and that 0.5 off of final grade (e.g., 4.0) would result for all absences beyond 3. One of the SA was on a team that when to national championships. Professor did not accept the SA's travel letter for that absence related to the playing in the national championship[ and said there was nothing he could do about the miss.

Excerpt from XXX XXX syllabus:

No distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences. Students are either present or class, or they are not. Attendance is determined by the collection of short, informal pieces of writing collected at the end of 20 pre-determined course meetings during the semester. These days have been highlighted in yellow on the syllabus, and marked with a small asterisk next to the date. Informal writing pieces are collected at the start and/or end of class on these dates, not the next time, not by a classmate, not six weeks after that fact. If you miss a particular day, then you are, sadly, out of luck.

You may miss three (3) course meetings. Save these for illness, major religious holidays, funerals, court dates, job interviews, National Guard obligations, etc. For each additional absence beyond three (3), your final course grade drops by half a point. For example, a student who might otherwise pass the course with a final grade of 4.0 but has missed a total of four course meetings – one more than the three permitted -- during the semester, drops to a 3.5 for the final course grade. Five absences would reduce that to a 3.0, six absences reduce that further to a 2.5, and so forth.

**Example 3**

Student-Athlete D

Course: XXX XXX- Prof XXXXXXXX

SA D missed exams 1 and 2 because of team travel. Professor did not allow him to make-up/take remotely either exam and said the this would result in increased weight on the final exam results. Late in the semester, SA D's team made the national championships. The professor said he would reschedule the final exam. The professor ended up giving the SA an incomplete. Now, about 70% of the final grade for that class will be based on the results of a final exam the SA is scheduled to take during the first 2-3 weeks of spring semester 2019.

Syllabus link-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

**Example 4**

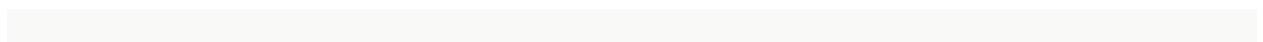
Student-Athlete E

Course XXX XXX

SA in XXX XXX missed three recitation sessions because of team travel but they only were allowed to make-up two. The same SA did not receive I-clicker points in lectures and were not provided with alternatives to earning the knowledge and points. Furthermore, the instructors did not accept MSU travel letters authorizing said absences that were presented to them by student-athletes.

It is requested that the appropriate committees of Academic Governance consider policy modifications, guiding language, and/or other help to promote the welfare, wellbeing, and equal treatment of students who miss classes because of approved university-related obligations.

Thank you



**From the MSU Office of the Ombudsperson**

<http://ombud.msu.edu/classroom-policies/index.html>

**Participation in University-Approved Athletic Competitions** - As stated in the MSU Faculty Handbook student-athletes are excused from classes to participate in university-approved events or competition. Before missing classes, student-athletes must present their instructors with a letter signed by both the director of the Student-Athlete Support Services and the faculty representative to the Athletic Council. These letters confirm the dates and locations of the out-of-town events and, depending on the schedule, may be issued as frequently as once a week. An excused absence does not excuse student-athletes from completing course work missed during their absences.

Some instructors develop attendance policies that allow students to miss a given number of class sessions without penalty or to drop their lowest grade on assignments or tests. Instructors have the discretion to apply -- or not to apply -- these course policies to student-athletes who miss class to participate in university-approved competition. Making exceptions for student-athletes in these situations does not violate NCAA rules. (See "General Advice to Students" below.)

From the FACULY HANDBOOK

[https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/student\\_athlete\\_relationships.html](https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/student_athlete_relationships.html)

## **Faculty Relationships with Student Athletes**

Last updated: 8/4/2003

### **V. INSTRUCTION (Cont.)**

*This statement was issued by the Office of the Provost on August 6, 1996 and revised on August 4, 2003.*

Michigan State University enrolls more than 700 student-athletes who participate in 25 intercollegiate sports. MSU recognizes the special responsibilities and privileges of these student-athletes. The University is committed to provide the environment and support necessary for student-athletes to establish and realize high levels of academic and athletic success.

Student-athletes are governed by policies and regulations of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the Big Ten Conference as well as by Michigan State University. All of these regulations are intended to establish shared restrictions and expectations for all student-athletes while recognizing the special burdens created by intercollegiate athletic competition.

The NCAA and Big Ten Conference regulations cover all aspects of recruiting, academic eligibility, and athletic financial aid of matriculated student-athletes. For faculty members, there are two general guidelines that are important to remember:

1. You cannot do anything for a student-athlete that you would not do for another student in a similar situation. On the other hand, you should not refuse to do something for a student-athlete, if you would do it for another student.
2. There are some things that you can do for an individual student that you cannot do for an individual student-athlete: for example, you cannot buy anything, not even a soft drink, for a student-athlete; you cannot provide a ride for a student-athlete; you cannot let a student-athlete charge a long distance telephone call to your business or home telephone number.

**CLASS ATTENDANCE:** Student-athletes are excused from class when competing in official events or games. Athletic Council recommended that competition schedules be so constructed as to limit the number of missed days to seven per semester. (This may not always be possible.) Each student-athlete should bring a team schedule to the instructor at the beginning of the semester to verify the excused absences. However, an excused absence does not excuse the student-athlete from completing the work assigned. [Student-athletes are frequently advised to schedule classes with mandatory attendance policies in the off-season or summer term.]