

Policies and Procedures: Excessive Student Absences



Overview

Deaf students have the same rights as their hearing peers, including the right to be absent. However, when they are absent from class, disability service professionals become concerned that the funds for interpreters or speech-to-text services are not being used prudently. By establishing policies and procedures for students and staff members to follow, disability service professionals are able to balance the need for access with the need to demonstrate responsible budgetary management.

What should be included in an excessive student absences policy?

The purpose of developing a policy is to encourage the responsible use of services. Such a policy can be part of an institution's larger guidelines for using interpreters and speech-to-text providers. A well-constructed policy

- defines what constitutes a “no-show,”
- outlines the process for notifying the disability services office of an upcoming absence,
- shares how responsible use of accommodations benefits both students and the disability services office,
- articulates penalties for excessive absences, and
- includes a mechanism for student notification when services will be suspended, along with the procedures to reinstate services.

A well-designed policy also (a) ensures student understanding and appreciation for the policy, (b) describes how the policy will be shared with the student at the beginning of the school term, (c) provides multiple means by which students can notify the office when they will be absent, and (d) allows for emergency situations that are beyond the student's control.

Some schools require that the students sign a form stating that they understand the policy.

Although it is not appropriate for staff members to discuss the cost of access services with students, students should be aware that institutions have limited budgets and that students have a responsibility to give advance notice of an absence whenever possible.

What is considered a “no-show”?

Attendance policies vary among institutions and from course to course. Many institutions define a no-show as an absence that occurs when a student does not attend class **and** does not notify the disability service office in advance. No-shows may also include when a student requests an accommodation for an event or appointment but fails to show up.

If there is no standard number of allowable absences for any student in a particular course, the same standard applies to the deaf student in that course; no additional expectations should be imposed.



NDC
National Deaf Center
on Postsecondary Outcomes

Occasionally, a student may be enrolled in classes where attendance is not required. In such cases, if the student chooses to skip most of the class sessions, alternative arrangements for scheduling interpreters should be discussed. For example, a student may request services for prearranged dates, such as test review dates, or to attend class only one time each week. Regardless of the arrangements made, it's important to ask students to follow the process and to allow for individual arrangements for complying with the policy.

Can I suspend services?

Services cannot be entirely canceled, but they can be temporarily suspended until a student completes specified steps to reinstate services. Often, campuses provide reminders about the policy after the first or second no-show. These reminders provide students with advance notice that they are in danger of having their services suspended. When suspending service becomes the only option, it should apply to only the class with excessive absenteeism, not to all of the student's classes.

What are some suggested steps for reinstating service?

There are many factors to consider when developing a reinstatement policy. The goal is to create a process that results in a timely restoration of services and does not create a burden for the disability office and the student. Reinstatement policies should articulate the steps the student must take to receive services again. Policies should also include processes that (a) require students to contact the disability service office to verify that they are still enrolled and intend to resume attending classes; (b) ensure that students understand all future consequences should excessive absences recur; and (c) determine whether additional support, such as counseling or tutoring, would be beneficial. Some campuses require students to attend a meeting with a disability services coordinator before reinstatement of services.

An effective no-show policy follows a consistent process but also allows for individualized arrangements, when necessary.

Can an institution charge students for excessive no-show absences?

In a very narrow ruling, one campus' process for penalizing a student who was habitually absent from classes without good cause and without advance notice was upheld (08102026 OCR Letter Utah Valley University). Campuses must be careful not to structure a penalty fee as a cost-recovery effort but rather as a nuisance fee that the student can pay via regular campus fee procedures, including the option of seeking a reduction in charges. The intent of a penalty fee is to encourage responsible behavior. The policy must provide for multiple methods of communicating with the disability service office.

Related Resource

Disability Services Handbook Templates – Student Handbook Template:

www.nationaldeafcenter.org/handbooktemplates

Additional resources on this subject may be available at www.nationaldeafcenter.org/resources



This document was developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, OSEP #HD326D160001. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

© 2019 National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International

Additional resources can be found at www.nationaldeafcenter.org