

At the May 5, 2026 Faculty Senate meeting, the following resolution passed with 32 votes in favor and 2 abstentions.

Faculty Senate Resolution Re: Improving Undergraduate Student Attendance Policies to Promote Learning and Engagement

Whereas,

- (a) regular student attendance and active participation are essential components in many courses for deep learning, fostering of a vibrant classroom community, and the successful attainment of course learning objectives;
- (b) faculty are in the best position to evaluate the impact of absences on their individual courses;
- (c) University attendance policies serve as a critical component of professional development, and aligning these policies with workplace expectations better prepares students for the responsibilities of their future careers;

And whereas,

- (d) undergraduate attendance policies, as defined in Article [3.1] of the [Undergraduate Academic Code](#), grant instructors discretion over class attendance “at all times with the exception of excused absences”; however, the current process for determining excused absences is complex and decentralized, involving multiple disparate entities including:
 - i. the Division of Student Affairs (DSA), which reviews and approves a wide range of absences originating from different groups including Dean’s offices, student extracurricular groups and professional development activities, ROTC, as well as those listed below (current DSA policies as reported to the Faculty Senate can be found in the Appendix);
 - ii. Academic Services for Student-Athletics and the Chair of the Faculty Board on Athletics;
 - iii. University Health Services and off-campus health services providers;
 - iv. legal proceedings, religious observances, and death or major illness of a student’s immediate family;
- (e) the current system forces faculty into a reactive role, requiring them to flag excessive absences only after they have occurred, while the lack of centralized reporting and oversight prevents proactive monitoring of a student’s cumulative absences across their entire courseload and hinders early intervention for students in crisis;
- (f) the Undergraduate Academic Code invites consultation with the student’s dean [3.1.3] for singular absences exceeding one week, but it does not take into consideration the cumulative impact of absences;
- (g) the Undergraduate Academic Code uses fixed quantities (e.g. “one calendar week” [3.1.3] or “two class days per semester” [3.1.3.7]), which fail to account for course-specific meeting frequencies or proportion of instructional time missed;

- (h) the Undergraduate Academic Code provides for faculty representation regarding athletic absences via the Faculty Board on Athletics and defers to medical professionals for health-related excuses, but it currently lacks a mechanism for faculty consultation on absences reviewed by the Division of Student Affairs;
- (i) some absences currently approved by the Division of Student Affairs, such as student clubs, conference presentations (for underclassmen), and “other events,” are not provisioned for in the Undergraduate Academic Code (see Items (8), (9), and (10) in Appendix);
- (j) the resolution of these systemic attendance challenges requires a united and concerted effort across the University, predicated on a robust partnership between the faculty, student academic advising teams, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Academic Council and with the support of the Office of the Provost and the Office of the President;

Therefore, be it resolved that: the Faculty Senate respectfully requests the following actions:

- (a) all parties involved in the oversight of student attendance recenter attendance framework on the dual goals of achieving specific learning outcomes and preparing students for the professional world; this includes modeling university attendance expectations after professional workplace policies, clearly defining short-term versus long-term attendance protocols, and fostering student accountability through the use of personal/sick day models;
- (b) the University develop a centralized, digital dashboard to facilitate unified absence management; insofar as compliance with HIPAA, FERPA, and other confidentiality laws allow, this comprehensive database shall provide:
 - i. a secure portal for University Health Services (UHS) and other authorized University entities to submit documentation directly, allowing for streamlined reporting and minimizing the risk of documentation forgery;
 - ii. a single interface for students to request absences; for deans or advisors to review, verify, and approve absences, contextualizing those decisions within cumulative absences; and for faculty to review approved absences and communicate concerns regarding the impact on academic progress;
 - iii. categorized data (e.g., illness, athletics, professional development) to allow academic advisors and other parties tasked with student well-being to query attendance trends;
 - iv. AI-driven screening and early-intervention tools, designed with expertise from mental health professionals, to flag concerning patterns for proactive advisor outreach;
- (c) the Academic Council, specifically its Undergraduate Studies and Faculty Affairs subcommittees, consider revisions to the attendance policies in the Undergraduate Academic Code to address systemic and pedagogical concerns raised in preambles (e), (f), (g), (h), and (i);
- (d) Undergraduate University Advising establish a standardized protocol for academic advisors that defines specific thresholds for cumulative absences—regardless of excuse status—to trigger holistic intervention; these thresholds shall remain independent of

- individual course policies and serve solely to identify students whose total lost instructional time jeopardizes their academic continuity and well-being;
- (e) Undergraduate University Advising develop and distribute a “Faculty Resource Toolkit” on attendance management that provides:
 - i. a definitive list of University-sanctioned excused absences;
 - ii. a directory of designated points of contact for absence verification and adjudication; and
 - (f) the Division of Student Affairs assess the current pipelines to excused absences (see Appendix) to:
 - i. ensure that excused absences are strictly limited to the categories authorized by the Academic Code, specifically investigating where discretionary absences (e.g., student clubs, conferences, and “other events”) are outside the scope of powers outlined in Section [3.1.3] and [3.1.3.7] of the Academic Code;
 - ii. monitor the cumulative impact of the expanding “originary points” for discretionary absences, assessing how the proliferation of these categories affects total student absences and the integrity of classroom instruction;
 - iii. integrate faculty and advisor consultation into the Student Affairs absence-approval pipeline, adopting the successful models that emphasize academic excellence used by the Faculty Board on Athletics and University Advising to better evaluate the necessity and impact on learning of non-urgent or discretionary absences.

Appendix: Report on Notre Dame Excused Absences Policies

Informed by interviews with:

- Brian Coughlin (AVP Student Development)
- Christine Gebhardt (AVP Student Health and Wellness)

Faculty Senate Record: Presented and discussed on December 2, 2025

To the best of the Faculty Senate's knowledge, there is no single document that summarizes all of Notre Dame's excused absences policies. Therefore a member of the Faculty Senate volunteered to compile such a list. After talking to several individuals, the senator concluded that there are essentially ten paths for students to obtain excused absences. These absences may originate from different groups. All are routed via the Division of Student Affairs (DSA):

1. Athletics. Varsity athletic programs require students to travel for events. There has been a steady increase in the length of travel events for non-football players since Notre Dame's joining the ACC due to the geographical distribution of ACC versus Big East, especially for newer ACC members. Longer travel events mean more days of excused absences. All excused absences for Varsity athletic programs receive the approval of the Faculty Board on Athletics prior to processing by Student Affairs and ASSA.
2. Excused absences for family death. Students may request up to five days of excused absences for grief (including travel days) of family members. The allowed "family members" are strictly defined in the Academic Code. Documentation such as death certificates must be provided. Records are kept by DSA to prevent abuse such as the same family member's death used as an excuse twice or forgery of documentation.
Caveats:
 - a. If more than five days are requested, the relevant Dean's office must approve the additional days.
 - b. If a student needs more time than ten days, the student is counseled to withdraw for that semester. For example, during the serious illness and death of a parent or sibling. Withdrawals have their own procedure and are not "excused absences."
 - c. Excused absences for extraordinary circumstances may be requested for situations such as serious illness in cases where the family member's death is considered imminent. Documentation must be provided. Difficult cases emerge when a family member is facing serious health problems (such as cancer treatments) but death is not considered imminent. Generally, non-imminent cases are denied.
3. Legal Proceedings. Very rarely (10-12 times per year) a student may be required to appear for legal proceedings. The OSA almost always approves these but they are not a source of growth in overall excused absence numbers.
4. Holy Days. Very rarely (1-3 times per year) a student may request an excused absence related to the student's recognized religious practice. These are approved in consultation with Campus Ministry.

5. Medical, Acute. Students can request excused absences due to acute illness or an emergency. Any request for excused absences beyond five days go through Accessibility Services and documentation must be presented to demonstrate legitimate need. University Health Services for Students triage will request and verify need. In case of a medical situation where illness and injury limit a student's ability to attend class, a medical excuse will be provided to the student. A request for a medical excuse is not a guarantee one will be granted. Approximately 24% of requests by students are denied. Caveats:
 - a. It is **not** sufficient to merely state that the student has visited a medical provider. The documentation must demonstrate need with an estimate of the length of the illness.
 - b. Retroactive requests are not approved. The need must be current. Illnesses over the weekend warranting a Monday absence are verified with the off campus provider seen.
 - c. Occasionally, there is dialogue among the student, the DSA, and affected faculty to discuss complicated situations.
 - d. Student' forgery of medical documentation is viewed as a very serious offence and referred to the Office of Academic Standards for resolution..
 - e. Records are monitored to identify students who obtain many medical excuses. While DSA cannot itself determine the legitimacy of any single medical issue, the DSA can investigate and either refer the student to Sara Bea for chronic conditions or, for example, insist on a deeper investigation by a medical professional. Usually just a message from DSA to the student identifying the large number of medical excuses is sufficient to solve the problem of student misuse of the system. The definition of "large number" is necessarily subjective due to constantly changing situations. For example, a flu season worse than normal may increase overall medical needs.
6. Medical, Chronic. Medical issues that are chronic and require extensive absences (defined as more than five days) must be approved via Sara Bea. The process Sara Bea follows is regulated by federal guidance.
7. ROTC. Absences related to ROTC programs were once very narrowly defined as medical certification. For example, a student may be required to visit a military-approved doctor at a specific location at a specific time for an exam to test that student's health qualification. However, these requests have expanded over the years to include off-campus physical training and other similar activities. Previous discussions about these expansions have resulted in support from the Provost Office representatives working with ROTC; therefore, the DSA almost always approved ROTC requests. It is unclear that there would be administrative support for pushback against ROTC requests.
8. Student Clubs, Typical. Student clubs may request excused absences for representing the university off campus. These are strictly limited to three per club per semester. The count of "three" includes any excused class day, even if no classes are missed by a student in the club. For example, if an event is a Friday-Saturday and an excused absence is issued for the Friday, and only one student (or no students) in the club has a class that Friday,

then the absence still "counts" against the three for that club. The decision of "three per club" is a long-standing practice agreed between the DSA and Deans. Changes to this policy are possible but would involve various parties and not solely the DSA.

9. Student Clubs, SIBC. The Student International Business Council (SIBC) is a student-led organization that connects students to professional experience opportunities. The SIBC often has hundreds of projects, so excuses are limited to three per student as opposed to the club as outlined above. The SIBC has been a major source of growth of excused absences as this organization has grown. The excused absences are often bunched at the end of semesters, especially the second semester due to the projects being semester long.
10. Dean's Offices. Various Dean's offices request student excused absences for conferences or other events. The DSA almost always approves these requests, with two exceptions: a) on-campus events rarely receive excused absences if at all possible due to the students', departments' and colleges' ability to control the schedule of the events, and b) events tied to specific classes are not approved.