Introduction and Background

Students at the Medical College are physicians-in-training who are expected to carry out all academic responsibilities in a professional manner. Professional comportment is an essential and required component of becoming an effective physician. Students must handle absences from required Medical College activities in a manner that reflects a standard of professional responsibility for practicing physicians. At the same time the faculty of the Medical College recognize that students learn in different ways that include in-class and clinical experiences, independent study, digital media, scientific investigation and presentations, to name a few --- many of which may compete for a student’s time. A central concept to the attendance policy is that students provide the faculty with a timely and valid request and/or notification for absences from any required curricular activities. The faculty considers a student’s honesty in presenting a reason for an absence to be the core principle that underlies all professional communication regarding the absence policy. Likewise, the student can expect that the faculty will apply the attendance policy in a way that is both fair and consistent, but which also considers a student’s individual situation. When a student does not attend a required session, and has not provided in advance an appropriate request for permission or explanation of the absence, as described below, the student is in violation of the standards of conduct required for students at the Medical College. This policy on student absences sets out the criteria and process for handling absences from academic duties; it also applies to students taking courses at the Medical College who are from other medical schools.

Rationale

The integrated curriculum of the Medical College in the foundational years (first year and half) is designed to promote an engaging, collegial interchange of ideas among students and faculty in all sessions including large group formats such as lectures. Students are expected to attend all sessions and to participate. In some formats that involve collaborative work, attendance and participation will be assessed and both comprise an important element in the satisfactory demonstration of competence. The faculty have identified small groups that meet one or more of the following rationales as those learning formats in which attendance and participation will be assessed: 1) sessions that involve collaborative teamwork (e.g., anatomy dissection, case-based formats such as
PBL or its equivalent, etc.) 2) sessions that involve interactive discussion (e.g., seminars that depend on student analysis, presentations, or discussion such as PBL, journal club, problem-solving, clinical case or ethics case analysis, etc.) or 3) demonstration of a skill (e.g., microbiology or physiology lab activities, interviewing, patient examination, OSCEs, simulations, first responder training etc.). Because respect for patients’ time and participation in the learning process is tantamount, attendance will be assessed at all sessions, in large groups or small group formats that involve patients. In addition, students shall attend, on time, all sessions that specifically involve written or oral examinations. A student who arrives late will not ordinarily be allowed additional time on an examination. The faculty leadership of each foundational course (i.e., Essential Principles of Medicine; Health, Illness, and Disease 1 and 2) will inform students in advance of which sessions meet the above rationale and involve the assessment of student attendance and participation.

The clinical phase of the curriculum mandates the full time commitment of the student in all patient-care and didactic activities. The student’s presence on the clinical floors of the hospital, clinics and physician offices is critical to the learning experience because it provides opportunities to observe and to participate in medical management decisions. Students are required to attend lectures, rounds, case presentations, conferences, clinics, on-call periods, and other experiences as designated by the course director.

The AOC Scholarly Project block time (i.e., Block 1 - four-months between February and June of the third year and another two-month block period in the fourth year) requires that students engage full-time in work related to their scholarly project at an officially approved primary site. During this 6-month block time, the student’s schedule will be largely shaped by the needs of their research project, including the requirement that they attend all activities (e.g., lab or research meetings) directed by their research mentor. In addition, students are required to attend all required AOC-related sessions as specified by the AOC Program leadership.

Similarly, during the Translational Science, Advanced Clinical Ethics, and Transition to Residency Courses, attendance will be assessed in small groups that involve collaborative teamwork, interactive discussion or demonstration of a skill, and in large group or small group formats that involve patients, and in any session as specified by the course director.

**Operational Issues**

Students have the right to speak with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at any time about questions they may have about the attendance policy itself or the concerns about the fairness in the application of the attendance policy.
Responsibilities of Students Regarding the Attendance Policy

Students are expected to have read the attendance policy, to abide by it, inquire in advance of the course leaders if they are uncertain how it might apply in their situation, handle all inquiries and evaluations by the faculty in a timely and honest manner, and follow through with counseling and/or satisfactory completion of missed course work. Attendance is expected unless excused.

Responsibilities of the Faculty Regarding the Attendance Policy

Faculty course and clerkship leaders are expected to implement the attendance policy as described above in way that is fair, transparent, consistent and measured in consequences for any violations. Faculty are expected, a priori, to indicate to students enrolled in their units how the policy will be implemented in their units. This should be done by a clear statement in the course, clerkship or AOC website and supplemented, if necessary, through class orientations, email clarifications, or other means.

Faculty leaders responsible for implementing the policy are expected to respond to student inquiries about the policy in a timely manner, consult with education deans as needed for advice, and evaluate student absences fairly and without preconceived assumptions or judgments.

Types of Absences

Excused absences: Emergent

Generally, the Medical College recognizes that emergent absences due to illness, personal emergency, or family emergency are not under the control of students and that it may be impossible for students to consult with course leaders prior to being absent for these reasons (“unplanned absences”). Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the student to notify the designated faculty or course leader or the Associate Dean (Student Affairs) as soon as these events occur or are known and no later than 24 hours after the missed session so that the Medical College may be assured of the student’s well-being and may make plans with the student regarding the resumption of regular activities.

Students with emergent absences must notify course directors as soon as the event is known. The “no later than 24 hours” clause does not mean that a student routinely has up to 24 hours after an emergent missed activity to notify the course director; rather it allows a feasible time frame for those students who are in a serious emergency that precludes immediate notification.
In addition, students with a recurrent pattern of excused absences, whether for illness or personal emergencies, will be referred to the Associate Dean (Student Affairs) by the Clerkship Director for evaluation and/or counseling.

Emergent events are not to be confused with other absences that can be anticipated and planned for in advance. These include:

1. Major family events or celebrations such as weddings involving immediate family, graduations, other family events of significance

2. Professional events and academic activities—presenting at a professional meeting, remediation of an academic encumbrance, NBME exam, residency interviews

3. Scheduled medical appointments

4. Religious holidays

In the clinical curriculum, there should be a request for permission a minimum of 30 days in advance of the beginning of the clerkship or sub-internship or as soon as the event is known. Students may also request to be excused for scheduled medical appointments and to observe religious holidays. Since religious holiday dates are well known in advance, students should request an excused absence for religious observances at least 30 days in advance of the beginning of the clerkship or sub-internship. In the case of scheduled medical appointments, students should request an excused absence as soon as the date of the event is known.

During the 6-month AOC Scholarly Project block time, students are expected to work full-time during weekdays on their scholarly projects at the primary site. Students must notify and/or request permission of the AOC program director for all emergent (“unplanned”) and planned absences from work on their scholarly projects. Notification/request of the faculty mentor alone is NOT sufficient. In the rare case that a student needs to work on his or her project away from the primary site, he or she must obtain permission from the AOC Program Director in advance.

**Unexcused Absences**

Absences without proper notification, including planned absences without prior request for permission or unplanned (emergent) absences without proper notification within 24 hours of the missed required session are considered “unexcused absences.” In the clinical curriculum, requests for permission for planned absences must be made a minimum of 30 days in advance of the beginning clerkship or sub-internship or as soon as the event is known. Unexcused absences will result in sanctions that may include, but are not limited to, receiving a zero grade for the activity missed, receiving an official citation for
unprofessionalism, receiving a “Marginal” grade in the learning unit or course or in serious cases, such as those affecting or interfering with patient care, receiving a “Fail” grade. Some voluntary absences are not considered reasonable by the Medical College. Actions such as purchasing tickets for travel to leave early or return later, or solely to obtain discounted fares or engaging in other elective activities on course instruction days are not acceptable practice. Students who engage in such conduct must assume full responsibility for whatever ramifications in their performance assessment result from their actions, as described above, since these actions result in unexcused absences. Course leaders are not required to administer make-up examinations, equivalent or extra sessions to accommodate these voluntary unexcused absences.

**Duration**

Generally, the time frame for an absence is expected to be no more than two consecutive days (including a Friday-Monday sequence). Emergent absences expected to last more than two days require that the student notify the Associate Dean (Student Affairs). Planned absences of more than two days require that the student first obtain the permission of the Associate Dean (Academic Affairs), or if unavailable, the Associate Dean (Curricular Affairs), before requesting permission of the designated faculty or course leader. When a student is uncertain about whether an absence will be considered potentially excusable, he or she should consult one of the associate education deans (student affairs, academic affairs, curricular affairs) for advice.

**Request and Notification**

Permission to be excused from a scheduled activity is to be sought by the student in writing (e-mail is acceptable). Students must ask for permission individually for themselves; they may not request permission for absences on behalf of other students. **Emergent absences** require written notification and **planned absences** require both permission and written notification in order to be considered excused. To ensure that the attendance policy is implemented fairly and consistently, students must notify and request permission of the course director or his/her designee (small group leader, preceptor, curriculum office staff, etc. are not sufficient). In the clinical curriculum, this means that students must notify and request permission of the Clerkship Director (e.g., Site Director, Clerkship Coordinator are not sufficient) or Sub-internship Director. Students may not negotiate an absence with the teaching faculty (e.g., a small group facilitator, office preceptor, ward attending, etc.), nor are the teaching faculty permitted by the policy to negotiate or arrange such absences (see “Faculty Observation and Reporting of Absences” below).

Students who will be absent emergently (or are absent for reasons beyond the student’s control), i.e., “unplanned absences,” are expected to notify the course director or his/her
In any discussion of a requested absence, the student must include an explicit discussion of:

- the reason for the absence;
- the student’s plan to acquire the information missed;
- the arrangement by the student for coverage of all clinical or course responsibilities;
- the student’s arrangements to identify and notify all teaching and clinical faculty, house staff, and students affected by the absence (typically those involved in a team effort or presentation); and
- the duration of the absence.

If the course director or their designees to be notified are not available in a timely fashion, are on vacation, or are away from the Medical College for other professional duties, the student should notify the Office of Academic Affairs in writing (e-mail).

Once a student has received an excused absence from the designated course directors, he or she should inform all teaching and clinical faculty, housestaff, and students affected by the absence (typically students involved in a joint presentation). In the case of unplanned, emergent absences, notification of all affected faculty and students may not be possible in advance.

**Categories of Absences**

**Illness/Medical issues: Emergent and Non-Emergent**

In the case of an individual’s emergent illness, the student must notify the designated faculty or course director as soon as the student feels the illness will interfere with attendance ideally before the required activity and no later than 24 hours after the missed session. The student must discuss the points included under Request and Notification. If the student is unable to reach the course director or designated faculty member, the
student must notify the Associate Dean (Student Affairs). If the student is too ill to attend scheduled educational activities, the faculty member may recommend that the student consult with the Associate Dean (Student Affairs), or be seen in student health. Students should see Student Health for evaluation after 2 consecutive days of illness. This is to ensure proper diagnosis and treatment and to avoid cases of under-treatment for serious illness. Making up the missed work to the satisfaction of the learning unit or course leadership is mandatory.

Students should make every effort to schedule non-emergent medical appointments for times that do not conflict with class sessions or required clinical activities. The medical college recognizes that this may not always be possible. For scheduled non-emergent medical appointments, students must notify the course director or his/her designee as soon as the student is aware of the appointment date in order for this to qualify as an excused absence. Course directors and faculty are not permitted to penalize students who miss class or required clinical activities as a result of attending to medical appointments.

**Personal/family emergency**

In the case of personal or family emergency, the student must notify the designated faculty or course director(s) as soon as the student is aware of the emergency and no later than 24 hours after the missed session. The student must discuss the anticipated length of the absence as fully as possible with the designated faculty or course director, and must arrange for a way to be in communication with the Medical College to monitor the course of events. As noted above, if the absence exceeds or is expected to exceed two days the student must notify the Associate Dean (Student Affairs). In cases where the time frame is not clear, the student must discuss a plan to provide periodic updates on the situation. Making up the missed work to the satisfaction of the designated faculty or course leadership is mandatory.

**Major family events**

Absences from class to attend major family events (which are scheduled by others without consideration of the student’s schedule) require permission of the designated faculty or course leader(s). In the clinical curriculum, there should be a request for permission a minimum of 30 days in advance of the beginning of the clerkship or as soon as the event is known. If the activity extends for more than two days, the student must consult with the Associate Dean (Academic Affairs). Making up the missed work to the satisfaction of the course leadership is mandatory and the course director’s decision is final.
Professional off-campus events

Academic activities (professional meetings, paper/research presentations) that interfere with course instruction days must be discussed with the designated faculty or course leader(s). In the clinical curriculum, there should be a request for permission a minimum of 30 days in advance of the beginning of the clerkship or as soon as the event is known. The discussion, which is a request for permission to attend the academic activity, must include a statement of the student’s exact role in the academic activity, the mechanism for making up missed course content, the student’s plan for covering all responsibilities, and notifications as discussed above. With timely notification and permission a student will ordinarily be excused if he or she is presenting a poster or oral session. Students generally are not excused to allow simply attending the conference. In the case of professional conferences, the student should describe how the conference would provide added value above that of the required curriculum to the student’s learning and/or career plans. In the foundational science curriculum, discussion with the designated faculty or course leader(s), the student must also obtain permission from any learning unit leaders or small group leaders that will be impacted by the absence. The course leadership may take into account the student’s academic standing in the course in the decision to grant permission for these types of absences. If the activity extends for more than two days, the student must consult with the Associate Dean (Academic Affairs). Making up the missed work to the satisfaction of the course leadership is mandatory and the course leadership decision is final.

Other off-campus events

The College recognizes that students may wish to participate in many off campus events such as charity fundraisers, political campaigns, athletic competitions, etc. The faculty understands that these activities may be rewarding and valuable, but considers that a student’s first priority is his or her immediate scholarly preparation to become a competent physician. Accordingly, attendance at events such as these on instructional days in which attendance and participation is assessed (e.g., specified small groups, clinical work, exams etc.) will not be considered excused absences.

Residency interviews

It is not recommended that students schedule required course work during the time that they will be interviewing for residency programs. There should be a request for permission as soon as the interview event is known, and any absences attributed to interviews for residency programs must be discussed with and approved by the course/clerkship director prior to their occurrence.
Sub-internships

Because of the high level of responsibility on sub-internships, sub-interns are expected to work each day for the entire rotation. They are not excused on Medical College holidays. If the student must miss clinical responsibilities for any reason, the request for permission or notification should be made as soon as the event is known and the student must help in making coverage arrangements. The sub-internship director has full discretion to determine if the work performed by the student satisfies the course requirements.

Religious Holidays

The Medical College recognizes that the members of its community, including students, observe a variety of religious faiths and practices. Few of the various religious days of observance are part of the Medical College’s holiday calendar. However, the Medical College recognizes and respects the religious beliefs and practices of its students and will accommodate them reasonably within the requirements of the academic schedule. As a result, the Medical College will not penalize a student who must be absent from a class, examination, study, or work requirement for religious observance. Students who anticipate being absent because of religious observance must, as early as possible and in advance of an anticipated absence of a day, days or portion of a day, request permission for the absence from the designated faculty or course leader(s).

Whenever feasible, faculty will attempt to avoid scheduling examinations and assignment deadlines on religious holidays. A student absent from a class because of religious observance shall not be penalized for any class, examination, or assignment deadline missed on that day or days.

In the event an examination or assignment deadline is scheduled on a day of religious observance, a student unable to attend class shall be permitted the opportunity to make up an examination or to extend any assignment deadline missed. No fees of any kind shall be charged by the Medical College for making available an opportunity to make up an examination or assignment.

No adverse or prejudicial effect shall result to any student who takes advantage of the provisions of this policy. If a student believes that he or she is not being granted the full benefits of the policy, and has not been successful resolving the matter with the course director, the student may confer with the Associate Dean (Academic Affairs). In the event a student continues to believe that he or she is not receiving the benefits of this policy, the student may file an appeal under the appeal provision of the policy on Promotion and Graduation.
Jury Duty

New York State has rigorous regulations regarding service on juries and does not allow students to be excused from jury duty.

A student who receives a jury duty notice from New York County should contact the Associate Dean (Student Affairs) as soon as s/he receives the jury notice. If the student cannot make the dates assigned because he or she is scheduled for a class, clerkship, or elective, s/he should call the number provided on the jury notice, explain that he or she is a medical student, and offer another two-week period to serve. The student may be asked to go to the court clerk to discuss the situation in person. There is no guarantee that students will be allowed to postpone jury service, but one’s willingness to make oneself available during the next break or vacation may aid the request. Students who repeatedly postpone jury service eventually will be required to serve, regardless of their academic schedule. Students should complete their jury service if they are not scheduled for class during the dates on their original jury summons.

Students who receive a notice for Grand Jury service or from a jurisdiction other than New York County should contact the Associate Dean (Student Affairs) as soon as they receive the jury notice.

Time Conflicts between Classroom and Clinical Activities

In the foundational years (first 1.5 years of the curriculum) classroom sessions and clinical activities are usually not scheduled simultaneously. In the longitudinal patient program known as LEAP in which students in teams follow a panel of patients over time, but do not have primary patient care responsibilities, some patient activities may conflict with classroom activities, including examinations. The leadership of the LEAP program sets forth a hierarchy of specific clinical scenarios in which students may be asked to weigh these competing demands. In all cases in which attendance at a patient activity conflicts with attendance at an in-class session in which attendance is part of the academic assessment, students are expected to provide timely request and notification to the designated course leaders. Students who have questions about the attendance policy as it pertains to LEAP should contact the LEAP faculty leadership.

In the clinical years (clerkships and sub-internships) when students are part of a patient care team, as a general rule, the care of one’s patient takes precedence over attendance at in-class didactic sessions or conferences. However, because these conflicts can never be totally free of ambiguity, students are advised to follow the directives of the clerkship directors and their faculty supervisors.
Faculty Observation and Reporting of Student Absences

To ensure that the attendance policy is fairly and consistently implemented, the teaching faculty in learning units and clerkships are not allowed to excuse students from class or clinical sessions. All requests for an absence should be referred to the course directors or their designee for evaluation. Faculty members who note that a student is absent from a session in which attendance is being assessed and is not known to have the permission of the course director should notify either the course director directly or the curriculum office in the foundational years, the clerkship director in the clinical years, the AOC program director, or the course director of the required courses in the AOC Scholarly Project block 1 time (i.e., Advanced Clinical Ethics and Translational Science). Faculty mentors of students in the AOC Scholarly Project should notify the AOC program director of any mentees who are absent from required activities specified by the research mentor (e.g., lab meetings, team research presentations, etc.). These course directors, in turn, should notify the Office of Academic Affairs of any unexcused absences of more than one day’s duration. In order to track absences longitudinally and for potential P/G purposes, both excused and unexcused absences should be reported by the course directors to the Basic Science Coordinator in the foundational science curriculum and to the Clinical Curriculum Manager for the clerkships and sub-internships.

Making Up Absences and Reporting

The work or activities that are missed from academic programs, regardless of the reason for the absence, must be made up. In the foundational science curriculum, the student is required to make up all course assignments, and may be required to make up additional activities at the discretion of the unit and/or course director. If there is an issue with resolving an absence or with the process for making up missed course work that is not resolved with the learning unit or course leadership, the student may confer with the Associate Dean (Academic Affairs).

In the clinical curriculum, for emergent absences and excused absences related to professional events or academic activities, students will be responsible only for making up required coursework. For any excused absence related to major family events, any unexcused absence, and when total time for excused absences exceeds 10% of the total time of the clerkship, both required coursework and clinical time must be made up. The clinical activities that constitute the make-up time are at the discretion of the clerkship directors and should be scheduled during the timeframe of the clerkship.

Consequences of Unexcused Absences

In the foundational years, students who incur an unexcused absence in a course (i.e., Essential Principles of Medicine or Health, Illness and Disease) may receive an email
message from the course director advising them of their violation of the attendance standards. In addition, the absence will be noted in the student performance profile on record in the Office of Curriculum and Educational Development. A second unexcused absence in that course may result in a written or email warning from the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs or other designated education dean, and a notation in the student’s official academic record in Academic Affairs. A third unexcused absence in the same course will result in the student’s receiving a grade of “Marginal” for that course which will remain in the student’s official academic record, but which will not be recorded on the student’s transcript. The student will be required to meet with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs or other designated education dean for further evaluation of the reasons for persistent absences. Upon a satisfactory completion of the meeting and/or any other additional recommended meetings or counseling sessions, the grade of “Marginal” will be converted to a grade of “Pass” for the purposes of the transcript but a notation will remain in the student’s record of the absences. Students who incur an additional unexcused absence may be required to participate in additional evaluation and investigation as deemed appropriate by the Senior Associate Dean (Education). Students who accrue three grades of “Marginal” on the official academic record may be subject to review by the Promotion and Graduation Committee. (See “Promotion and Graduation Standards and Procedures”)

In the clinical years, where patient care responsibilities are the primary focus of the student, any unexcused absence will result in immediate evaluation and investigation by the clerkship director. Each unexcused absence will be reported to the Associate Dean, Program Development and Operations of Medical Education and Clinical Curriculum Manager who will track these across clerkships and sub-internships. In keeping with the policy for the foundational science curriculum, 2 unexcused absences across clerkships (i.e. during the clerkship years) may result in a warning email from the Associate Dean, Academic Affairs, and 3 unexcused absences across clerkships will result in a “Marginal” in the clerkship during which the third unexcused absence occurs. During the Sub-internships, one unexcused absence will result in a “Marginal” grade. Depending on the scope and circumstances of unexcused absences and clinical activities missed, a student may also receive a “Marginal” or “Fail” in either a clerkship or sub-internship. This is at the discretion of the course director in consultation with the Associate Dean, Academic Affairs and other relevant education deans.

Remediation may include meetings and/or counseling by the Senior Associate Dean (Education) or the Associate Deans of Academic or Student Affairs. All missed assignments and clinical activities will be made up, and may include the possibility of repeating a clerkship or sub-internship in part or in its entirety and this plan will be at the discretion of the Associate Dean, Academic Affairs in consultation with other relevant education deans and the course director.

In the period devoted to Areas of Concentration, the student’s research mentor will notify
the course leadership of the AOC program, typically a pathway director or the AOC
director, of any persistent unexcused student absences. The course leadership of the AOC
will evaluate the reasons for the absences and, if warranted, depending on the pattern and
types of missed activities, record such absences in the student’s official academic record
and/or require that missed sessions be made up. The consequences of unexcused absences
from required sessions of courses that occur during AOC Scholarly Project block time
(i.e., AOC SP-related required sessions, Translational Science, and Advanced Clinical
Ethics) are identical to those as specified for unexcused absences incurred during the
foundational years (see above). For continued persistent absences, the AOC director will
consult with the Associate Dean, Academic Affairs about additional evaluations,
stipulations or sanctions.

The course directors of electives that students take as part of the required course for the
completion of the MD degree program, after appropriate determination that an absence is
unexcused, should report such absences to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for
further evaluation and/or measures.

Students who take electives or pursue degree programs at institutions other than WCMC
are expected to comply fully with the absence policy as set forth by that institution and to
incur consequences of its violation as determined by that institution. Evaluations/grades
received from the institution will become part of the student’s official academic record at
WCMC.