



Managing Short-term Absences to Promote Public Health

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Temporary procedures for health-related short-term absences (2021-22)

The current assumption for fall 2021 academic planning is that self-assessment public health controls will remain in place and that self-isolation will be necessary both for suspected COVID cases and confirmed COVID cases. We will also be directed to stay at home if we have symptomatic contagious illnesses that mimic COVID symptoms.

Consequently, we anticipate dealing with an increase in short-term instructor and student absences in situations where previously an individual may have felt slightly ill but well enough to teach or come to class. The following offers a policy framework and procedures for both instructor and student short-term absences for health reasons.

For instructors, it is particularly critical to note that individual course policies must be flexible enough to accommodate class absences of this nature without penalizing students or requiring the student to go through a formal academic concession procedure for every absence.

Please note that the law school is not offering options for students to take courses fully remotely as of Term 1 of the 2021/22 Winter Session, and all exams will be in-person. While we appreciate the flexibility that remote learning has afforded some students, our courses are offered as part of in-person instructional degree programs. In particular, the accreditation of our JD degree program through the Federation of Law Societies of Canada has been based on this requirement, with the pandemic circumstances affording an exception granted on the ground that most learning within the law school continued to be offered synchronously. For this reason, students hoping to continue to rely on recorded lectures for the upcoming academic year as a substitute for in-person attendance should be informed that this is not permitted.

Students who assert that they cannot attend an in-person program for reasons that might be the subject of accommodation should contact the [UBC Centre for Accessibility](#).

Accommodations for students with disabilities are handled centrally through the UBC Centre for Accessibility. Once accommodations are approved, the CFA works with Student Services at the Law School (and the Graduate Program Office and/or Associate Director, Indigenous Legal Studies if applicable) to put the appropriate and available accommodations in place.

[Academic concessions](#) (for reasons of illness, bereavement, etc.) are handled centrally in the law school by the Chair of the Academic Procedures Committee and Student Services.

Instructors must not waive academic requirements, approve an alternate form of evaluation, or otherwise modify their course policies for individual students except through the academic concessions policies and procedures. The only exception to this rule is that instructors should waive graded attendance or participation requirements for students who have short-term absences due to illness as outlined in this policy. Ideally, course policies should be designed to account for the likelihood of these absences.

I. Instructor in-person absence:

The law school does not expect instructors who feel too ill to teach to do so just because the means are now available to teach remotely. If you are too ill to teach, this will be managed as before:

- Notify Reception
- Students notified by instructor or instructor's administrative assistant
- Class cancelled, cancellation posted on room
- Make-up class scheduled where appropriate¹

If you are well enough to teach but must self-isolate at home due to public health instructions, you will need to use one of the following options:

1. Pre-recorded lectures, posted to Canvas course site
2. Fully remote class via Zoom

A. Remote teaching options for health-related short-term instructor absences

1. Pre-record lectures and post to Canvas course site

- This option is the least interactive (i.e., lecture only). Depending on the length of absence from the classroom, instructors may consider organizing a virtual space for Q&A, discussion, etc.
- Information about how to record lectures at home can be found at <https://lthub.ubc.ca/tool-finder/lectures-presentations/>.
- Students can use classroom and class time assigned to the course to watch pre-recorded lectures on their own devices with headphones. Students should be encouraged to bring functioning headphones to class throughout the year just in case.

What to do:

- Notify Allard Law Reception that you will not be teaching in-person for reasons of self-isolation. If you know the duration that you will need to self-isolate, please specify this.
- Notify students in your class (e.g., via Canvas, the FSC) of where, when and, if known, for how long, they can find the pre-recorded lectures, and what else might be available to them, or expected of them.
- Reception will post notices on classroom doors advising students that the instructor will not be teaching in-person and to consult, e.g., Canvas, email, for further details about course delivery.

¹ The practice at the Allard School of Law is that instructors may choose to schedule make up classes for missed classes, during times designated for the purpose. This is in the discretion of the instructor and will depend on the number of hours missed, the timing in the term, and the impact on achieving the overall learning objectives of the course.

2. Fully remote class (no classroom instruction, all participants join via, e.g., Zoom)

- This option is possibly the easiest and something many instructors will now be used to.
- There are no AV implications for classroom delivery, but students can remain in assigned classrooms to participate on their own devices using headphones. Students should be encouraged to bring functioning headphones to class throughout the year just in case.

What to do:

- Notify Allard Law Reception that you will not be teaching in-person for reasons of self-isolation. If you know the duration that you will need to self-isolate, please specify this.
- Notify students in your class (e.g., via Canvas, the FSC) of details regarding how they can join the remote class, and whatever else they might need to know, or is expected of them. You may wish to note that students are welcome to use the assigned classroom as long as they have a personal device and use headphones.
- Reception will post notices on classroom doors advising students that the instructor will not be teaching in-person and to consult, e.g., Canvas, email, for further details about course delivery.

II. Managing Short-term Student Absences for Health Reasons

A. Public Health Context

The *COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Guidelines* (July 5, 2021) state:

Institutions are strongly encouraged to develop and/or follow established accommodation mechanisms to ensure that students who cannot physically be on campus (e.g., they are ill, adhering to quarantine rules, self-isolating, attending a vaccine appointment, etc.) are not significantly disadvantaged in their educational pursuits. Institutions are also strongly encouraged to waive any requirements for medical documentation from students for absences given the strain this will cause on the medical community (p. 10).

We may see more short-term student absences from the classroom than under pre-COVID conditions, on the assumption that public health rules and recommendations for the fall will require students to stay at home when sick, even if they have tested negative for COVID, and to self-isolate when they have tested positive for COVID.

B. Instructor Responsibilities

Following the *Guidelines*, instructors will need to consider what arrangements they will adopt to enable students in these circumstances not to be significantly disadvantaged. This document outlines the menu of options instructors can adopt. Instructors are responsible for communicating to students in a timely fashion (i.e., before the start of classes) how they will be handling short-term student absences for health reasons and what steps students need to take.

In addition, teaching faculty should be aware that attendance components of their courses need to be flexible, i.e., they should not create a disincentive for students to follow public health measures. Students should not be penalised for missing class due to a short-term health related absence nor should they be required to seek an academic concession.

C. What is a Short-term Absence?

For these purposes, “short-term student absences” can generally be understood as anything 2 weeks or under, **OR** as an absence that does not involve missing a significant percentage of the course material (such that it may trigger academic concession considerations). In some instructional contexts (e.g., full term clinics or intensive courses), an absence of 1-2 weeks, while “short”, may have a much greater impact and what is considered a long-term absence may be triggered sooner.

Absences that are longer than 2 weeks and/or which may trigger academic concession considerations are dealt with separately and must involve Student Academic Services or the Graduate Program. If a student notifies an instructor of an anticipated absence that falls outside the scope of this policy, or if a student’s absence continues beyond what is covered by this policy, the student should be advised to contact studentservices@allard.ubc.ca (JD Students) or their Graduate Program Advisor (graduate students).

While the temporary strategies for managing short-term student absences outlined below are driven by considerations specific to the COVID-19 public health context, **any short-term absences for health reasons are temporarily within scope of this policy framework**. If a student notifies an instructor of a short-term absence for health reasons, instructors should not solicit further health-related information, which is private.

D. Options and Procedures

1. Recording lectures (AV system)

- a. Some instructors record and post their lectures as a matter of course and/or as part of their pedagogical practice. If you wish to use this method as the preferred way for students who need to be absent for short periods of time for health-related reasons to access the instructional materials, you will need to advise students that this is the course policy.
- b. Some instructors may not routinely record lectures, but may wish to handle short-term student absences using this method. If so, you need to let students in your course know that this will be the preferred way for students who need to be absent for short periods of time for health-related reasons to access the instructional materials, and what steps students need to take, e.g.:
 - Students should advise the instructor of their absence for health-related reasons as soon as possible, and the duration, if known.
 - If the absence is not expected to be long (e.g., 1-2 classes), students can be encouraged to rely on obtaining class notes from others. Determining what length of absence warrants recording lectures is at the discretion of the instructor.

- Students should be made aware that recorded lectures may not be available right away, and that they may need to rely on obtaining class notes from another student for at least the first missed class. Both students and instructors should be aware that there may be occasional technical difficulties which will prevent recording lectures.
- If the instructor determines that the student should be provided with a recording, the instructor needs to advise UBC IT AV (Rohan Sheehan: rohan.sheehan@ubc.ca; AV Help Desk: av.helpdesk@ubc.ca; 604.822.7956) that they would like to record their class, identifying the class, the time, the classroom number, and for how long (if known) lectures for this class need to be recorded.
- **Requests for class recording cannot be fulfilled the same day.** If an instructor is advised that a student will be absent for a short period of time beginning the same day, they should advise the student to obtain notes from a classmate for at least the first class, until the recording can be set up with AV.
- Instructors will need to determine how to share the recording with the student(s) in question and communicate this to the student(s), and whether they should be made available to all students or just the student(s) in question.

Instructors who adopt this approach should be aware that they may be dealing with situations of overlapping or consecutive short-term student absences, such that recording lectures may effectively last for the course of the term.

Please note that it is possible to record lectures for evening classes, but on-site AV assistance will not be available and instructors will have to follow written instructions for, e.g., putting on and turning on the microphone.

2. *Livestreamed lectures/classes:*

As with 1(a) above, instructors who are amenable to livestreaming lectures should let students in their course know in a timely fashion that this is the way short-term student absences for health-related reasons will be handled, and what steps to take, e.g.:

- Students should advise the instructor of their absence for health-related reasons as soon as possible, and the duration, if known.
- If the absence is not expected to be long (e.g., 1-2 classes), students can be encouraged to rely on obtaining class notes from others. Determining what length of absence warrants livestreaming lectures is at the discretion of the instructor.
- Students should be made aware that livestreamed lectures may not be available right away, and that they may need to rely on obtaining class notes from another student for at least the first missed class. Both students and instructors should be aware that there may be occasional technical difficulties which will prevent livestreaming lectures.
- If the instructor determines that livestreaming is warranted given the duration of the anticipated absence, the instructor needs to advise UBC IT AV (Rohan Sheehan: rohan.sheehan@ubc.ca; AV Help Desk: av.helpdesk@ubc.ca; 604.822.7956) that they would like to livestream their class, identifying the class, the time, the classroom number, and for how long (if known) lectures for this class need to be livestreamed.
- **Requests for class livestreaming cannot be fulfilled the same day.** If an instructor is advised that a student will be absent for a short period of time beginning the same day,

they should advise the student to obtain notes from a classmate for at least the first class, until the livestreaming can be set up with AV.

- Instructors will need to share the connecting link provided by Rohan with the student(s) in question.

Instructors who adopt this approach should be aware that they may be dealing with situations of overlapping or consecutive short-term student absences, such that livestreaming lectures may effectively last for the course of the term.

In addition, instructors will need to decide whether they want to enable two-way synchronous communication for questions via a chat app, and would need to communicate this with absent students.

Please note that it is possible to livestream lectures for evening classes, but on-site AV assistance will not be available and instructors will have to follow written instructions for, e.g., putting on and turning on the microphone.

3. *Hybrid classroom*

We are not offering the use of a hybrid classroom technology for any student absences in the academic year 2021-22.

4. *Student notes*

As a back-up or alternative to recording and livestreaming, instructors should consider facilitating some way for students to share and obtain notes (while protecting from disclosing student emails and other personal information). This could be done through creating a 'class notes' folder on Canvas, or through using OneDrive. (If instructors choose to use a non-UBC platform for this purpose, they should be sure that no personal student information is posted to the site.)

While students are resourceful and often self-organize (see 7 below), ensuring that there is a designated platform for sharing will mean that this is accessible to all students. If this is your only or primary method for handling short-term student absences for public health considerations, it is particularly important that you set up a platform for sharing and accessing notes. In addition, you will need to inform students in your class that this is how you will be handling these types of absences.

For upper year lecture classes, it is also possible to access funding through the law school to hire a student in your class as a paid notetaker. Please contact Wakana Nakajo **by July 15** if you are interested in this option (wakana.nakajo@ubc.ca).

5. *Smaller classes / seminars / experientially-based classes*

Livestreaming or recording may not work well in these instructional settings. Depending on the setting, other, lower-tech options (e.g., FaceTiming in) might be better considered as an alternative.

6. *Clinics/externships*

Clinics should follow workplace protocols that are aligned with overall safety plans. Extended absences in clinics can impact a student's ability to earn their pass/fail credit. Clinical instructors should consider alternative (i.e., remote) work arrangements that would allow students who must remain at home for health-related reasons to continue their clinical work, and should work with Student Academic Services staff in cases where this cannot be achieved. (We are not contemplating full-time remote clinical participation as an option for students; this section is meant to address unanticipated absences.)

7. *Student self-organization, various*

Students will likely develop their own support networks and arrangements to handle short-term absences. These may include arrangements instructors may or may not want to allow in the classroom, such as FaceTiming through a peer's device into a classroom, or having another student record the lecture on a personal device. Instructors should state to students what the parameters for their class is for such arrangements, and whether they are encouraged, discouraged or not permitted.