Westminster College views class attendance as an individual student responsibility. Students are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments. Faculty are expected to provide notice of the dates on which major exams will be given and assignments will be due on the course syllabus and/or Canvas.

Students are expected to follow the attendance policy established by the instructor in each class. However, some students with disabilities may be approved for an accommodation which may require the development of a modified attendance agreement for a student in a specific course. Generally, these students have disabilities which are chronic or episodic in nature which may cause difficulties with regular class attendance. This might include but is not limited to, students with diabetes, epilepsy, cancer, migraines, and conditions requiring ongoing or specialized medical treatment. Students with psychological disabilities who are experiencing an exacerbation of symptoms may also request modification of attendance policies.

**Determining How Many Disability-Related Absences Are Reasonable**

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has provided the following guidelines to assess if attendance is an essential element of a course:

1. Is there classroom interaction between the instructor and students and among students?
2. Do student contributions constitute a significant component of the learning process?
3. Does the fundamental nature of the course rely on student participation as an essential method for learning?
4. To what degree does a student’s failure to attend constitute a significant loss to the educational experience of other students in the class?
5. What do the course description and syllabus say?
6. Which method is used to calculate the final grade?
7. What are the classroom practices and policies regarding attendance?

The accommodation should be provided unless the accommodation threatens the integrity of the course as offered. It is important that the student and course faculty member discuss the issue so that the student can then make an informed decision regarding alternatives. Requests for accommodations for absences due to a disability will be considered on an individual and course-by-course basis.

**Accommodating Class Absences**

When a class is missed due to a disability-related absence, a general rule for determining a reasonable timeframe for a makeup or postponement of an assignment (such as a paper, exam or quiz) is the time equivalent to that which was missed. In certain courses, it may be appropriate to consider an alternative assignment, reading or project to make up for missed class discussion or projects. Other examples of how disability related absences may be accommodated include the ability to submit or make up missed assignments or assessments that have been impacted by the disability-related absence without grade penalty. To help facilitate the discussion, and set parameters between a faculty member and a student a Modified Attendance Agreement should be completed by the student and faculty member for each course to clarify expectations and set guidelines.
The Modified Attendance Agreement should be completed at the beginning of the semester or as soon as the student presents the Letter of Accommodations to the faculty member.

This agreement should be established before absences have become an issue. Faculty are only required to provide approved disability related accommodations after receiving a Letter of Accommodations and a discussion between the student and faculty member has taken place.

The method and timing of notification of absences and making up any materials, exams, assignments, etc. missed due to the absence should be mutually agreed upon and detailed in the Modified Attendance Agreement.

When a student is absent due to their disability, they are responsible for the course content, lecture notes, and information presented that day. The student needs to arrange how they will obtain this information.

The student is not required to present the faculty member with medical documentation verifying their disability-related absences, but may be required to document other non-disability related absences as per the syllabus requirements.

In most instances, communication with Disability Services and the provision of additional documentation is not needed to verify the student’s absence(s). However, if the absences meet or exceed the number of absences agreed upon in the Modified Attendance Agreement, Disability Services should be informed. This will allow Disabilities Services to be of assistance in answering questions about the accommodations from both the student and the faculty member.

If the student requests a change to the number of absences initially agreed upon due to a change in their disability, the student should be referred to the Coordinator of Disability Services. Additional documentation or an update from the student’s treating physician may be needed by Disability Services to determine if a modification to the agreement or other accommodations may be appropriate.

References & Resources:

- **Questions and Answers on Disability Discrimination under Section 504 and Title II.** Retrieved June 13, 2016, [http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/qa-disability.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/qa-disability.html).
- **University of Illinois,** 30 NDLR 104, Case No. 05-04-2078 (OCR Region V 2004) (OCR found no fault with an instructor’s announced policy of failing any student who missed in excess of ten classes; evidence adduced that policy was applied to nondisabled students as well)
- **Metropolitan State College (CO),** Case No. 08-98-2013, 15 NDLR ¶ 92 (OCR Region VIII 1998) (upholding accounting department’s refusal to relax attendance policy after engaging in deliberative process and concluding such would result in fundamental alteration based of program)
- **Cabrillo Community College (CA),** Case No. 09-96-2150 (OCR Region IX 1996) (essentiality of attendance decided on case-by-case basis in light of class requirements and methodology; when attendance is not essential, college should consider taping classes for students whose disabilities prevent attendance)
- **Project Shift:** Faculty Development. Retrieved June 13, 2016, [http://www.projectshift-refocus.org/faculty.htm](http://www.projectshift-refocus.org/faculty.htm)

(Adapted from Texas A & M University, Disability Services, Disability Related Absences Agreement and similar agreements from other colleges and universities)