

The Geisel School of Medicine Policy On Absences From Clerkships

It is an expectation that students will be present for all scheduled activities during their clinical clerkships, but there are events in all our lives that sometimes result in the need to miss one or more days from a clerkship. The purpose of this policy is to clarify and standardize which reasons for absences are considered to be potentially excused absences and which are not, to explain the process of requesting absences, and to describe how lost time may be made up.

The guidance contained in this policy covers a large majority of reasons for student absences observed over many years, but is not meant to be all inclusive. There are other events that may cause a student to be absent, and there are also extenuating circumstances that may occur. In those cases the individual clerkship will be called on to make fair and well-reasoned decisions.

This policy was prepared with the recognition that Geisel medical students are hard-working professionals with a strong vested interest in their own learning.

Excused vs non-excused absences

Event	Absence Excused?	Make Up Time Needed?	
		6 or 8 week clerkship	4 week clerkship
Student illnesses, including infections that could put patients or other staff at risk	Yes	If > 2 days missed	If > 1 day missed
Illness or death of a close family member or close friend	Yes	If > 2 days missed	If > 1 day missed
Presentation at a medical conference	Yes, if notification >2 months ahead	If > 2 days missed	If > 1 day missed
Religious or cultural holidays	Yes	If > 2 days missed	If > 1 day missed
Wedding (student is bride or groom)	Yes, if notification >2 months ahead	If > 2 days missed	If > 1 day missed
Residency interview or orientation	Yes	If > 2 days missed	If > 1 day missed
NBME exam – Skills exam in Year 4	Yes	If > 2 days missed	If > 1 day missed
Personal days (such as a birthday)	No	Yes – for all days missed	Yes – for all days missed
Vacations	No	Yes – for all days missed	Yes – for all days missed
Family or school reunions	No	Yes – for all days missed	Yes – for all days missed
Attending a medical conference	No	Yes – for all days missed	Yes – for all days missed
Attending a wedding	No	Yes – for all days missed	Yes – for all days missed

Communications

Timely communication between the student and clerkship director is essential to any episode of student absence from clerkship activities.

For events that can be planned well in advance, such as a wedding, the advance planning should ideally begin prior to the lottery where clerkships are chosen in order to pick a clerkship or elective block that does not have night or weekend call at the time of the event. This will avoid missing any clerkship time. The Family Medicine clerkship, GAM, Neurology and most electives do not have night or weekend call.

For other events that can be planned in advance, but become known after the clerkship schedule is set, students should make a request to the clerkship director regarding the proposed absence as soon as the dates of the event are known. Call schedules can sometimes be adjusted to free up a given weekend day or night.

For unforeseen events such as an illness or family emergency, students are expected to notify their preceptor / ward team and the clerkship office of any missed time and its duration as soon as possible.

Making up missed time

The Year 3-4 policy at the Geisel School is that students may have up to two days of excused absence on a six or eight week clerkship before make-up time is required, and up to one day for a four week clerkship. Unexcused absences will always require make-up time, and in addition have the potential for being regarded as a breach of professionalism which could be referred to in grade narratives and could affect a student's overall grade. It is the student's responsibility to work with the clerkship director to plan any necessary make-up time.

Consequences of unexcused absences

An unexcused absence is a potentially serious matter and may be looked upon as a breach of professionalism. It is expected that the student would be counseled by the clerkship director about such an episode, and that it would be an important element in the assessment of the student's professionalism competency in the clerkship grade narrative prepared for the student.

Other potential consequences of unexcused absences will depend on the seriousness of the matter and might include inability to receive an honors grade on the clerkship, reduction of a clerkship grade, failure of a clerkship, counseling by the Assistant Dean for Clinical Education or a formal Letter of Concern for the student's file, particularly if there is a pattern of absences across clerkships.