



Instructor Absence/Course Mode Change Policy IST_AC-22 Administrative Guideline

Sometimes instructors are unable to teach class sessions, due to illness, family emergencies, academic conference participation, etc. This policy provides guidance on how to manage such situations.

In general, **instructors are not allowed to cancel classes; only Penn State cancels classes.**

In cases where instructors can anticipate the absence (e.g., to attend an academic conference), the following applies:

- The instructor will arrange to ensure that instruction occurs in some other way.
 - Alternatives include but are not limited to arranging for an alternate instructor, utilizing remote instruction, arranging for an asynchronous activity, having one or more guest speakers, and utilizing TAs and IAs to lead class activities, supported by LAs (see “TA, IA, and LA Rights and Responsibilities” below).
 - Under certain well-defined circumstances, RAs may be allowed to serve as guest lecturers (see “RAs as Guest Lecturers” below).
- Instructors who need to change more than 10% of scheduled classes (i.e., mode, instructor, timing) within the duration of the course (e.g., 16 weeks for a typical course) must develop and share their plan for such changes with the Associate Dean for Graduate and Undergraduate Studies for approval, so that we can ensure appropriate plans are in place.
- Per university guidance, when classes are designated as being offered in residence at University Park, instructors can transition some class meetings to a remote format. A remote format may include synchronous remote instruction, asynchronous remote instruction, or asynchronous remote learning (e.g., an asynchronous learning activity where the faculty member is not directly engaged). Importantly, instructors cannot convert more than 24.99% of a residential course to a remote format without special permission. To allow the college to ensure compliance with this limit, individuals teaching courses within the College of Information Sciences and Technology are required to report any class sessions that are move from in-person instruction to any remote form of instruction/learning via the following form: [In-Person Course Sessions Taught Remotely \(smartsheet.com\)](#)

There are also times when a last-minute cancellation may be required due to an unexpected illness or emergency. In these situations, the following applies:

- Instructors should have contingency plans to ensure course objectives are achieved even if they have to miss a class, though doing so may not always be possible. This does not mean preparing an entire shadow lecture plan for the day, but rather being positioned to do something should an unexpected situation arise. Such plans might include a combination of the following:
 - Knowing whom you will contact in case of a last-minute situation.
 - Ensuring that you have their phone number and/or email stored in your mobile devices.
 - Discuss contingencies with TAs at the beginning of the semester.
 - Have canned activities available, such as group project time, or test preparation time, or a planned optional activity that could be slotted in anywhere during the semester.
 - Using regular meetings with TAs to go over plans for the next week.
 - Area professors-in-charge and the AD for Graduate and Undergraduate Studies are also available to assist.

- We also ask that faculty inform the Associate Dean for Graduate and Undergraduate Studies, so we can be prepared for inquiries from students, parents, and others that are often associated with such situations.

TA, IA, and LA Rights and Responsibilities

This policy does not grant additional rights or responsibilities to TAs, IAs, or LAs than they already have.

Learning Assistant (LAs, undergraduate students) responsibilities are summarized as follows:

LAs may assist with explaining course concepts in office hours, providing ungraded feedback on assignments, helping teams get organized for large projects, coaching students on problems related to course assignments, and collecting informal feedback on how the course is going. They may also assist with grading (provided the instructor supplies the student with a grading rubric)” (source: <https://teaching.ist.psu.edu/learning-assistants/>).

Teaching Assistants (TAs, typically doctoral students) and Instructional Assistants (IAs, MS students) may

be asked to grade larger assignments than LAs, but they, too, should be provided with a detailed grading rubric created by the instructor. They can also be invited to lead lab sessions and to assist with teaching from your lesson plan once or twice in the semester, if they are expert enough in the material and you feel that they are up to the task. (source: <https://teaching.ist.psu.edu/teaching-orientation/course-assistants/>)

For graduate classes, allowable TA/IA/LA support is more limited than it is for undergraduate classes; see the following university policy for details: [GCAC 902](#).

RAs as Guest Lecturers

RAs may not be asked to serve as substitute instructors or TAs, because doing so is outside of the scope of their grant-funded RA appointments, likely violating Penn State's contract with the granting authority and also violating IST's contract with the RA.

However, RAs may be allowed to offer guest lectures during faculty absences provided that all of the following conditions apply.

- The guest lecture must be directly relevant to the student's RA work
- Such guest lectures should be for planned faculty absences only (not emergency ones)
- An RA guest lecture must have a title and abstract (i.e., it is formally an invited talk, which students can put on their CV)
- The number of RA guest lectures is limited to two guest lectures per course, per semester, and to three guest lectures for all courses combined in a given semester
- The instructor must inform the AD of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies whenever an RA will be asked to do a guest lecture to cover a planned absence