Union

Union School of Theology Student Attendance Policy

Approved by Union School of Theology (UST) Academic Board 17-01-2018

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1. CONTENTS

2. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER POLICIES

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following documents. This list is not exhaustive:

- Union School of Theology Student Handbooks
- UST Learning Support Policy
- UST Data Protection Policy
- QAA 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education
- Open University Handbook for Validated Awards

3. KEY PRINCIPLES

3.1 This attendance monitoring policy will apply to ALL students enrolled on an academic programme at Union School of Theology.

3.2 The School expects students to attend all scheduled learning sessions associated with each module or programme of research they have elected to pursue. With this in mind, class attendance registers will be kept for each scheduled learning session.

3.3 UST staff and students comprise a community of learners who commit to work, meet, and fellowship together. Attendance is expected at all UST events arranged for them, including timetabled classes, workshops, pastoral groups, student meetings and meetings of the UST community for personal, spiritual and pastoral formation.

3.4 Union School of Theology believes that students should be active participants in their learning experiences and must take responsibility for achieving their potential through successful completion of each stage of their studies.

3.5 This Student Attendance Policy is intended to create a partnership between UST and its students to assist students in making full use of the learning opportunities that are provided and help them to achieve their learning potential. It recognises the enormous investment that students make, both in time and money, in choosing to pursue a programme of Higher Education. It also recognises the care and attention lecturers and other students put into preparing material and arranging classes to support that learning. As a responsible institution, UST believes it has a duty to follow-up promptly on matters of non-attendance indicated in the class-register (which is an official record) so that students can be supported and given every opportunity to succeed. UST is committed to building excellence in academic practice and student engagement across the institution, in order to provide a friendly, collaborative and welcoming learning community.

4. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS CONCERNING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

4.1 Learning thrives when it is done in community as a shared experience. Students are expected to play their part in enabling UST and its Learning Communities to grow together as places of learning, spiritual growth and pastoral support.

Attendance enhances -

- educational development within the area of study;
- receiving knowledge, understanding, and building learning skills for success in the programme;
- the formation of community at UST and opportunities for personal and pastoral care and support for all its members
- preparation for all assessments (formative and summative, written and oral);
- the development of practical work or group work (including working with others in lectures, seminars, tutorials or presentations);

- contributing to the learning of others and to enhancing the formation of a community of learners, enabling students to bring their own experience and perspectives to the learning process;
- developing skills of working and community formation with others from a range of different backgrounds in preparation for future ministry service; this can include working in cross-cultural situations.

4.2 Students are expected to take responsibility for organising their studies and ensuring they are aware of their timetable and expectations for attendance at all activities relating to their programme of studies. Students will be informed of any timetabling or room changes via their UST email addresses, and on the Union Cloud. It is the students' responsibility to check regularly for information that may include important timetabling or room changes through their UST email account, and on the Union Cloud.

4.2.1   Students must attend and make themselves available to undertake all learning activities relating to their programme of studies during the dates published by UST and any re-sit assessment dates as necessary.

4.2.2   Learning Activities relating to their programme of studies include: lectures, seminars, tutorials, one to one tutorials, online discussion groups and other practical classes, field trips and placements; attendance for the purpose of assessment and examination; supervisory meetings; placements, other timetabled activities which students are expected to attend.

4.2.3   The UST timetable may include classes in the morning, afternoon and occasionally require attendance at evening or weekend events.

4.3   Students on the MTh programme (Campus mode) are required to attend the intensive block teaching weeks for the modules they are studying for the programme.

4.4   Students in learning communities, whether on the GDip or MTh programme, are required to attend all schedule learning sessions

5. SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ATTENDANCE ON BA AND GDIP PROGRAMMES

Programme completion is based on satisfactory performance in the Programme Assessments, together with satisfactory attendance at all scheduled classes whether on campus or in a learning community.

5.1 Class Attendance: Students must attend all classes/ time in their (physical or online) Learning Community, for the full duration of each semester. Near 100% attendance is expected of students. In the case of absence, due to illness or other circumstances beyond the control of the student, a minimum of 75% attendance is required to still receive credit for a given module (or 50% if there is appropriate documentation supporting extenuating circumstances). Students who fail to achieve the minimum attendance will normally be deemed to have failed that module.

5.2 Class registers must be completed at each scheduled learning session. These are formal documents which may be inspected at any time, and the Board of Examiners may request to see them as proof of fulfilment of attendance requirements. The registers attest that students have fulfilled the class attendance requirements necessary for completion of their Programmes. They are checked by the Programmes and Registry Co-ordinators before exam boards for this purpose. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that his/her signature has been entered in the register for each class attended in all modules required to complete the programme of study and obtain the award sought. The register will be withdrawn 5 minutes after the class has commenced. Students arriving after that point will be marked as absent for that class.

5.3 Unavoidable absence due to illness or other valid cause should be reported to the lecturer as soon as possible. Students may self-certify for a limited number absences (up to 25% of all scheduled classes) due to personal illness. Students should submit a letter of explanation for any such absences. Written explanation for any other absences beyond the 25% permissible by self certification should be provided together with supporting evidence such as that of a delayed or cancelled train, medical appointment, letter from a minister, court official, lawyer, social worker, etc. This evidence should be submitted to the *Programmes and Registry co-ordinators* in advance, or within 7 days of the unavoidable absence for illness. Students are responsible for ensuring that the partner institution is notified of any such extenuating circumstances at the time they occur and for supplying supporting documentation by the published deadline. If certification is not submitted by the end of the Semester in which the module is scheduled, the certification will not normally be accepted.

5.4 If an absence for a verifiable cause is known in advance a student must notify the *Programmes and Registry Co-ordinators* and the Module Academic Lecturer.
They will inform them of ways to catch up for the work they have missed. Such causes include

- death or serious illness of a close relative or friend;
- significant adverse personal/family circumstances, burglary, fire, major court proceedings;

- leave, approved by the School, to undertake fieldwork, research or conferences;

- jury duty;

5.5 It is the responsibility of the student to obtain any relevant teaching material that has been delivered or distributed during this absence.

5.5.1   In the case of essay submissions and examinations, any student wishing to be granted a delay in submission or the opportunity to sit the exam on a different date based on Extenuating Circumstances should follow the procedure set out in the UST Extenuating Circumstances Policy on the UST website.

5.5.2   Students achieving less than 75% attendance at the classes scheduled for a module who believe that they have a valid cause for their absence (for example, an ongoing serious medical condition) can request that their situation receive special consideration by the Extenuating Circumstances Committee, which reports to the Board of Examiners. Students are responsible for ensuring that UST is notified of any extenuating circumstances at the time they occur and for supplying supporting documentation by the published deadline. See the UST *Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedures*.

a. **Absence from Summative Seminar Presentation –** digital or paper copies of any work that should have been presented at a seminar must be submitted to the seminar leader within seven working days of the scheduled event. Where such a presentation is graded (rather than being assessed on a simple pass-fail basis), and is submitted late and without extenuating circumstances it will be penalised in line with the following tariff: a 10% reduction will be made from the overall marked score for each working day it is late, down to the 40% pass mark (for undergraduate work) and 50% pass Mark (for postgraduate awards) and no further. Work that is submitted 7 or more working days late without extenuating circumstances will be refused (whether the assessment is graded or marked on a pass/fail basis), and a mark of 0 given.

b. **Ministry Placement:** (Undergraduate Students only) Practical training is an integral part of Undergraduate courses at UST. All students are required to undertake a placement at Levels 5 and 6. The hours of required attendance at Ministry Placement are given in the relevant module specification. This will be monitored by the placement supervisor. Any unavoidable absences should be notified to the Placement Supervisor as in 5.3 above. Students failing to meet the required hours of attendance on the Ministry Placement without extenuating circumstances will be deemed to have failed the module.

c. **Personal Development Plan Courses:** Each semester as part of their Personal Development for future ministry, students on campus are expected to attend a series of Workshops and Training Seminars which are part of their preparation for future ministry. Students will complete a learning portfolio based on these training sessions, which will be discussed with their personal tutor at the end of each year. Attendance registers will be taken and any unavoidable absences should be reported as above.

6. ATTENDANCE AND UNDERGRADUATE PROGRESSION

6.1 Students must fulfil attendance requirements in all the modules they have taken in order to progress to the next level.

6.2 Students who have been unable to progress on to the next level due to inadequate attendance because of personal circumstances, may defer their studies and resume them again at a suitable time in the future. Modules that are incomplete or have been failed due to not meeting attendance requirements will need to be retaken.

7. ATTENDANCE AND POSTGRADUATE PROGRESSION

7.1 MTh students must attend all the intensive residential weeks at UST campus, or attend all the scheduled classes in the Learning Community where MTh is delivered.

7.2 100% attendance is expected of all students. Students may self-certify for a limited number absences (up to 25% of all scheduled classes) due to personal illness. Students should submit a

letter of explanation for any such absences. Written explanation for any other absences beyond the 25% permissible by self-certification should be provided together with supporting evidence of Extenuating Circumstances such as that of a delayed or cancelled train, medical letter or evidence of a medical appointment, letter from a minister, court official, lawyer, social worker, etc.

This evidence should be submitted to the *Programmes and Registry co-ordinators*. Students are responsible for ensuring is informed UST of any such extenuating circumstances at the time they occur and for supplying supporting documentation by the published deadline. If certification is not submitted by the end of the Semester in which the module is scheduled, the certification will not normally be accepted. Extenuating Circumstances with respect to absence will be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Committee, who will report to the Board of Examiners [see Section 10 below].

8. ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR VISA STUDENTS

8.1 Students studying at UST on a Student Visa are required to meet the strict attendance requirements set out in the visa conditions. Their attendance at lectures, seminars, tutorials, supervisory sessions and any other classes will be monitored weekly through the attendance sheets. The *Programmes and Registry Co-ordinators* will check lecture attendance monthly.

8.2 The School has a duty to report students with Student visas to the immigration authorities when the student has missed 10 consecutive expected student learning contacts. Students are reminded of this at the start of every academic year, together with the implications of being reported to the Home Office.

8.3 If a student fails to enrol within the time limit, withdraws or defers from their course, the School will inform the UKVI using the Sponsorship Management System.

8.4 If a student is refused a renewal of their visa during the course of their time at UST and does not take steps to leave the country, the School will inform the UKVI using the Sponsorship Management System.

9. ATTENDANCE MONITORING

9.1 Attendance requirements are communicated to students at the start of their programme. The Student Handbook for their programme should refer students to this policy.

9.2 Programme leaders have a responsibility to remind students of the importance of attendance and especially the clear link between attendance and assignments and/or examinations and performance. This should be emphasised during induction and at initial meetings with students and should be reinforced by lecturers and by Lead Mentors in Learning Communities. Students will be informed at induction the name to whom they should report any absence from classes. This induction information is made available on the VLE and the Student Handbook.

9.3   Responsibility for ensuring that an accurate record of student attendance is kept, lies with Programme Leaders and Learning Community Lead Mentors. Students should also take responsibility for signing the register to indicate their attendance. Each lecturer or Lead Mentor is responsible for circulating the attendance register at the start of each class, ensuring it is accurately filled in. The *Programmes and Registry co-ordinators* will monitor lecture attendance. If the *Programmes and Registry co-ordinators* believe that a student's attendance pattern means they may fall below the required 75% attendance threshold, a communication will be sent to them on the student's UST email address.

9.4   If a student is experiencing personal difficulties these should be reported immediately to the Programme Leader or Lead Mentor so that implications for attendance can be discussed.

10.   ACTION IN THE EVENT OF NON-ATTENDANCE

10.1   If a student's continued absence from class puts the student at risk of falling below the required 75% attendance for the module, a meeting will be arranged with the Programme Leader, at which the reasons for repeated absences will be discussed. A record will be taken of work that needs to be caught up on. Evidence of any compensatory work being completed must be submitted to the Programme Leader. Failure to do this will result in failure of the whole module.

10.2   If a student falls below the 75% attendance required for a module based on self-certification and Extenuating Circumstances have been reported, this will be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Committee. Even with Extenuating Circumstances students must have attended at least 50% of all classes to pass the module. In these circumstances the Extenuating Circumstances Committee may make a range of recommendations to the Board of Examiners, including requesting extra compensatory work, requesting students re-take part of the module, or asking the students to re-take the entire module, re-attending all classes and submitting the required assignments (assignments submitted will be on different questions than those submitted in the previous year).

11.   ACTION IN THE EVENT OF CONCERN FOR A STUDENT'S WELL-BEING

11.1   Should poor attendance be the result of challenging personal circumstances, personal and emotional support is offered first through the Personal Tutor. Further confidential support and advice is also available from the Student Welfare Officer and the Pastoral Dean.

11.2   In certain circumstances, such as possible depression or stress related issues, students are encouraged to consult their doctor. If the difficulty relates to personal issues then students are offered the option of referral to their local church pastor, or the pastor of the church they are attending. UST can also connect students with experienced counsellors in the local area.

12.   DATA PROTECTION

All student attendance records are kept in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. See the UST Data Protection Policy for details.

13.   RESPONSIBILITIES, POLICY APPROVAL AND REVIEW

This policy will be available to all, monitored regularly and reviewed and evaluated annually. The Provost, Academic Dean, and the Programme Leader have overall responsibility for the attendance policy, including its approval and regular review.

The Programme Leaders and Academic Registrar have responsibility for overseeing the monitoring of attendance and ensuring that decision making complies with Open University and UK Visa regulations.

This policy will be included in staff and student induction.

Version	Author	Review Date	Reason for change	Equality Impact Assessment check (and comment)	AB Approval date *
1.1	Gary McKee and Iain McGee	Nov 2022	Changes of role names (esp. Programmes and Registry Co-ordinators) and specific reference to 60% ext. circs in 5.1 (already referenced elsewhere)	Checked	29h November 2022
1.2	Iain McGee	May 2023	Change of attendance requirements in light of discussion with OU and internal discussion (75% and 50% with ext circs.)	We believe this will help students balancing family and other responsibilities	23rd May 2023