



EXECUTIVE BRANCH

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Caitlin G. Moore

To: Katrina Wangen, Deputy Pro Tempore of Legislative Affairs
CC: Emma Custis, Speaker of the Senate
Samantha Ciresi, Senate President Pro Tempore
Brianna Urea, Legislative, Judicial, and Rules Committee Chair
Ryan McClellan, Legislative, Judicial, and Rules Committee Vice Chair
Brodie Taylor, Student Government Coordinator
From: Caitlin Moore, Attorney General
Date: June 17th, 2022
Subject: Opinion on Academic Purposes Under the Blanket Excuse Policy

I, Attorney General Moore, in accordance with the Constitution, Statutes, and Senate Rules of the Student Body of the University of Central Florida, hereby issue the following opinion to the Deputy Pro Tempore of Legislative Affairs, Katrina Wangen, and all other interested parties:

Here, the question is whether activities or outside commitments not serving an academic purpose or not used for academic credit may properly be invoked and applied under the Blanket Excuse Policy of Senate Rule 7: Student Senate Absences (7.09). They *do not*. The Blanket Excuse Policy does not apply to internships, jobs, or other outside commitments which are not required for academic purposes or not applied for academic credit.

This question arose after Senator Mole submitted a Senator Absence Request Form, requesting a blanket excuse to commence on May 19, 2022, and end on August 4, 2022. Senator Mole noted he would have to be “consistently late” to Senate meetings, stating he has required meetings for an internship that lasts until 6:30 p.m. on Thursdays, and consequently, would be late to Senate meetings. Adequate proof of these meetings was provided and is not at issue in this opinion.

Senate Rule 7 (7.03, Section B) establishes “Student Body Senators who are late for Senate Meetings will be excused from having a one-half (1/2) absence charged against them if they are present-and-voting not more than thirty (30) minutes after the meeting is called to order.” Nonetheless, the scope of this opinion is not concerned with what counts as an absence, but rather what would be considered an academic purpose under the Blanket Excuse Policy (7.09), a question that arose out of the scenario described above. It is still entirely plausible for Senator Mole, or anyone similarly situated, to have outside commitments, not for academic purposes and not approved under the Blanket Excuse Policy, to not be in violation of Senate Rule 7 (7.03).

I.

Thereunder Title III: The Legislative Branch (Chapter 309.1), “Senate is a Year-Round Commitment” and Student Body Senators “are required to attend weekly Senate meetings.” The policies for absences are detailed in Senate Rule 7.

Pursuant to Senate Rule 7 (7.09), the Blanket Excuse Policy, the excuse needs to be *necessary*. While not an exhaustive list, the rule explicitly mentions examples of evidence that may be submitted to *necessitate* the recurring absence of a Student Body Senator, “such as transcripts, graduation requirement sheets, class offering schedules, or any other documents that the Student Body Senator feels are relevant to showing a valid and unavoidable reason for necessitating the excuse.” Notably, the reason for the excuse must be valid and unavoidable, the evidence submitted must necessitate



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the blanket excuse, and the activity prohibiting attendance—either partially or for the entirety of the meeting—must serve an academic purpose.

II.

Currently, there is no definition of academic purposes in Title II: Student Government Statutory Definitions and Parliamentary Authority or in the Senate Rules. After close inspection of university policy, the logical parallel to a Senate Absence Request Form is the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities' Program Verification Form.

The policy recognizes that students may be expected and required to “represent the university in authorized events and activities.” To the same degree, faculty members must “offer a reasonable opportunity” to those students to complete their requirements without penalty due to their absence.

As such, it is logical to apply that standard to the issue before us today, so long as it remains in accordance with all other Student Government policies and regulations. After careful inspection of Student Government constitutional and statutory precepts, this office found it does. Student Body Senators who are expected and required to represent the university in events, activities, and outside commitments with an academic purpose ought to be granted a reasonable opportunity, in the form of a blanket excuse request, to uphold and complete their requirements without penalty due to their absence.

It is the responsibility of the Student Body Senator to properly file and submit all forms, documentation, and evidence associated with the blanket excuse request in accordance with the Student Government Statutes and Senate Rules.

III.

The Blanket Excuse Policy exists to ensure a system of accountability and integrity. It provides ways to enable Student Body Senators, who are students first, to balance their interests and commitments without sacrificing their role in Student Government. However, it does not exist without limits.

For the foregoing reasons, it is the opinion of the Office of the Attorney General that participating in an internship for non-academic purposes *does not* fall within the realm of proper reasons to be granted a blanket excuse.

Sincerely,

Caitlin G. Moore
Attorney General
University of Central Florida