

Motion to Revise the Policy on Class Attendance

Draft from Special Senate Exec Com Subcommittee
Sent to Ad & St, November 11, 2009
Passed by Admissions and Standards, January 21, 2010

Motion:

Effective Summer 2010

Section 1334 of the Catalog is repealed and replaced with the following:

The resources of the University are provided for the intellectual growth and development of its students. The University expects each student to take full responsibility for his or her academic work and academic progress. Students are expected to attend classes in order to gain command of the concepts and materials of their courses of study. As such, the University does not mandate the number or percentage of absences that are acceptable but suggests a guideline of 15% for determining an excessive level of absence. The specific class attendance policies for each class are at the discretion of the instructor, in accordance with the policies of the department and college.

All matters related to student absences, including making up work missed, are to be arranged between the student and the instructor before the semester begins or on the first week of classes. All instructors will, at the beginning of each semester, make a clear statement in the course syllabus for each of their classes, describing their policies for handling absences. Students are obligated to adhere to the requirements of each course and of each instructor. Instructors are encouraged to provide avenues for students to make up examinations and other work missed due to an excused absence.

Excused absences are recognized in the following cases:

1. University-Sponsored Events

Absences due to activities approved by the Office of the Provost, in which a student is an official representative of the University will be recognized as excused when the student informs the instructor in writing during the first week of the semester of his or her participation in an activity that may generate excused absences and the dates of planned absences for the semester. If requested, the appropriate university official will provide a memo stating the official nature of the university business in advance of the activity. Absences due to similar events, which could not have been anticipated earlier in the semester, will be recognized as excused absences upon advance notification of the instructor by an appropriate faculty advisor or administrator.

2. Legal Obligations

Absences due to legal obligations (for example, jury duty, military orders) will be recognized as excused absences. The student must provide the instructor with written documentation of such absences at the earliest possible date.

3. Religious Observances

Students wishing to have an excused absence due to the observation of a religious holiday of special importance must provide advance written request to each instructor by the end of the first week of classes.

Class Attendance by Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs requires that institutions of higher learning immediately report to them when a student discontinues attendance for any reason. Instructors must report to the Registrar's Office the absence of a veteran student as soon as it is known that the veteran student will not be returning to class. Generally, this should be reported after one week of absences and no later than two weeks of nonattendance by a veteran student.

In addition, it is suggested that the faculty give due consideration to absences relating to the following events:

- A. Death or major illness in student's immediate family
- B. Illness of a dependent family member
- C. Illness that is too severe or contagious for students to attend class

Policy To Be Repealed:

Here is the policy that would be repealed if the motion above passes:

The resources of the university are provided for the intellectual growth and development of its students; it is expected that students should attend class regularly.

The Department of Veterans Affairs requires that institutions of higher learning immediately report to them when a student discontinues attendance. Georgia State University institutional policy requires that professors report the absence of a veteran student as soon as it is known that the student will not be returning to class. Generally, this should be reported after one week of absences and no later than two weeks of nonattendance by a student.

All matters related to student absences, including the making up of work missed, are to be arranged between the student and the professor. All professors will, at the beginning of each semester, make a clear statement in the course syllabus to each of their classes, describing their policies for handling absences. Professors will also be responsible for counseling with their students regarding the academic consequences of absences from their classes or laboratories. Students are obligated to adhere to the requirements of each course and of each professor.

Students must be present for announced quizzes, laboratory periods, or final examinations unless the reasons for the absence are acceptable to the professors concerned. A student who is absent because of participation in activities approved by the Provost's Office will be permitted to make up work missed during his or her absence, provided that the student misses no more than

15 percent of class hours per course per semester. If requested, the appropriate university official will provide a memo stating the official nature of the university business in advance of the activity. Faculty are strongly encouraged to take into consideration religious holidays of the student's faith, summons, jury duty, or similar compelling reasons for absence.

Rationale:

In order to bring Georgia State University's policy in line with peer institutions, other University System of Georgia research universities, and other universities in the Colonial Athletic Association, this motion revises the existing class attendance policy. The proposed policy reflects the language and tenor of policies at the majority of these institutions.

The Senate Executive Committee created Senate Joint Committee on Class Attendance including representatives from Faculty Affairs, Admissions and Standards, Academic Affairs, Athletics, Student Life and Development and the Executive Committees. This committee, chaired by Elisabeth Burgess, included Marta White, Peter Lindsay, Brendan Calandra, Terry Frey, Don Reitzes, Siva Nathan, and Lacey Enyart. Dena Freeman-Patton attended meetings to represent perspectives from Athletics.

The existing policy was originally approved in 1998 and in light of changes in the student body, new Senate policy regarding syllabus statements, and changes in travel required by GSU's participation in a new athletic conference, a review of the current attendance policy was warranted. 1) The student population at GSU increasingly reflects a more traditional age student population who engage in a wide variety of university sponsored and sanctioned activities. These activities can place demands on students that may take them away during scheduled classes. 2) In 2009, the University Senate passed a policy requiring faculty to have clear statements regarding class and university policies, including attendance. 3) The athletics department is confronting difficulties with the ability of some student athletes to conform to NCAA standards under the current attendance policy. The source of the potential problem is found in the statement that, "A student who is absent because of participation in activities approved by the Provost's Office will be permitted to make up work missed during his or her absence, provided that the student misses no more than 15 percent of class hours per course per semester." In seasons when GSU teams are successful and are invited to participate in post-season play, athletes may miss more than 15% of classes.

This committee drew on data collected by earlier subcommittees and research collected on attendance policies at peer and regional institutions, as well as other CAA schools.* The key findings of this review were 1) that GSU has a more specific policy, with the 15% specification, than most other universities, and 2) that most policies were either substantially more limited or substantially more complex than that of GSU. The policies of the latter group tended to be more explicit about what constituted absences that instructors should treat as excused and/or how instructors should accommodate students who have such absences. These policies tended to highlight not only issues related to veterans (as noted in the GSU policy) but also university sponsored events, religious observances, legal proceedings, and student and family illnesses.

Given this review of other policies, the committee undertook a more thorough review of GSU's Class Attendance policy, with issues beyond the impact on athletics considered. For example, Athletics does an excellent job of informing instructors about schedules and absences due to participation on the team. Advisors of students who participate in other types of university sponsored or sanctioned events are less consistent and rigorous in providing paperwork regarding scheduled absences. As well, the committee noted that other institutions rarely specified a percentage or number of classes a student may miss. Additionally, the committee recognized that accommodating student absences may vary by discipline, and the attendance policy should allow instructors freedom to develop alternatives that are both manageable for the instructors and reflect the rigor of the class. Finally, the committee noted that several instances where student absences should be excused were not included in the policy.

The resulting recommended amendments are geared to accomplish the following:

- a) create a more structured and easily accessible (readable) document for students;
- b) highlight the expectation that students regularly attend and take responsibility for their academic progress;
- c) highlight the role of instructors in adherence and responses to attendance and absences;
- d) allow instructors (and departments) the flexibility to develop their own attendance policies which may be more or less rigorous than University guidelines;
- e) ensure that students and instructors are informed of the policy and that absences for approved university sponsored events are managed in a fair and timely fashion.

*The institutions whose attendance policies examined included: James Madison, Hofstra, UNC-Wilmington, Northeastern, George Mason, Old Dominion, Virginia Commonwealth, U. of Delaware, Drexel, Towson, William and Mary, U. of Maryland, Florida State, Lipscomb; Eastern Kentucky, Oakland. Also included were: Alabama-Birmingham, Toledo, Indiana U., Purdue-Indianapolis, U. of Houston, Portland State, Cleveland State, U. of Missouri-St. Louis, U. of Memphis, Florida A&M, and U. of Pittsburgh.