

G

## Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Subcommittee Report on Attendance Policies February 26, 2015

The Academic Affairs Subcommittee (Chris Craun, Kaye McKinzie, Lisa Christman, Art Lichtenstein, Jane Dahlenburg) was charged on January 13, 2015, with investigating faculty views about a campus-wide attendance policy.

We began by identifying current UCA policies and statements in official handbooks and bulletins.

The Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Handbook, the Graduate Bulletin, and the Student Athlete Handbook all have statements regarding attendance. Common threads are: 1) Attend class. 2) "Attendance and tardiness are primarily a student-teacher-class relationship." 3) Familiarize yourself with your professors' policies.

The Faculty Handbook has the following policy: "All faculty are required to assist university offices in the management of accurate student records. At the beginning of semesters, it is necessary to verify class rosters, noting students who do not appear and those who attend but are not listed. At the end of each term faculty are also required to verify attendance for all students earning a grade of F. Failure to validate attendance has serious financial consequences for the university. When students drop and add classes, or withdraw, faculty members are expected to complete and forward appropriate forms."

Additionally, an attendance policy is required in all syllabi.

We then devised a questionnaire which was distributed to all faculty. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions and an open comment section. Three hundred and five (305) faculty responded. Questions and results are as follows. (Note: We did not ask whether faculty were familiar with current statements and policies.)

1. Should UCA require all faculty to take attendance?
 

Yes	104	34.2%
No	200	65.8%
Answered question	304	
Skipped question	1	
  
2. Should UCA distinguish between EXCUSED and UNEXCUSED absences?
 

Yes	171	56.2%
No	133	43.8%
Answered question	304	
Skipped question	1	
  
3. Should UCA be prescriptive in what constitutes an EXCUSED absence?
 

Yes	145	47.7%
-----	-----	-------

No	159	52.3%
Answered question	304	
Skipped question	1	

4. Should UCA establish a policy on dropping students after a certain number of absences? (Numbers below are based on a traditional semester class meeting 2 or 3 times per week.)

No	160	52.6%
Yes, 1 absence	1	0.3%
Yes, 2 absences	2	0.7%
Yes, 3 absences	15	4.9%
Yes, 4 absences	72	23.7%
Yes, 10 absences	47	15.5%
Yes, more than 10 absences	7	2.3%
Answered question	304	
Skipped question	1	

5. Should faculty continue to be allowed distinguish between EXCUSED and UNEXCUSED absences?

Yes	246	80.9%
No	58	19.1%
Answered question	304	
Skipped question	1	

6. Should faculty continue to be allowed to self-determine what constitutes an EXCUSED absence?

Yes	233	76.6%
No	71	23.4%
Answered question	304	
Skipped question	1	

7. Should faculty continue to be allowed to establish their own policy on dropping students after a certain number of absences?

Yes	230	75.7%
No	74	24.3%
Answered question	304	
Skipped question	1	

Question 8 asked for additional comments. One hundred twenty-three (123) faculty responded, often in depth. Faculty views on student attendance are very diverse, like the faculty themselves. However, there are some broadly shared points that, while not universal, do seem to represent a rough consensus opinion.

1) A commitment to educating students should be the top priority behind any policy at UCA, trumping faculty and/or student convenience, statistical retention, athletic competition, or simplicity. This commitment should be palpable to students and their parents. Multiple faculty pointed to scheduling as the point where this

commitment appears to waver. Students in special activities are enrolling in courses where the in-class demands are high despite knowing that their extraneous schedules will demand they miss many times. Since these schedules (academic, athletic, drama, whatever) are all set ahead of time, a student's (or the University's) priorities impact this process.

2) Faculty clearly believe they are the best placed to evaluate student absences and their impact on student performance within their own individual classes.

3) Faculty do not want to prioritize taking roll and calculating attendance over time dedicated to educating students in their curriculum.

4) There are concerns that a university-wide policy would not account for online classes.

5) While most (but not all) faculty believe that attendance policies should be crafted by instructors for their individual classes, there is support for a university policy under the following conditions:

- a. The University sets a base-line drop for attendance policy that is lenient - somewhere between 6-10 absences.
- b. The University backs and supports any faculty policy that is more constrictive.
- c. Faculty continue to decide what absences should be counted (i.e. excused) and which should not. While some respondents wished for some guidelines regarding excused/non-excused credentials, most indicated that they wanted university support for their judgment.
- d. It is impractical for faculty to take attendance every day in large lecture settings. If the University wishes to implement a policy, there should be reliable, time-efficient ways to verify attendance (card swipe, phone swipe, etc.).