

## **Should an attendance policy be implemented that affects the course grade?**

I have never calculated attendance into determining a student's course grade, but at times I have wanted to in order to further develop a sense of professionalism in my students. A department-wide discussion on the use of attendance in grade determination began among animation instructors in early 2011.

For an attendance policy, some questions pop into my mind:

1. What are the plusses and minuses of an attendance policy that affects the course grade?
2. What does a fair but effective policy look like in terms of hours missed/amount deducted?
3. How can such a policy be easily and effectively implemented?
4. Should this policy be department-wide or left to instructor discretion?

My thoughts on the above:

Plusses:

- Encourages student attendance, reinforces professionalism.

Minuses:

- Extra work for instructor, will invite additional arguments from students claiming they were in attendance on such-and-such class when you have marked them absent (either they are lying or not remembering correctly, or you made an error or oversight in recording the attendance, but either way how is the issue resolved? The stakes are higher if it affects the grade).
- Fair and effective policy? How about a 5% deduction for each absence after the first two? This would drop a student a full letter grade after four absences; two letter grades after six absences (with gradations in between). Since we meet roughly 21 times per quarter, 6 absences is over 25% missed time -- surely a student would be fired from a job for this -- and looking at it that way I don't see a two letter grade drop as overly unfair. I often have in-class exercises or work-in-progress critiques that are worth points, which with this policy would make absence a doubly bad idea. Plus it's likely the six-absence student is not doing stellar work in the first place, so all of this may compound to a failing grade.
- Easy implementation? My being a heavy but non-expert Excel user in grade spreadsheets, it's probably not super trivial to put in some sort of running tally that affects the grade snapshot as the quarter rolls along, but it would be easy enough to just add a column that lists absences on the grade report, and then I manually deduct at the end of the quarter. A savvier implementation may not be too much harder. I think the policy needs to be easy to understand and calculate, for the sakes of the instructor AND the students. Moving to eCompanion as we are now being mandated, even if just an initial step of posting syllabi at this point, may complicate the issue of calculating attendance into the grade -- I'm not familiar enough with the system to determine such a thing at this point.
- Department-wide policy? Arguments can be made for the benefits of a consistent policy across classes, but I don't enjoy having these kinds of policies imposed upon me -- it affects my course design. We should, however, discuss this as a department, and IF we can come to an agreement where everyone is satisfied with the policy, we should perhaps try implementing it across the department. We revisit the issue after a quarter or two and see what's working/what isn't. If no consensus can be reached, either the Academic Director mandates a particular action or it continues to be an individual decision.