

## Attendance

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### Abstract

Attendance is extremely important for success in college. Instructors are encouraged to emphasize the strong positive correlation between attendance and course performance. Class size and the type of class taught dictate the most appropriate policy to follow. This chapter is about the best practices and options that work with most classes. As always, any class attendance policy is strictly up to the professor, but this chapter includes some basic guidelines. Emphasizing the importance of attendance could be achieved in many different ways including giving incentives to students to come to class and providing opportunities to participate in group projects. As a resource to faculty, we discuss common bookkeeping techniques for large, small, and online/hybrid courses such as the use of technology, roll call, seating charts, quizzes, and in-class/group-activities. We will also explore different ways attendance can affect students' grades including rewards versus penalties, and making the attendance a percentage of the final grade.

## **Introduction**

Since attendance is extremely important for success in college, instructors are encouraged to emphasize the strong positive correlation between attendance and course performance. Absenteeism is one of the early signs that a student may be at risk in the class. Tracking attendance will provide the instructor data with which to send students early alerts. Holding the students responsible for their attendance will emphasize its importance. It is only through attending class that students are provided the opportunity to hear the instructor's insight on the material being taught. Being able to participate in and listen to group discussions and activities enriches the students' understanding and develops their ability to communicate ideas more effectively. Specific policies for attendance tracking are up to the individual instructor. However, class size and the type of class taught will dictate the most appropriate policy to follow. This chapter is about the best practices and options that work with most classes.

## **Bookkeeping**

### **Large Sections**

Attendance tracking can prove to be difficult in large section classes. Roll call is time consuming and audible responses often cannot be heard. As alternatives, many instructors use different techniques including sign-in sheets, notecards, quizzes, in-class activities, seating charts, and technology. All of these techniques, except the use of technology, will require organizing the information after each class or at the end of the semester to tally the absences. Attendance can be entered into Moodle2 so that it can become part of the students' grades.

**Sign-in sheets.** Instructors pass around a sign-in sheet or have students sign in at the door. Some do this during each class meeting and others prefer to do this randomly throughout the semester. Of course, passing around a sheet is not always reliable or verifiable; as students will ask a friend to sign for them. Standing by the door, or having a preceptor stand by the door, as students sign in will make this method more reliable. Not knowing when the sheet will be passed around or having them sign out as they leave could possibly help ensure the student staying for the entire class.

**Notecards.** Instructors require students to bring in signed notecards to class. A notecard is collected from each student either when he/she enters or exits the room. Preceptors can help in this effort. When using this method, it will be important that a uniform sized card is required for organization. This method is more reliable than the sign-in sheet method due to the personal contact between the student and the instructor/preceptor.

**Quizzes/in-class activities.** Instructors give quizzes or have graded in-class activities to take the place of a sign-in sheet. A small, short answer or multiple-choice question on a topic discussed during the lecture can be projected and students can submit their answers. Making the student copy the question down as well as the response and showing work where appropriate, can prevent students from turning in multiple submissions. In-class activities, such as creating ten minute journal entries on a particular topic presented during the lecture, are also effective in tracking attendance.

**Seating charts.** Instructors have had success keeping track of attendance in large sections using a seating chart. One of the drawbacks to this method is the time spent initially in making the chart. Another drawback is the difficulty in determining which seat is empty if the

section meets in an auditorium style room. To help with this, the seating chart can be passed around as a sheet or in several sections for students to sign. A preceptor can also be used to mark the empty seats during the class period.

**Technology.** Instructors use technology to track students' attendance. The use of clickers will require students to purchase a clicker if they do not already have one. Using a barcode scanner or the AccuClass app for iPhone will result in an initial cost to the instructor or department. There will be an account fee each year for using the iPhone app, while there is a one-time cost for the barcode scanner. When using technology to track attendance, it will be up to the students to bring their clicker or their student IDs to every class.

**Clickers.** Instructors use clickers to track attendance by asking students to answer short answer questions during the lecture. Instructors can also project a four digit lecture code on the screen and require the students to enter the code. The results can then be uploaded to Moodle2 so that it can become part of the students' grades. With this technology, reliability can still be an issue if students bring their own clicker as well as a friend's.

**AccuClass app.** Apple has a free attendance taking app for iPhone and iPad. However, instructors will also need an account for the cloud-based AccuClass database software. The first semester of enrollment is free. After that, the fee will be around \$49 per year. Institution rates can be given if an entire department wants to enroll. To use the app, instructors use the built-in camera to read the barcode on the students' ID card. There is also an optional magnetic strip reader that attaches to the apple device to allow students to swipe their IDs as they enter. The price for this device runs around \$79 - \$89.

**Barcode scanners.** Instructors use barcode scanners to track attendance. All student ID's have a barcode representing their ID number. The instructor can scan the ID's as the students enter and/or exit the classroom. The scans will be directly entered into an Excel spreadsheet if using a corded scanner or can then be uploaded later when using a cordless batch type scanner. Scanners can be purchased by the individual instructor or by the departments for as little as \$20 - \$25. Excel has the capability to match the barcode scans with the student ID numbers. The instructor can have a zero entered if a match cannot be found and any other notation if a match is found. The personal contact required between the student and instructor will make this technique more reliable.

### **Small Sections**

Attendance tracking in small sections is just as important as it is in larger ones. Due to the smaller number of students taking attendance, it will be a much easier task. The same methods discussed for the larger sections can be implemented, or an actual roll call can be used. This method allows for faculty to familiarize themselves with their students, which can help establish a rapport.

### **Online/Hybrid Sections**

Attendance tracking in the nontraditional online or hybrid section is just as important as it is in the traditional face-to-face section. However, the attendance requirements will be different. Instead of making a physical appearance, students should be required to make a digital appearance.

**Online.** Attendance/participation tracking for online sections can be achieved in several ways. It is advised that the instructor specify the online activities that will be used for this

purpose. Of course, these activities differ from one type of course to another. Some examples of these activities include:

- Students participating in an online discussion in a chatroom or using the “Forum” feature in Moodle
- Students logging in and visiting required course content regularly
- Students attempting 50% or more problems in an online assignment
- Students taking short quizzes at the end of each session to ensure that the student went over the content of that session
- Posting graded activities such as assignments or quizzes that are only available/unlocked after reading a file or watching a video
- Using the attendance activity in Moodle that enables instructors to take attendance and students to view their own attendance/participation records

**Hybrid.** Hybrid courses combine the face-to-face contact of a traditional course with the “at home” convenience of an online course. Attendance can be taken on the days students are required to be on campus. Refer to the sections on attendance tracking in large section classes for suggested methods. Participation grades can also be given using some of the suggestions listed in the online section.

### **Ways Attendance Can Affect Grades**

There are many ideas about how to encourage students to come to class. Relating the statistics about the correlation between attendance and grades is always a good idea, but it does not “motivate” most students to attend the class. Connecting attendance to either a “reward” or “penalty” seems to be the best motivating factor.

**Reward**

Some professors prefer the “rewards” factor by giving bonus (extra credit) points on a student’s test average or overall average grade for having no or at most one or two absences (excused or unexcused). Another way to give students bonus points is by focusing on attendance by a student’s participation. Depending on the type of class and how the class is structured, the instructor chooses the technique that works for the class. This leads to the question, how much should this extra credit for attendance or class participation be worth? This of course is dependent on the style of class and the professor; however, the key is to get the majority of students to come to class.

**Penalty**

Another way of motivating students to attend class is by making attendance mandatory, and linking point deduction on their grade due to lack of attendance. For example a professor may state in his/her syllabus:

If you have more than 4 absences (excused or unexcused), your grade for the class will be lowered by a letter grade, and if you have more than 6 absences - you will fail and have to repeat the class! You are expected to be on time and stay until the end of every class. Arriving late or leaving early will be counted as an absence.

When attaching “penalties” to attendance, the professor must be mindful of “special circumstances” like the death of a family member or major illness. It is a good idea to make sure that the students are aware of the proper procedure in these instances, namely, that they should contact the Dean of Students’ Office. That office in turn verifies the particular hardship and emails the instructors.

### Combination Reward/Penalty

Students who attend are rewarded while students who do not are penalized. To accomplish this, the number of days the student attends, divided by the number of total days, less the number of absences allowed is used as a multiplying factor to the student's grade. For example: If you take attendance 30 times during the semester and allow students to have two absences, the student's average will be multiplied by the number of days they attended divided by 28.

$$\text{The Multiplying Factor} = \frac{\text{Number of Days attended}}{\text{Total Number of Lectures} - \text{Number of Allowed Absences}}$$

$$\text{The Multiplying Factor is } \begin{cases} > 1 & \text{if a student missed 0 or 1 lecture} \\ = 1 & \text{if a student missed 2 lectures} \\ < 1 & \text{if a student missed more than 2 lectures} \end{cases}$$

So, the number that you multiply the student average by will either be greater than one, equal to one, or less than one. Multiplying by a number bigger than one will reward the student who is there more than the required number of days by adding points to his average. Multiplying by a number less than one will penalize the student who misses more than the allowed number of days by deducting points. Finally, multiplying by a number equal to one will not add or deduct points for the student who has the number of allowed absences. In summary,

$$\text{The Multiplying Factor } \begin{cases} \text{is a reward} & \text{if a student missed 0 or 1 lecture} \\ \text{has no effect} & \text{if a student missed 2 lectures} \\ \text{is a penalty} & \text{if a student missed more than 2 lectures} \end{cases}$$

### Conclusion

There is a variety of methods for keeping track of classroom attendance. The size and type of class will dictate the most appropriate method in any situation. But, no matter what technique is used for this purpose, class absences are one of the early signs that a student may



need an alert. When students are expected to attend each lecture, not only do they receive the obvious benefit of the instructor's insights and explanations, but they also receive a clear message from the university that personal responsibility for class attendance belongs to the students. This also provides them with the valuable practice of doing something they don't necessarily want to do.

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