

Faculty Senate Resolution 12-3

“Including Class Attendance Among Course Grading Criteria”

Introduced by Professors Louis Day, James Stoner and Claire Advokat

WHEREAS, class attendance is fundamental to a quality education at Louisiana State University, the state’s Flagship University; and

WHEREAS, excessive class absences may result in students’ failure in courses, thereby delaying their graduation and possibly leading to withdrawal from the university; and

WHEREAS, the State of Louisiana subsidizes the educational costs of all LSU students and has a right to expect respect for its investment in this education, respect which includes but is not limited to, regular class attendance; and

WHEREAS, the most effective means of fostering student responsibility for class attendance is a university policy permitting instructors to include attendance among their grading criteria; and

WHEREAS, Academic Affairs has interpreted the statement in the current university policy on grading (PS-44) that judgments concerning grading “should be based solely on academic considerations” as prohibiting taking into account class attendance in the awarding of grades

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Faculty Senate recommends that PS-44 be amended to insert these two sentences following the word “considerations” as noted above:

Because class absences are likely to affect a student’s mastery of course content, they may be considered among these “academic considerations” in determining the final course grade. Therefore, instructors, at their discretion, may also include “unexcused” absences as a component in the assignment of course grades, as long as attendance policies are spelled out clearly in the course syllabus at the beginning of the semester.

Background

After considerable discussion with colleagues over the years, representing most of the major colleges, we are convinced that the problem of class absences is wide-spread and pervasive and is inimical to the quality of education expected of a flagship university.

Since the inauguration of PS-44, Academic Affairs has generally interpreted this policy as precluding any grade considerations based upon class attendance. Admittedly, the language is rather ambiguous, but a fair reading of PS-44 is that the policy does indeed prohibit the use of class attendance in the determination of a student’s grade. We believe the time has come to change this policy to permit instructors to take class attendance into consideration in their

grading. This amendment would send a strong message that the university considers class attendance essential to the intellectual development of LSU students.

Some of the rationales for this policy change are incorporated into the Resolution, but we offer the following additional justifications for this policy change:

1. Because some faculty are frustrated with what they perceive as a “culture of permissiveness” at LSU towards class attendance and a policy that frustrates their attempts to alter this culture, they resort to other means to circumvent the policy by including in their syllabi class participation points or grades. While class participation grades have frequently been used as a legitimate component of the grading scale, too often they are employed as a means of encouraging (if not ensuring) class attendance. A policy change like the one proposed above would at least make the process of including class attendance in the grading scale more intellectually honest.
2. Like most communities, a university is animated by certain core values that are imparted to its students through a continuous process of acculturation. Among these are professional responsibility and respect. Students who are persistently absent display a wanton disregard for the academic responsibilities that flow from the privilege of attending an institution of higher learning with selective admission standards such as LSU.
3. Within the university setting, students form a *learning community* among themselves. The absence of some class members from this intellectual environment demeans the quality of this shared experience and displays a lack of respect for their classmates. In addition, regular class absences signal a lack of respect for the instructor on the part of the student. This proposal will send an unmistakable signal to our students that they have a moral obligation to attend class, except when they are impeded by circumstances beyond their control.
4. Insofar as we can tell, the current university policy is inconsistent with most other major universities. A survey of the policies of 19 universities, representing geographical diversity, revealed that 18 of these permitted grading, at least to some extent, on class attendance (the 19th university’s policy was somewhat ambiguous) as long as this expectation is included in the syllabus.