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1-27-2006

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Shumaker, Nancy, "Deleting Classes First Day for Non-Attendance" (2006). *Faculty Senate Index*. 364.
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Deleting Classes First Day for Non-Attendance

Submitted by Nancy Shumaker

1/27/2006

Question:

This is an item of information for the Faculty Senate rather than a motion: University policy requires all students to attend the first class meeting of all classes for which they are registered. Students who do not attend the first class meeting of a course for which they are registered will be dropped from the course. This policy applies to all levels of courses. It is the student's responsibility to verify course drops and check that fees are adjusted.

Rationale:

The objective of this new policy, which will take effect in fall semester, 2006, is to optimize seat availability in classes by deleting individual students who do not attend that class on the first class meeting day and making the seat available to other students who do need the class. The Waitlist function on BANNER will be used to put students needing that class in a queue to get the class if a seat becomes available.

Response:

There was one agenda request from Nancy Shumaker to inform the Senate and faculty that students who did not attend the first day of class would be automatically dropped, so students on a wait list could be accommodated. The SEC met to discuss that, and we had many questions on implementation, and placed the item as an information/discussion item listed as #8 on the agenda.

Minutes: 2/13/2006: 8. Information/Discussion Item:

Dropping Students who do not attend first class:

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): We have hard copies that we will distribute.

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: I guess I will open the questioning or discussion of this item. Where did the idea of a “required first day attendance policy” come from, and when was it enacted?

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): My understanding is that this has been something that has been under discussion for actually several years, and that it was something that actually was approved by Enrollment Management. I think Mike Deal has the history for us. He can recount it better than I can.

Mike Deal (Registrar): This idea actually did come up a couple of years ago, maybe as long as three or four years ago, and I think it actually originally came from faculty looking at ways to try to improve the management of the class seat. It came up again, I believe, last fall at the beginning of fall term of 2005. Again it came from a faculty member in CLASS, I believe, and it was brought to the Deans’ Council for discussion in September, and then on to the Enrollment Management Council in September. And both of those groups did endorse it, and it went forward then to the President’s Cabinet, and was approved at that point.

Michael Nielsen (CLASS): I was wondering in the spirit of shared governance, and in the Senate’s role of helping, as the handbook puts it, “participating mutually in the development of policies at the departmental, college and university levels,” and “the academic affairs of the University which concern the Faculty Senate and which it shall be responsible in formulating policies and reviewing procedures include academic activities, general educational policies of the University, the welfare of the faculty, other matters that promote the interest of the faculty and the university.” I was wondering if it occurred to anyone else that this seems like the faculty and the Faculty Senate are pretty much left out of the loop, and it is just a decision made by the administration without any real effort to involve the faculty or Senate?

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: As a point of information, the first I knew about it was when I saw the posting from Nancy Shumaker.

Michael Nielsen (CLASS): And from my perspective, I found out about it a few hours ago in an email. Hardly a shared governance kind of thing to do it seems to me. I guess maybe it is not so much a question as a comment.

Candy Schille (CLASS): I can understand your point real well. It looks to me though as if this is it; this is our discussion time. If we have something to say about this, we better say it loud and clear.

Barry Balleck (CLASS): I understand the process and so forth, but I am a bit troubled that the people that are most affected by this, of course, are the students, and as I am reading through the proposed timeline implementation, the students are not even going to know about this until March. It is almost like a fait accompli here it is, take it or leave it. I do not think our students are lazy. I do not think our students purposely miss classes.

Maybe some do, but I do not think that is the majority of students. My experience has been that most students want to get there the first day of class to see the syllabus to decide whether or not they are going to drop the class. I think that there are some very detrimental affects that we can see on students. Particularly international students may have trouble flying back from a long vacation or getting back in the summer and those sorts of things. One of the biggest problems I think we all face is trying to get our students to read their GSU email account or look at their GSU email account or look at their GSU mail boxes. I do not understand how we are going to be able to notify students and implement this systemwide for over 16,000 students. And as I said, to me it seems that since the students are directly involved in this, they should have been up at the top of this timeline rather than near the middle of it. And I was just wondering what the process for that was.

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): If I could address that, the Academic Advisement Council has already met and discussed this, and we have asked the advisors in the different advisement centers as well as the advisors who work in the Academic Advisement Center, to begin advising students that this is going to happen in the fall. So all of the students who go through those advisement centers are going to be told about this when they go in for advisement. The other thing is that the committee is working very hard to determine how we can take care of those exceptions. I, of course, raised the issue about international students, and I think the committee is very anxious to make sure that we do have some kind of an escape valve in the sense that we have some way the students can let us know that they are not going to be able to be back for that first day, so that they do not get dropped from the class. We are finding that the classes that we are having difficulty with are not necessarily those freshman classes, but the classes that are needed for students as they progress toward their major. And we are running into difficulties when we get some of those classes that will be full when they show up on WINGS, but then that first day of class we have students who do not show up and we do not know whether those students actually intend to be in the class or not. That prevents other students who need that class to proceed with their major from taking the class, and sometimes delays them in the process of moving forward, and this is one effort to try to help those students get the classes when they need them.

Kent Murray (CLASS): This appears to produce a kind of a domino effect in that if I am on a reserve list, and somebody does not show, they get dropped; so now I can get into this class, am I going to drop another one to get into this one. Then that opens up a seat there. Then it keeps dominoing all the way through the system, and for what justifiable reasons will we establish for an excuse on day one?

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): We are trying to establish a list of what we would call justifiable excuses, for example, if someone is in the military and is not able to come back, if someone is an international student and is not able to get back, if there is an accident or there is a family emergency, there is a medical emergency; we are coming up with a list of what we would call rational excuses that we would be able to verify.

Michael Moore (COE): What kind of provision is there for online classes? The College of Education is teaching a lot of online classes. I cannot see us validating or verifying enrollment on the first night of an online course.

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): That is one of the issues that we are trying to determine right now. What would we do about an online course, because that is a different kind of course and we are not really sure if that is the same kind of problem that we have with the available seats in a classroom that we have on campus?

Michael Moore (COE): And it also treats students differently. It may mean that students would think, "Why go through all this when I can just simply choose online?" I also share Michael's concern about process, too, and I make that point.

Mary Ann Rogers (SGA): Just a question. It seems like we are almost penalizing the students who went through advisement, registered on time, and got their classes. And, in a sense, as a peer advisor also we are always encouraging early advisement. Also, sometimes what I might consider a valid excuse for me being absent might not be on a professor's prepared list of valid excuses. If your excuse is not on the list, you are dropped from the class.

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: As a point of information, we had this system at my prior institution, and to make life even more difficult, they typically started classes on Thursday. The implementation there was that the students had to communicate directly with their instructors, and it was up to the instructor and the student to try and decide whether or not it was a valid reason. And it worked pretty well. I only had maybe four or five a semester out of about 250 students who had problems with it.

Godfrey Gibbison (COBA): You know it seems to me that it introduces so much hassle, that I am not sure that it achieves so much benefit as to justify the hassle. A hot list of exceptions and talk to your instructor; it just does not seem like that there is enough benefit to be achieved to make it really worthwhile.

Mary Marwitz (CLASS): In the third bullet of your handout it says "Waitlisted students will be registered for a class as seats become available." I interpret that to mean that as a student is not verified and a spot becomes available, the next person on the queue becomes registered, and that student is notified that she is in the class. If she somehow misses that notification and then misses that class that she did not know she was in, she will be dropped for it, and it rolls on. And it is possible that she would miss her opportunity for a class that she needed or wanted because she did not know that she was in it. Part of this bullet says that students will be registered as seats become available. The next part says they will be given permission to register. I am asking for clarification on that bulleted part of the process.

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): The wording on that is difficult. Actually they will be notified that they can register for the class. Students are on a waitlist because they have put themselves on there saying they want that class, and they are notified ahead of time

that if the class opens up, they have a chance of getting an email that will give them permission to get into that class. So those students we would assume would be watching their email, hoping they got one saying, "Yes, there is a seat in this class available and you have the opportunity to register." We are asking the students if they feel like they really need a seat in a class, to put themselves on a waitlist for it, and then you watch and see if a seat opens up, and they will get an email telling them that it has opened up and to register for it.

Leslie Furr (CHHS): We were just discussing that in California we always had this rule that if you did not show up for the first class, and at least by the first two classes, the professors just dropped you from the class. And basically, that is what you are setting up here now, because all that professors have to do if they want to keep you in the class is just check that you were actually attending the class. They could lie, right?

Don Fausett (COST): Seems like this has implications related to our attendance verification pertaining to financial aid also. If we say someone is there in order for them not to get dropped, we are also certifying their attendance to be eligible for financial aid, as of a certain date, which may have federal statutes pertaining to falsehoods related to it.

Jerry Wilson (COBA): I think I agree totally with Godfrey; it seems like we are creating a new infrastructure to deal with something that we are not entirely sure is broken completely, in the first place, and whether or not it will fix it. Concerning the waitlist, how do I get on it? You mentioned that sometimes majors cannot get into a class because it fills up. So, if my name is next on the list, and I am not a major in that particular area, do I still get a slot in that class? What about the folks that are thinking they may want to major in that subject, so they want to take this class, which is the first in the series and if they really like that, then they will change their major, but they are not a major now? Is some process in place that we keep them from being at the front of the waitlist?

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): We have not talked about prioritizing students. We had talked about students putting themselves on the waitlist, and we had not talked about there being any criteria as to whether they were a major or not. I am just saying that is an instance of where we are showing some difficulties as our retention rates go up and we have sophomores and juniors and the numbers of those students growing that we are seeing the crunch happen in those classes those students need. But we were not talking about letting some students put themselves on a waitlist and others not. We are saying if the student really wants to take a class and the class is full, they can put themselves on a waitlist.

Clara Krug (CLASS): If I may, I would like to ask Senator Rogers a question. Ms. Rogers, at what point did the Student Government Association become aware of the "deleting classes first day for nonattendance"?

Mary Ann Rogers (SGA): A student happened to overhear a conversation in the fall, and that was it. We have not been made aware.

Clara Krug (CLASS): Happened to overhear a conversation?

Mary Ann Rogers (SGA): That is all I am aware of. It was brought to us in the fall, and a Senator said, "You know we have heard this might be going on."

Clara Krug (CLASS): Okay, so a Senator heard this, and at what point did the Enrollment Management Council come to the SGA and ask for your discussion of this?

Mary Ann Rogers (SGA): We can check the records; I'm not aware of that.

Clara Krug (CLASS): As far as you know. . .

Pat Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: If you look at the schedule it is not due to happen until next month.

Mary Ann Rogers (SGA): Yes.

Clara Krug (CLASS): It did not occur, so that did not occur.

Mary Ann Rogers (SGA): I apologize. As of right now, I do not even know that they are even on the calendar for March to talk to us.

Clara Krug (CLASS): I'd like to ask a point of order, I guess, parliamentarian. This is for information and discussion; we are not to have action; is it possible to propose a resolution?

Bob Cook (Senate Parliamentarian): We have had this happen before, where we had a discussion item and then people would say if we are going to keep discussing it, we might as well wait until new business and have a motion. We can terminate the discussion anytime, and then under new business anyone can propose a resolution.

Clara Krug (CLASS): Okay, so we could propose a resolution not to endorse this policy? That would be doable. Thank you.

David Robinson (CLASS): As shared governance goes, this is a joke. Plenty of people have brought up the specific potential problems that this could create. It strikes me just in general, in principle, that you have got sort of a "gotcha" here at the core of this, which is just obnoxious. I am a fairly disorganized person. I have missed classes, as a student, as a teacher. Once I missed the first day of class completely because I thought it was in a different building, and that was a long time ago. I will not do it again. I think that the rule should be humane; they should not try to aspire toward a sort of mechanical perfection, which ejects the student from the seat that he is not in on the first day of class. It seems to me that this is a much more effective way of quietly

boosting our real class enrollments above our predicted class enrollments. I am not sure it helps the student very much though. Another thing, what is the expected involvement of instructors going to be in the situation?

Are you expecting us, say if I have got 100, 150 students, which is not too odd, if I've a full load, with a lot of core classes, let alone people who teach large classes like in History and so on, how many times during that first week am I supposed to be checking my roll, checking attendance and then crosschecking that with an online form to make sure? I already have to go through this routine for enrollment verification. I propose that I have better things to do than do it two or three more times for several classes.

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): I think the intention is that you check attendance the first day that you hold the class, and then, if there are students who enroll in that class either that day or the next, because they were on a waitlist and have had a chance to enroll, that they would then request that you verify their attendance and you would go in and verify their attendance.

David Robinson (CLASS): So, Nancy, this means approximately a doubling of our work the first week with respect to enrollment and reporting to the Registrar.

Mary Marwitz (CLASS): So it is up to the student to go to the professor and say, "I have just added this class; will you verify my attendance this day?"

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): Right, and what we have talked about doing, for example, is, if we have a student who cannot make it the first day and has an excuse, there will be a code that will show that the student should not be dropped, and if a student comes in and registers that day for the class, the student should notify you and ask to have the attendance verified. There would be a code put on the student so they could not be inadvertently dropped until they have had a chance to do that.

Kent Murray (CLASS): The students love to have an optimum schedule with alternate courses. How many waiting lists can a student be on at one time which congests the whole system there? Plus, what about some special situations where the instructor wants to give an override on the limit in their class, is this taken away from them? Or if a student has a prerequisite which the instructor wants to override to put them in a class, is this now out of their hands because we are playing numbers only?

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): I do not think this has anything to do with overrides. I think this has to do with the fact that there are a given number of seats usually in the class. I think it is, however, the college or department that handles the override situation. I think this has to do with those classes that are on WINGS that are available through the registration system for the students.

Godfrey Gibbison (COBA): I think from all the discussion we have had so far that we have probably more than adequately demonstrated the number of problems that could

emerge in the first week or so of class with this in place, and so the question is, again, the number of people who are going to be benefited or affected by this, does it really justify this?

Linda Bleicken (Provost): From what I am hearing, there are significant questions about this. And I am not here representing the Enrollment Management Council, by any degree, but one of the pieces that concerns me a great deal, is a pledge that I actually made to students a few years ago, that to the best of my ability, I would not be responsible for implementing something that affected them without at least letting them know in advance. Of all the things that concern me, that I think concerns me the most. I think we need to take this back and take a look at, not only the basis for it, but also the implementation questions that we are hearing.

Michael Nielsen (CLASS): This discussion reminds me of a situation that I have had in one of my classes in particular. About five years ago a student failed, or he might have gotten a "D" in my class. Now every fall when I teach that class, I see him there sometime during the first week, and I do not see him until the next fall. And I do not know what kind of financial aid program he is trying to scam. I am a lot more concerned about that kind of person taking a seat that could be much more beneficially used. Maybe that is something that the Enrollment Management Council could look at. I do not know of any mechanism that I could use to report that.

Linda Bleicken (Provost): Actually, I think there are mechanisms in place to keep those students from actually gaining credit for a class. I would like to tell you, from my standpoint in recollecting how this all started, I think one of the biggest problems that we have had is in the Sciences and in classes where we have a seat number that is limited by the equipment that is actually there to be able to conduct the class. This might occur in a Writing and Linguistics class where we have a limited number of computers and in some Broadcasting classes where the equipment is limited. In those cases, it really is important to know how many students are in the class. because, if in fact you have 25, and at day five you actually have attrition that knocks that back to 19, there are 6 students that I assure you wish they could have had that class who will not get that class and will not be able to be in that class. It is not the case that that happens in every class, but it is a real factor in some of the classes where we have limited resources to be able to deliver instruction.

Pat Walker (CLASS): Just to go along with what Mike Nielsen was saying, I am teaching Art, where we have limited resources, and we have to limit the number of students we have in class according to the number of easels we have or whatever. Sometimes it is a problem when somebody signs up and then does not show up the first day, but more often recently the problem has been with attendance verification. The way that runs for the students to get their financial aid, I get several students in a class that show up, who are there to be verified and as soon as the verification period goes, I suddenly do not see them. They do not get credit for the class, but they never intended to get credit for the class. They just do not come back, so somebody else who may have wanted to take that class cannot take it. That is more of a problem in our department, I think.

Clara Krug (CLASS): So what happens now? Do you withdraw this proposal, so that we have something written that states that this is not going to be adopted until there is some further discussion that would include the Faculty Senate and the Student Government Association? I guess I want to put in writing what will transpire after this afternoon's discussion, so we know for certain.

Nancy Shumaker (AVPAA): I will be glad to take this back to the Enrollment Management Council, and to tell them about this discussion, and to ask them if perhaps what we should do is begin to engage the Student Government Association in a discussion and also faculty members in a discussion about the policy, if that is what seems to be the best way for us to proceed at this point.

Clara Krug (CLASS): Thanks.

Barry Balleck (CLASS): I would just add that some member of the Enrollment Management also needs to get on the SGA agenda in the next week or two.