

Adopted: March 10, 2020

**ACADEMIC SENATE  
Of  
CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY  
San Luis Obispo, CA**

**AS-890-20**

**RESOLUTION ON CLASS ATTENDANCE**

**Impact on Existing Policy: This resolution impacts AS-592-03/IC “Resolution on Class Attendance,” which includes CAM 485.2. This resolution also impacts the policy as it is communicated on the Academic Programs and Planning website, where these policies are posted, as well as the Cal Poly catalog.**

- 1 WHEREAS, The policy on Class Attendance has not been reviewed since the  
2 passage of AS-592-03/IC in March 2003; and  
3
- 4 WHEREAS, This section outlines the excusable reasons for allowing students to  
5 make up missed work; and  
6
- 7 WHEREAS, The last Class Attendance policy was instituted with the  
8 understanding that the policy would continue to be reviewed and  
9 updated to reflect additional appropriate excusable reasons for  
10 missing class and allowing students to make up missed work; and  
11
- 12 WHEREAS, Cal Poly values an inclusive culture that is supportive of students  
13 striving to balance their obligations as caregivers while meeting  
14 expectations for course requirements; and  
15
- 16 WHEREAS, The current policy omits any mention of students with dependents,  
17 who are parents, guardians, or caregivers at the undergraduate,  
18 graduate, and professional school level; and  
19
- 20 WHEREAS, Overall, the proposed policy provides clarifying language that is not  
21 stated in the current policy. As presently published, the Class  
22 Attendance policy reads as follows:  
23
- 24 Class Attendance
- 25
- 26 It is strongly urged that instructors accept the following  
27 “excusable” reasons for allowing students to make up missed  
28 work:  
29
- A. Illness with a doctor’s statement

- 30 B. Serious illness or death of close relatives
- 31 C. Active participation in university events (an instructor
- 32 may require a statement from the adviser involved
- 33 certifying that the student was actively participating in
- 34 a recognized university event)
- 35 D. Field trips
- 36 E. Religious holidays
- 37 F. Selective service and military reasons
- 38 G. NCAA athletic competitions
- 39 H. Instructionally Related Activities (IRA)/competition
- 40 I. Jury duty or any other legally required court
- 41 appearances
- 42 J. Job or internship interviews;
- 43

44 Therefore, be it

45  
46 RESOLVED: That the wording in Class Attendance policy be changed as follows:

47  
48 It is strongly urged that instructors accept the following “excusable”  
49 reasons for allowing students to make up missed work:

50  
51 And, be it further

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53 RESOLVED: That the following clarifying language be added to the policy as  
54 excusable reasons for making up missed class work:

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56 B. Injury, illness, death, or any extenuating circumstances of close  
57 relatives (to include but not limited to natural, adopted, and/or in-law  
58 children, parents, legal guardian, siblings, grandparents,  
59 grandchildren as well as spouse or partner)

60  
61 Extenuating circumstances can be defined as serious and exceptional  
62 factors outside the student's control which adversely affected the  
63 student's attendance during class time.  
64

Proposed by: Dr. Jerusha Greenwood, Ashlee Hernandez,  
Alan Faz, Tess Loarie, Kylie Clark  
Date: February 26, 2020

## **Update to the Class Attendance Policy to Include Students with Dependents**

In the fall of 2019, Student Affairs launched a needs assessment as part of the Students with Dependents Initiative. A survey was developed and distributed to students who identified having minor dependents (via FAFSA), patrons of the Orfalea Family & ASI Children's Center, the Educational Opportunity Program, TRIO Achievers, the Veterans Success Center, and Cal Poly Scholars. They identified 109 incoming students for Fall 2019 with minor dependents.

The Resolution to Update the Cal Poly Attendance Policy to Include Students with Dependents addresses a specific need identified by the assessment: the clarification of the language in the course attendance policy to include students with dependents<sup>1</sup>.

The proposed resolution charges the Academic Senate Instruction Committee to revise the excused absence language on the Academic Programs and Planning website and Cal Poly Catalog to be more inclusive of nontraditional students who are responsible for the care of dependents. A dependent, in the revised language, will include parent, legal guardian, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, spouse or partner, as well as natural, adopted, and/or in-law children.

Updating the language surrounding excused absences will provide the following opportunities for Cal Poly:

- Encourage faculty to support students with dependents to succeed in college by excusing absences and permitting them to make up missed work. Doing so facilitates achievement of the GI 2025<sup>2</sup> graduation rate goals;
- Aid movement toward the Cal Poly Diversity and Inclusion Initiative<sup>3</sup> to recruit and maintain a diverse student body;
- Align Cal Poly better with the full scope of Title IX and California AB 809<sup>4</sup>, which address protections of pregnant students and students with dependents; and
- Align Cal Poly with California AB 2289<sup>5</sup>, a policy regarding public schools, that states that students with dependents shall be excused from school due to an illness or medical appointment with their child, including absences to care for a sick child.

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<sup>1</sup> Several other needs were identified as a result of the assessment. For example, access to priority registration to reduce complications related to scheduling conflicts between parental responsibilities and Cal Poly classes and coursework; the development of resource guides with campus and community resources; the availability of more diaper/baby changing stations throughout campus, and family friendly study areas were all identified.

<sup>2</sup> "Graduation Initiative 2025." The California State University, Online. <https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/y-the-csu-matters/graduation-initiative-2025>.

<sup>3</sup> "Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives – Diversity & Inclusion: Cal Poly." Diversity & Inclusion | Cal Poly, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, 2018, Online. [diversity.calpoly.edu/initiatives/](https://diversity.calpoly.edu/initiatives/).

<sup>4</sup> United States. California State Assembly. "An act to amend Section 66281.7 of, and to add Section 66061 to, the Education Code, relating to public postsecondary education." AB 809. Print.

<sup>5</sup> United States. California State Assembly. "An act to amend Section 66281.7 of, and to add Section 66061 to, the Education Code." AB 2289. Print.

Current language on the Academic Programs and Planning website <sup>6</sup>states that “it is strongly urged that instructors accept the following ‘excusable’ reasons for allowing students to make up missed work:

- Illness with a doctors statement
- Serious illness or death of close relatives”

At present, the policy omits mention of students with dependents who require care but are not seriously ill. This creates complications for students who are responsible for the care, for example, of infant/small children running a fever high enough to keep them out of daycare but not serious enough to require a visit to a primary care physician or urgent care facility. According to the Orfalea Family/ASI Childcare Center, children who have experienced a fever above 100F, stomach ache, sneezing with a runny nose are not permitted to attend the program until their symptoms have been absent for at least 24 hours. When such symptoms appear suddenly (which is common with the onset of illness) Cal Poly students often experience difficulty procuring alternative care for their children, or are unable to afford that alternative care. Similarly, students with dependents who are not minors but have immediate requirements for care often find themselves unable to choose between their dependents and attending lectures, activities, or laboratories.

Other Universities in the United States have adapted their attendance policies to be more inclusive of non-traditional students:

#### **CSU Fresno**

Unplanned student absences should be authorized when the student has a short-term serious and compelling medical condition or when a death or serious illness in the immediate family (i.e., parent, spouse, sibling or child) prevents attending class.

#### **CSU Long Beach:**

Death, injury, or serious illness of an immediate family member. An immediate family member is defined as a close relative, or a person residing in the immediate household of the student.

Additionally, Mississippi State University<sup>7</sup>, Marshall University<sup>8</sup>, and Texas A & M<sup>9</sup>, are a few examples of Universities that have language that use language inclusive of dependents or immediate family.

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<sup>6</sup> Academic Programs and Planning “Class Attendance.” Online. <https://academicprograms.calpoly.edu/academicpolicies/class-attendance>

<sup>7</sup> “Class Attendance and Reporting Absences.” Mississippi State University Policies, 2016, Online. [www.policies.msstate.edu/policy/1209](http://www.policies.msstate.edu/policy/1209).

<sup>8</sup> “Excused Absences.” Marshall University Policies and Resources, 2019, Online. [www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs/policies/#ExcusedAbsences](http://www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs/policies/#ExcusedAbsences)

<sup>9</sup> “Attendance.” Texas A & M University Student Rules, Rule 7: Attendance, 2019, Online. [student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07/](http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07/)

Associated Students, Inc.  
California Polytechnic State University  
San Luis Obispo

Resolution #20-04

RESOLUTION TO UPDATE THE CLASS ATTENDANCE POLICY TO INCLUDE  
STUDENTS WITH DEPENDENTS

- WHEREAS: The ASI Board of Directors serves as the official voice of students at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly), San Luis Obispo; and
- WHEREAS: Current Cal Poly Class Attendance Policy<sup>1</sup> omits mention of students with dependents, who are parents, guardians, or caregivers at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional school level<sup>2</sup>; and
- WHEREAS: The United States Government Accountability Office reveals there are nearly four million undergraduate students who are raising children, representing 22 percent of all students attending United States colleges<sup>3</sup>; and
- WHEREAS: California Education Code section 48213 stipulates that children with obvious signs of illness are not accepted into a childcare facility and are excluded from care for a minimum of 24 hours<sup>4</sup>; and
- WHEREAS: At Cal Poly, the Orfalea Family & ASI Children's Center Policy Handbook<sup>5</sup> states teachers assess each child's wellbeing upon arrival and send sick children home<sup>6</sup>, creating unintended consequences for students with dependents who rely on child care providers in order to attend class; and
- WHEREAS: In California policy regarding K-12 public schools, Assembly Bill (AB) 2289<sup>7</sup> states a student with dependent shall be excused from school due to an illness or medical appointment of their child, including absences to care for a sick child; and
- WHEREAS: Other institutions such as Mississippi State University have adopted explicit excused absence policies for students with dependents, excusing absences for issues regarding a student's immediate family members including a: parent, legal guardian, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, spouse or partner, as well as natural, adopted and/or in-law children<sup>8</sup>; and

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1 "Campus Administrative Manual." Academic Senate, 1991, [academicsenate.calpoly.edu/cam](http://academicsenate.calpoly.edu/cam)

2 California Student Aid Commission. Students with Dependent Children (SWD) FAQs. [Csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/swd\\_frequently\\_asked\\_questions.pdf](https://csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/swd_frequently_asked_questions.pdf)

3 United States Federal Government Accountability Office. "More Information Could Help Student Parents Access Additional Federal Student Aid." Aug. 2019, Online. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/701002.pdf>

4 United States. California State Education Code. Title 2. Division 4. Part 27. Chapter 2. Section 48213.

5 Associated Students Incorporated, "ASI Children's Center Policy Manual," March 2019, Online. [https://www.asi.calpoly.edu/form\\_policies/show/129](https://www.asi.calpoly.edu/form_policies/show/129)

6 University of California San Francisco, California Child Healthcare Program, "Excluding Children due to Illness," Sept. 2009, Online.

[https://cchp.ucsf.edu/sites/g/files/tkssra181/f/excl\\_en0909.pdf](https://cchp.ucsf.edu/sites/g/files/tkssra181/f/excl_en0909.pdf)

7 United States. California State Assembly. "An act to amend Section 66281.7 of, and to add Section 66061 to, the Education Code." AB 2289. Print.

8 "Class Attendance and Reporting Absences." Mississippi State University Policies, 2016, Online. [www.policies.msstate.edu/policy/1209](http://www.policies.msstate.edu/policy/1209).

WHEREAS: In compliance with Title IX<sup>9</sup>, the California State Legislature passed AB 809 in September 2019, requiring higher education institutions to post the notification of protections for pregnant students and students with dependents on their website, emphasizing the rights of students with dependents<sup>10</sup>; and

WHEREAS: Despite evidence that nationally, students with dependents have higher grade point averages than their traditional peers, only about eight percent of students with dependents in college will obtain an associate's or bachelor's degree within six years<sup>11</sup>; and

WHEREAS: While the California State University system has implemented the Graduation Initiative 2025 in an effort to increase graduation rates for all CSU students by eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps<sup>12</sup>, current graduation rates suggest that students with dependents require additional support to succeed in college; and

WHEREAS: Cal Poly's Diversity and Inclusion Initiative states the university will recruit and maintain a diverse student body<sup>13</sup>; and

WHEREAS: Nationally, students with dependents constitute one-third of first-generation college students, and nearly 37% of black students are students with dependents<sup>14</sup>; hence, this issue dramatically impacts Cal Poly's Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives, yet no policy exists to bridge this achievement gap.

THEREFORE  
BE IT  
RESOLVED:

The ASI Board of Directors hereby urges the Cal Poly Academic Senate to revise the wording as it pertains to the class attendance policy to include the following:

#### *Class Attendance*

*It is strongly urged that instructors accept the following "excusable" reasons for allowing students to make up missed work while considering implementation shall be equitable for all qualifying students:*

- A. Illness with a doctor's statement*
- B. Serious illness, death, or any extenuating circumstances of close relatives (including but not limited to parents, legal guardian, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, spouse or partner, as well as natural, adopted, and/or in-law children)*

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<sup>9</sup> Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities

<sup>10</sup> United States. California State Assembly. "An act to amend Section 66281.7 of, and to add Section 66061 to, the Education Code, relating to public postsecondary education." AB 809. Print.

<sup>11</sup> Wladis, Claire. Alyse C. Hachey, and Katherine Conway. "No time for college? An investigation of time poverty and parenthood." *The Journal of Higher Education* 89.6 (2018): 807-831, Online.

<sup>12</sup> "Graduation Initiative 2025." The California State University, Online. <https://www2.calstate.edu/csu-system/y-the-csu-matters/graduation-initiative-2025>.

<sup>13</sup> "Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives – Diversity & Inclusion: Cal Poly." Diversity & Inclusion | Cal Poly, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, 2018, Online. [diversity.calpoly.edu/initiatives/](https://diversity.calpoly.edu/initiatives/).

<sup>14</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research. "College Students with Children are Common and Face Many Challenges in Completing Higher Education." Mar. 2013, Online. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED556715.pdf>.

FURTHERMORE  
BE IT

RESOLVED: This resolution will be sent to University President Jeffrey D. Armstrong, Interim Provost Mary Pedersen, Vice President for Student Affairs Keith Humphrey, Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion Jozi De Leon, Academic Senate Chair Dustin Stegner, Dean of Students Kathleen McMahon, College of Engineering Dean Amy Fleisher, College of Architecture and Environmental Design Dean Christine Theodoropoulos, College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences Dean Andy Thulin, College of Science and Mathematics Dean Dean Wendt, College of Liberal Arts Dean Philip Williams, and Orfalea College of Business Dean Scott Dawson.

Certified as the true and correct copy,  
in witness thereof, I have set my hand  
and Seal of the San Luis Obispo Cal  
Poly Associated Students, Inc. this  
\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2020.

ADOPTED at the regular meeting of  
the Board of Directors at San Luis  
Obispo Cal Poly Associated Students,  
Inc. this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2020.

Attest:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
ASI Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed:  
ASI Chair of the Board

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed:  
ASI President

Authored By:

Ashlee Hernandez, Masters Candidate, Higher Education Counseling and Student Affairs

Alan Faz, Board of Directors, College of Engineering

Tess Loarie, Board of Directors, College of Engineering

Kylie Clark, Board of Directors, College of Liberal Arts

Dominique Morales, Board of Directors, College of Liberal Arts



**CAL POLY**

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February 13, 2020

ASI Student Government  
California Polytechnic State University,  
San Luis Obispo  
Julian A. McPhee University Union  
Bldg. 65, Room 202

To the ASI Board of Directors,

As a faculty member, academic senator, and member of the Cal Poly Academic Senate Executive Committee, I am very pleased to provide a letter of support for the Resolution to Update the Class Attendance Policy to Include Students with Dependents (Resolution #20-).

I believe it is the duty of the academic institution to remove structural barriers that prohibit the academic and professional development of students. This includes a close examination and revision of any policy that advises faculty about student attendance in classes, especially when the nature of student life outside of the classroom is considered. Students with dependents – including children, parents, siblings, grandparents, legal guardians, partners – require better accommodation from the university in the form of clearer policy guidance regarding excused absences.

While Academic Programs' language about excused absences includes "serious illness or death of close relatives," a clearer statement that supports students with dependents would provide those students an ability to appeal to their instructors for accommodation when they learn cannot attend class due to immediate and/or emergency circumstances. For example, students with dependents enrolled at the Orfalea Family/ASI Children's Center must retrieve them if they develop a fever or cannot drop them off for care if they do. Childcare on the central coast, particularly if needed at the last minute, is notoriously difficult to find. I can attest to this both as a parent and as an instructor of students with small children.

This resolution will help the university align itself more effectively with its own childcare facility's policies, as well as with California public school policy and education code. We will better comply with Title IX regarding pregnant students and students with dependents, and help our students achieve their educational and professional goals.

Please support the passage of this resolution.

In community,

Jerusha B. Greenwood  
Associate Professor, Experience Industry Management  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo



Dear ASI Board of Directors,

I am writing in support of the Resolution to Update the Class Attendance Policy to include students with dependents. As a parent of two children, I am constantly faced with the struggle of choosing parenting over school. My education is very important to me but due to limited childcare resources I often have to miss class when my children are sick. One of my children has an incurable brain disease called Moya-Moya. Her condition is monitored by Dr. 's at Stanford Hospital and she often has multiple appointments per month. Due to my daughter's insurance and the high volume of patients her doctor sees, I do not have the ability to schedule appointments around my school schedule. During the flu season, my children were sick multiple times and were diagnosed with the influenza virus. In order to protect other children from getting sick, my children needed to stay home from school. Since childcare providers cannot risk getting other children or themselves sick as a parent I had to miss class to stay home to take care of them. When I have to miss class for my children's medical needs or illnesses it is currently considered unexcused by the school. This causes a large barrier amongst many students who have dependents. Often times this barrier can cause students to put their education on hold.

My daughter was diagnosed in the beginning of 2019 with an incurable disease and it was my first year at Cal Poly. My whole life changed and my daughters medical needs became my first priority. I often thought about withdrawing from my classes and putting my education on hold because I knew I was not always going to be able to attend my classes due to my daughters new diagnosis. I think it is very important that the school consider the students who have children and allow us to have excused absences when we need to miss class due to the needs of our children. Many of us are trying to achieve lifelong goals and we need to feel supported by the school when it comes to pursuing our education.

Sincerely,

Gabriela Perez  
Undergraduate Student

CAL POLY | School of Education  
College of Science and Mathematics

Andrew M. Byrne  
California Polytechnic University  
School of Education 02-136  
1 Grand Avenue  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

4 February 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing today in support of a resolution advanced by Ashlee Hernandez regarding students with dependents. The resolution asks that explicit language is added to the university class attendance policy in the Cal Poly Catalog and campus administrative policy, which “strongly urges” instructors to accept certain reasons, which are listed in the policy, for missing class. Among those reasons are, for example, religious holidays, illness, or an athletic competition. The policy is clearly nonbinding for faculty, but the explicit language enforces a culture of access and equity for students who must miss class for good reason. I think family is one of the most important reasons to miss class.

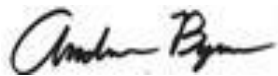
I believe in adding unavoidable caregiving responsibilities to what I think is a generous, *explicit* list of excuses for absence. This would give instructors nonbinding guidance to support our students who are parents or caregivers.

Parenthood is a significant potential student identity. By adding explicit language to the list of possible excuses for absence, I believe faculty would be encouraged toward better inclusion. The CPX initiative has revealed that there are many faculty members such as me who believe strongly in recruiting and retaining a diverse student body. The data presentations of CPX emphasized a number of identities’ perspectives on diversity, equity and inclusion. A few of the CPX discussions since have focused on intersectional identity: being a member of more than one identity concurrently. It is intersection that most strongly relates to the resolution offered by Ms. Hernandez. If we truly seek to increase racial/ethnic diversity in our student body, I remind my colleagues that up to 1/3 of our potential students of color are parents. The likelihood of parenthood among graduate students, and graduate students of color, is even higher. It is more likely that students of minoritized backgrounds are parents, than white students. So, to declare that we welcome a diverse applicant pool without *explicitly* reassuring a significant portion of that applicant pool, who are parents, that they will be supported at times when they must prioritize children and family, is to effectively reduce the diversity of our potential applicant pool.

We explicitly welcome and recruit athletes. They are listed in the policy already. We list jurors, and students missing for military, field trip, job seeking, or religious reasons. We support their absences and the opportunity to make up missed work, explicitly, by listing those situations. Faculty are “strongly urged” to excuse athletes for their sporting events, but our attendance policy is completely silent on the issue of a child with a fever. We have the opportunity to considerably expand our potential applicant pool’s diversity by explicitly welcoming parents to our student body. We can do this by reassuring them that we value students who are parents, as we already do for athletes, jurors, students who are ill, and others. I am requesting that Ashlee’s proposal be given serious consideration, and that explicit language be added to the excusable reasons list for students to miss class and make up the missed work.

Thank you for your consideration of this important resolution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Byrne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Andrew" and last name "Byrne" clearly distinguishable.

Andrew M. Byrne, PhD, CRC, CCCE  
Assistant Professor, School of Education

[anbyrne@calpoly.edu](mailto:anbyrne@calpoly.edu)

Dear Rob,

As someone who was a parent starting in my college years and as a psychologist with expertise in development across the lifespan, I am writing to express my support for the modifications to the excused absence policy to explicitly mention children and other close relations. Many Cal Poly students have multiple responsibilities that extend to the area of caregiving for children, parents or grandparents, spouses, and other relations. This refinement of the language in the excused absence policy recognizes and affirms the importance of those responsibilities, which I know our students work to balance with their responsibilities towards their studies.

Thank you for consideration,

Debra L. Valencia-Laver, Ph.D. (pronouns: *she, her, hers*)

Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts  
Professor, Psychology & Child Development  
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407  
PH: 805.756.2359 FAX: 805.756.5748  
dlvalenc@calpoly.edu

February 10, 2020

To Members of the Academic Senate,

I am writing to show my enthusiastic support for the **student-led resolution to clarify language in the class attendance policy to include students with dependents.**

The current attendance policy states excused absences include: Serious illness or death of close relatives.

This proposal would change the language to include the following: “Serious illness, death, or any extenuating circumstances of close relatives (to include but not limited to parents, legal guardian, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, spouse or partner, as well as natural, adopted, and/or in-law children).”

The current CalPoly attendance policy omits any mention of students with caregiving duties, thus impacting their ability to both care for their sick child and remain in good academic standing. In other words, student parents who miss class to care for their ill dependents result in a “unexcused” absence. Because much of caretaking responsibilities are gendered, the current version of the attendance policy impacts student mothers disproportionately, thereby hindering our institutional diversity and inclusion goals. This work has been led by one of my mentees Ashlee Hernandez, a former transfer student and first generation CalPoly alumna and student parent, and currently enrolled in the Master’s degree program in the School of Education and whose research and advocacy work is funded by the Baker Koob Endowment.

The goal of this resolution is to create a policy aimed toward closing equity gaps for students with dependents, but it also creates visibility for students who feel invisible on this campus. **The support for this policy is part of a larger body of both existing<sup>1</sup> and proposed<sup>2</sup> work addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues highlighted in the CPX report with goals of increasing retention and on time graduation for this population of students.**

I believe that a vote for this policy will help CalPoly move closer toward meeting CSU’s Graduation Initiative 2025—by eliminating equity gaps in degree completion for this student population.

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact me at [tcheuk@calpoly.edu](mailto:tcheuk@calpoly.edu) and #805-756-6775 (office).

Sincerely,



Dr. Tina Cheuk

Assistant Professor, School of Education, CSM  
Diversity Cluster Hire (2019)

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<sup>1</sup> Research work is funded through Office of University Diversity & Inclusion (BEACoN Research) and Baker Koob Endowment.

<sup>2</sup> A Strategic Initiative proposal was submitted by Dr. Tina Cheuk and Dr. Joni Roberts (Kinesiology) with the support of Amy Gode (Assistant Director, Disability Resource Center), Genie Kim (Director of Wellbeing, Campus Health and Wellbeing), Suzanne Phelan (CSM/Kinesiology & Public Health), Charlotte Rinaldi (Retention Specialist, University Advising), and Alison Ventura, (CSM/Kinesiology & Public Health).

## The Invisible Work of Students with Dependents

I made a deliberate decision not to share my status as a student parent when I first enrolled at Cal Poly. I was already overwhelmed by navigating this institution as a first-generation, low-income woman of color. I did not need another marker of diversity—another potential source of bias—as a part of my identity.

Yet, during my first quarter, I was forced to expose my identity to my professor when my son was unexpectedly sent home with a fever. When I requested to care for my sick child, the options were untenable. Missing class to care for my sick child was considered an “unexcused” absence, which on that date, meant that I would not be able to make up the in-class assignment that was 25% of my grade. This experience was devastating because it forced me to choose between being a ‘good’ parent and a ‘good’ student—two identities that do not necessarily complement each other in institutions where student parents are made to feel invisible.

We could all do a better job of recognizing that student parents exist across all of the six colleges and in our classrooms. We need inclusive policies that allow student parents to thrive both as a student *and* a parent. The amount of effort we put into being a student while balancing our caregiving duties is what propels us to do what it takes to succeed. I promise the last thing we want to do is to miss a class—we fought too hard to get here. We want the same opportunity to make up missed classwork when our dependents are sick.

Some of these circumstances are beyond our control. Childcare facilities and public schools are mandated by law to exclude sick children from care for a minimum of 24 hours, creating unintended consequences for students with dependents. For example, if my son becomes suddenly ill, it is difficult to find and afford back-up childcare. Similarly, students who care for their ailing adult family members face similar challenges—torn between caring for their ill-family members or attending class. Student parents should not be penalized for taking care of our family members when they fall ill.

The current class attendance policy omits any mention of students with caregiving duties, thus impacting our ability to both care for their sick dependents *and* have the opportunity to remain in good academic standing. Our current attendance policy is in direct contrast to other California State Universities like Fresno State and Long Beach, with class attendance policies that support student so that they can care for their family members when they fall ill without the pervasive fear of being punished.

While diversity and inclusion is a core tenet of the values of Cal Poly’s campus, student parents are absent from these conversations. As a result, this population is made to be unseen, advertently erasing the narratives of *who* can occupy and thrive. Institutions reap the benefits when students can bring their authentic selves to school. We all benefit when students feel like they belong and aren’t penalized for their student parent status.

With the support of the Educational Opportunity Program, Associated Students, Inc. (ASI) and Student Affairs, we have offered greater clarity in the language in the class attendance policy to be inclusive of student with caretaking responsibilities. As this resolution moves to the Academic

Senate, I urge faculty members to take into consideration policies that recognize this student population and enact practices that can better include student parents and our diverse personhoods we bring into our learning spaces.



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Dustin Stegner

**Date:** April 22, 2020

**From:** Jeffrey D. Armstrong  
President

**Copies:** Mary Pedersen  
Al Liddicoat  
Amy Fleischer  
Andy Thulin  
Christine Theodoropoulos  
Dean Wendt  
Philip Williams  
Bruno Giberti  
Cem Sunata

**Subject:** Response to AS-890-20 – Resolution on Class Attendance

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This memo acknowledges my support of the above-entitled Academic Senate resolution. I appreciate the thoughtful updates to the class attendance policy, which refer to a more realistic and inclusive description of our student body and the extenuating circumstances they may encounter during their educational experience.

Please extend my thanks to the Academic Senate members for their attention to this matter.