

Attendance Strategies from Plymouth State Faculty Members

We sent out a short survey asking our colleagues to “please share an attendance-related strategy or practice that you have tried, along with any observations related to it that you would like to share with colleagues.” Here are three responses that we received:

The grand majority of my classes are outdoors and experiential in nature, so students in my classes - especially first year students - quickly learn that they cannot just read a chapter in a book or look at a PowerPoint on Canvas to catch-up on what was presented, experienced, and reflected. Therefore, they realize early on that attending classes is essential. Students who continue to miss classes, are most likely realizing that they are not yet ready for college or the pursuit of a degree in Adventure Education. In addition, for first and second year students, I take attendance and give points for each class attendance. However, for junior and senior students I tell them I do not take attendance and do not give points for their expected class attendance. Normally, my junior and senior classes are always very well attended unless students have a justifiable reason for their absence. ~Christian Bisson

*Day 1 discussing the need for attendance, and maintaining a policy where folks get a week's worth of absences unasked. Afterward, each additional absence is a deduction of a letter grade from their final grade. The rationale is based on the class having a workshop model, and that participation in the classroom work is the focal point of the class, and that their attendance was where the learning was happening. At some point, failure to attend crosses the threshold where a meaningful experience isn't possible. In workshoping, there is also mutual accountability related to being prepared to interact with peers' work as they have prepared to interact with yours. I also ascribe to a line from bell hooks in Teaching to Transgress: "The first paradigm that shaped my pedagogy was the idea that the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere." If students are not attending class there are either structural barriers preventing them from doing so, or there are pedagogical issues where they don't *want* to. Some reflection on pedagogy is always worthwhile. I've never had a student fail specifically due to attendance, which has included courses at various times of the day and at varying lengths. In reviews, folks have said that they appreciated the class in spite of them being early morning or late evening classes. ~PSU Faculty Member*

Each class is worth 5 participation points. Whatever worksheets, activities, and discussions we do in class are worth the points. Class participation points came about because I had a mutiny on my hands in the spring of 2022. Students declared they would only come to class if there were points for what we did in class. Students have 4 unexcused absences they can use any time needed. If they need more, they have to get them excused following the university protocol. They can choose to lose points for missing classes or request make-up work, and I will send them the activities and reading we did in class. The option to make up work enabled me to create accommodation when needed while other students had the external motivation they requested. ~Megan Heidenreich