

# **CHALLENGES IN THE TEACHING OF MARKETING – METACOGNITIVE THOUGHT SOUGHT CLASS ATTENDANCE POLICIES: BEST PRACTICES/ STUDENT CHALLENGES/ ADMINISTRATIVE OVERRIDES**

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## **Abstract**

Class attendance appears to be the best known predictor of better college grades which is directly linked to student retention and graduation rates. The historical importance of class attendance and administrative support of class attendance management is highlighted by attendance policies of yesteryear. Thirty years ago many universities adhered to the policy that if a student had three unexcused absences or didn't show for the first class day, the professor had the prerogative of dropping the student from the course. Since that time, class attendance policies at many universities have gotten lax, perhaps too lax to double ensure high levels of student retention and graduation rates. Recently, skipped classes by students, professors' attempts to control them, and their effect on increased retention and graduation rates have been dominant and growing topics of concern among marketing educators and others, as well as among college administrators. Yet many of these educational constituents feel they have little control over class attendance issues as fulfillment of attendance, even in the case of mandatory attendance, is an individual-student driven factor especially if not enforced. Today many educators place the responsibility of class attendance squarely on the backs of individual students and letting students' grades fall if they do not attend and cannot make good exam grades otherwise regardless of need to increase student retention and graduation rates. Perhaps this continual decline in attendance is due in some part to many professors practicing very lax attendance policies. As research findings showed, some professor class attendance policies consist of, 'I think class attendance is important, if you don't, don't attend, we are better off without you;' or, 'I don't take attendance, now don't hang yourself with this rope I've given you.' Others showed class attendance rewards applied only in borderline grade cases.

Recently, though, there are additional constituents becoming very concerned about students earning better grades thus increasing student retention and graduation rates -- those being state legislators and college-students' parents who are both pushing for accountability regarding increased student retention and graduate rates. State legislators and parents (from an investment perspective) are beginning to take a second look at class attendance policies as they are concerned with educational success outcomes and boosting retention and graduation rates. Some are so concerned to the extent that, as reported by the media, skipped classes are beginning to be monitored with the use of high-tech attendance trackers. Several recent media-published articles have addressed the issue of cracking down on skipping classes through the use of these trackers. Today, with four in ten full-time college students failing to graduate in six years (wsj.com, Jan. 14, 2015), a growing number of universities are adopting mandatory attendance policies; or starting to enforce ones they have had 'on their books' for years – albeit became virtually buried in various university and college policies and procedures' computer access link/sublink search functionalities - thus are literally forgotten about due to lack of intended enforcement. Research showed that some state legislatures highly suggest mandatory attendance in state-accredited educational institutions, but do not mandate them,

Empirical research showed that given professor-prerogative attendance policies, a popular provision among today's colleges and universities, some professors have 'relaxed' attendance policies to the point of directing students in course syllabi to attend class, or not, specifying that attendance will not be taken and no reward granted for attendances and no penalty imposed for absences. Some colleges of business have college-wide standardized course syllabi that includes a section entitled 'student responsibility for learning.' The syllabus template analyzed did include a computer link to student responsibilities, albeit the class attendance portion was buried in numerous

sub-links that required drill-down patience, thus was not directly included in syllabi analyzed, with one exception .

Another issue of concern is class attendance policy enforcement. Today, as the majority of universities practice professor-prerogative class attendance policies, it is assumed enforcement of these, as needed in the case of errant students, is also of professor prerogative -- as long as the policy is clearly spelled in course syllabi. However, fearful of lawsuits perhaps, when a student challenges a class attendance policy, some administrators do not support the professor, instead support the student even if that student had what most educators would consider undue extreme absenteeism.

Student challenges, lack of administrative enforcement support, and lack of consistency among the various state, university, college and professor levels of policies and procedures concerning class attendance provided the impetus for exploratory research study as follows.

### **Empirical Exploratory Research and Findings**

Exploratory findings indicated need for a comprehensive model for writing course attendance policies that might serve as a best-practices model addressed here; and indicated a need for a codification model of expected students' responses to various attendance grade increasing or decreasing class attendance motivational factors not be addressed here. To this end, we analyzed class attendance policy-related (CAP-related) statements published in recent semester syllabi, across five business disciplines (n=49) at a select college of business. A large variance in both structure and content of CAPs analyzed was determined. This research addressed here provides a starting point for drafting a generalizable "Best Practices" CAP model that has overarching attendance-related implications for students, professors, administrators, and law makers.

The benefits of class attendance, and research thereof, is of critical importance, yet has been of limited study in extant literature. The elements in or draft 'best practices' model, as shown in Table 1 below, was based on the following: 1) Limited findings in extant literature; 2) Content analysis of university, college, and department level policies and procedures for existence of and consistency between the various levels; 3) Content analyses of the attendance section, if any, using recently-implemented course syllabi documents as implemented by professors of 'principles' courses across five business disciplines (n=49, including 13 marketing professor-published syllabi) at a select college of business. This content analysis was very interesting and quite challenging. The draft 'best practices' model is offered as a starting point for metacognitive-based educator discussions.

In terms of research study implications, the inductive and content analytic approach we used to develop the model suggests an approach useful for examining many related issues such as pre-requisite technology skills, late work, missed work, and other class room management and course enrollment issues. The normative implications of this work and the call for marketing faculty to reflect on and address attendance policies are broad in scope and highlight the need for metacognitive thought among educators. This research also highlights the need for considering class attendance policies in the context of communicating benefits to students and in the context of creating attendance policies that are consistent with existing state, university and department policies.

In conclusion, this research not only stresses the need for metacognitive thought among marketing and other educators as we strive to develop best practices in writing effective class attendance policies but that are also motivational to students in their development of self-motivation toward class attendance; and, that will stave off the need for the use of tracker technology in order to help students make better grades, thus increase college student retention and graduation rates. (References are available upon request.)

Table 1: CAP ‘Best Practices’ Template Model for Writing CAPS (a draft for educator\_metacognitive thought)

- A. Professor Confirmation Statement of CAPS Structure/Content with CAP Requirements and Academic Policy and Procedures, State to Student (non-graded category).
- B. Professor Philosophy of Student Class Attendance Criterion - stated in an intrinsic incentivizing manner (non-graded category)
  - Short Term Benefits:
  - Long-Term/Graduation/Job Hunting Benefits:
  - Life-Time Benefits:
- C. Professor’s Expectations Student Behavior Regarding Class Attendance & Attendance Grading Policy as a Direct % of Final Course Grade (*directly graded or ungraded category as specified below*)
  - Frequency of Attendance:
    - Mandatory - implying from higher academic authority.
    - Required - implying Professor-prerogative. If so, give rationale, these are both criterion quite measurable. Rationally, one can’t directly measure graded attendance, per se, if attendance criterion is suggested, urged, recommend and so on, as currently practiced by some educators – as such these proxy attendance factors such as class participation, in-class quizzes and so on, would be part of category D below.
  - Attendance Allowance, if any: (# of absences with no penalty; perfect attendance, extra points; etc.)
  - Attendance Grading Policy:
    - Graded or Ungraded (specify with rationale, if graded, place grading schema here)
    - Attendance Grade Incentives (Grade Point Increases, GPIs):
    - Attendance Grade Penalties (Grade Point Deductions, GPDs): Late arrivals; Early Departures
    - Valid Excused Absences (administrative defined here, if any/acceptable other)
    - Unexcused Absences (define here)
    - Excessive Absenteeism (define here and specify if to be a grade penalty)
    - Make-Up Policy and Procedures (define & specify here with any grade penalty): Exams, Projects,
    - Late Work, and/or other and any associated instructions and sanctions, if any)
    - Modality of Assessing Attendance:
      - Direct (Constant or Random): Roll Call, Sign in Sheet, Clickers, etc.
      - Indirect (Constant or Random): In-class quizzes, writing, etc.
- D. Professor’s Expectations of Students’ Responsibility on Learning (*indirectly graded category*)
  - Class Preparation; Participation; Professionalism; Attentiveness; Classroom Civility; Unauthorized use of electronics in classroom; and other like criteria, and grading criterion (bonus points – on what (specify); extra credit - added to what (specify))
- E. Professor’s Communication/Feedback/Consultation with Student Procedures (non-graded category)
  - Relationship between Attendance grade and final course grade (Notes: Any graded attendance component must be included in both the Course Evaluation Policy and Class Attendance Policy of the Course Syllabus.
  - Professor to Student: Attendance grade consultation; verbal warnings concerning attendance behavior, the use of digital posting of grades as semester progresses, and so on.
  - Relationship between Attendance grade and final course grade (Notes: Any graded attendance component must be included in both the Course Evaluation Policy and Class Attendance Policy of the Course Syllabus.
  - Student to Professor: Addressing Attendance Concerns, Grades, etc.