

Attendance

Hills (1991) provides an excellent analysis of how to deal with attendance:

If the desired behavior or competency is to attend class regularly, then have that as a written objective and base grades on it. (For most courses above the primary grades, this approach would be absurd.) If the

desired behavior or competency is a skill in the topic under study, such as effective behavior in an operating room, then base the grade solely on the level of skill achieved in that behavior. If a student is able to develop that skill without attending [classes], then his or her attendance is irrelevant as far as an evaluation of competence is concerned. If some students are truant, and if this situation influences the behavior of other students, then you have a disciplinary problem, and you should deal with it as a disciplinary matter, not as an academic matter. If the student cannot be evaluated on something like skill and effectiveness in the operating room because no one has seen him or her function in one, then no grade should be given at all. You have no basis for determining a level of competency, so you should not pretend otherwise. (p. 541)

School policies often go to great lengths to distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. This is legitimate and may be necessary for accountability purposes, but it is not appropriate for assessment and grading purposes because our only concern should be this: Do they know or understand or can they do, regardless of absence or whether the reason for the absence is good, bad, or indifferent. Gathercoal (2004) makes this very clear when he states “Excused and unexcused absences are not relevant to an achievement grade. There is no legitimate purpose for distinguishing between excused and unexcused absences. For educational purposes, therefore, there needs only to be recorded absences” (p. 163). He also describes an interesting exchange in a workshop he presented on this issue:

Teacher: “Are you telling me that if a student has been ill and another has been skipping, that they both should be able to make up the work missed?”

Gathercoal: “[Yes,] both needed an educator when they returned, perhaps the one who skipped more than the other.”