Considering a Revised Attendance Policy for PLU

Background

While the PLU faculty has adopted some common expectations for class attendance, there is a wide variety of policies among individual faculty. Some faculty impose grade penalties for missing more than a certain number of classes. These penalties are in some cases severe, and sometimes provide no exceptions for illness, family emergencies, or – the point of the current proposal – for missing class when away from campus representing the university.

There is anecdotal evidence about the negative impact of such practices on the recruitment of students and even on retention. At the same time, this past fall the Governance Committee noted differences between statements of our attendance policy in the Faculty Handbook and in the PLU Catalog that could lead to confusion over just what policy the faculty has adopted. The Faculty Handbook, which presumably should govern if there is a conflict with catalog language, says the following (emphasis added):

“While attendance itself is no measure of successful learning, and course grades are issued not on the basis of attendance but on the basis of academic performance, such performance normally includes regular participation in the total class experience and is evaluated accordingly.”

Conversations over the past two academic years in faculty committees (EPC, Governance, and Campus Life, with ARTS taking at least a brief look this month), as well as in Deans’ Council, have resulted in broad consensus for revising the attendance policy. The key features of the proposed revision for discussion today are as follows:

- The focus of the revised policy would be on student participation in a course, not merely class attendance.

- There would be a recognition of the value, both to the university and to our students, of students’ participation in a wide range of educational experiences – for example in music, athletics, and when presenting at professional meetings, even though that sometimes results in missed class time while representing the university. (Participation that the university features in its admissions materials – and also features on the PLU website for marketing and fundraising purposes.)

- The burden would be on the student to make arrangements for making up missed class material and missed assignments.

- Faculty requiring students to attend events outside the officially-scheduled class time would need to provide an alternative assignment for those unable to attend, unless the event was essential to the course.

The suggested revision may be found on the next page. If the Faculty Assembly approves a revised policy, perhaps at its September meeting, the change would take effect no earlier than Spring 2016.
Revised policy – a draft for Informal Discussion

SECTION 10. CLASS ATTENDANCE—STUDENTS
[Faculty Handbook, Section III, Part VI, Section 10]

The university assumes that every student has freely accepted personal responsibility for regular class attendance. While attendance itself is no measure of successful learning, and course grades are issued not on the basis of attendance but on the basis of academic performance, such performance normally includes regular participation in the total class experience and is may be evaluated accordingly. In the event of unavoidable absence students are strongly encouraged as a matter of courtesy to inform their instructors and may be required to do so. Any arrangements for remedial make-up work are discretionary between instructor and student, except as specified below.

Undergraduate students officially representing the university for an organized event (such as a music performance, athletic competition, forensics tournament, or presentation at an academic conference) shall not be penalized solely for missing class. In addition, students who miss class while officially representing the university shall be allowed to make up missed exams, as well as quizzes worth more than 1% of the course grade. Whether a missed lab, clinical, or other in-class activity may be made up shall be up to the academic unit.

The burden is always on the student, not the faculty member, to take steps to remedy the effects of absences from class. In particular, the student is responsible for making prior arrangements with the instructor to complete missed work or to substitute comparable work instead. An academic unit may adopt shared policies to govern such make-up work, including an expectation that the work be submitted or the test taken prior to the absence.

When attendance is required at an event outside the official, announced class schedule (such as a lecture or field trip), an alternative assignment shall be made available for students unable to participate unless (1) the activity is essential to the course, and (2) either the course description in the catalog, or a course description or comment in the Banner interactive schedule – available to students when registering – has indicated in advance the essential required activity.