

Why are we here?

Mandatory attendance policies offer few worthwhile incentives



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Oh, the horror.

"Attendance for this class is required. After 3 absences, you will be dropped a letter grade."

Those words are possibly the scariest thing that could happen to college students. I know what you're thinking. Yes, it's true. Opening up your Victoria's Secret to find Roseanne Barr would not be as scary.

It's interesting that a syllabus can devote as much space to the attendance policy as it does to the goals and objectives of the class.

It's also interesting that a word as simple as "attendance" can become devastating with the simple modifier "required."

These required attendance policies evaluate students quantitatively, rather than qualitatively. They tell you that a certain number of classes must be attended in order for you to hold onto the grade you have earned.

I have a deal to make with you. Instead of me showing up each class with a hat pulled down over my face, yellow junk in the corners of my eyes and moist drool on my face, I'll make a concerted effort to learn the material.

I may only come once a week, but it will be on my own terms. I will take my weekly shower before class, participate in class, show some responsibility by learning all the material and get As on all the tests.

While some professors may buy into the deal, many will sit strictly and mandate that we serve each daily sentence as scheduled.

Why should our success in a class be determined by my weekly concrete wall time? I realize that we are sup-

posed to be sponges, but when we HAVE to be there, the information bounces off immediately.

Professors are going to lower our grades if we're not there, huh? If someone can demonstrate that he has learned an A's worth of material, why should he get a B?

I suppose it's because grades depend on much more than tests. If so, then classes need to be taught with this in mind.

Grade us on the leadership and creativity we show in group presentations. Grade us on the personal improvements we display as we overcome our shyness and participate in class.

Don't grade me on how well my sorry ass fills out a seat.

If my ass determines what grade I deserve, than I'm basically in trouble anyway. Besides, this ass would probably rather be on a couch in front of a TV.

Give quizzes and have group discussions.

Get to know students' names so you know who is struggling and who is not.

Do something so students aren't simply concrete walls. Do not be Marketing 341.

Professors may feel it's disrespectful for students to skip class. They may say we are wasting their time. Well, if we show up we may be wasting our time.

If we don't show up occasionally, they will still have others to teach. The students who may need assistance will be happy because they may receive more personal attention.

Some learn differently. Some may come to class every day because they are auditory learners. They may treat class as an appointment, and they will be upholding their honor by attending.

Those that don't show up occasionally don't feel that way. While others are at their appointments, the skipper probably have an important game of spades or NFL Game Day to play.

Who cares what they are doing? If the class is not worthwhile, and the students determine they will not get anything out of the trip, they probably won't.

In this case, everyone wins. Those

that want or need to go to class will be satisfied, and those that don't want to pause their PlayStations will be happy.

So, let us decide. Is it worthwhile, or can I get the same knowledge and experiences by reading the textbook?

If you build it, they will come. If you teach it, they will learn.

Yes, people will come if they need to. If students feel they will learn from the class, they will have their butts in the seats.

When grade inflation became such a popular topic last year, it amazed me that required attendance was not attached to the issue.

Basically, they are both the results of cop-outs used by educators.

"Oh, I'm not teaching very well. I'll bump the grades up."

"Oh, no one comes because I'm not teaching very well. I'll make them come."

The issues are tied together because they both are brought about by education deflation.

Our education suffers because educators won't reach out to the students. They may slap a mandatory attendance policy on us but then not even test over lectures. If we are forced to come to class, there had better be some incentive.

Some professors are very good about overcoming the educational decline. On the first day of class, I had a professor inform us that attendance is not mandatory, and we will not be graded for it.

However, he asked that we at least come every day until the first test. Then, after taking the exam, we could decide whether or not we needed to be there.

He didn't want us to make an uninformed decision. By this time we would have information on hand from which to decide.

When a professor does this, students get the message that the class will probably be worthwhile. I've never seen an economics class so consistently full.

Others reach out to students in their own ways. They have joke time. They use film and the Internet to discuss topics relevant to the students. They memorize students' names.

These professors are also likely to hold students responsible for material learned in class. Not just class time, but the information covered.

Our tuition money is not a baby-sitting fee. It is a

ticket to a strong education. If we get the full value of our ticket from a book, we won't come to class.

Professors can require us to be there, but the education still won't be reaching its consumers.

If they don't want to accept my deal, they should at least supply a counteroffer.

To use my "Get out of jail free" card, I must admit that my current professors have offered me a fair counteroffer.

They have built it, and I come. They teach it, and I learn.

A simple questioning of any of my high school teachers would reveal my attendance to be an incredible revelation.

They have shown me that I need to be there, and not that I have to be

there.

If only I hadn't wasted the last four semesters searching for motivation, I may have actually learned from my classes.

In fact, my freshman roommate and I may have actually attended a few classes.

Knowing Jeff and myself, probably not. But it would have been better than pictures of Roseanne.



Do or do not

Students should dare to make most out of life by choosing a career they will love



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Sometimes the future seems like it will never get here. Then, when we get busy and try to deal with things that are happening right now, it sneaks up on us and the cycle repeats itself.

Seriously, do you remember sitting in a boring math class as a junior in high school and thinking graduation would never come? Then, the next thing you know you're walking across a stage wondering what happened to the last four years.

Now you're sitting in a different boring math class, reading the paper before a lesson in derivatives will begin, and the same thing comes to mind, right?

For some people, I think it's the same question. For others, maybe you aren't quite ready to leave behind the things that only a university can provide. Regardless of the question, it exists nonetheless.

What will I do after I graduate?

Now that we're all hopelessly institutionalized, where will we end up after the end of our seventh senior year finally arrives? Flipping burgers in Iowa? Working as a bartender in New York? Flying a private plane for a tycoon in the Bahamas?

Some days, we think we've got it all figured out. Other days, maybe we're not so sure about things. There has to be a middle ground between the state of hopelessness and having perfect direction. So how do we figure out what that is?

Over the summer, I worked among the movers and the shakers in Chicago at the National Lutheran Center. One Tuesday morning, I made it downstairs just in time for a weekly chapel service. Once it had begun, we came to the point where the guest preacher for the week was ready to give his sermon.

He talked a bit about the lessons for the week, then proceeded to talk about his life as a minister. As time had dictated, he was about to enter retirement, and he talked of the ups and downs of his career over the past four decades.

Before he ended the sermon, he talked of growing up on a farm and having to carry out his daily chores. One day, he said, he had been told to shovel a pile of manure onto a truck.

As he was out on the farm, carrying out a task I can thankfully say I

haven't had the pleasure of performing, something happened to him.

He said that while he stood in that pile of manure, he found his calling. From that moment, he was destined to be a pastor and he never regretted the choices he made during his life.

We all face pressures that sometimes seem overbearing. Maybe we have days when we wonder if it is all worth the energy we put into this college thing, and maybe other days we feel invincible. But as long as we're still playing the game, we're that much closer to figuring things out.

As I listened to the minister's testimony about the nature of his life and the results of his decisions, it only amplified a truth that I already believed to exist — we make the best decisions we can, and the rest is out of our control.

You want to be a doctor? Fine, go to medical school. But remember that no amount of money will buy you long-term happiness. So if you decide it isn't right, then don't just go through the motions.

MAKE A CHANGE.

Somewhere in America there is a 22-year-old college graduate who will go to law school for two years and then decide she wants to be a teacher.

Somewhere in America, there is a 7-year-old boy who wants to be a fireman when he grows up. Maybe when he gets to college, he'll decide

to major in architecture and design the next Taj Mahal. What matters is that he follows his heart and doesn't subject himself to what everyone else thinks he should do or become.

Somewhere in America there is a second-year college student who has changed her major five times in less than two years and is on the verge of total breakdown.

Sometimes, patience seems like a never-ending battle, but it is a battle worth fighting nonetheless. If you get in a hurry, then you might go nowhere faster than you would like. It's better to take your time and go somewhere meaningful than rush to the wrong place and wish you'd thought things out more carefully.

If you reach 50 and still haven't decided what you want to do, then you might want to merge a bit farther into that fast lane.

I am one of the lucky ones, I guess. I have retained the same major since my first day here and have scarcely had to question my goals for the future. Plus, I am inching toward a dream that was born in the mind of a second-grader who was then about knee-high to a grasshopper.

But everything is not laid out for me just yet. I wouldn't want it to be, because then there would be no adventure. Graduate school? Maybe. Probably. But where and for how long has yet to be determined.

I don't know, and I like not know-

ing. Sometimes life deals out opportunities that you can only embrace if you are willing to be flexible.

Be ready.

Take chances.

Don't look back.

Our generation will determine our future, no one else. If you want to be the next Vincent van Gogh or Emily Dickinson, by all means fight the good fight.

Better yet, don't be the next van Gogh or Dickinson or even the next Michael Jordan. Be the first Tom Chambers or Allison Foster. Be different and be it LOUDLY.

If you are subjected to 103 people telling you "No thank you" as a painter, 237 rejection slips as a writer, or 312 people telling you "We're looking for something else" as an aspiring actor, **SO BE IT.**

Cooper's Law: Falling down doesn't mean you're out of the game. Staying down does.

Hey, that's catchy. Maybe I should become a songwriter and form a band. We'll be called — hmmm — how about Chumbawumba? Yeah, that's it. We'll sing the songs that remind us of the good times, and maybe we'll even sing the songs that remind us of the best times.

As for the manure? Well, let's leave that for our old friend, Biff Tannen.

I'm sure he's due for his annual McFly special right about now.