



PFFAC Tip Sheet by Dr. Sarah Gergel:

Contending with high levels of absenteeism – 2021W2

As we have seen in recent weeks with airlines and other industries, high levels of absenteeism due to illness, quarantine, or isolation requirements has meant that in some situations staffing is been reduced by 10 to 30%. You may find yourself in a similar situation with your classroom.

I encourage you to develop attendance and assignment policies that prioritize the health of individuals as well as your entire classroom and yourselves as educators. Please try your best to avoid making an attendance policy, participation policy, or approach to posting lectures that might unintentionally compel students to attend class when they are unwell. Recognize that some students may be unable to access a COVID test or testing site to determine their status. Make it easy for students to stay home and stay safe without fear of falling behind. This may include abandoning or significantly relaxing requirements for attendance.

Below are some ideas – ranging from simple to more complex – to contend with potentially high rates of absenteeism in class:

1. Consider dropping the lowest mark within an assignment group in canvas. It's as easy as checking a box.
2. Consider basing your marks on 12 weeks of content instead of 13 weeks. The added flexibility allows for a "makeup" week in the syllabus.
3. Consider some element of collaborative peer-to-peer teaching. Not only can this help make the classroom lectures more accessible in general, but it can also help students who must miss class. For example, students could earn bonus points for typing up lecture notes which are then made available to other students in the class who missed that day.
4. Similar to the above, students could earn extra credit by making a short video of their own lab experience (simply using an iPhone, for example) which is then shared with students who missed a class.
5. Consider creating one optional or bonus assignment due near the end of the term available for students who missed class, or any others are worried about their performance given the circumstances of the pandemic.
6. You might also decide to make a particular week's assignment optional if attendance is so poor that you are quite concerned about the class as a whole.
7. You might consider repeating an extra session of a lab (at the end of the semester) that was particularly poorly attended.

Ultimately you as the instructor know what makes the most sense for your course. But I hope that some of these ideas help you craft a strategy that works for teaching our students and also not

overly burdening you and your TA's as you manage the term. And I hope that pondering some of these issues early on helps you avoid being completely taken by surprise if excessive absenteeism becomes an issue either during online or in person teaching.